

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

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 26 January 2021

### **Present:**

Councillor Nicky Dykes (Chairman)  
Councillor Judi Ellis (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Marina Ahmad, Yvonne Bear, Kevin Brooks,  
Robert Evans, Christine Harris and Neil Reddin FCCA

Reverend Roger Bristow  
Emmanuel Arbenser  
Angela Leeves

### **Also Present:**

Councillor Peter Fortune, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education & Families  
Councillor Kieran Terry, Executive Assistant for Children, Education & Families

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Will Rowlands and Mrs Joan Mc Connell.

### **35 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no additional declarations of interest.

### **36 MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, CHILDREN & FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2020 were agreed, and signed as a correct record.

### **37 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING**

A total of 6 questions had been received and these are attached at Annex A.

### **38 MATTERS OUTSTANDING AND WORK PROGRAMME** **Report CSD21015**

The report set out progress on matters outstanding from the last meeting and the Committee's work programme from the remaining meetings for the 2020/21 municipal year.

Members noted that at the next meeting there would be a Panel Question and Answer session with the Children, Education and Families Senior Leadership Team, comprising – The Director of Children's Services, the Director of Education, the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care, the Assistant Director of Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation, and the Head of Children's Services Finance.

The Chairman reported that the Budget Task and Finish Group had held a further meeting recommendations from which had fed into the Budget Sub-Committee meeting on 19 January 2021. Recommendations from the Budget Sub-Committee would be drafted by the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman and forwarded to the Executive for consideration.

In relation to Youth Engagement, the Chairman reported that she and the Vice-Chairman had attended a very good meeting with Bromley Living in Care Council (LINCC) and Bromley Youth Council to hear the thoughts of young people in the Borough concerning some of the items for consideration on the Committee's agenda.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

### **39 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families, Cllr Peter Fortune, attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Committee. The Portfolio Holder gave a brief introduction highlighting the following issues:-

- Over Christmas the latest lockdown was imposed and very late in the day notification was given that schools would not be reopening to all children in January. The Portfolio Holder stressed the importance of recognising that schools were not currently closed, teachers were working, children were learning and children from critical worker families and vulnerable families were in school. Rather than being closed schools were working differently at the moment.
- The restrictions placed on school attendance had presented challenges for the Local Authority. Schools had been supported with the roll out of meal vouchers and with re-opening in January – albeit in a different way – and support with remote online learning was also put in place.
- for the majority of schools are accessing the national food voucher programme and the Committee noted that Bromley had not experienced issues with the quality of food parcels experienced by some other areas and reported in the national media.

- Conversations had taken place with schools to ensure that there was sufficient IT equipment in place.
- Four key issues had emerged in the past four weeks:
  - Early Years – there had been some concern around Early Years settings remaining open. Settings had sought reassurance about safety. Communications with the settings had been maintained and conversations took place with MPs who had asked conversations of the Minister. Locally support was provided to Early Years providers to ensure that if they had to close there were no ramifications.
  - Critical Worker Children – in some provisions the numbers had certainly been higher than in “Lockdown 1”. Local school leaders were having conversations with parents and the Local Authority where there were areas of concern and monitoring would continue.
  - Teacher Testing – the Local Authority has written to schools and Early Years to confirm that testing was available in the Borough and teachers would be supported to access testing where necessary.
  - Exams – DfE had confirmed that it would consult on what would happen with the summer exams and the consultation had started last week.
- Communication was key and the Local Authority was working hard to maintain communication with all school leaders, providers, vulnerable families, and MPs. Weekly updates for Councillors had been reinstated and these provided the local context and could be more widely shared where necessary.
- Excellent work on the Domestic Violence agenda had been undertaken and the Portfolio Holder had attended a workshop delivered by ‘Drive’.
- The Corporate Parenting Board continued to meet.
- The Ofsted Annual Conversation had taken place and excellent feedback received.

The Portfolio Holder concluded his update by recognising the extraordinary commitment and dedication demonstrated by staff. Every single member of staff had been focused on ensuring that children and young people were safe.

Cllr Fortune then responded to questions making the following comments:-

- In terms of the provision of IT equipment for home learning, the Local Authority had been actively reaching out to schools and colleges. Where reports of families requiring help with technology were received the Local Authority had been responding and using the full extent of the powers it had. The Committee noted that over 700 devices had been issued and the Local Authority was working with schools to enable them to order additional laptops direct from the DfE where necessary.
- It was important to recognise the heroic efforts of teachers. Teachers were teaching, although differently. Additionally, it was also important to recognise that they had been required to quickly adapt to different ways of teaching. Teachers were currently doing more work and working longer hours than normal in order to deliver an online curriculum.

- Conversations had started around the educational gap that would be an inevitable consequence of the Lockdown. The Local Authority would continue to think about working with partners and the various agencies to ensure that everything possible was done to close progress gaps.
- There was an expectation that additional funding for Schools post lockdown would come forward, however the situation remained very fluid and confirmation of additional funding had not yet been received.
- Referrals to the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) had increased by 24%. Unsurprisingly during a lockdown situation, domestic violence remained the predominant issue although there was a broad spectrum of reasons for referral into the service.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for the update and extended its thanks to staff for their commitment and dedication.

**A PERFORMANCE REPORTING - CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY  
DATASET  
Report CEF20040A**

The report provided the regular update on the performance of services for children. The performance index provided in appendix one of the report was as at the end of October 2020.

The Committee noted that whilst the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was visible across the Performance Report there remained a number of positive outcomes that had been achieved.

There remained challenges arising from Covid around some of the indicators and mitigations had been put in place. Performance across the Portfolio continued to be closely monitored.

In response to a question around the percentage of care leavers who were in Education, Training or Employment (EET), the Committee noted that there was an inevitable impact arising from the Covid pandemic and the reality was that it was likely that further increases in those classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training) would be seen. It had been predicted that this would happen and consequently the Head of Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers had developed an EET Strategy. The Local Authority was working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and in addition to this a Panel had been established to review and offer individualised support to any young person at risk of becoming NEET.

The 6-week 'New Beginnings' programme also appeared to be having a positive impact and the Committee would be provided with more information about this initiative in the CLA Update presented to the next meeting.

The Chairman recognised the improvement that had been made in relation to the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans and congratulated the Team on the progress that had been made.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**40 PRE DECISION SCRUTINY OF REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION  
BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND  
FAMILIES**

The Committee considered the following report where the Children, Education and Families Portfolio Holder was recommended to take a decision:

**A AN INTERGENERATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE  
STRATEGY FOR 2021-2024 'MAKING DOMESTIC ABUSE  
EVERYONE'S BUSINESS'**

The previous Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2016-19 had expired and a new wider and more comprehensive strategy had now been developed and designed to encompass the full remit of domestic violence and abuse. Domestic abuse crosses the whole Borough, all communities, all ages, and all socio-economic groups. The new strategy had been developed to address this and challenged all partners to work together to tackle this. The new strategy, An Intergenerational Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy For 2021-2024 'Making Domestic Abuse Everyone's Business' demonstrated Bromley's commitment to tackling perpetrators and supporting both victims and survivors of domestic abuse in its widest sense and invited partners to join the public demonstration of this commitment.

The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support introduced the new Strategy. The Strategy had been developed as a useful training tool in addition to a statement as to where Bromley was and its direction of travel.

The Head of Early Intervention drew the Committee's attention to the Bromley Commitment to Tackling Domestic Violence to which Bromley Council and the Police had signed up. As other partners signed up to the Commitment the document would be refreshed to reflect this partnership-wide approach. All partner agencies were being encouraged to sign up to the Commitment.

The Committee noted that the Sanctuary Scheme across Bromley had been reintroduced. The scheme enabled victims to remain safely in their own home through the provision of additional security.

The Drive Scheme was a new perpetrator intervention programme. The Committee noted that whilst Bromley had fewer perpetrators of domestic abuse than neighbouring boroughs such as Croydon, Bromley's perpetrators were of a higher harm level. The Drive programme was intended to tackle specifically this issue of high harm perpetrators of domestic abuse with the aim being to reduce the numbers of such domestic abuse incidents by tackling the source of the problem. In response to a question, the Committee heard that the Drive Programme had been piloted across the Country and the closest pilot to Bromley had been Croydon. The Drive Scheme was now being rolled out across the BCU (Basic Command Unit – i.e. Bromley,

Croydon and Sutton). Where the pilots had been conducted there had been an 82% reduction in the extent of the harm inflicted on victims. Members of the Committee were invited to attend the strategic launch of the programme with details of the launch to be provided following the meeting.

Members noted that there had been a significant increase in the number of incidents of domestic abuse. The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support reported that the total number of referrals into the service last year had been 466. So far this year (quarters 1, 2 and 3) the referral rate was at 700. This demonstrated the timely nature of the production of an intergenerational domestic violence strategy which would be promoted across the strategic partnership.

The Committee noted that Domestic Abuse Awareness training was open to all Councillors and staff. Details of training could also be sent to local MPs. Members noted that efforts were currently underway to identify a provider who could deliver online training.

In response to a question, the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support confirmed that colleagues in Adult Social Care, the previous Chairman of the Adult Safeguarding Board and colleagues in Trading Standards had also been involved in the development of the Strategy to ensure that it addressed the issue of domestic violence against elderly people. In addition, colleagues across the wider workforce were also invited to contribute via a number of existing Committees and Boards; the DVA VAWG Strategic Board, the DVA VAWG Operational Forum, the Safer Bromley Partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Bromley Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

**RESOLVED: That**

- 1. The Portfolio Holder be recommended to note, endorse and approve the promotion of the new intergenerational Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy for 2021-2024 "Making Domestic Abuse Everyone's Business"; and**
- 2. Partners be encouraged to come forward and commit to the delivery of the Domestic Violence Strategy.**

**41 UPDATE FROM EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICE AND BROMLEY CHILDREN PROJECT**

The report set out the work of Early Intervention and Family Support and the services provided to families during COVID since 1 April 2020.

The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support provided a brief introduction highlighting a pleasing milestone – the Facebook page for the Service had now attracted over 1000 followers. The Team had worked very hard to reach this milestone and was rightly proud of its achievement. The Committee also noted that the new website for the SEND Information Advice and Support Service would go live later in the week.

In response to a question concerning whether any of the adaptations that had been made in response to Covid would become permanent, the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support reported that it had been pleasing to see an increase in the number of couples attending parenting courses together. These courses sometimes presented childcare issues for parents however the move to virtual provision had reduced some of these challenges. The Service was now looking at ways to provide both physical courses and a virtual presence in order to maintain these increased levels of participation.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support noting that the report clearly set out the vast amount of work undertaken by the Team and the adaptations that had been made in response to Covid.

**RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to note the report.**

#### **42 YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE UPDATE** **Report CEF20035**

The report provided an update on the work of Bromley Youth Offending Service (YOS) since January 2020, including the management of the service during the pandemic and the performance and other work of the service.

The Head of the Youth Offending Service introduced the report highlighting that throughout the Covid pandemic service delivery had been maintained from the Office as well as exploration of different virtual platforms for conducting supervision with young people. There was evidence of stronger engagement through these digital platforms. The Service had conducted a survey of young people to get a sense of their experiences and overwhelmingly young people had reported that they liked engaging with the virtual meetings with safety featuring highly as a reason for this. Members noted that there had also been a good level of engagement with parents and good performance had been maintained.

Reoffending rates were low although this was a volatile measure and changes were likely when data was next reported. Members noted that young people could reoffend for a variety of reasons. The number of children in custody had increased significantly although Members were reminded that the percentage increases were skewed by the small numbers involved.

The Committee noted that the Service had published a three-year Youth Justice Strategy which set out the ambition for children and young people. The Service was working to the Youth Justice Board Guidance around 'child first, offender second'. The strong focus on practice had continued and the workforce had been stable and committed over the last 12 months. Members noted that an inspection of the Youth Offending Service was expected, and staff were working hard to deliver a positive outcome.

In response to a question, the Head of the YOS explained that the category for 'Violent Offences' was very wide and included minor assaults as well as

very serious assaults. Members noted that the Service had seen an increase in some very serious offences committed by young people not previously known to children's social care with the pandemic also having an impact. There were delays coming through the system and often the YOS was not provided with information until children and young people were in court.

The Committee noted that there were currently 13 children looked after within the YOS. As well as having an allocated social worker the young person was also given a YOS social worker and joint meetings were held in an effort to holistically work with the young person.

In relation to safeguarding, emotional welling and gang affiliation, the Head of the YOS reported that issues were tracked and monitored through the MEGA (Multi Agency Exploitation and Gang Affiliation) Panel with lots of good work being undertaken. Members noted that the YOS was proud of the Health Team in place (including a clinical psychologist, school nurse and speech and language therapy) who worked with children and young people, particularly those who had experienced trauma. In addition, the wider CAMHS delivered through Bromley Wellbeing could also support children and young people where necessary.

**RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to endorse the Annual Report.**

#### **43     ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20** **Report CEF20036**

The report provided Members with an overview of the work of the Adoption service in compliance with legislation. Members noted that whilst still accountable for its children, in July 2019, Bromley had moved over to the Regional Adoption Agency.

The Committee heard that the Adoption Team was doing a lot of work and had continued to place children with permeant families throughout periods of lockdown. Following the first lockdown the Adoption Service had seen an increase in the number of post adoption requests it received. In addition, family finding continued with the Service processing 10 Adoption Orders this year.

In response to a question, the Adoption Group Manager confirmed that the Service only had one child waiting and was currently family finding with access to a large pool of adopters through the Regional Adoption Agency. Recruitment and assessment of adopters was managed through the Regional Adoption Agency and there were currently 79 adopters available.

Members noted the high levels of performance within the service and thanked the Group Manager and her Team for the enthusiasm and passion that had been shown and all the good work that continued.



**RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to endorse the Annual Report.**

**44 PRIVATE FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20  
Report CEF21039**

The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 requires the Fostering Agency to produce a report on fostering activity (including private fostering) to the Agency Executive and an updated Statement of Purpose on an annual basis.

The Committee noted that there had been a significant (but understandable) reduction in the number of notifications from Independent Schools. Members further noted that there was a well resources training provision and training was currently being provided online on a quarterly basis.

The Director of Children's Services highlighted the recognition that had been received from Ofsted for the inclusion of Private Fostering in the Local Authority's Self-Evaluation.

**RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to endorse the Annual Report.**

**45 VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT  
Report CEF20037**

The report provided the regular update on the performance of the Virtual School for children in care and children previously in care currently adopted or cared for under a Special Guardianship Order.

The Head Teacher of the Bromley Virtual Scholl introduced the report explaining that she had taken up post at the end of August 2020. Within the report there were some strong highlights including personal education planning, strong educational outcomes for children looked after including good GCSE outcomes and other vocational qualifications, and pleasing post-16 work with 22 care leavers accessing higher education.

In relation to the response to Covid and the impact of the first lockdown, the Committee heard that it had been a challenging time as the usual attendance data from schools had not been available. Consequently, the Team worked very hard, making weekly phone calls to check wellbeing and to ensure that young people had the support and IT equipment that they needed and that where necessary schools were challenged and foster carers were supported in relation to home learning.

In the Autumn Term attendance monitoring resumed and data was checked every day. Where a child was off school due to isolating the Team contacted the foster carer to ensure that the necessary equipment and learning was in place for the period of isolation. In the Autumn Term there were 69 pupils with at least one day's absence. In these circumstances a lot of one to one

online tuition was to put in place to ensure that the children looked after were not disadvantaged. This term, where appropriate looked after children needed to be considered for a place at school. Risk assessments were undertaken to ensure that the right decisions were taken in each individual case. In the first week of lockdown 25% of children looked after were in school and this had now increased to 55%.

The Committee noted the difficult circumstances for all young people currently accessing higher education, noting the even greater challenges faced by children looked after. Members heard that the Service was currently monitoring and tracking closely those young people in higher education. It had been a very difficult time for them and there were certainly issues around isolation with online learning and limited opportunities to socialise with peers. Where necessary support had been provided.

The Committee noted that children and young people could move schools for a variety of reasons and whilst the Service sought to ensure continuity, especially in the GCSE and A-Level years, sometimes changes in schools were unavoidable. Often disruption was caused when a foster carer gave notice on a placement or where there were particular issues with a young person themselves. There were a range of complexities around where children and young people were placed and where it was not possible to maintain continuity of education provision the Service worked with young people to ensure that the transition was as smooth as possible. Members noted that coming out of the Covid pandemic there were likely to be some fragile placements.

**RESOLVED That the report be noted.**

**46     CONTRACTS REGISTER AND CONTRACTS DATABASE  
Report 20042A**

This report presented an extract from November 2020's Contracts Register for detailed scrutiny by PDS Committee. The Contracts Register appended to the 'Part 2' report includes a commentary on each contract to inform Members of any issues or developments.

In relation to Contract 4947 – Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls – Members noted that since the report had been drafted progress had been made and the contract had been extended for a further year.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**47     LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (VARIATION) ORDER  
2006, AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000**

**RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded during consideration of the items of business listed below as it was likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if**

**members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.**

**The following summaries  
refer to matters involving exempt information**

**48 EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES  
PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2020**

**RESOLVED** that the exempt minutes of the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee meeting held on 10 November 2020 be agreed.

**49 PART 2 HOLDING THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER TO ACCOUNT**

**A PART 2 PERFORMANCE REPORTING - CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY  
DATASET  
Report CEF20040B**

The Committee noted the Part 2 information contained in the report.

**50 PART 2 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY**

**A PART 2 CONTRACTS REGISTER AND CONTRACTS DATABASE  
Report CEF20042B**

The Committee considered and noted the Part 2 commentary relating to the Contracts Register.

The Meeting ended at 8.10 pm

Chairman

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## Children, Education and Families PDS Committee 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### Agenda Item 4b– Questions to the Portfolio Holder

#### Questions from Emma Martin, Chair, Bromley Brighter Beginnings

1. How many supermarket vouchers, funded by the Covid Winter Fund, were distributed by schools to eligible children before the start of the Christmas holidays, and how many eligible children did not receive a voucher?
2. Can the Council please confirm whether there are any surplus funds from the £600,000 that was allocated, after taking into account the February half-term, and what will happen with any such surplus funds?

#### **Reply:**

***More than 27,000 supermarket vouchers have already been distributed by schools to children eligible under the Covid Winter Fund grant. We are grateful to schools for distributing the vouchers to all eligible families. To our knowledge, all eligible children received a voucher.***

***All of the Covid Winter Fund grant allocated to the department will be used in line with the grant conditions by 31 March 2021.***

#### Questions from Alisa Igoe

*Reference: Portfolio Holder's reply to Alisa Igoe's question (number 19) at Full Council 7 December: "Reply: The guidance does not stipulate that the Council should contact families directly. The Council is working with schools to provide support for vulnerable children, including all those eligible for Pupil Premium in time for the Christmas holiday period."*

1. Could you kindly state on which date in December Bromley wrote to all schools offering holiday free school meal vouchers, if a reply was received from every school, if not, exactly how many schools, split into numbers of primary/secondary, did not reply and therefore did not receive vouchers before Christmas?
2. On 12 January Department of Education and Marcus Rashford were speaking urgently with suppliers of food parcels after concerns about inadequate content. Could you please confirm if any Bromley free school meal eligible families are receiving parcels in place of vouchers and, if so, do they contain enough food and would vouchers not be best?"

**Reply:**

***The department wrote to all schools on 30 November and again on 10 December. All schools responded and were able to order vouchers before Christmas.***

***The Government relaunched the national free school meals voucher scheme on 18 January and the vast majority of Bromley schools are utilising this system. Schools were asked to inform the department of any concerns with food parcels this term. No issues have been expressed to the department about the quality of food parcels provided this term by Bromley schools.***

#### **Questions from Laura Vogel**

1. Considering the recent revelations regarding FSM catering, and Government school meal guidance from 8th January 2021, will Bromley Council commit to providing local vouchers to parents so they can shop near-by for nutritional, economical, fresh food to prepare for their children?
2. Has the council been in touch with the Department for Education regarding procurement of hardware for children to access remote learning?

**Reply:**

***This has been superseded by the reintroduction of the national voucher system by the DfE, which has been welcomed by Bromley schools.***

***Yes. The department has issued children with approximately 700 devices through schools and Children's Social Care. We have supported schools with accessing devices through the DfE scheme, through which schools can order additional devices as needed.***