

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 23 January 2018

Present:

Councillor Nicholas Bennett J.P. (Chairman)
Councillor Neil Reddin FCCA (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Kim Botting FRSA, Mary Cooke, Ian Dunn,
Nicky Dykes, Ellie Harmer and Chris Pierce

Also Present:

Councillor Peter Fortune, Portfolio Holder for Education, Children and Families

27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Angela Wilkins, Mary Capon (Co-opted Member representing the Church of England), Joan McConnell (Co-opted Member for Catholic Schools), Emmanuel Arbenser (Parent Governor Representative), and Councillor Tom Philpott. Councillor Ian Dunn attended as substitute for Councillor Wilkins.

Following the meeting, apologies were received from Councillor Alan Collins and Aaron Regisford.

The Committee extended its congratulations to Councillor Tom Philpott and his wife on the birth of their son.

28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no additional declarations of interest.

29 MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 OCTOBER 2017 AND MATTERS OUTSTANDING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2017, were agreed and signed as a correct record.

The Committee agreed that it would refer responsibility for the monitoring of responses to recommendations made by the Select Committee at previous meetings to the Education, Children, and Families Budget and Performance Monitoring Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED: That responsibility for monitoring responses to recommendations made by the Select Committee at previous meetings

be referred to the Education, Children, and Families Budget and Performance Monitoring Sub-Committee.

30 QUESTIONS TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS ATTENDING THE MEETING

No questions had been received.

31 QUESTIONS TO THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS ATTENDING THE MEETING

No questions had been received.

32 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Education, Children and Families, Cllr Peter Fortune, addressed the Committee highlighting work undertaken within the Portfolio since the last meeting.

- A number of schools had been visited by Ofsted inspectors with a high number of schools being assessed as either Good or Outstanding.
- Efforts were being made across the Portfolio to ensure that the Local Authority was more visible to schools and that schools were aware of the support that the Local Authority could provide.
- Harris Academy had recently hosted A National Citizen Service (NCS) event which had been attended by the Portfolio Holder and Minister Tracey Crouch MP.
- A review of SEN provision across the Borough continued.
- Provisional results from Key Stage 4 had been good with over $\frac{3}{4}$ of schools achieving above the national average. 2017 had seen strong academic results across the Borough.
- In terms of building new schools in the borough, challenges continued. The planning application for the Shaw Academy had been rejected by the Development Control Committee, and the application for Bullers Wood School for Boys was due to be reconsidered by the Development Control Committee on Thursday 25th January 2018.
- There had been a positive outcome from Ofsted's 5th Monitoring Visit of Children's Services. The letter received from Ofsted following the visited recorded that "no inadequate practice had been found and some aspects of Good practice had been identified."
- The Portfolio Holder had met with the Independent Chairman of the Bromley Safeguarding Children's Board.
- The Portfolio Holder had attended a meeting of the Living in Care Council and continued to attend the regular meetings of the Children's Service Improvement Governance Board.
- Members of the Committee were urged to go and see the fantastic work that was going on out in the Community.

- Finally, the Portfolio Holder had extended his congratulation to his Executive Assistant, Councillor Tom Philpott, and his wife on the recent birth of their son.

The Portfolio Holder responded to questions, making the following comments:

- As yet, it was not clear whether Shaw Academy would appeal the decision of the Development Control Committee to refuse the planning application and the best case for the Bullers Wood application would need to be presented to the Development Control Committee on Thursday.
- A comparison of Bromley's exam results with the top 10 authorities in the Country would be circulated to Members following the meeting.
- Over the next few years the Local Authority's relationship with schools in the Borough needed to fundamentally change. The Local Authority needed to ensure that it was visible to schools, would work to overcome issues collectively, and was able to facilitate relationships with the wider Bromley partnership.
- It was expected that in September 2018, there would be no primary schools in the Borough that were not academies; there would be only three schools maintained by the Local Authority (2 Special Schools and 1 Secondary School).
- A date for the School Place Planning Working Group would be set once information had been collated and analysed.

Action Point 1: That the comparison of Bromley's exams results with the top 10 authorities in the Country to be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his update.

33 EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME REPORT CDS18015

The Committee considered its work programme for the 2017/18 municipal year. The Chairman highlighted that the end of the current term of office for councillors was drawing near, with elections due to take place in May 2018. It was already clear that there would be at least 20 new Members of the Council following the elections.

It would be for the new Committee in the 2018/19 municipal year to determine the Committee's ongoing work programme.

A Members emphasised the importance of attending the site visits that were arranged and set out at Appendix 2 of the report..

RESOLVED: That the work programme 2017/18 be noted.

34 SCRUTINY OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

The Interim Director of Education, who had been in post for just over two months, outlined her background and responded to questions, making the following comments:

- The current Director would only be in post for a limited time and was working with the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Education, Care and Health Services to permanently recruit to the post of Director of Education.
- The previous Schools Partnership Board had been superseded by the rejuvenated Bromley Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Executive Board which was chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive and included representatives from partner organisations such as the Police, Health, Schools, Early Years, and Further Education, amongst others.
- Schools were under no legal obligation to have a relationship with the Local Authority. Therefore it was important for the Council to work in partnership with Schools and highlight its commitment and responsibilities towards schools. Since joining the Council the Director of Education had identified that schools were keen to have a relationship with the Local Authority but they needed greater clarity surrounding lines of responsibility for vulnerable children.
- In terms of developing a relationship with schools the way forward was to demonstrate that the Local Authority and Schools in the Borough had common objectives and could work together. That a collaborative approach to working could bring about improvement.
- The majority of academy trusts had followed non-statutory guidance on the construction of governing bodies and were concentrating on ensuring that people with the right skill set were appointed to governing bodies. In terms of increasing the number of Local Authority Governors across the Borough, the way forward was for the Local Authority to make itself visible and demonstrate that an individual with a local authority background could bring valuable experience to a Governing Body.
- The two biggest challenges for the future Director of Education were firstly, addressing the gap that currently exists between the highest achieving pupils in the Borough and those whose achievement was at risk. In order to do this pathways would need to be mapped to bring clarity to the tiers of support and ensure that children received the right support. Secondly, SEN provision needed to be reconfigured across the Borough, including alternative provision. The alternative provision market would need to be stimulated and a quality assurance mechanism put in place.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Director of Education for her update.

35 WITNESS SESSION: EARLY INTERVENTION AND TROUBLED FAMILIES

The Committee had been provided with a range of written evidence in advance of the meeting. This included a report explaining the early intervention offer in Bromley and setting out the background to the Tackling Troubled Families agenda and how this had been integrated within Early Intervention and Family Support Services, the Ofsted Inspection Framework, An executive summary of the review into integration and opportunity in isolated and deprived communities undertaken by Dame Louise Casey DBE CB, and *Breaking the Lock: a new preventative model to improve the lives of vulnerable children and make families stronger*. In addition to this the Select Committee was provided with feedback that had been received from families attending Children's Centres and some relevant Case Studies.

The Chairman was pleased to welcome Rachael Dunley, Head of Early Intervention and Family Support (LBB), Deborah Cole, Team Manager: Children and Family Centre and FSPP (LBB), Barrie Cull, Internal Auditor (LBB), PS Alex Komoroczy (Metropolitan Police), and PCSO Sue Kennedy (Metropolitan Police) to the meeting.

Opening the discussion, the Chairman emphasised that it had always been the case that early intervention was critical and it was noted that recently the Independent Chairman of the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board had described Bromley's Early intervention Service as "the jewel in Bromley's crown".

The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support set out the background to the Bromley Children's Project which was now in its 22nd year and had evolved over time and now encompassed a number of family support services. In recent years the service had become much more responsive to the needs of children and their families as well as the schools who provide valuable support to children. The Bromley Children's Project was now able to evidence the changes that were being made to the lives of families across the borough and the ways in which these families were engaging with the services that were offered. In 2016/17 over 20,000 unique individuals had accessed the service. That total had already been exceeded in 2017/18 with two months of the year left to run. The aim of the service was to make a difference to families across the Borough and be able to evidence the difference that was being made. One area that had been identified for improvement was ensuring that school were kept informed. To address this, information events were being held for schools which aimed to highlight the services that were on offer. Enhanced visibility of the service would ensure that families would get support as early as possible.

The Team Manager at Castlecombe Children and Family Centre outlined her role to the Committee and provided an example of early intervention at work, highlighting that with the right support it was possible for families to make sustainable changes that would provide long term benefit.

PC Alex Komoroczy, and PCSO Sue Kennedy, who covered the wards of Mottingham, Chislehurst and Bickley, outlined the involvement of the Police in early intervention work explaining that weekly contact sessions were held at the Children and Family Centre. During these sessions the Police were able to provide advice and help to families. The sessions provided an excellent opportunity not only for the Police to help and support families in a familiar setting but also to gather information that was useful to the Police. Police Officers and PCSOs were able to work closely with the Children and Family Centre to identify families who would benefit from support and signpost them to relevant services. The Police stressed that the Children and Family Centre provided valuable services to vulnerable families and helped to address a number of social issues within communities. It was highlighted that a number of the issues dealt with by the Police stemmed from poor parenting. PCSO Sue Kennedy had previously been a Schools' Officer and therefore had known a number of the families for a very long time. The Committee heard that some of the communities in Mottingham were probably some of the hardest to reach and by working in partnership the Police and the Children and Family Centre were able to provide valuable support and advice to families who were otherwise distrusting of services.

The Internal Auditor explained that Internal Audit provided independent assurance prior to a troubled families claim being submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). A sample of 10% of claims was reviewed and the evidence to support the claim was considered to ensure that claims submitted to the DCLG met the established criteria and were timely. Audit findings were fed back to the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support and her team as well as to the Council's Audit Sub-Committee. The purpose of Internal Audit was to provide robust challenge and the current system appeared to be working.

The Select Committee explored a number of issues and in response to a question surrounding the ways in which children could be traced from birth the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support explained that a multiagency approach had to be adopted. Responsibility for recording children from birth rested with health services who had their own separate databases to store information. Importantly, all babies when they were born were issued with NHS numbers. It was these numbers that were used to ensure that the different agencies engaging with a child were referring to the same child. The Director of Education explained that once a child was on a school roll there were mechanisms in place that enabled them to be tracked and traced. However, one of the bigger challenges for all local authorities was those children who had never been on a school roll. In circumstances where children were taken off a school roll systems were in place to be able to track the child and this system of tracking continued until they were registered at a new school or registered as being home educated or moving abroad. The Director of Education explained that the Local Authority was aware that since September 2017 just over 600 children had been removed from school rolls. The Department also had a detailed breakdown of the number of children who have moved out of the Borough and registered with another school, those that have moved abroad and those that had opted for elective home education. In

relation to inward migration, the Director of Education explained that in-year admissions were co-ordinated by one officer in the Council and when an application for a school place in Bromley was received the child would be tracked with systems in place to cross reference. However, in relation to children under statutory school age, there was no statutory requirement for a parent to register the child with the Local Authority and therefore it was harder to track these children. However, the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support highlighted that the Health Visitor Service undertook 5 mandatory health checks from birth so it was likely that very young children would be known to health services.

A Member of the Committee noted that a lot of resource appeared to be focused on deprived areas and queried whether sufficient support was available to families considered to be in a higher socio-economic group but nevertheless still requiring help and support in terms of parenting. In response the Head of Early intervention and Family Support highlighted that a great deal of support was offered to all families through other partner agencies such as the Health Visiting Service and GPs, who would provide support with issues such as post-natal depression. In terms of Children and Families Centres, when the provision of the Centres was restructured a number of years ago efforts were made to ensure that over 84% of the population of the Borough was within 2 miles of a Children and Family Centre. The services offered at the Borough's Children and Family Centres were open to any family experiencing issues who required support.

In terms of the growing issues of gangs, in response to a question, the Head of Early intervention and Family Support explained that some families had come forward to seek support but that this was still very much a learning curve for the service. The Bromley Children's Project worked very closely with the Police gangs team and the parenting course "Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities" sought to address what could be termed 'risky behaviours' in order to help support families.

The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support explained to the Committee that when a family was referred into the Service a holistic assessment of the whole family was undertaken. The aim of the Troubled Families Initiative was to work with the family as whole and for a whole range of issues to be tackled jointly. Therefore practitioners set goals for the whole family and the measure of success was the level of change for the family as a whole.

The Team Manager of Castlecombe Children and Family Centre explained the process that was adopted following referral and set out the timescales involved. Once cases had been considered by Panel referrals were made to practitioners. Practitioners then had 48 hours to make contact with parents. Following this a period of 28 days was allowed for discussions with the family to enable goals to be set. Practitioners then worked with families for, on average, between 16 and 26 weeks. On occasion the time spent with families extended beyond 26 weeks as long as the family was continuing to make progress. This was closely monitored to ensure that there was no drift or

delay and each practitioner received 4 hours of supervision from their manager a week in order to monitor the progress of cases.

The Committee queried whether it had been possible to track the impact of early intervention programmes on families that had been supported by the service when it first started over 20 years ago. The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support confirmed that it had not been possible to do this partly due to lack of resources but also because 20 years ago there was not the same level of reporting and recording. However, some of the families that had been supported through early intervention in the earliest days of the Bromley Children's Project now themselves worked within the service. In response to a question surrounding how the impact of the service could be measured the Internal Auditor emphasised that in order to meet the criteria for payment by reward set down by the DCLG the Local Authority had to evidence sustained significant improvement.

The Committee noted that whilst the Bromley Children's Project worked with a range of partners there was not yet any partnership working with Victim Support but the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support confirmed that she would make contact with the organisation. It was also noted that no contact had been made with local magistrates and the Chairman suggested that this might be an area to work on.

The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support explained in response to a question that when families were resistant to the support that was offered practitioners often had to use tenacity and perseverance to encourage the family to understand the value of this support. Practitioners would review the original referral and see if any encouragement could be offered by the referring organisation and would not give up until every avenue had been exhausted. However, it had to be borne in mind that it was a 'by consent service' so there was no way of forcing families who really did not want to work with practitioners to accept the help offered. In cases where there was suspected abuse or safeguarding concerns and the family was unwilling to engage a referral to the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) Team or the Merlin Team would be initiated and any useful intelligence shared with colleagues in the Police.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support explained that aside from the regular returns to DCLG there was no separate, stand alone, inspection of troubled families. The whole service was inspected under the framework of Children's Services and Tackling Troubled Families would form part of this Ofsted Inspection.

In relation to caseloads, the Chairman queried whether there was a sufficient number of staff to run the service. The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support responded that more staff would be helpful as caseloads within early intervention were challenging. Early Intervention Practitioners worked with families, not just children, and there could sometimes be four or five children in one family. Managers were alert to the pressures faced by staff and action

was being taken to address staff vacancies. It was anticipated that the service would be fully staffed by April 2018.

The Bromley Children's Project undertook a lot of preventative work in relation to young people at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and practitioners often worked with families to identify employment opportunities. A member of staff from the Bromley Children's Project was currently seconded to HR, working with the lead officer for apprenticeships in the Council.

In terms of cooperation with the wider Bromley Partnership, the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support confirmed that at grass roots level cooperation was good and strong working relationships had been developed. A very valuable relationship now existed with Public Health and it was hoped that in the future more work could be done with GPs in the Borough. The service was constantly aware of the pressures facing partner agencies, for example the Police were undergoing a restructure which could present challenges and this would require flexibility and open lines of communication.

The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support reported that there was also excellent cooperation with other Council services. Where there were areas of weakness these were reviewed to ensure that they could be overcome. When new social workers joined the Council efforts were made to ensure that they were made aware of the Early Intervention model at Bromley as it was a model that was generally not replicated elsewhere.

The Chairman asked that following the meeting a structure chart be provided to the Committee, setting out where the Bromley Children's Project sat within the overall departmental structure.

Action Point 2: that a structure chart to be provided, setting out where the Bromley Children's Project sat within the overall departmental structure.

The Chairman thanked all the witnesses for attending the meeting and asked that, if there were any recommendations, whether they be local or national, that witnesses would like the Committee to consider, these be forwarded to the Committee clerk.

36 COMMITTEE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chairman requested that Members forward any proposed recommendations for inclusion in the report to the Committee Clerk. Once the report and recommendations had been drafted the report could be approved by the Committee via email and referred to Full Council.

The Meeting ended at 9.20 pm

Chairman