

## **EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 16 October 2018

### **Present:**

Councillor Nicholas Bennett J.P. (Chairman)  
Councillor Neil Reddin FCCA (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Marina Ahmad, Kathy Bance MBE,  
Yvonne Bear, Judi Ellis, Chris Pierce, Will Rowlands and  
Stephen Wells  
Emmanuel Arbenser and David Hullah  
Tajana Reeves

### **11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies for absence were received from Angela Leeves (Early Years Representative) and Reverend Roger Bristow (Church of England Representative).

Apologies were also received from Councillor Fortune (Portfolio Holder) and Councillor Dykes (Executive Assistant).

### **12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no additional declarations of interest.

### **13 MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, CHILDREN & FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 4TH JULY 2018**

With reference to page 10 of the minutes, a Member noted that 'positive discrimination' was in fact illegal. Whilst it was noted that at the meeting this term had been used by the Officer concerned, it was agreed that the reference in the minutes would be amended to "positive action".

Referring to page 12 of the minutes, a Member highlighted that whilst at the meeting the Chairman had referred to 'apprenticeship opportunities for people identified by the Council', following the meeting it had been agreed that the recommendation from the Committee be that contractors should be required to 'offer apprenticeship opportunities to young people'. In light of this the Committee agreed that that this reference should be amended.

The minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2018 were agreed, and signed as a correct record, subject to the amendments outlined above.

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

No questions were received.

**15 MATTERS ARISING AND WORK PROGRAMME  
CSD18150**

The Committee considered a report dealing with the Committee's business management.

Matters Arising

In response to a question concerning whether a further meeting had been arranged with the Diocese to discuss a Catholic Secondary School in the Borough, the Deputy Chief Executive agreed to investigate further and report back to Members following the meeting.

In response to a question concerning any impact of the Restructure of the Youth Courts the Deputy Chief Executive reported that conversations with the Police had indicated that there appeared to be no immediate impact however, the situation would be kept under review.

The Deputy Chief Executive also confirmed that in respect of Streetwise, a couple of conversations had taken place with Lewisham. The contractual agreement was between Streetwise and Lewisham and as a result of this LB Bromley had limited ability to intervene. However, a further follow up meeting had been arranged between LB Bromley and LB Lewisham and the plans regarding Streetwise had been put on hold until this meeting had taken place.

The Chairman noted that no Bromley children had been forced to attend Croydon schools. The Committee noted that Bromley parents had the choice to send their children to Croydon schools and the Chairman requested that following the meeting information on the number of children who chose to attend Croydon schools be provided to the Committee.

The Chief Executive attended the meeting to provide Members with an update concerning the Aeronautical College at Biggin Hill. In the interests of transparency the Chairman confirmed that he was no longer a Governor at London South East Colleges. In order to support the update the Chief Executive circulated the letter that had been sent to the Principal of London South East College along with two maps of Biggin Hill airport; one of which highlighted 3 specific sites and a 'Strategic Plan' detailing proposals at the Airport.

The Chief Executive provided some context around the history of the issues with the Aeronautical College, explaining that in July 2014 the London Mayor has issued Supplementary Planning Guidance. This had encouraged some land at Biggin Hill to be used as an education facility with specific reference to

aeronautical and high tech. Subsequent to this, there had been a report to the Council's Executive identifying up to £3.5m funding for the Biggin Hill area from Outer London Business Funding that the Local Authority had received.

Referring to the 'Strategic Plan' map, the Chief Executive reported that at the time this had been developed discussions about the Master Plan were ongoing and initial discussions took place about an aviation academy at the 'West Camp Site' owned by Bernie Ecclestone. In the early days it was envisioned that the funding identified would be used to bring that site into use. The intention was for the Council to achieve an asset in return for the investment. However, the plans started to fall through and the Chief Executive explained that the letter he subsequently sent to the Principal of London South East Colleges on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017 was about the funding set aside for skills.

At the same time, in June/July 2017, the Airport indicated that it was seeking to locate the Aeronautical College at site (2) (in proximity to Milking Lane Farm). The Local Authority Planning Department had a number of concerns over this site and as a result of this the Airport offered site (3) to the College. As part of this offer the Airport expected the College to secure a contribution of £1.2m from the Council for road infrastructure and access to the west of the Airport where the site was located. London South East Colleges made a submission to the GLA based on this offer. When Council Officers further investigated the contribution that had been requested it was unclear how the figure of £1.2m had been reached as the Council's estimate of the cost was significantly lower. The Chief Executive highlighted that it was worth noting that at this time proposals had not been presented to any Council Committees and no formal decisions had been taken by the Council.

The Chief Executive reported that the College was now looking to identify a new site. In November 2017, the (new) Leader of the Council had attended a meeting with the Principal of London South East College (which was also attended by the Children, Education and Families Portfolio Holder and the Chief Executive). At this meeting the possibility of exploring a loan from the Council to the College was discussed.

In response to questions from Members the Chief Executive confirmed that as far as he was aware no further meetings had taken place with the Principal of London South East Colleges. No update had been provided by the College concerning the progress of the submission to the GLA.

In respect of the loan, at a rate of 6%, which the Council had offered to the College, Members queried the intention with regard to the Outer London Business Funding given the remit of training and questioned whether the offer of a loan was in place of the funding. The Chief Executive confirmed that the loan was in place of the funding and clarified that the £3.5m identified by the Executive was for skills, training and development in the Biggin Hill area as a development centre.

The Committee explored the issues of the loan at an interest rate of 6%. The Chief Executive reported that the Leader had tasked the Director of Finance with making the terms of the loan as attractive as possible. Given the impact of the expansion of the College the Director of Finance had felt that a rate of 6% was appropriate in the circumstances. The expansion of the College had affected its finances and this raised questions about the use of taxpayer, Council funding under these circumstances.

Turning to the letter to the Principal of the College dated 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017, the Chairman suggested that anyone reading the letter would naturally assume that funding of up to £3m was being offered. The Chairman suggested that the letter, the offer of a loan at 6%, and the Leader's response to a question posed at the Executive, Resources and Contracts PDS Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018, did not reflect on the Council in a positive manner. In response the Chief Executive stressed that throughout the process the Council had been supportive of the proposal for an Aeronautical College at Biggin Hill, however this support was subject to the formal decision making process of the Council. Following the delivery of the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017 letter, the College had submitted a bid to the GLA reflecting funding of £1.2m (not the £3m referenced in the letter), this indicated that the College had not expected funding of £3m from the Council. The Executive's consideration of £3m funding had been on the basis of the Council gaining a significant asset. However, events moved quickly. When the site moved to (3) Officers had concerns about the value of the £1.2m funding as the Council estimates indicated that the proposed infrastructure would cost significantly less. Since November 2017, there had been no further discussions with the College, although there had been some unconfirmed hearsay about consideration of a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> site (the 5<sup>th</sup> site being within the Business Park).

The Chairman also expressed concern that neither the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families, nor the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing were aware of the existence of the letter. The Chairman expressed serious concern that it appeared that Officers had not adequately prepared the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing for a question that had been asked at the recent meeting of Full Council. The Chairman highlighted that Members should be able to expect clear answers to questions posed at Council. In response the Chief Executive agreed to investigate how well prepared the Portfolio Holder had been for answering the question, highlighting that Officers were not responsible for the final answer given at a meeting of Full Council.

Concluding the discussion, the Chairman reiterated that the events did not reflect well on the Council. The proposal for an Aeronautical College presented a major opportunity for training in the Borough and to this end £3m funding had been set aside, yet to date nothing had been spent. The Chairman queried whether the change in Council leadership had coloured the approach to an Aeronautical College at Biggin Hill.

## Work Programme

The Committee agreed to hold a Special Meeting at the beginning of December 2018. The purpose of the meeting to consider the following issues:

1. Analysis of Education undertaken by the Director of Education
2. Scrutiny of the Education Budget

It was also suggested that as the Portfolio Holder had been unable to attend this meeting he should be asked to provide an update to the Special meeting.

### **RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. David Hullah (Secondary Parent Governor Representative) be appointed as a Co-opted Member to the Children, Education & Families Select Committee for 2018/19 with voting rights;**
- 2. Progress on matters arising from previous meetings be noted; and**
- 3. The 2018/19 work programme be agreed subject to the amendments outlined above.**

### **16 QUESTIONS TO THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING**

No questions were received.

### **17 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE**

As the Portfolio Holder was unable to attend the meeting it was agreed that he would be asked to provide an update at the Special meeting due to be held at the beginning of December.

### **18 SCRUTINY OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, CARE AND HEALTH SERVICES**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for Education, Care and Health Services, Mr Ade Adetosoye, attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Committee. Mr Adetosoye gave a brief introduction with an overview of his first 21 months in post, highlighting the following key achievement and challenges –

- The launch of the ‘Roadmap to Excellent’ and the Transformation Programme; this introduced the Caseload Promise. Generally the caseload of social workers had been kept below 20 however, the past three weeks had been particularly busy and caseloads had slightly increased.
- 80% of social workers were now permanent staff and the progress that had been made in this area was something to celebrate.

- As a result of additional funding that had been received it had been possible to establish a specialist Team for CSE, Missing and Gangs. In the 2016 Ofsted Inspection the Local Authority's inability to track its young people at risk in terms of CSE and gangs had been particularly criticised and this new team directly addressed this criticism.
- The outcomes of each of the 7 Monitoring Visits undertaken by Ofsted demonstrated measurable progress within the Service. The previous week the annual conversation with Ofsted had taken place.
- It was expected that Children's Services would receive its inspection from Ofsted within the next two months and preparation for the Inspection was ongoing.
- A great deal of progress had been made with the recruitment of social workers and this was something else to celebrate.
- In conclusion, the Deputy Chief Executive stated that he was proud of the way in which the Council had embraced children in care and had taken steps to celebrate the work of children in care.

Challenges included:

- The budget. LB Bromley was still below the national average and its statistical neighbours in terms of the number of children in care. This directly impacted on the budget as it was likely that the Local Authority would see further increases in the number of children taken into care.
- Early intervention. A key area was to work with schools in relation to early intervention. There were a number of options to be explored in relation to encouraging schools to do more in respect of early intervention. The possibility of locating certain early intervention services in schools should also be explored.
- More needed to be done to increase the outcomes for children in care at Key Stage 4 (in respect of achieving 5+ GCSEs). Currently 25% of pupils achieved 5+ GCSE and steps needed to be taken to increase this.
- More work needed to be done around providing apprenticeship opportunities for Bromley's children in care.

In conclusion, the Deputy Chief Executive reported that in the past year there had been 3000 referrals into Children's Social Care, 6000 visits to early intervention centres. There were currently 2000 children in need, 280 children subject to a Child Protection Plan, 310 children in care, and 63 children monitored through the Local Authority's MEGA Panel (relating to CSE, Missing and Gangs). The Deputy Chief Executive stated that he was confident that good foundations for further service improvements were in place. The progress made by the Service had been measured and validated through the seven Ofsted monitoring visits however, capacity to manage future demand would remain a key issue.

Mr Adetosoye responded to questions, making the following comments –

- The last regulatory visit by the Youth Justice Board had been positive. The Youth Offending Service was currently in the process of updating the Youth Justice Plan. A Borough-wide Knife Strategy was being developed in conjunction with the Police. Recruitment issues within the Youth Offending Service were being addressed. A further inspection of the Service was expected in two years and the service was making good progress in maintaining its current position in terms of the inspection judgement. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that if required he would provide a further update to a future meeting of the Select Committee.
- Following a successful recruitment and interview process for the Director of Education a job offer had been made and accepted. It was hoped that the new Director of Education would be in post in January 2019. The Committee extended its thanks to the current Interim Director of Education for her work and the support she had provided to the Committee.
- In relation to Bullers' Wood; a Public Enquiry of the Appeal would be conducted by the Planning Inspector in the first week of November. The Enquiry would relate to the second of the three applications and it was expected that it would take place over 4 days. The Local Authority was also currently working with the School in relation to admissions within the Pan London Agreement.
- Turning to the issue of SEND Reforms; Bromley had been one of the few local authorities to transfer to Education Care and Health Plans (ECHPs) on time. There was now a need to focus on the quality of the plans. Officers were also reviewing the capacity of the local estate to support children with more complex needs that required more expensive independent provision. There was a need to promote amongst parents the excellent schools in Bromley. There was a clear need to look at different ways of managing the budget. To this end a bid for a specialist school at Hawes Down had been submitted to the DfE in recognition of the need to increase the capacity to place children locally. The Deputy Chief Executive stressed that there were no proposals to move children from their current schools and that this was about increasing future capacity. The Deputy Chief Executive agreed to circulate the description of the new SEND bid and the proposed plan to Members following the meeting.
- In relation to CAMHS; the Deputy Chief Executive stressed the need to review early intervention to reduce the flow into Tier 3 and Tier 4 of the framework. A number of options were being considered and a bid had been submitted concerning locating CAMHS clinicians in schools. The outcome of the bid would not be known until mid-November 2018. Opinions amongst Members on this proposal were divided with some Members seeing value in the proposals whilst others expressed concern about young people being deterred from accessing services provided in Schools due to the possibility of being identified. The current arrangements provided a more anonymous service that enabled parents to accompany very young children as well as providing services outside of school hours. The Deputy Chief

Executive confirmed that both Bromley Y and Oxleas had been involved in the design of the change to service provision and the Chief Executive of Oxleas was one of the signatories to the bid that had been submitted.

- Turning to the issue of the recruitment of foster carers; the Deputy Chief Executive highlighted that foster-to-adopt secured permanency for a child much earlier. Whilst it may mean that the Local Authority lost a foster carer it was a price worth paying in order to achieve permanency for a young child as the right outcome for the child was secured. Members stressed the need to retain some home grown foster carers as different skill sets were required for fostering and adoption. In response to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that he considered that the regionalisation of Adoption Services was a positive move as it pooled resources and increased choice. It would be possible to take decisions around permanency at a much earlier stage as well as increasing the capacity for recruitment and delivering economies of scale in the future.
- In relation to improving the education outcomes for children in care, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that this was a key priority for the Corporate Parenting Board and the Education Business Partnership. Work was ongoing to identify opportunities for children in care and Officers were working with Bromley College to identify any support that could be provided.
- Attention had now turned to Social Worker retention following the initial focus on recruitment. A Retention Strategy was being developed and a good retention package had been put in place. It was clear that manageable caseloads, in line with the Caseload Promise, would be key to staff retention. The work of the Council's Social Workers was also celebrated. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that he was confident that caseloads were reducing, despite the recent increase in referrals into the Service. In response to a question the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the target was to have a 95-99% permanent work force.

## **19 MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING SUB COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18TH JULY 2018**

The minutes of the Education, Children and Families Budget and Performance Monitoring Sub Committee meeting held on 18th July 2018 were noted.

## **20 LIVING IN CARE COUNCIL VIDEO**

The Committee watched a video that had been made by the Living in Care Council entitled "Listen when I Speak". The Committee thanked the Living in Care Council for the informative video, noting that it had raised a number of questions which would feed into the Committee's Scrutiny Review in January 2019 focused on Corporate Parenting.



## **21 WITNESS SESSION: SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE BUDGET**

The Committee had been provided with a comprehensive report in advance of the meeting. Included within the report was an overview of the Children's Social Care Budget and data surrounding the families accessing children's social care and the reasons for referrals into the service. In addition to this, Members had before them the Bromley Safeguarding Children's Board Neglect Strategy. Following the publication of the agenda supplementary financial information had been circulated to Members.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Ade Adetosoye, Mr Bradshaw and Mr Dare to the meeting. Members of the Committee explored a number of themes and issues with the witnesses.

The Head of ECHS Finance introduced the report and highlighted that the current forecast was a £1.5m overspend in the Children's Social Care budget (after management action). The supplementary information provided to the Committee provided a further breakdown of the budget and current outturn. The Chairman highlighted that in 2016/17 there had been an injection of funding from the Executive following the Ofsted Inspection.

The Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning West emphasised that Children's Social Care was a demand-led Service. The report presented to the Committee had detailed some of the reasons that Bromley children had entered care. There was a range of children accessing statutory services, often with a variety of needs. The Committee noted the national challenges around the availability and access to secure beds. The result of the inadequacy of the market to meet the high demand meant that young people often had to be placed in other, non-secure, provision with a high, and therefore costly, ratio of staff to child. The report before the Committee detailed three case studies of Bromley children looked after. Two of the three young people had been unknown to the Local Authority prior to coming into care.

The Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning West also emphasised the range of packages that were offered to children with disabilities in order to support them to remain at home. Many of the young people had complex disabilities and this placed an extreme strain on parents. As a result of this parents often required additional support such as, but not limited to, respite care. The costs associated with children with disabilities entering care were high as a result of the complexity of their care needs.

The Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning West reported that it was difficult to identify why there had been an increase in the numbers of children being referred recently into Bromley. The Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning informed Members that within Children's Social Care the combination of mental health issues, and drug and alcohol dependency amongst parents was known as the "toxic trio". There were a number of factors that led to children being taken into care. The Local Authority worked

with parents in an attempt to keep children within the home environment for as long as possible however, sometimes the Local Authority had to embark on care proceedings to request endorsement from the judiciary to take children into care. There were times also when a child would enter care in a crisis rather than in a planned way through the Court. Every decision for a child that was taken into care was reviewed at the weekly Placement Panel. All external placements were also reviewed at this panel which was attended by colleagues from the CCG and Education as sometimes the cost was shared. The Panel ensured the placement provider was providing value for money.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the work of social workers in any local authority was to manage risks. If mistakes were made and children placed at risk of harm a social worker could lose their license to practice. The Deputy Chief Executive reminded the Committee that the post holder of statutory Director of Children's Services was the only post in local government could receive the sanction of removal by the Minister for State.

#### Accuracy of Forecasting

The Head of ECHS Finance confirmed that forecasting was robust however, the budget for Children's Social Care remained volatile as a result of the needs-led nature of the Service which was often outside the control of the Local Authority. The Head of ECHS Finance referred to the recent court judgement concerning a Bromley child who required a secure bed. As no suitable secure placement was available it had been necessary to place the young person in a residential placement outside London with 3:1 care. As a result of this the Local Authority had incurred unplanned costs in the region of £5,000 to £6,000 per week. Costs such as these were often hard to predict and therefore hard to reflect in the budget.

The report provided to Members set out the number of children predicted to access children's social care until 2022/32 and the expected numbers in each category of placement. It was noted that realistic baseline budgets would result from robust forecasting however, it was necessary to bear in mind at all times that the budget was subject to the unknown and unplanned influences on the Service.

The Chairman noted that for the current 2018/19 financial year there was already a variance in the budget of £2.4m in Fostering and Adoption Resources resulting from a significant increase in expenditure in just one area. On the basis of this significant variance in budget the Chairman questioned the accuracy of forecasting. In response the Head of ECHS Finance reported that forecasts were based on Officers knowledge of past activity and well as their best prediction of future trends. Targets for mitigating management actions were set but if some were not delivered the budget deficit would continue. The 2019/20 budget process that had just started would be reviewing the current position. There had been a spike in children entering care that had not been predicted at the time the budget was set. There was a clearly a need to set challenging targets however, there was also a need to be realistic about the demands being made on the Service.

The Committee noted that Officers budgeted to actuals although this could be problematic when forecasting future demands. Current forecasting enabled growth to be built into the budget using information from the service, although this was set at a point in time each year. Challenges remained and the expectation was that the service mitigated this as far as possible.

#### Benchmarking with other Local Authorities

The report to the Committee set out details of benchmarking against other Local Authorities. The Head of ECHS Finance urged the Committee to approach the statistics with some caution as differing measurements could lead to different interpretations. The conclusions drawn from the statistics could differ depending on the measurement being considered. With reference to the unit cost for Children's Social Care at Redbridge, the Head of ECHS Finance provided some context and explained that whilst Redbridge did spend less than Bromley overall they had approximately 50% more children in need and as such the averages were skewed. There was undoubtedly more work to do in terms of unit costs and further investigation was required.

#### Learning from Best Practice in other Local Authorities in reducing the Unit Cost

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that further work around reducing the unit cost of placements was a key priority. There was a need to reduce reliance on placements outside of London as the cost of this type of placement was unregulated. There was a clear requirement to manage the market differently and place more children within London as the Pan London Agreement set a cap on the cost of placements.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that there would undoubtedly be growth in the Service but that it was important to manage the growth.

Members of the Committee expressed scepticism around the fact that there appeared to be one Local Authority whose unit cost was £832. It was suggested that this cost was unlikely given the average unit cost was much greater at £11,304. It was agreed that the data would need to be further investigated. Clearly if a local authority had been able to deliver a service that was compliant with regulatory standards for such a low unit cost there were lessons that could be learnt

#### Developing new ways of working and the future use of Artificial Intelligence

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman concerning whether there was any change of practice that would result in teenagers who enter the care system late being identified at an earlier stage, the Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning West emphasised that one of the key principals was to leave children in their home for as long as possible. Social Workers tried to support parents as much as possible through early intervention services and support

packages that were put in place. However, ultimately when parents were unable to cope their children enter the care system.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that funding had been secured to establish and deliver a Diversion Programme. Through this programme a team of two social workers would provide support.

In response to a question from a Member the Head of ECHS Finance reported that the Local Authority had received the funding from the CCG detailed in the report. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that discussions with the CCG around additional funding were ongoing. The relationship with the CCG had improved compared to the position 3 or 4 years ago and £1m in funding for placements had been received from the CCG. The position was under review and further discussions would take place with the CCG.

A Member noted that there was an increasing number of children entering care with a similar increase in the complexity of the children entering care because of increasing medical need. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that he was confident if there was a requirement to approach the CCG for additional funding based on the need profile constructive discussions would take place.

In response to a question concerning the 'Staying Put' initiative, the Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged that this was a cost effective way of keeping young people between the ages of 16 and 25 in a stable placement with foster carers they knew. Bromley was exceeding its target for Staying Put and was fulling utilising the available funding.

In relation to alternative options for the placement of children, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that that there was a Commissioning Plan in place and this set out the delivery of mitigation and savings. One of the features of the Commissioning Plan was a review of High Needs Placements. In addition to this consideration was being given to new initiatives that would manage the risks in a slightly different way, especially the risks around leaving children at home when parents exhibited drug and alcohol dependency. Managing such risks in a different way would impact on the budget position.

A Member expressed concerns around proposals that were under consideration to further involve schools in early intervention work. It was suggested that the principal remit of schools was to education young people. The Member noted that currently a great deal of social care based support was provided to families with primary aged children. Once the children transitioned to secondary school the interventions significantly reduced or stopped and families were left unsupported. It was suggested that Children and Family Centres should focus more support on children who were approaching or going through puberty. It was noted that Children and Family Centres did not currently open during the weekend and this was a time when teenagers could access support if necessary. The Member suggested that this gap needed to be addressed. In response, the Deputy Chief Executive highlighted that Children and Family Centres did run sessions on issues such

as gangs and managing challenging behaviour, and these sessions were targeted at families with teenaged children. It was acknowledged that whilst effective programmes were in place there was always more that could be done and Officers would take on board the concerns that had been raised.

### Secure Beds

The Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning West explained that there were two types of secure placement: a secure placement through the criminal justice route which was court placed; and welfare secure. In the case of welfare secure the Local Authority could place a child in a secure bed for their own safety, although this decision had to be endorsed by the court within 72 hours. Welfare secure placements were in a secure house that was well staffed and often in a remote location. The Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning West explained that the placement could often be therapeutic however, the Court would only endorse a placement of 12 weeks. This was in reality very little time to influence and turn around a challenging pattern of behaviour. The Committee noted that the mix of children within a secure placement had to be carefully managed. As a result of this all applications went to a central database where they were carefully reviewed. There were often around 30 applications for a single secure bed.

### Recruitment of Social Workers

Members noted that the ambition of the Deputy Chief Executive was to reach the target of 90% permanent staff. The intention was to maintain the current 80% permanent staff and increase from this level. A stable, permanent work force would reduce financial pressure and would also provide much needed stability to the children in the care of the Local Authority.

In response to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Local Authority recruited Social Work Assistants to the Service. However, legally Social Work Assistants were prevented from undertaking Child Protection cases and signing off on assessments.

### Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Committee noted that the recruitment of foster carers was a key priority for the Service. Foster Carer recruitment had significantly increased from a very low base of 7 and Bromley now had 29 foster carers. Progress was on the right trajectory although there was always more that could be done.

Members noted that the use of Independent Fostering Agencies was far more costly than in-house foster carers. By recruiting more in-house foster carers costs could be significantly reduced.

### Net Migration and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning West reported that more families had entered the Borough

than had left the Borough. The Committee noted that where children were subject to a Child Protection Plan or were considered to be 'Children in Need' there was a statutory obligation to notify the new host Local Authority. If a Care Order was in place the responsibility for the child would remain with the family's previous host Local Authority.

The Committee noted that one of the key issues facing the Local Authority was the inadequacy of the funding for unaccompanied asylum seeking children received from Central Government. Currently the funding that was provided did not even cover the placement costs let alone the costs of the social worker and other costs associated with a child in care. Members also noted that no grant funding was provided for the first 25 unaccompanied asylum seeking children placed in the Borough. These costs had to be met from the already stretched local authority budget. In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that if the child's application for asylum was successful and once the necessary paperwork was in place the grant would be received until the young person reached the age of 25. If the application was unsuccessful and the child was to be repatriated the grant would cease.

A Member recalled that there had once been a proposal to encourage families who had migrated to the United Kingdom and subsequently settled in Bromley to foster unaccompanied asylum seeking children. No further updates on this proposal had been received and it was suggested that this should once again be investigated.

### Commissioning Process

In response to a question the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Commissioning Plan was a three to four year plan which was monitored by a departmental delivery board. Key actions and the processes in place were reviewed on a line by line basis. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that he was confident that the plan would support the delivery of key savings across the Service. Some progress had already been made in delivering savings against the injection of funds into the Service.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Chief Executive, the Head of ECHS Finance and the Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning West for their input into the review. It was noted that once the report had been drafted and recommendations agreed the report would be presented to Full Council for consideration.

The Meeting ended at 10.00 pm

Chairman