

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 1 February 2024

Present:

Councillor Kira Gabbert (Chairman)
Councillor Jonathan Andrews (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Graeme Casey, Sophie Dunbar, Robert Evans,
Hannah Gray, Colin Hitchins, Alexa Michael,
Ryan Thomson and Rebecca Wiffen

Reverend Roger Bristow and Shamilah Martin
Alice Kirby and Tommy Velvick

Also Present:

Councillor Kate Lymer, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education
and Families
Councillor Jeremy Adams (observing)

40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Rosie White.

41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no additional declarations of interest.

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

Two questions for oral reply and one question for written reply were received at the meeting. A copy of those questions, together with the Portfolio Holder's responses can be viewed as Appendix A to these Minutes.

43 MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2023

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

44 MATTERS OUTSTANDING AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME Report CSD24014

The report set out progress against outstanding actions from previous meetings and the forward work programme of the Committee.

With regard to Minute 30: Matters Outstanding and Forward Work Programme, the Committee were advised that the Deep Dive on supporting vulnerable or disadvantaged young people to transition from education to employment scheduled for March 2024 would be considered later in the meeting as part of the Deep Dive on youth support and NEET. The next Deep Dive would be held at the June meeting and would focus on the first destinations of 16- and 18-year-old school leavers, including those educated at home. A Member suggested expanding this Deep Dive to incorporate the Local Authority's role in overseeing home education as well as the qualifications and first destinations of young people educated at home, and this was supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

45 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families provided an update to the Committee on her activities.

As Lead Member for Children, Education and Families, the Portfolio Holder was delighted at the outcome of the recent Ofsted Inspection in which Children's Social Care Services had been judged to be outstanding across all areas. The Portfolio Holder paid tribute to the exceptional work of Officers and Senior Leaders in securing this amazing achievement, as well to the vital work of Members who were active and committed Corporate Parents. The best practice of the Children's Social Care team was being recognized at a national level; however, there was still scope to learn and Mark Riddell MBE, the National Advisor for Care Leavers had made some suggestions for developing this already outstanding service area which were being acted on. Upcoming events included the Celebration of Achievement for Children Looked After which all Members were invited to attend, and a meeting of the 1st Hayes Rangers Group hosted in the Council Chamber to which the Mayoress would speak about her experiences as a previous Mayor of Bromley and as a senior officer in the Metropolitan Police.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

46 OFSTED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES Report ECHS19017

The report set out the findings of the Ofsted Inspection of the Local Authority's Children's Social Care Services in November 2023 which had concluded that children in the Borough received "exceptionally strong services". The outstanding rating in all areas was the highest rating that Ofsted could give, and the Local Authority was only the third local authority to have received a judgement of outstanding in all areas of children's social work since the introduction of the new Ofsted Inspection framework in 2022, which included a new judgement for care leavers.

The Chairman led the Committee in congratulating officers, the Senior Leadership Team, the Portfolio Holder and the Committee for their contribution to such an outstanding achievement which was the culmination of several years of hard work. The Director of Children, Education and Families also thanked Members for their excellent support which had also been acknowledged by Ofsted in recognising the 'strong corporate and political commitment' to the shared vision for Children's Services at Bromley.

The Chairman asked about the one area identified for improvement by the Inspectors, and the Director of Children, Education and Families confirmed that this related to using plainer language in correspondence with parents where the Local Authority was seeking to remove children from their care via the Court process. In response to a question from another Member, the Director of Children, Education and Families explained that the terms 'Children's Social Worker' and 'Young Person's Advisor' used in the Inspection Report referred to different roles within the service with the Young Person's Advisor role being a non-Social Worker qualified post that supported Care Leavers. With regard to next steps, the Director of Children, Education and Families underlined that an outstanding rating was not the final destination. The needs and demands within Children's Social Care were ever changing and there were many challenges ahead, including managing resources more effectively.

The Chairman moved that the Committee's thanks to officers, the Senior Leadership Team, the Portfolio Holder and Members be recorded as a recommendation. The motion was seconded by the Vice-Chairman, put to the vote and CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) The findings of the Ofsted report and the outlined plan to address the recommendation identified in the report be noted; and,**
- 2) The Committee's thanks to Officers, the Senior Leadership Team, the Portfolio Holder and Members be conveyed for their hard work and excellent achievement in securing an outstanding rating in all areas of Children's Social Care services.**

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

The Committee considered the following Part 1 (Public) report where the Children, Education and Families Portfolio Holder was recommended to take a decision:

1 February 2024

**A 2024/25 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG)
Report CEF23067**

The report provided an outline of the final Dedicated Schools Grant allocation for 2024/25 and an overview of how this would be spent. The Schools' Forum had also considered the report at its meeting on 18 January 2023 and had recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families approve the final Dedicated Schools Grant allocation for 2024/25 and the methodology of its distribution.

The Chairman was pleased to note the funding increase of £14.7M for the Early Years block for 2024/25 which reflected the new funding available for younger children aged two and under and an increased part-time equivalent rate for three- and four-year olds and disadvantaged two-year olds, as well as an increased Early Years Pupil Premium and Disability Access Fund across the new funding streams. Another Member expressed significant concern regarding the deficit budget for the High Needs Block with a deficit of approximately £21M projected for the end of 2024/25. The Head of Finance: Children, Education and Families explained that the ongoing and significant deficit in funding within the High Needs Block was a national issue impacting local authorities across the country. The Government had put a Financial Disregard in place which meant that the deficit did not have to be counted within the Local Authority's reserves and the Local Authority had developed a Dedicated Schools Grant Recovery Management Plan in consultation with the Department for Education to mitigate the overspend as far as practicable.

The Chairman asked what the views of the Schools' Forum had been on the proposed final Dedicated Schools Grant allocation for 2024/25 and was advised that the Schools' Forum had agreed with Scenario 2 and Option 4 for the Early Years' and Schools' Blocks respectively which would maximise the funds provided directly to Early Years providers and schools. Early Years providers had also been consulted on their preferred funding model and had expressed a strong preference for Scenario 2. These preferred options were the closest to the Department for Education's National Funding Formula which was not yet mandatory but would become a requirement for future years. The Schools' Forum had also commented on the overall funding envelope for the High Needs Block which, as well as being insufficient overall, had not received any budget increase for 2024/25, although an additional one-off grant had been paid for 2023/24.

A Member observed that school rolls had fallen dramatically in parts of London in recent years and queried whether this was the case for Bromley and, if so, what the financial implications would be. The Director of Education advised that demand for primary and secondary school places fluctuated over time. While birth rates were currently falling across London, Bromley continued to see high demand for its primary and secondary schools, although there was some evidence of falling demand at secondary level which would impact individual schools as funding was allocated on a per pupil basis. School places were reviewed annually by the Committee's School Place

Planning Working Group, and it may be that some schools would seek to reduce their published admissions number to mitigate an anticipated fall in demand in the short- to medium-term. The Head of Finance: Children, Education and Families added that the Department for Education had established a Falling Rolls Fund for the 2024/25 financial year which was allocated on the basis of Super Output Areas but that no area within the Borough qualified for funding under this scheme at present.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to approve the Dedicated School Grant allocation for 2024/25 and the methodology of its distribution, taking into account the views of the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee and the Schools' Forum.

48 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER ITEMS

A CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PORTFOLIO DRAFT BUDGET 2024/25 Report CEF23068

The report considered the Portfolio Holder's draft 2024/25 budget which incorporated the future cost pressures and initial draft budget saving options reported to the Council's Executive on 17 January 2024. Members were requested to consider the initial draft budget being proposed and to identify any further action that might be taken to reduce cost pressures facing the Council over the next four years with a view to the Council's Executive making recommendations to Council on the 2024/25 Council Tax levels. There were still outstanding issues and areas of uncertainty remaining and any further updates would be included in the 2024/25 Council Tax report to the meeting of the Council's Executive on 7 February 2024.

In reviewing the draft budget, a Member observed that emergency foster placements remained a substantial cost pressure for the Portfolio and queried whether it would be feasible to establish a Local Authority-owned children's home that offered better value for money than placements made via Independent Fostering Agencies. The Director of Children, Education and Families confirmed that all options for future service delivery would be considered. Moving forward, a significant emphasis would be placed on developing innovative and cost-effective service models that would help contain the cost pressures caused by increasing demand for statutory services and regular updates on the findings of this work would be reported to the Committee. A Member suggested there may be scope for innovative practice within the youth service as some local charities and organisations were already working effectively with young people within local communities. Another Member asked about transformation work already delivered within SEND Transport and was advised that two travel trainers were now in place and details of the number of children and young people benefitting from this service would be provided to the Committee following the meeting.

1 February 2024

A Member underlined the need to continue to focus on recruitment and retention as permanent staff were more cost effective than those employed via an agency. The Director of Children, Education and Families was pleased to report that the Local Authority's overseas recruitment work continued to be very effective in securing high quality staff and it was anticipated that the 'Outstanding' Ofsted judgement would help attract the highest quality staff to join the Local Authority in a permanent role. Another Member highlighted the Local Authority's low settlement funding per head of population which was £123 per head of population for the 2024/25 financial year against a London average of £330 and stated that this disparity in funding levels needed to be resolved. The Chairman queried whether recharges were made to the Adult, Care and Health Portfolio with respect to services for young people with special educational needs and disabilities aged 18-25 years and the Head of Finance: Children, Education and Families confirmed that a funding mechanism was in place to ensure that costs were charged to the appropriate Portfolio. It was expected that an additional social care grant would be provided to the Local Authority for the 2024/25 financial year to help offset some costs and this would also be apportioned between the adults' and children's services.

In considering how the draft budget was displayed to the Committee, a Member noted that the original 2023/24 budget was shown alongside the draft 2024/25 budget with further columns for increased costs and other changes. The Member suggested that it could be helpful to include the projected end 2023/34 budget to enable Members to compare the actual costs for 2023/24 with the draft budget for 2024/25 and this request would be noted for future reporting.

Councillor Rebecca Wiffen tabled an additional recommendation requesting the Committee:

2.2 Consider extending full council tax relief for care leavers, offering 100% discount on council tax for care leavers until the age of 25, provided the following criteria are met:

You must be a London Borough of Bromley care leaver, having been/being looked after by the Borough, and have applied for other discounts such as single person discount/student discount.

The Chairman stated that any such decision was in the remit of Full Council and moved that the recommendation be deferred to the meeting of Full Council on 26 February 2024 when the 2024/25 budget would be set. This motion, proposed by the Chairman, was seconded by Councillor Alexa Michael, put to the vote and CARRIED.

RESOLVED: That:

- **The update on the financial forecast for 2024/25 to 2027/28 be noted;**

- **The initial draft 2024/25 budget be noted as a basis for setting the 2024/25 budget; and,**
- **The Council's Executive be recommended to note the comments of the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee on the initial draft 2024/25 budget at its meeting on 7 February 2024.**

**B CEF RISK REGISTER 2023/24
Report CEF23070**

The report set out the Children, Education and Families Risk Register update for Quarter 3 for the 2023/24 financial year.

RESOLVED: That the current Children, Education and Families Risk Register and the existing controls in place to mitigate the risks be noted.

**C PERFORMANCE REPORTING - CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY
DATASET PART 1 (PUBLIC) REPORT
Report CEF23069A**

The report presented a regular update on the performance of services for children across a suite of performance measures.

RESOLVED: That the November 2023 outturn of key performance indicators and associated management commentary be noted.

**D DEEP DIVE: YOUTH SUPPORT AND NEET
Report CEF23071**

The Committee welcomed Linda King, Youth Support Programme Manager (Universal) who shared her expertise in the area of Youth Support and the support of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), including mentoring and work experience opportunities.

A Member observed that Bromley Youth Support Service had been asked to make £125k savings for both the 2024/45 and 2025/26 financial years and queried whether this was achievable. The Assistant Director: Specialist Services clarified that the service was looking for ways to work more effectively rather than cutting its provision and spoke of the recent launch of the Good Work Bromley Exchange as an example of innovative partnership working to support young people into employment, including those with additional needs. A Member asked how the Bromley Youth Support Programme encouraged young people who were NEET to engage with Information, Advice and Guidance and was advised that an individualised approach was taken which could include one-to-one or group employability work and other mechanisms for support and encouragement. The Youth Support Service had strong links with a range of partners including schools, voluntary sector youth groups and health partners such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Bromley Y.

1 February 2024

With regard to work experience, a Member queried why 22 young people had refused an offer of work experience with the Local Authority in 2023/24. The Youth Support Programme Manager (Universal) explained that some young people applied for several work experience opportunities and other young people were limited by time as to which offers they could accept. Work experience opportunities with the Local Authority were promoted across all secondary schools as well as via the Bromley Education Business Partnership. A Member described the work experience model used at London Biggin Hill Airport in which young people rotated between different departments and the Youth Support Programme Manager (Universal) explained that whilst the Local Authority tended to place work experience students in a single team, participants were encouraged to use a careers tool to choose a placement linked to their interests and ambitions. A Member asked whether any of the young people who had undertaken work experience with Bromley had gone on to work for the Local Authority, suggesting that this could be beneficial for shortage areas such as planning and social care work. The Youth Support Programme Manager (Universal) advised that the majority of work experience students were still attending secondary education, but the Local Authority did employ a number of staff or apprentices who had prior links to the Local Authority, including work experience or as Children Looked After. Young people accessing Information, Advice and Guidance services in Bromley were also encouraged to consider shortage skills areas for their future career.

In considering other areas of service provision, a Member highlighted the benefits of mentoring programmes and encouraged all Members to become mentors and to promote this opportunity across their own networks. Another Member suggested that care leavers be prioritised to participate in the Bromley Mentoring Initiative. A range of supportive internship models were delivered in partnership for young people who were NEET or had special educational needs or disabilities and a Co-opted Member emphasised that suitable work experience and preparation opportunities should be available to young people of all abilities. The Co-opted Member underlined the need for an expansion of further education for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including those of high ability, and for the Local Authority and its partners to be ambitious for this cohort by providing more specialist further education, training and employment opportunities. In response to a question from a Member regarding the Youth Support Service's mobile buses not being ULEZ compliant, the Youth Support Programme Manager (Universal) advised that the service had been able to offset other grant funding to help fund a replacement vehicle to undertake mobile and detached youth engagement. Existing service users were being consulted on how to fit out this vehicle and this included reviewing similar provisions by other local authorities and charitable organisations.

The Chairman led the Committee in thanking Linda King for sharing her expertise.

RESOLVED: That the thematic session be noted.

49 CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES INFORMATION ITEMS

The items comprised:

- Contracts Activity Report

RESOLVED: That the Information Briefing be noted.

50 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**

51 EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2023

The Part 2 (Exempt) minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

52 PORTFOLIO HOLDER PART 2 (EXEMPT) UPDATE

The Committee heard a Part 2 (Exempt) Update of the Portfolio Holder.

53 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER ITEMS PART 2 (EXEMPT)

A PERFORMANCE REPORTING - CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY DATASET PART 2 (EXEMPT) REPORT

The Committee considered a report setting out Part 2 (Exempt) aspects of performance reporting against the Children's Scrutiny Dataset.

The Meeting ended at 9.18 pm

Chairman