

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 25 January 2022

Present:

Councillor Judi Ellis (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair)

Councillors Judi Ellis, Hannah Gray, Simon Jeal,
Robert Mcilveen, Ryan Thomson and Stephen Wells
Reverend Roger Bristow

Also Present:

Councillor Kate Lymer, Children, Education and Families Portfolio
Holder
Councillor Kieran Terry, Executive Assistant for Children, Education &
Families Portfolio
Councillor Robert Evans

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Nicky Dykes and the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Judi Ellis was in the Chair.

48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no additional declarations of interest.

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

One written question was received and is attached at Appendix A.

50 MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, CHILDREN & FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2021 were agreed, and signed as a correct record, subject to Reverend Bristow's apologies being recorded.

51 MATTERS OUTSTANDING AND WORK PROGRAMME Report CSD22012

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.

Members noted that the Care Leavers Covenant had been circulated by the Portfolio Holder following the last meeting.

In response to a question concerning an update on progress in relation to Marjorie McClure School, the Director of Education confirmed that the work would commence in Spring 2022.

The Committee noted that it would be receiving a report concerning referrals into the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and this would be added to the Committee's work programme. The Director for Children, Education and Families confirmed that demand through the front door of the service remained high.

In relation to the link with local businesses in terms of work experience for young people, the Director of Children, Education and Families would liaise with Councillor Gray concerning the action that was required and an update would be provided at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

52 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families, Cllr Kate Lymer, attended the meeting and highlighted the following updates:-

- The Portfolio holder had attended a LGA workshop on political leadership of SEND and would be attending a further LGA workshop concerning a whole council approach to Children's Services.
- In February 2022, there would be a round table event focusing on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organised by the Police. All MPs, lead councillors and relevant council officers from the three boroughs within the BCU would be attending.
- A successful holiday activities and food programme was delivered during the Christmas holidays and the scheme had now been extended to enable events to be run for all three of the school holidays in 2022. Food voucher support would also be available during the February half term via the Household Support Fund.
- In November 2021, a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Network had been launched amongst Bromley schools and was very well received.
- In December 2021, the "Schools Safe Scheme" was launched by LBB and the Metropolitan Police Service bringing together agencies seeking to increase preventative safety measures in schools.
- In December 2021, the Bromley Well Young Carers Service had won a national activity for kids award.
- Councillor Jefferys had been appointed as a Local Authority Governor at Southborough Primary School. The Portfolio Holder encouraged all councillors to consider becoming school governors, highlighting that it was a very rewarding role to fulfil.
- The annual engagement meeting with Ofsted would take place at the end of the week.

- The Corporate Fun Day had been postponed and it was hoped would now be held in the Spring.
- The launch of the Care Leavers Hub had been postponed with a new date being set soon. The Portfolio Holder would make enquiries regarding a suitable time for a Member visit to the Hub once it was formally open.
- A Celebration of Achievement Event for Children Looked After would be held on 17th February 2022 at the Warren.

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

- There were two separate elements of the Household Support Grant and the lead Department was the Housing Department. An element was managed within the Education Department for the provision of supermarket vouchers. That element of funding had been protected to enable the support to continue for the February half term and Officers also expected it to continue for the Easter holidays as well. The Department would be writing to schools to confirm that funding would be available. The Committee noted that the grant currently supported approximately 9,200 children per week during school holidays.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for the update.

53 PERFORMANCE REPORTING - CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY DATASET Report CEF22001A

The report provided the regular update on the performance of services for children as at the end of October 2021.

The Committee noted that there were two indicators which had fallen below the target set:

Indicators 13 and 19 - Child Protection Review

Members noted that further investigation had revealed that there were some training needs around the new social care management system – Liquid Logic. Officers were satisfied that there were no safeguarding concerns and the correct number of children had been reviewed. More training had been implemented and performance had now improved. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care was monitoring performance on a weekly basis and was assured that performance was higher than the system was reporting.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director for Strategy, Performance and Transformation explained that the Liquid Logic system had been live in Children's Services since July 2021 and use of the system had been monitored. Whilst other indicators had fallen behind, managers were aware that this did not fit with their understanding of practice and performance and were therefore able to address any training issues with the system. The Committee received assurances that all key indicators were now back to where they should be.

The Chairman congratulated the Service on the green performance indicators, especially in relation to the stability of long-term placements in what had been a very difficult period noting that the good performance was a credit to the work of the Service and the excellent foster carers who were willing to engage with the Service.

The Committee welcomed the stretch targets that had been included as well as the understanding of how and why targets had been missed.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

54 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 DOMESTIC ABUSE: EXTENSION AND VARIATION OF CONTRACT
Report CEF22012**

The report sought to use the final option to extend the contract with Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid for the delivery of a range of support services to women and girls at risk of, or who had suffered domestic abuse (DA) for a further one year commencing on the 1st April 2022. Authorisation was also sought to vary the original estimated contract value for 2022/23 from £154,262 to £200,000 to cover the increased costs of delivering victim support services as proposed by Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid to deliver this service following an unsuccessful Tender exercise and to vary the contract value to cover the additional MOPAC funded DRIVE IDVA post for six months until 30 September 2022, at a cost of £20,897.

The Committee noted the typing error in paragraph 12.1 which should have read "there are *no* HR implications".

In response to a question, the Head of Early Intervention and Family Support confirmed that the DRIVE IDVA position was a separate MOPAC funded position. In terms of the increase in the cost, there had been a 100% increase in the numbers of families seeking support and as a result of this the decision had been taken to further add to the MOPAC grant.

Members noted that this was a difficult contract to place, and work had begun on the process of seeking alternative providers from April 2023. A paper outlining proposals from 2023 would be presented to Members in the summer. There was an acknowledgement that the size of the budget may need to be reviewed and options for exploring funding from across the partnership were also being considered as this was an issue which impacted on a number of partner agencies.

The Committee noted that the Service was well promoted via social media to encourage victims to come forward and access services where necessary. A senior police officer had developed an app to facilitate reporting and assist mapping of domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to

1. **Extend the existing domestic abuse ('DA') contract with Bromley & Croydon Women's Aid for one year utilising the final option to extend the current contract for 1 year, commencing 1 April 2022.**
2. **Vary the proposed annual cost of the DA contract for services to support victims of abuse for 2022/23 to reflect the substantial increase in the costs of Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid to deliver this contract safely to women within the Borough. The new estimated annual value will be £200,000. This is an increase on the estimated value of the contract, originally £154,262 for 2022/23.**
3. **Vary the proposed value of the DA contract to incorporate the additional six months MOPAC funding for the continuation of the DRIVE IDVA post at the cost of £20,897 until 30 September 2022.**
4. **Approve the variation to the contract estimated annual and whole life values as follows: -**
 - (i) **WAS: as per previous Gateway Report to the Portfolio Holder dated 31 March 2021; Updated to reflect the inclusion of the DRIVE grant for 2020/21 and 2021/22 and totalled £186,392 for 2020/21, £191,769 for 2021/22 and £154,262 for 2022/23 with a whole life value of £532,423.**
 - (ii) **NOW: as per this Gateway Member Report; Updated to reflect the recommendations in 2.1 – 2.3 above and updated to reflect the increase in the value of the victim services contract for 2022/23 and the recent confirmation of the extension to the DRIVE grant for 2022/23 this now totals £186,392 for 2020/21, £191,769 for 2021/22 and £220,897 (this is £200,000 for victims' support services plus the £20,897 for the DRIVE IDVA) for 2022/23 with a whole life value of £599,058.**

**B PRIVATE FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021
Report CEF22004**

The report provided a self-evaluation of London Borough of Bromley's (LBB) practice against The Children Private Fostering Arrangements for Fostering Regulations 2005. The report also gave details of the circumstances of children identified as Privately Fostered.

The Committee noted that the table detailing the ethnicity of children in private fostering arrangements during 2020/21 would be circulated following the meeting.

Noting that the report made reference to ensuring that the child's needs arising from faith, race, cultural and education were met, a Member sought and received assurances that consideration was also given to meeting any needs around sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.

The Chairman noted that it was a very interesting report reflecting a lot of detail.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder recommended to endorse the annual report.

55 BROMLEY COMMUNITY WELLBEING
Report CEF22007

Policy Development and Scrutiny Committees were able to review contracting arrangements on an annual basis, where the contract was valued over £500k. The Bromley Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Service contract commenced on 1 April 2021 and had an annual value which exceeded this threshold (50/50 with SEL CCG). The report provided an insight into the delivery of the contract in accordance with the service specification and did not consider the wider CYP mental health and wellbeing arrangements that were delivered outside of the contract. Bromley Y had developed an accompanying presentation in order to provide an awareness of operational service delivery which was attached to the report.

The Chairman welcomed Gill Allen, Director of Bromley Y, James Postgate, Associate Director for Integrated Commissioning Bromley CCG and Daniel Manns, Integrated Strategic Commissioner Bromley Council and South East London CCG Bromley to the meeting.

In response to questions, the Committee noted that significant additional resources had been put into both CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and Bromley Y with the local children's mental health system expanded by a third in the last three years. Members noted that CAMHS was now a £4m service. There were still challenges in terms of recruitment although there had been significant investment.

The Director of Bromley Y welcomed the 9-year contract and reported that they were not yet fully staffed as a result of the backlog but would be. The Service was ensuring that where young people were waiting, there was sufficient resources in place to provide some support. The only area of concern was the gap between Bromley Y (a needs led service) and CAMHS (a threshold led service) with the young people waiting arguably the most vulnerable. The Committee noted that the situation was challenging, with growing waiting lists but there was a clear desire to identify the best solution for the young people. Members requested that an update be provided at the next meeting confirming that meetings had taken place and plans were in place.

The Director of Education highlighted the impact of successive lockdowns on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people over the past two years. Early intervention and early identification of wellbeing needs was identified by the Local Authority and its partner agencies very early as a key ongoing priority. There was a particular focus on the earlier identification of wellbeing needs before they reached the point of significant mental health needs requiring specialist services. Bromley Y had been central to leading on this early intervention work and the delivery of a mental health and wellbeing toolkit for schools which had been very well received. It would be through this work around early identification and prevention that some of the sustainability issues could be addressed. The Director of Children, Education and Families confirmed that the need for further resources to support mental health and wellbeing would be an ongoing priority.

Members noted that work continued on the children's social care business case and meetings were taking place around the additional investment.

The Director of Bromley Y confirmed that there were currently no young people on the Board of Trustees as it was very difficult to attract young people however, a youth ambassador was in place and was looking to strengthen the voice of young people and link with Wellbeing Ambassadors in schools.

The Committee noted that performance data was now available with a full report being provided in the next few months. Members also sought and received assurances that performance data would also provide information on vulnerable service users such as black and minority ethnic groups, LGBT, and neurodiverse and disabled young people.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

56 ANNUAL ADOPTION REPORT 2020-2021 Report CEF22003

The report provided an overview of the activity of Bromley Adoption Service from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

In opening the discussion, the Chairman welcomed the excellent outcomes reflected in the report with 10 children achieving permanency and the service supporting children very well. The Committee also commended the work of the family finders who did an excellent job in seeking permanency for young people.

In relation to the complaints referenced in the report, the Adoption RAA Service Manager provided an overview explaining that one adopter had not agreed with the decision taken not to allow her to continue with stage one of the process. A second complaint related to letterbox contact and this could sometimes be a difficult situation to manage.

In response to a series of questions, the Committee noted that the aim of the service was to secure a permanent family for children. Sometimes it was not possible to exactly match a child's culture and identity with a new adopted family and this was not an impediment as long as the service was fully satisfied that the placement would meet the needs of the child and the prospective adopters were able to demonstrate that they would actively promote the cultural and identity needs of the child.

Assessments concerning the separation of siblings were a large piece of work involving foster carers, schools and a number of other professionals involved with the child and sibling group. It was an emotional journey for social workers as sibling relationships were regarded as the most enduring and siblings would not be separated unless absolutely necessary. There were also levels of scrutiny and quality assurance before any decision to separate siblings was taken.

In relation to the performance indicators, the Committee noted that the trajectory over the last few years showed a consistent improvement in performance. The pandemic had impacted on performance, although family finding work had continued. The service continued to actively family find for children well before care proceedings were concluded.

The Committee noted that in terms of post adoption support, efforts had been made to unify post adoption support across the Regional Adoption Agency. Significant efforts were made to ensure that adopters had the necessary support and access to services. During the pandemic some virtual sessions (such as coffee mornings and workshops) were offered and this year a more robust calendar of virtual coffee mornings was being delivered. It was envisaged that as restrictions were eased, an element of these virtual sessions would continue to be offered.

Members noted that there would never be enough adopters for the number of children requiring permanency, however, being part of the Regional Adoption Agency had increased the opportunities available. One of the key aspects was ensuring that the right adopters were available.

In relation to the work that needed to be undertaken in order for the Service to move to outstanding, the Adoption RAA Service Manager reported that it was now about matching children with the right adopters and ensuring minimum disruption for the children. Another aspect was the post adoption service, ensuring that adopters felt supported.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**57 BROMLEY VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21 'A
TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO TEACHING VULNERABLE
CHILDREN INCLUDING THOSE IN OUR CARE"
Report CEF22002**

The report provided the Committee with a 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.

In response to a question, the Virtual School Head Teacher outlined the work being done to better engage young people with education. The Committee noted that there were a number of factors affecting the persistent absentee data as, due to the pandemic, children had been in education for fewer days. The periods of lockdown had had a greater impact on young people entering care later and who may have already been more disengaged with education. Members noted that Primary School attendance was very good with foster carers going a good job of getting young people to school. There was a greater focus on young people in Years 10 and 11 and engagement had been difficult because of the lockdowns that had been imposed during the last two years.

Advisors were now working in a different way and overseeing a specific cohort. Weekly attendance was being monitored and every personal education plan quality assured. Advisors were able to work with schools to identify suitable interventions and direct pupil premium funding in the right way. A flexible approach was taken to the support provided but the key was to challenge schools to ensure that they were using every resource available to make sure that young people were encouraged to attend school, that the curriculum was appropriate and that adequate support was available to re-engage the young person.

The Virtual School Head Teacher explained that in terms of Covid Catch up for looked after children, each child and young person had a personal education plan which was regularly reviewed. Three additional questions had been included on the personal education plan in relation to Covid. The Service had also reorganised how the Pupil Premium Plus was distributed to schools. Funding was given to schools termly and each term a pupil progress day was held to review the progress of each individual child. This ensured that the Pupil Premium Plus was tailored to the barriers for the individual child. It was not always about academic catch up but reviews could also consider aspects such as mental health and extracurricular activities. For those children who were progressing well, the funding could be used to enrich their educational experience. Schools were also challenged on how they were spending their Covid recovery funding and the appropriateness of the curriculum provided.

In relation to the impact of Covid in the longer term, the Virtual School Head Teacher explained that figures for the expected progress of children were lower than the service would want them to be, however the figures were also affected by the fact that children missed large periods of education when the

lockdowns were imposed. The Service had an awareness of the children who had been most affected and those who were struggling to engage. There had been some successes in challenging potential exclusions and good work had been done with schools but there had been some children who had needed to move onto other settings. The Committee noted that roughly 10-20% of the cohort were struggling and the remainder of the cohort were affected in the same way as every other child who had experienced disruption to their education over the past two years. The important thing was that the Advisors knew the children very well and extra monitoring and tracking was in place which enable challenge to be used and, where necessary, support put in place.

The Committee noted that the post CLA Advisor met the statutory duties introduced in 2018. In addition, Post-16 Advisors worked closely with other services to ensure that when young people reached 18 years old, they had a clear idea of their destinations. There were currently 24 young people in higher education and 8 who had started university in Autumn 2021. One of the Post-16 Advisors was a specialist in careers advice. In addition, the Chairman noted that the Leaving Care Team provided a great deal of support as did many of the Council's foster carers.

In response to a question, the Virtual School Head Teacher explained that there were not many children from displaced families within the Service. Those who did access the Service were mostly aged 16 and above and were supported by Post-16 Advisors who worked with Bromley College to access a ESL (English and a Second Language) course to enable them to develop their English as quickly as possible. These young people were particularly affected by the lockdowns as the courses were delivered virtually which, in the circumstances, made them difficult to access. In these cases, the young people were supported, with meetings taking place in parks and outdoor areas in order to maintain a connection. It could be more challenging to find a school place for the few under 16s entering the Service but Bromley schools had been very accommodating and had done their best to support the young people. The Committee noted that there were small numbers but suggested that it would be helpful for a further update to be included in the next Annual Report.

Members noted that the role of the Virtual School had been extended and that some posts were being grant funded. The Virtual School Head Teacher confirmed that although the grants were provided on an annual basis there was some certainty that the grants would continue. From September 2021, the duties of the Virtual School had been further extended and there was a requirement to promote the education of all children with a social worker. Consequently, the Service had been monitoring the education of children with a Child Protection Plan since the beginning of January 2022, and schools had been responsive to this.

In relation to Challenge 2 within the report, the Committee noted that the joined up worked had been further developed and monthly meetings brought together the key Heads of Service and representatives from the single points

of contact for SEN. The meetings considered a number of issues, for example, at one point in the year the transition from primary and secondary school would be reviewed. This was replicated across the key transition points.

Members also noted that there were currently 11 staff within the Team including admin and quality control staff. There were enough staff to oversee the children in a meaningful way, staff knew each child well and meetings were prioritised to ensure the best outcomes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

58 CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES INFORMATION ITEMS

The items comprised:

- ETE Update
- CEF Contracts Register

59 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**

60 EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2021

The Part 2 (exempt from publication) minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2021 were agreed, and signed as a correct record.

61 PART 2 PERFORMANCE REPORTING CHILDREN SCRUTINY DATA SET

The Committee noted the Part 2 (exempt from publication) report. Two indicators were noted by the Committee and Management commentary was provided and discussed.

The Meeting ended at 8.46 pm

Chairman

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**CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES
POLICY DEVELOPMENT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ITEM 3A: QUESTIONS TO THE COMMITTEE**

**THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED FOR WRITTEN REPLY
BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CHILDREN EDUCATION & FAMILIES PDS
COMMITTEE**

1. From Owen Wittekind to the Chairman of the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee

An understanding of mortgages, taxes, pensions, etc. are important things for young adults to understand after leaving school, and can be confusing for many people. How are these key life skills covered in the council's youth service provision, and what services does the council offer to academies on these subjects?

Reply:

In Bromley the majority of schools are academies, which operate outside of local authority control and have considerable autonomy over the curriculum. The Children, Education and Families Department recognises the importance of preparing young people with financial awareness. We would signpost Bromley schools to the Money and Pensions Service resources on financial education, which is backed by the Government.

As part of our broad offer to young people, our Youth Services will frequently work with young people on budgeting skills and how to manage money across a number of scenarios such as managing benefits and when they are starting out in employment which will include advice about tax and pension contributions.

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