

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 10 March 2021

Present:

Councillor Nicky Dykes (Chairman)
Councillor Judi Ellis (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Yvonne Bear, Kevin Brooks, Christine Harris,
Neil Reddin FCCA and Will Rowlands

Reverend Roger Bristow
Emmanuel Arbenser

Also Present:

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

51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Joan McConnell.

52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Robert Evans declared that he sat on the Board of Bromley MyTime.

53 MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, CHILDREN & FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 26 JANUARY 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2021 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

54 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

One written question, for response by the Portfolio Holder, was received and is attached at Appendix A.

55 MATTERS OUTSTANDING AND WORK PROGRAMME

The report set out the proposed programme for scrutiny of reports relating to the Children, Education and Families Portfolio for the 2021/22 municipal year.

The Committee noted that the Schools Place Planning Working Group would be meeting in April 2021. The Chairman asked Members to contact her if they wished to sit on the Working Group.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

56 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:-

- The 5 weeks since the last meeting had been busy as a result of pressures around the pandemic. Prior to the start of the meeting the Portfolio Holder had circulated an update to elected Members setting out the work that had been undertaken by the Department to support children and families across the Borough.
- The Portfolio Holder paid tribute to parents, teachers, and staff in education settings who had only just emerged from an “incredibly testing” period over the last three months. It was highlighted that throughout the period of partial school closure teachers and key worker children had remained in schools.
- The Portfolio Holder recognised that it had been a very challenging period for the children and students themselves, it was important to note that there was an ongoing collective responsibility to ensure that the gap in education that had been created by the pandemic was filled.
- Schools fully reopened on Monday 8th March and so far the reports had been very good. The Director of Education and his Team had remained in contact with schools and the feedback was that there was adherence with all the safety measures that had been put in place and testing was going particularly well.
- It had been a year of almost insurmountable challenge and it was important that everyone in the community felt protected and supported. To this end further details would be circulated setting out a suite of measures in respect the support offered to children and families to address the various impacts of the pandemic. A digital health and wellbeing toolkit had been sent to schools. Furthermore, a dedicated MASH line for teachers had been opened to facilitate direct contact with the Local Authority in the event that schools identified concerns. A parenting support booklet had been circulated and there were dedicated single points of contact for all the schools. The Council was also working very closely with Bromley Y to provide extra wrap around support for mental health consultation.
- With just over 2 weeks until the Easter Holidays, attention was now turning to the provision of holiday activities in compliance with the restrictions that would still be in place and extending the opportunity for food vouchers to support those families requiring this support.
- The Department was continuing to support Early Years settings with most of the settings now fully open and operational.

- A keen eye was being kept on the children for whom the Local Authority had Corporate Parenting responsibility and a number of Members had recently attended the celebration events.
- In terms of the allocation of secondary school places, figures were now available, and these demonstrated that Bromley remained above the London average in terms of the children allocated their first-place preference.
- The Portfolio Holder thanked the PDS Committee for its welcome challenge over the last 12-month period. The Portfolio Holder paid testament to the extraordinary staff for their “continued grit, determination, dedication, commitment and compassion” during what had been an extremely challenging period.

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

- Funding for the holiday program was for holiday activities rather than academic catch up. Separate academic recovery funding had been made available to schools to help teachers provide extra lessons and extra support to narrow the inevitable gaps that will have emerged as a result of the pandemic. The Local Authority was working with schools to provide support and best practice. Narrowing the attainment gaps would be a key focus going forward.
- In terms of teacher assessment of the impact of home learning, there would be wider teacher assessments once children had settled back into school. The priority for the first week back had been the welfare of children. Members noted that teachers were used to undertaking this type of baseline assessment and identifying strategies to ensure that children made the necessary progress.
- Schools were keen to ensure that the environment was safe for teachers, staff and students and reports had indicated that compliance with the safety measures within schools had been high.
- The pandemic had hit industries in a range of ways and there had been a clear impact on entrance jobs for young people, particularly those young people for whom the local authority had responsibility. The situation was being closely monitored and steps were being taken to ensure that young people were adequately supported. An Education, Employment and Training (EET) Strategy had been developed to focus on those young people that become Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) to ensure that as recovery from the pandemic started those young people were provided with the support they need.
- The opening of Council premises was being reviewed corporately. Throughout the pandemic Children’s Centers had been opened but to a greatly reduced footfall. Over the next few weeks there would be a review of how premises could fully reopen, and staff could be safely brought back to deliver services. There would also be a review of any new ways of working that would be required. It was clear that a flexible approach would need to be adopted which enabled the Local Authority and its staff to respond to situations as they arose.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for the update.

**57 CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PORTFOLIO PLAN 2018
TO 2022 UPDATE - QUARTER 3 2020/21
Report CEF21009**

The report presented the quarter 3 update of the Children, Education and Families Portfolio Plan 2018-2022.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**58 PRE DECISION SCRUTINY OF DECISIONS FOR THE CHILDREN,
EDUCATION & FAMILIES PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

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

**A BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21
Report CEF21002**

The report provided the budget monitoring position for 2020/21 based on activity up to the end of December 2020.

The Committee noted that the latest projected overspend had reduced to £370,000 although the full year effect remained high. The majority was contained with 2021/22 growth there would be a continuing need for close monitoring going forward.

Members noted that the 2021/22 budget had been predicated on 320 looked after children rising to 327 by the end of the financial year.

In respect of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), the Committee noted that the DfE expected any deficit to be managed as part of the overall funding envelope. There had been surpluses in the past and significantly more funding had been received for 2021/22 and Officers hoped that it would be possible to manage and contain the deficit within 2021/22 funding. If this was not possible there would need to be a report back to the DfE who would then consider what further action was required. The Director of Education confirmed that a number of transformation projects were in place to mitigate the pressures within the DSG including work around Alternative Provision. Another key area of focus was the spend in relation to SEN places and it was believed that the approved opening of a Special Free School would have a significant impact.

Members noted that there were some sold services to schools including Education Psychologists, Finance and Workforce Development, and whilst there were currently no plans to extend the offer of sold services the Department would continue to look at new ways to generate income where appropriate.

In respect of pressures on school places, the Portfolio Holder reported that plans were in place for the expansion of some settings. There were pressures but robust plans were in place to manage the pressures.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to note the latest projected overspend of £370,000 on the controllable budget, based on information as at December 2020.

B CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/21 Q.3
Report FSD21015

On 10th February 2021, the Executive received a report summarising the current position on capital expenditure and receipts following the 3rd quarter of 2020/21 and presenting for approval the new capital schemes in the annual capital review process. The Executive agreed a revised capital programme for the five-year period 2020/21 to 2024/25. The report before the Committee highlighted changes agreed by the Executive in respect of the Capital Programme for the Children, Education and Families Portfolio.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to note and acknowledge the changes agreed by the Executive on 10th February 2021.

C PROCEEDING TO PROCUREMENT (GATEWAY 0) FAMILY
DRUG AND ALCOHOL COURT SERVICE (FDAC)
Report CEF21012

The London Borough of Bromley had been a member of the Pan London Family Drug and Alcohol Court Service (FDAC) consortium since January 2018. The consortium was made up of 9 London Boroughs; the London Boroughs of Wandsworth, Camden, Bromley, Croydon, Sutton, Lambeth, Southwark and the Royal Boroughs of Kingston and Richmond. The service was available to all participating boroughs with the London Borough of Wandsworth acting as the lead commissioning borough. The current contract arrangements would be coming to an end on 31 December 2021, however due to the pandemic and other delays in decisions made by member organisations, the report sought authorisation from the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families to: a) proceed to procurement to re-tender the FDAC service with LB Wandsworth as the lead commissioner, for a two year period with an option to extend for a further 1 + 1 years, following the agreement of the Assistant Director of Governance, the Director of Finance, and the Director of Corporate Services; and b) extend the existing contract by up to 1 year, to mitigate against the adverse impact on the current contract, if member authorities have delayed internal approval which results in a delay to the commencement of the tender. The proposed cost of the new contracts following the tender would be £165k per annum, with a whole life value of £660k. The value of the extension (should it be required) would be £165k full year effect, or pro rata depending on the additional time that might be required to support the preparation for the new tender. Consequently the maximum cost of the proposal (tender plus the extension) was £825k.

The Committee noted that packages cost approximately £16,500 and whilst the contract was based on 10 packages a year for each consortium member there was flexibility to meet need through buying and selling packages within the Consortium.

Members discussed the costs of assessments that may be required, noting that the FDAC contract provided significant cumulative savings and the service was well respected and outcomes for children positive.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to

- (a) approve the proposal for LB Bromley to remain in the Pan-London Consortium and proceed to tender the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) service, with the LB Wandsworth as the procurement lead authority. The proposed duration for the new arrangement is for a period of two years (with the option to extend the arrangement for up to a further two years) at an estimated annual contract value of £165k (whole life value £660k); and**
- (b) approve an extension to the contract from 1 January 2022, should it be required for a period of up to 12 months, at an estimated annual value of £165k.**

59 PRE DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXECUTIVE REPORTS

The Committee considered the following reports on the Part 1 agenda for the meeting of the Executive on 31 March 2021:

A BASIC NEED/CAPITAL PROGRAMME Report CEF21013

The report provided an update on the capital schemes within the Council's Basic Need Programme.

The Committee noted that there was no underspent Section 106 monies in respect of Education, funding had been allocated and was waiting to be spent. The Director of Education confirmed that there was no risk of losing any Section 106 funding allocated to Education.

The Chairman suggested that it may be helpful to share the appendix with the Vice-Chairman of the Executive and Resources PDS Committee who had led that Committee's Section 106 Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to:

- a) Agree the updated Basic Need Programme as set out in Appendix 3. subject to Full Council approval.**

- b) agree the allocation of an additional £4,128k of S106 allocations to projects within the Basic Need Capital Programme as outline in Appendix 2.**
- c) agree that the schemes at Marian Vian Primary School and Red Hill Primary School be brought forward to the Projects in Delivery (Funded) Programme and that an allocation be included to fund requirements secondary bulge classes or temporary accommodation, should it be needed for the Council to meet its statutory duty.**
- d) Agree that, where required, funding be delegated to schools for local delivery subject to there being sufficient mechanisms in place to control expenditure and ensure delivery of outcomes.**
- e) note that schools will be submitting planning applications in association with these works.**

B AWARD OF CONTRACT TO BLOOM PROCUREMENT LTD FOR THE PROVISION OF SPECIALIST RESOURCES

The report sought authorisation to engage specialist resources to support the implementation of a new Social Care Information Management System. The Council was currently making use of Bloom Procurement Services Ltd. via the NEPRO Framework with the report seeking to make further use of that arrangement to conclude the implementation of the new Social Care Information Management System. Funding to enable this award of contract had been approved by the Executive in a business case to replace Bromley's Social Care Information Management System (September 2018, Gateway 1 Report ED10868).

Members noted that Bloom Procurement Services Ltd had been providing support with the implementation of Liquid Logic, the replacement for the social care management system. To date, the implementation of the programme had gone well and the children's social care system was due to go live this summer with the adults system going live in the autumn. Support following 'go live' would be in place for a further 12 weeks.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director for Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation confirmed that at the point the system went live there would be some integration with the systems used by health partners and the system would continue to evolve over time.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to

- a) Approve the continued use of Bloom Procurement Services Ltd via a direct award on the NEPRO Framework for a further £450k of specialist resources to continue the implementation of a new Social Care Management Information System.**

- b) **Delegate to the Chief Officer the approval of the award from the framework of individual contracts following further competition as/if required.**
- c) **Delegate to the Chief Officer the approval of the award from the framework of individual contracts without further competition, subject to the agreement of the Assistant Director Governance & Contracts, Director Corporate Services, and Director of Finance.**

**60 LOCAL AUTHORITY DESIGNATED OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT
2019/20
Report CEF21004A**

The report updated Members on the activity and performance of the Local Authority Designated Officer role (LADO) for 2019/20 and provided evidence of the effectiveness of the LADO service provided to and on behalf of Bromley's children between April 2019 and March 2020.

The Director of Children's Services reported that going forward the LADO would be reaching out to a number of organisations in order to assist with wider understanding of the work of the LADO.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

**61 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20
Report CEF21005**

The report provided an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service between 1 April 2019 and the 31 March 2020 analysing and evaluating practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children and the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer service in ensuring the local authority, as a corporate parent, discharges its statutory responsibilities towards looked after children. Appendix A to the report provided an evaluation of the services response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) were nationally introduced to represent the interests of looked after children. Their role was strengthened through the introduction of statutory guidance in April 2011. The Independent Review Officers (IRO) service was set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) and linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011.

The report identified good practice as well as highlighting areas for development in relation to the IRO function. The IRO had a key and statutory role in relation to the improvement of care planning for looked after children. The responsibility of the IRO was to have an overview of the child's care

planning arrangements in respect of the child's wellbeing in placement and plans for the future.

Members noted that during 2019-20, the Reviewing Service had undergone a big change. The roles of IRO and Child Protection Chair had been combined and the role was now called 'Reviewing Officer'. The new role was necessary in supporting the development of a service that was able to listen and respond to young people's wishes all the way through their relationship with Children's Social Care. The goal was to now put in place a stable group of Reviewing Officers who would help make this important role have real purpose and make a difference for children and young people.

The change to the role saw some fluctuations in staffing and the introduction of a new management team. The Service maintained the number of reviews held in timescale (91%).

The Director of Children's Services highlighted that there had been a focus of capturing the voice of the children. One of the biggest issues for young people was around dispute resolution which was not viewed as a complaint but viewed more as young people being able to discuss issues with their Reviewing Officer as someone independent from the service.

Members noted that the service had been realigned to ensure that Reviewing Officers followed a young person's journey leading to better continuity. In response to a question concerning the high turnover of staff, the Committee received reassurance that the changes that had been made to the Service had been right for the children and young people. The Head of Quality Improvement confirmed that there was now stability within the Service and confidence that the right staff were in place to take the service forward.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

62 CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20 **Report CEF21008**

The report captured the activity of the Council and corporate partners in supporting children in care and care leavers.

The Committee noted that within the last 12-months there had been a complete change in the landscape which had required the Service to grow and expand. The active involvement offer had been developed and grown. Over the summer a full programme of events had been run for young people and the events were well attended. The website had also been developed as part of the exploration of the different ways in which the service could reach out to its young people.

Progress had been made in identifying and matching suitable placements leading to increased stability for young people. Work continued with different providers to ensure that the right support was in place for young people when

they experienced difficulties to ensure that they achieved a sense of permanence.

Education, Employment and Training (EET) remained a key issue for the service as work and training opportunities not only provided financial stability for young people but also delivered huge wellbeing benefits. As a result of the pandemic, some of the first jobs to be lost had been in the retail and hospitality sectors and this had a disproportionate impact on young people, particularly those for whom the local authority had corporate parenting responsibility. In response to this the EET Strategy had been re-written over the Summer 2020 and the EET Officer now sat within the Active Involvement Team so that wrap around services could be put in place. NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) Data was closely monitored and all the young people in the NEET cohort were involved with the EET Officer. Whilst recognising that it was a difficult landscape, Officers believed that the right strategy was in place and time was now needed for the strategy to bed in and for the opportunities available to young people to be developed. There were lots of avenues to be explored to enable the Service to be as ambitious as possible for young people.

In relation to concerns around the support for young people leaving care, attempts had been made to increase the frequency of support. Links had also been made with Adult Services in order to ensure sufficient support at the point of transition. A Transitions Panel, which brought together a number of the agencies working with young people had been established to assist with the management of the transition process. The Portfolio Holder explained that a lot of work was done to reach out to care leavers to ensure that they had the support they needed going forward. Through this process a number of the concerns of care leavers could be identified and addressed.

In response to a question concerning the impact of the Covid pandemic on the number of children coming to the attention of children's social care, Members noted that there had been more pressure and more complexity in families, particularly around adolescent mental health. However, numbers of Looked After Children had not significantly increased although there had been a greater demand for Early Intervention services.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**63 CHILDREN EDUCATION AND FAMILIES CONTRACTS REPORT
AND DATABASE
Report CEF21007A**

The report presented an extract from February 2021's Contract Register for detailed scrutiny. The Part 2 report provided a detailed commentary on each contract to inform Members of any issues or developments.

The Committee noted that there were currently no contracts flagged for concern.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

64 SCRUTINY OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Director of Children's Services provided an update to the Committee which is attached to the minutes at Appendix B.

The Director of Education reported that:

- From the start of the pandemic, the focus had been on the most vulnerable and this had resulted in the development of the Vulnerable Children and Young People Project, through which professionals across multiple agencies identified the 1,900 children they were most concerned about, below statutory social care involvement. A seconded team ensured regular contact and signposting to support or referrals as appropriate. The line of sight provided, together with the efforts of schools and settings to ensure regular contact, was a significant reassurance to the senior leadership team and Portfolio Holder.
- Rapidly changing Government guidance had been a feature of the pandemic and a key challenge had been keeping up with sometimes twice daily DfE updates containing multiple detailed policy guidance documents. To assist school and setting leaders with this, the Director of Education wrote to leaders every evening for more than four months, to set out the key updates and local advice and support available. Through weekly meetings with the DfE, Regional Schools Commissioner and Ofsted, the Local Authority was able to provide feedback and challenge to emerging guidance, which was acted upon on several occasions.
- The launch of the Bromley Safer Schools App, a team of named professionals around every Bromley school and regular updating of the Bromley Education Matters website for all education professionals in the Borough was a key achievement.
- To ensure support for Bromley children more than 800 laptops were distributed to disadvantaged children and through schools the Department ensured that eligible children received supermarket vouchers in the school holiday periods. This was now being extended to cover Easter.
- Attention had now turned to the full return of all children to schools and settings, although it was important to remember that schools and settings had continued to support critical worker and vulnerable children throughout the past year.
- A comprehensive package of support and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit had been put in place and had been very well received by professionals and was already in wide usage. Mental Health and Wellbeing had been a priority throughout Covid, for staff, fellow professionals and children and young people.

- Working with Public Health colleagues, the Department had supported schools to implement a robust system of control measures to prevent transmission of the virus, in line with the latest guidance.
- There was naturally concern around the impact of the lockdowns on children's education and the Department would continue to work closely with schools to support them in the recovery programmes, with a particular focus on narrowing progress gaps for vulnerable groups. This would remain a priority for the Department for the foreseeable future.
- The performance of the Directorate had continued to improve, during what had been an immensely challenging year. This was reflected in the increased timeliness of EHCPs and reduction in exclusions.
- Key projects had continued in spite of the pandemic including the Alternative provision project, joint working between SEN and YOS and work to deliver two new free schools in the Borough.
- The Director of Education thanked school and setting leaders, teachers, Early Years professionals and other key front-line staff for their hard work and determination to support and educate all children, but particularly the most vulnerable. In addition, the staff within the Department had risen to the enormous challenges of the past 12 months with good grace, adapting quickly to working at home and not just maintaining, but increasing support for children throughout the pandemic.
- Going forward there would be a continued need for services, particularly requests for statutory assessment, which was a vulnerability going forward. Whilst there would be future challenges ahead, the department was in a good place to meet them.

The Assistant Director for Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation provided an update to the Committee highlighting that it was clear that the Directorate had been on an improvement journey. Whilst the Department continued to strive towards excellence, it no longer felt difficult as a result of the significant change in culture over the past three years. Over the past years the role undertaken by the Assistant Director had evolved and moved towards one that was now 80% support and 20% challenge. It was now clear that managers knew their services well, knew their vulnerabilities and were keen to drive improvements. This provided assurance and confidence that standard processes were now working, and this better facilitated the process of constructive challenge.

Members offered their congratulations to the Director of Children's Services and the Senior Leadership Team for the fantastic amount of work that they had got through on behalf of the children in Bromley.

The Committee noted that the Early Intervention Services provided support to those children who did not meet the social care criteria but supported families to prevent their escalation. Work was underway to update the directory of universal services available to ensure that support was available to all families.

Members recognised that in terms of the recovery from Covid, teachers were one of the most important assets. There would be a number of aspects to the process of recovery including physical as well as emotional wellbeing. Covid recovery would be a long-term programme which would need to encompass a range of services, including the provision of Youth Services. It was noted that as well as a range of local initiatives, there were also a range of national programmes in place to support children as part of Covid recovery.

The Committee noted that the Corporate Leadership Team had already begun to reflect on the lessons that could be learnt from the response to the pandemic. A review had begun of the changes that had been imposed to identify what had worked well and could be taken forward as the local authority adjusted to a new business as usual model. There was a general acceptance that some of the changes imposed by the pandemic would become permanent.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman expressed thanks to all the staff across the Directorate for their hard work and dedication over the past 12 months.

65 CHILDREN EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PERFORMANCE REPORT Report CEF21011A

The report provided the Committee with the regular update in the performance of services for the children up to the end of December 2020.

The Committee noted the improvements in performance reflected in the report, noting in particular that the target for Education, Care and Health Plans had now moved to amber.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

66 ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee noted the submission for the Annual Scrutiny Report which had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be submitted to the Executive, Resources and Contracts PDS Committee on 24th March 2021.

67 EDUCATION INFORMATION ITEMS

The Children, Education & Families PDS Information Briefing comprised one item:

- Children's Services Risk Register

RESOLVED: that the Information Briefing be noted.

68 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

69 PRE DECISION SCRUTINY OF PART 2 DECISIONS FOR THE CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

The Committee considered the following Part 2 reports where the Children, Education and Families Portfolio Holder was recommended to take a decision:

A POST COMPLETION REVIEW REPORT - EDUCATION CAPITAL SCHEMES

As part of the Capital Programme Procedures it was a requirement that schemes be formally reviewed within one year of completion and the outcome of the review presented to the Portfolio Holder for endorsement.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to endorse the findings of the Post Completion Reviews that have been carried out in respect of:

- Beacon House Refurbishment
- Crofton Infant School Additional SEN Class
- Langley Park Schools for Boys (BSF)
- Riverside School – 1FE Secondary ASD Specific Provision
- The Highway Primary School
- Tubbenden Primary School SEN Expansion
- Universal Infant Free School Meals

70 PART 2 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER ITEMS

A PART 2 CHILDREN EDUCATION AND FAMILIES CONTRACTS REPORT AND DATABASE
Report CEF21007B

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

**B PART 2 CHILDREN EDUCATION AND FAMILIES
PERFORMANCE REPORT
Report CEF21011B**

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

**C PART 2 LOCAL AUTHORITY DESIGNATED OFFICER REPORT
Report CEF21004B**

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

The Meeting ended at 8.52 pm

Chairman

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Children, Education and Families PDS Committee
10th March 2021

Agenda Item 4b– Questions to the Portfolio Holder

Questions from Alisa Igoe

1. Could you kindly explain how Bromley Council have contacted families needing grants from the “Bromley Winter Grant Fund”, where they are suffering the effects of Covid deprivation yet not in receipt of benefits and especially how families with pre-school age children are able to access the £149,000 in the Hardship Fund?

Reply:

The Hardship Fund sits within the Housing, Planning and Regeneration Portfolio. I am informed that the Hardship Fund within the Covid Winter Fund Scheme has been well publicised including through a news release and the Newshopper. Families, including those with pre-school aged children, are able to access and receive grants through the Hardship Fund element of the Covid Winter Fund. In terms of assisting those that haven't been able to access benefits, Housing, Planning and Regeneration Officers made as many agencies aware as possible, including the Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice Bureau. Additionally, there were notifications to all housing associations, Bromley Winter Night Shelter, Thames Reach as well as Bromley's own housing service, which includes Money Advice and Support and Resettlement, who can target vulnerable households including those that may not have access to income currently. Officers also sought to promote the scheme through the Early Intervention Service, Mind, Age UK, Probation Service and local churches.

2. Bromley guidelines state families with school age children should access the government's Covid Winter Grant fund by approaching their Bromley school. Could you kindly confirm these families are able to access and receive grants for needs other than food vouchers (as stated in the government guidance above) and, are families made aware this includes paying utility bills?

Reply:

The Hardship Fund sits within the Housing, Planning and Regeneration Portfolio. I am informed that families are able to access and receive grants for needs other than food vouchers, including utility bills through the Hardship Fund element of the Covid Winter Fund. Housing, Planning and Regeneration Officers widely publicised the scheme, including through the Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice Bureau. Additionally, there were notifications to all housing associations, Bromley Winter Night Shelter, Thames Reach as well as Bromley's own housing service, which includes Money Advice and Support and Resettlement, who can target vulnerable

households including those that may not have access to income currently. Officers also sought to promote the scheme through the Early Intervention Service, Mind, Age UK, Probation Service and local churches.

Janet Bailey Director Children, Education and Families.

This is an update one year on in relation to Children, Families and Education directorate and what a year

Firstly, to say how proud I am and so lucky with the senior management team but all workers in the Children, Education and Families Directorate.

We started the year in January 2020 continuing our journey of excellence to ensure that children were safeguarded and following our annual conversation with Ofsted at the backend of 2019.

The 2020/21 year was to capitalise on the work progressed both in Children's and Education following the positive outcome of the Children's Social Care (CSC) and SEND inspections.

We were fully aware that following our next planned annual conversation in November 2020 CSC would anticipate a focussed visit in early 2021 to validate the continuation of progress and to look to our next innovations and aspirations for our children.

However with Covid the schedule went out the window and we were informed that instead of the annual conversation we would receive an assurance focussed visit in November 2020 – we were ready for this but following the Prime Minister's announcement of further lockdown this was cancelled on the morning it was due to start. Our regulators then combined the separated Education annual conversation on the 9th December 2020 and added in CSC. This was a positive outcome and although not published, confirmed our continued trajectory for children in Bromley. We are likely to have the paused focussed/assurance visit now around March/April 2021 and then will be due for a full inspection in 2022 following the next annual conversation in November 2021.

We are also preparing for our Youth Offending Service (YOS) inspection which again has been postponed until April when the schedule will begin again.

YOS have been working hard to ensure that the new methodology by the youth justice board is adopted is being followed.

We sent our Self Evaluation to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and they then decide if a visit is needed to validate but wrote to us to confirm that no validation is required – indicating - we know ourselves well and there are no issues of concern for the regulator.

So, in March 2020 Covid marched across the country and we entered our first lockdown. I am proud to say and have reported to this PDS throughout the fantastic work carried out by CSC and Education and in Strategy and Performance teams. All the services pivoted quickly and confidently, and staff responded going above and beyond.

We updated our continuity plans and ensured that I sent a weekly email sent to staff to give updates and issues around: Do we visit families and how; Where do we get PPE; How do we keep children safe; How do we ensure that children do not slip

through – this in particular to those children not known to CSC but vulnerable by virtue of Education Health and Care (EHC) plans and we reviewed with Education over 1900 children to give assurance their needs were being met.

Colleagues in health were redeployed which had a knock on effect for social workers and the multi-agency partnership – this meant that some children were not being seen in schools, nurseries and other locations, health were not visiting due to that redeployment, our short break facility which was crucial to our children with disabilities and their families was closed.

The Local Authority galvanised itself in the pace of rolling out our new laptops to staff and moving to more digital ways of working to promote stay at home if you can.

Our organisational and departmental response to Covid as a Council, was confident and ensured our services continued to keep children and young people safe in Bromley.

- Underneath the overarching Council-wide recovery plan, we had a dedicated departmental recovery plan to manage our response led by the Assistant Director for Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation.
- Resilient staffing arrangements: we had over 90% staff working from the start and throughout. Vast majority of staff working from home since March 2020, with a limited number of staff in the Civic (around 11 or 12 social workers with 2 managers and one Head of Service (HOS) on the floor)
- Leadership presence for frontline staff: our 8 Heads of Service worked on a rota basis to attend the Civic Centre site and support workers who were in the office
- Daily HOS Keeping in Touch meetings Chaired by the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care to resolve any issues or anxieties quickly and with this being replicated for Education colleagues.
- No regulatory flexibilities or easements agreed by Government were used by Bromley
- All six Children and Family Centres were initially closed for about three weeks but quickly pivoted to provided support, advice and guidance to our families during lockdown – an instant helpline for telephone and email enquiries was set up.
- The majority of our social work visits were initially conducted virtually in accordance with Government guidelines, but we quickly turned from 'why you should visit a family to why should you not visit' in line with social distancing requirements
- Where home visits were required, an individual risk assessment was undertaken, senior management approval sought, and appropriate PPE provided.

Impact of leaders

- Our social work permanency stands at 85% across children social care and we continue to hold interviews for new staff.
- Our HOS in the Referral and Assessment Service has for the first time recruited 5 permanent team managers, this tier of management is incredibly

difficult in 'normal times' so is outstanding that all 5 joined around the same time and remotely but they have felt supported and valued.

- The Assistant Director for CSC was made permanent in February last year following a period of acting up
- One of our experienced agency Managers was promoted to the permanent post of HOS Safeguarding West.
- We have continued to maintain permanent Heads of Service throughout the division which has given consistency and experience to the workforce.
- We appointed a new Principal Social Worker who also joined us late Summer remotely and she is supporting our newly qualified social workers, our social work academy and training for our Bromley Relationships Model (BRM).
- Our strong performance management framework and our practice review work (audits) continued to ensure an effective 'line of sight' for senior managers and has continued as normal during the pandemic.
- We are still carrying out around 50 audits every six weeks with Covid flexibility built in. It could have been easy to postpone these but we did not want to lose momentum and ensure that we were checking ourselves.
- In addition, we have continued with the Practice Assurance Stocktakes – mini Ofsted - throughout all the service areas.
- We continue with our Practice Improvement Board chaired by an independent ex Ofsted Quality Assurance Officer – these are held quarterly and give assurance to me that we are continuing on the journey to excellence – albeit with a Covid caveat
- As part of our progress the Assistant Director for Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation continues to be our challenge in relation to performance and we have maintained very good performance throughout this period.
- Our BRM enables social workers to develop meaningful relationships with our children and their families, our audit and quality assurance approach has validated this together with ongoing compliments from families, children and professionals.
- We reviewed all our cases including those at the MEGA panel to ensure that plans were appropriate, supporting and safeguarding children. All MEGA cases were reviewed every two weeks to ensure safety plans were fit for purpose and multi-agency partners wrapped around these children.
- We shaped our training programmes to reflect emerging training needs during the pandemic, including domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, parental substance misuse, bereavement, professional curiosity.
- Bromley Safeguarding Children's Partnership has provided frequent and routine contingency oversight meetings to focus on our individual and partner collective response to Covid-19.
- Schools continue to be active partners in multi-agency meetings and in providing support to children during lockdown
- Children's Social Care hosted its Annual Staff Conference in September 2020. Two sessions were held with over 200 staff attending with speakers but more importantly keeping in touch with staff.
- Robust financial planning arrangements and budget monitoring are in place to ensure balanced budget for 2021/22

- Thanks to your continued support as Members and Corporate Parents and our Portfolio Holder and the corporate leadership team we ensured that the needs of children were prioritised.
- **Early Intervention and Family Support Services (EIS)** have responded proactively and have remained flexible to meet the needs of our families during the pandemic
- Although our six Children and Family Centres closed initially they quickly offered daily activities online, workshops and activities – cooking and reading - utilising social media and online forums – offered pre booked appointments to health colleagues for those children who were premature or failing to thrive and the centres were Covid safe to support them.
- A Facebook page was created and through the course of its inception has now reached over a 1000 hits.
- They have run sessions for a range of children across our services, including our children looked after and leaving care, the Living in Care Council (LinCC), children accessing services from the Children with Disabilities team and our voluntary sector CASPAR
- During the lockdown, our MASH took a cautious approach and increased step-downs to Early Help Services to ensure ongoing support after an assessment
- A dedicated Early Help Services Team Manager was allocated to all teams within CSC for social workers to call and discuss support options for individual families throughout the child's journey
- Developed a range of webinar-based parenting courses and seminars; ran 'Preparing your Child to return to School' sessions via WebEx.
- *"It was really good, I felt confident in helping my kids returning to school, and they were reassuring, gave good tips and strategies for talking to my kids and help them return to school and they were happy to talk to me about my worries since lockdown and how I was feeling and my relationship, you know mother and child. They were reassuring and if it was a score of 1-10, it was 10+."*
- EIS secured MOPAC money for DRIVE programme and participated in other MOPAC money bids (the Committee received an update in these and DV strategy at its last meeting).

MASH), Referral and Assessment (RAS), Emergency Duty Team (EDT) and Atlas "THE FRONT DOOR"

- Referrals have continued into the MASH and increased by over 25% - We are predicting a further increase of around of 10-15% on top of the increase of 25% as schools open

- Good response from schools through the dedicated consultation line as schools have remained open throughout lockdown to vulnerable children and key workers.
- A dedicated line for families requiring support (not just food parcels) was established - these calls often underline more complex issues of DV and mental health.
- Despite volume, the MASH partnership has worked well to ensure that children and staff were safeguarded
- We took a proactive stance of flexible application of threshold leading to higher referral rates:
- When the restrictions started in January 20, we took a decision to continue face to face assessments and continued to make weekly contact with families
- We put in increased staffing capacity in MASH to offer additional support to schools and two extra social workers as contingency where families did not meet CSC criteria but deemed vulnerable: introduced consultation line for professionals to discuss with social worker
- Additional practitioner from the Early Help Service seconded to MASH to assist with increased volumes and to offer additional support to families and to professionals
- 92% of all assessments completed.
- Emergency Duty Team worked well - seamless transfer of information between EDT and MASH at the morning handover meeting to ensure issues picked up quickly.
- The Atlas team is now located within the MASH and contributes intelligence to daily MASH meetings
- Good take-up and timely completion of RHIs and use of information to identify and mitigate risks - 94% of looked after children who went missing were offered an RHI, with 95% acceptance rate
- All CYP who go missing from home and care or are at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation or serious youth violence are known to the Atlas team.
- MEGA (Missing Exploitation and Gangs Affiliation). Reviewed all children immediately on the MEGA list to ensure safety plans secure

Safeguarding and Care Planning

- We made conscious decisions not to immediately close CIN cases due to the pandemic to ensure that re referrals did not increase. This was welcomed by families although added to the caseloads. This increase was a ripple effect from the high volume coming through the front door.
- Our safeguarding social workers continued to visit their children through various means. Remember these are families we have known and have relationships with so virtual, on line and face to face took place. We continued to ensure that our practice standards on visiting was adhered to.
- Good timeliness - 93% of ICPCs held within 15 days of strategy discussion.
- We have 242 Children were subject to a Child Protection Plan
- These children were visited regularly in line with our practice standards – 10 days

- 100% of child protection plans reviewed within timescale
- All children on plans over 9 months are closely monitored with a new scrutiny panel which is chaired by HOS Stuart Hills.
- 88% of ICPCs result in a CP Plan. We know we have the right children.
- The Children with Disabilities Team has worked closely with SEN colleagues to determine those children with complex needs accessing specialist education prior to lockdown had access to appropriate provision or support packages during this time. CWD Group Manager attended education KIT meetings
- The Staying Together Team recruited a fourth worker during the pandemic to enable families to stay together where CYP are on the edge of care – of 102 children, only 4 came into care
- Our QA activity confirms that the weekly Legal Gateway Panel for children in PLO or entering proceedings is effective and shows good management oversight + reviews of Supervision Orders.
- We set up virtual courts to try and prevent delay to children with the backlog of court, we set up hair strand testing for substances which without the court cases would not progress
- We have 100 children in the court system at the moment – the courts have backlog

Children Looked After (CLA) and Permanency

- Moved swiftly to virtual Permanency Planning Meetings during the pandemic to ensure no delays for our children.
- We moved our fostering campaign and recruitment online and during the first recruitment drive during the first lockdown we secured 25 applications which was higher than the same campaign the year before pre Covid.
- Our fostering panel pivoted to online panels to continue to approve carers, review them and match children to long term families.
- We have continued to progress permanency planning including transition to adoption to avoid delay for children.
- 323 looked after children in Bromley – our rate is in line with London and national comparators
- All CLA regularly contacted by their social worker with regular virtual/in-person visits to ensure care plans were working – we increased contact through digital means in addition to any visits.
- Our long-term placement stability improved significantly.
- Our therapeutic service 'THRIVE' has been accessed by many foster carers and their children enabling them to understand children's behaviors and how to manage and reflect on difficult situations during this period and has led to improved stability rates.

Regional Adoption Agency (RAA):

Our RAA established in July 2019 with 8 other London LAs as '*Ambitious for Adoption CORAM Capital*' Hillingdon, Waltham Forest, Harrow, Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham and The City of London. –

- There were 12 Bromley looked after children placed with prospective adopters during the year 2019 through 2020.
- 8 children were made subject to adoption orders in 2019/20
- We continued to ensure that children and their permanency was key and during Covid we continued to match children to adopters and not only this but we ensured that placements were made one including our staff and foster carer travelling to Scotland to ensure that the introductions were not interrupted.
- We currently only have one child waiting to be placed
- No placements disrupted during 2019/20.

Children Looked After and Care Leavers

- During the lockdown we ensured activities for our children – lockdown art, cinema evenings with popcorn and evening meal/dinner delivered to children homes and have supper together, cooking classes, cultural evenings. We celebrated our care leavers achievements, Celebration of Success on 30th October 2020.
- We held an auction of the artwork on the 23rd October and raised £1500 at auction for our LinCC and Care Leaver Forum –
- Members through our chair of PDS financially contributed to our Christmas project – THANK YOU.
- Last year we celebrated our children at the Warren just before lockdown and this was the last assembly for our Virtual School Head Teacher Helen Priest who announced her retirement but remained as our first Corporate Grandparent and we have welcomed Sally Kelly to Bromley. She joined us in lockdown at the end of August and has been fantastic in supporting and getting to know our young people and staff remotely. She has continued to push their academic aspirations and our children have achieved well this year despite the issues with exams.
- We have continued, despite the fatigue, to look for innovation and grants and we have been successful in two DWP applications to support young people into work through NEET and EET and also to equip young people for work when the country opens up again.
- The Head of Service for Care Leavers has written an ETE strategy being ahead of the curve in understanding the issues that our young people will likely have as we come out of this pandemic and the impact on them
- We have refreshed our Corporate Parenting Strategy and our Portfolio Holder as Chair of the Board continues to ensure that voices of our young people are heard
- This year we refused to allow our celebration of achievement not to take place albeit differently and we have recently held this in two parts for younger and older children over two days – 24 and 26th February 2021 with over 100 children taking part in their homes on line and I know members were also present to enjoy the days. We ensured that all the children had their goody bag with awards in them and these were delivered secretly to their foster carers to open on the night to great excitement by our young people.
- Some of our young people have worked during Covid – one of our care leavers working on the front line Covid ward as a student nurse; a young man who had begun a career in hospitality and the hotel closed – he volunteered

on furlough and went back to the hospital and saw some of the doctors when he was born and a child – was given an award by his employer.

- 2 dedicated CAMHS workers for children looked after to support their mental health/wellbeing. CAMHS practitioners also joined reflective group supervision, which is well received by staff.
- We received a £39,000 grant for Wellbeing for Education Return to train and support schools and colleges to respond to the wellbeing and mental health needs of CYP as a result of Covid-19.
- We have worked hard to ensure children have suitable contact arrangements through our children's centres, facilitating a Covid-safe environment.
- All CLA are well supported by the Virtual School. Schoolwork reviewed twice weekly to ensure that both children and their carers are supported
- PEPs have continued during the pandemic - 90% of children looked after had a PEP in the summer term despite the lockdown.
- 75% of our young people are currently making expected progress at school
- Our children achieved their predicted grades at GCSE and A-level despite the challenges of lockdown and Sally Kelly presented her annual report to the last PDS
- Bromley Y, our wellbeing service, works with young people, especially our care leavers, who would not reach threshold for adult mental health services. Bromley Y accept referrals for our care leavers to 25 and offers support, mentoring and triages if there is a higher level of need.

Following the announcement on the 22nd February we have again pivoted to provide a school's hub information and letters were sent to schools to advise them of additionality of support from the 8th March for the next 3 – 6 months

- increased capacity in our MASH service and set up a dedicated consultation line for teachers – the purpose of this being that you can have discussions about any worries or concerns or wanting information as to where to signpost your parents. Qualified social workers will be able to engage with you and if it is appropriate ask you to make a referral or offer alternatives. Please do continue to use the Threshold of Need document for referrals into MASH in the usual way.
- Please remember that you have a Head of Service link for your school and I am resending the names and contacts numbers.
- Our Children Centres have pivoted throughout the pandemic offering services on line including a parenting line and this will continue to be available for parents and we have produced a parenting booklet which is a good source of information and easily distributed electronically to your parents.
- We have set up an EIS SPOC and deputy SPOC for schools in the children centre localities so that Heads, inclusion leads, and teachers know who to contact within Early Intervention Service
- BCP Parenting Helpline for families.
- Twice weekly 'drop in' line specifically for teaching staff every Tuesday and Thursday after school from 4.30 – 5.30pm. The first of these will commence on the 11th March. Children Social Care Managers, HOS, AD, Jared and I will be present to try and support and assist with any questions in relation to safeguarding or support. We will develop these with you as we go forward

and anticipate initially, they will run for 3 months with a review and opportunity for the remainder of the school year.

- Our Education Safeguarding Lead – Joan Keenan-O'Malley - is joining our morning MASH meetings to ensure that she can reach out to you in support over the next few weeks specifically in terms of giving advice.
- Bromley Y have offered a specific consultation email similar to the Trailblazer in- box but this will be dedicated for teaching staff; they will respond within 48 hours and offer advice with any anxiety or behavioural issues in supporting students back into the classroom. They are our triage through to higher levels of intervention - emotional and mental health wellbeing and this again will replicate the consultation line of CSC in advising but also being able to suggest referral routes.

In conclusion:

- We have safeguarded children
- We have supported and ensured the wellbeing of our staff
- We have continued with training for our staff
- We continued to recruit permanent staff and retain them
- We have continued to challenge ourselves in practice and performance
- We have supported families across all services
- We have ensured our children continue to fulfil their ambitions through education and destinations, work, etc.
- We have ensured that we have capacity within the system to sustain the increase in referrals to our MASH
- We have monitored closely our caseload promise and staffing capacity – it is a challenge but staff dedication and understanding in the crisis
- DV strategy launched
- Stability of placements
- Worked with our partners in the police, health and education
- Carried out review through Jim Gamble of the MASH and partners have agreed to put more into the service –

WHAT ARE OUR VULNERABILITIES GOING FORWARD?

- Recruitment and retention of permanent staff/ ability to recruit skilled staff for the posts vacant.
- Ensuring we maintain our caseload promise 12 – 15 children
- Lag in court completions – this has impact on finance being in the system but more importantly children not having care plans finalised eg. mother and baby placement – the assessment is negative court will not move the final hearing therefore delayed until June– the family will remain in assessment centre costing us 85K – but child not secured in long term stable placement
- Limited supply and increasing costs of residential placements – including the specialist placements for very complex young people – Covid pressures. The concern around any secure placement required and no availability and the cost of that placement as we know around 6K but bespoke will go up to 8 or 9K
- Increase in the Looked After Population due to Covid and families being unable to cope

- Increase in the number of referrals to MASH increased by 25%? anticipated another 10% - will this bottom out - ? staffing, caseload promise etc. that bulge moves to Early Intervention and also Safeguarding and CLA
- Increased complexity of children (SEND). v Impact of Social Work Act 2017 implementation.
- Long term closure of short breaks throughout 2020 resulting in demand and cost pressures

Next steps

What to retain

- Working in a more digital flexible world for meetings has had benefits – our GP/POLICE colleagues have joined in conferences – they have experienced difficulties in the past to physically attend. – new way of working has enhanced this for us and for them
- Strategy meetings particularly for police colleagues who work a shift schedule can now phone in and participate more easily and information is more live.
- Meetings are more focussed; social workers need to be in the office less when writing reports and case notes and this means they can visit in a more concentrated way and write up.
- Some core group meetings are more beneficial over a digital platform – they can be held in other venues rather than at the Civic/schools – it also means when rooms are premium, we do not have to delay meetings.
- More frequent visits in between visits to our young people and care leavers – this means that the visit is not always specific but just keeping in touch and picking up information and part of the relationship model and as a corporate parent
- Training online means more of a take up – people not physically having to work around visits etc.

What Will Not Change

- We are very social animals in the social work field and face to face visits to families is crucial – there is a sense and tangible feeling about what life is like for a child when you are in their home – this must never change.
- Conferences for families being in the room and feeling the support of professionals but also the challenge to make changes for children.
- Being in a family and meeting a child face to face – watching the minutia of their ticks and face changes in an instant – who is in the room with a child – are they able to be free with their comments and views – a sense of what is this child's experience – would this be good enough for my child?
- DV is crucial to be with a victim and understand and feel the issues.
- Mental health and wellbeing – again critical that we can sense the individual
- Being able to hug our children appropriately.
- Courts re opening to face to face – enabling families to have the opportunity of seeing the professionals albeit painful sometimes – having their day physically in court is very important in their story about fighting for their child.