

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Wednesday 19 December 2018 at 7.00 pm

MINUTES

PRESENT: Councillor Liz Atkins (Chair), Councillor Malcolm Clark, Councillor Nicole Griffiths, Councillor Dr. Mahamed Hashi, Councillor Philip Normal and Councillor Emma Nye

APOLOGIES: Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer

ALSO PRESENT: Maria Bellinfantie (Deputy Chair Lambeth Youth Council), and Maria Taylor (Young Lambeth Coop)

1. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, with a special welcome to Maria Bellinfantie, Lambeth Youth Council, who was attending her first meeting, and all attendees introduced themselves. The below declarations of interest were raised:

- Councillor Dr Mahamed Hashi and Maria Taylor informed the Committee that they worked with the Young Lambeth Cooperative.

2. MINUTES (23.10.18)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2018 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

3. DECEMBER FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MEDIUM TERM STRATEGY REPORT 2018-2023

The Chair, Councillor Liz Atkins, noted that it was unacceptable to run local government on shoestring budgets, with central Government's planned cuts forcing Lambeth to find an extra £43m saving over the next three years, with a £12m reduction to Children's Services. There was a need to ensure frontline services were protected from cuts, that early help continued and residents received the help they needed.

Annie Hudson, Strategic Director for Children's Services, gave a presentation to Members included as background papers for this item.

The Chair, Councillor Liz Atkins, then noted the Overview and Scrutiny's (OSC's) recommendations expressing concern at the level of service changes, impacts on the most vulnerable and the need to increase in-house foster care. All Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee Members shared concern at the level of changes and Lambeth's ability to achieve proposed savings, highlighting the £8m savings required in non-staffing service transformation.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Deputy Leader (Children and Young People), Councillor Jennifer Brathwaite; Annie Hudson, Strategic Director for Children's Services; Cathy Twist, Director of Education; Tony Parker, Director of Commissioning and Improvement; and, Michelle Hayden-Pepper, Interim Director of Children's Social Care, responded:

- The demands on CSC were considerable, but officers believed that the proposed changes were deliverable through tight and careful programme management, although additional capacity was needed. The Council's Chief Executive, Andrew Travers, agreed that a strong programme management approach was required.
- The numbers of children in care had been significantly above statistical neighbours, but had fallen and was now fairly steady over the last 12 months, at around 400-420, which was comparable to other similar inner London boroughs.
- There were large numbers of teenagers coming into care (in common with other London boroughs) and there were concerns that care did not provide consistently good outcomes for this group of children, with outcomes for children coming into care at a relatively young age and/or who stayed for long periods being generally better.
- The concern regarding the Council's ability to improve fostering performance was understood, but the proposals were different to that of two years ago when Lambeth was rated inadequate and failed to grow fostering as pledged.
- Neighbouring boroughs had higher proportions of children looked after cared for by in-house carers; in Lambeth this stood at around 25% of all children fostered being with in-house carers. There was capacity to improve both recruitment and retention; and a key element of the revised strategy was that a one-Lambeth approach would be crucial to deliver new targets.
- The one-Lambeth approach would involve schools, health services, councillors, and other partners; and the delivery of the Strategy would be regularly discussed and monitored at the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Teenagers were expensive to place in care and were often placed with private providers, which meant significantly higher costs whilst not always improving outcomes for young persons; instead, social workers needed to work with families to get children back home, in extended families, or within the wider community.
- Commissioning was often market-led and it was challenging to find provision for young people. The aim of future commissioning was to work together with other boroughs and partners, such as the South London Commissioning Programme, which would lead to significant savings and to better wraparound support services, such as mental health services. This would enable children to feel safe in a cheaper placement and halt escalations to higher cost placements.
- The South London Commissioning Programme would go live in April 2019, but a rethink of local provision, closer inter-borough working, and the Looked After Children (LAC) Commissioning Strategy were all needed to reduce costs.
- Officers would supply the Committee with details on savings for monitoring.
- Complaints raised at the recent Forum had been listened to by the Assistant Director for Children Looked After and reflected in the fostering paper presented to the Corporate Parenting Board. In addition, the Deputy Leader (Children and Young People) noted that officers were open to discussion, knew shortcomings and were eager to overcome and improve. Further discussion would take place in January with foster carers who shared the Council's ambitions to be one of the best boroughs for fostering. The Assistant Director had also met foster carers to hear their views and proposals to improve performance, and crucial to success would be strong marketing capability in order to attract carers who might otherwise work in the independent sector.
- The Regional Adoption Agency could impact on placement costs, but these were likely to

be relatively small.

- Frontline was a new fast-track social worker scheme; with participants taken on as postgraduates, with a consultant social worker taking on four trainees for a year, after which Lambeth agreed to employ them for at least a year post qualification. The Frontline national programme was funded through the Department for Education (DfE) and the contract was for just one year post qualification.
- Good career progression pathways were essential to retain social workers.
- Lambeth had taken on 13 newly qualified social workers and was looking to recruit another eight in March 2019, but it needed experienced social workers to be social work educators.
- The Children in Care Council (CiCC) attended Corporate Parenting Board and took part in the Fostering Recruitment Strategy discussion, and were to be invited to a special meeting in spring 2019 with foster carers to discuss the proposed Strategy.
- Social workers would stay if the conditions they operated in were supportive of good practice, properly supervised, in a pleasant working environment, with low caseloads (with Lambeth at the low end of London average, averaging at 15 per social worker), and retention was therefore about more than salary.
- The retention of social workers was a London-wide problem. Whilst some boroughs had key worker housing, most Lambeth staff commuted in utilising Brixton's excellent transport.
- Lambeth was competing with a locum market where social workers could earn significantly more.
- The Pause Project would work to support the most vulnerable women who had repeated numbers of children removed from their care; whilst significant savings were not expected nor large numbers of persons impacted, it was hoped to have a positive long-term impact. The chance of having subsequent children removed, once one children had been removed, was over 50% after 18 months, and it was important to find different ways of supporting and helping women.
- The Early Help Service relied significantly on the Troubled Families Grant programme, which was anticipated to end in 2019/20, and there was much national concern and petitioning to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) who funded the programme regarding concerns that this would lead to the potential national collapse of early help.
- The above challenges were factored into the redesign of Lambeth's Early Help approach with a major restructure of staff (primarily through reducing vacancies) and their deployment, and link-up with universal services such as schools, voluntary sector, and other partners. The Streatham pilot would shortly extend to Tulse Hill, and would be kept under review.
- The spreadsheet (agenda pack, page 43-44) detailed savings, with placement savings divided fairly evenly over four years as the staff restructure and different operating procedures needed to be embedded to impact on cost. In other areas, such as Procurement and the re-commissioning of Youth and Play, more savings were front-loaded.
- It was noted that some Year 1 saving targets were larger than they appeared as they included savings agreed in previous years.
- Effects on frontline services, staggering cuts differently, and risk were under review; however, early savings, such as in Youth and Play, generally comprised building and maintenance; but reviews had reduced some Year 1 and increased Year 2 savings, such as in the Youth Offending Service (YOS).
- The placements savings for year one were now lower than previously to take account of

changes needed in Fostering and Placement services before benefits were realised. This would be regularly reviewed by senior management to ensure Lambeth was not overspending.

- The average independent fostering placement was considerably more expensive than in-house foster caring, and so there was a need to invest in recruiting and marketing to ensure delivery of a good service, but it would be challenging to deliver the necessary budgetary cuts.

RESOLVED:

1. To note and endorse the recommendation from OSC (Recommendation 4) regarding the level of service changes proposed in Children's Services and the impact this could have on the borough's most vulnerable residents, as well as the feasibility of delivering the savings proposed. CSSC requests that progress reports on achieving saving targets and impacts on our most vulnerable young people be brought to this Committee on a six monthly basis.
2. An action plan on fostering should be developed with stakeholders and monitored by this committee. There should also be engagement with the Children in Care Council and their views sought on the Fostering Strategy, along with other strategies affecting children in care.
3. The committee should be updated on progress in reducing agency workers through Frontline and other council/local initiatives.
4. The Committee records the importance of continuity of care to young people in care and encouraging new social workers to stay in Lambeth.
5. The committee notes the welcome commitment to the Pause project and the help to women who have repeated removal of their babies into care.
6. The committee notes that the early help service funding ends in 2020 and recommends that there be a review of the new model of service with which it will be forced to operate and associated reduced staffing.

4. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY

The Chair, Councillor Liz Atkins, opened the item by noting that all children deserved to be the best they could be and Lambeth was committed to delivering support so young people could stay in the local community. However, that aspiration was challenged by central Government's imposed budget, increasing numbers of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) children, and raised community expectations that could not be met in current spending constraints.

Cathy Twist, Director of Education; and, Adam Yarnold, Lead, Special Education Needs & Disability, provided an update on the SEND Strategy and preparation for external inspection, noting that:

- A local area inspection of services and partner work by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted was awaited in early 2019, and would review how Lambeth provided and commissioned SEND services.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 changed eligibility criteria and support available, in particular expanding the age range for additional support from 3-19 to 0-25 years; and Lambeth was implementing its requirements, but budgets had not changed much since 2014.
- The SEND Strategic Board was overseeing the Act's requirements, self-evaluating, identifying areas for development, and implementing and monitoring outcomes.

- Funding for SEND came from three sources: the Dedicated Schools Grant [DSG] (mainly via the high needs block); the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)'s budget; and, through the Council's revenue grant.
- Costs were increasing significantly and budgets nationally were challenged.
- The paper also detailed how Lambeth assessed and met needs and outcomes, including with partners; areas for development and next steps; provided statistics requested by OSC; support and provision from early stages to adulthood; and, summaries of specialist education provision.
- The paper also detailed funding to support travel assistance to and from school as well as the Children's Services' projection and reduction of a £4.5m overspend.

The Committee next heard from Christine Golding, GMB Education Convenor; and, Laura Liverotti, therapist at the Park Campus Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), who noted:

- Last year's cut to the outreach service, covering support and the transition between the PRU and mainstream, predominantly affected black and Afro-Caribbean boys;
- Feelings of a lack of hope and concern that children would be unable to go back to mainstream schools;
- Pupils most at risk in PRUs or mainstream schools were not always receiving the support they needed; and,
- Pupils were not always receiving proper reintegration nor social skills preparation for bigger classes, their self-esteem, reactions to their previous attendance at PRUs, and positive visions for their future.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Deputy Leader (Children and Young People), Councillor Jennifer Brathwaite; Annie Hudson, Strategic Director for Children's Services; Cathy Twist, Director of Education; and, Adam Yarnold, Lead, Special Education Needs & Disability, responded:

- The Action Plan and Strategy were included in the agenda pack (pages 117 and 103-114 respectively) and officers would provide measurable targets for SEND pupils, including the four priorities of the Local Area Plan.
- Councillor Brathwaite had written to central Government in November, setting out the woeful financial circumstance for all London boroughs, and asked attendees to review the London Councils survey results on CSC, which detailed that all but one London borough's CSC was in deficit. There were no extra funds forthcoming from central Government, whilst the Secretary of State for Education's announcement on 17 December only allocated an extra £1m for London, which did nothing to assist the most vulnerable, and vulnerable children were bearing the brunt of austerity.
- Special schools were funded in one of two ways, via place-finding element and by top-up element for particular needs. Previously, top-ups were given on a per-child basis, with place-finding evenly distributed, and resulted in significant dissatisfaction. A fairer banding arrangement had been implemented in tandem with special needs workers, heads, governors, and outside bodies: to combine funding in one pot and banding children by their needs from Bands A to E (least to highest need). This better matched funding to schools' needs, whilst some schools had been capped in their first year so that no school received more or less funding than before and banding arrangements would be reviewed after a meeting in January for the next financial year.
- It was difficult to say whether different children's needs were funded differently to other boroughs, but officers would distribute comparative figures used by the design exercise for the banding system.
- Lambeth had re-tendered the bus contract from Veolia to London Hire, noting that the new

system was more flexible with variable bus sizes and lower costs, however Lambeth had pledged to provide transport to any child who needed it, but was encouraging independence.

- Independent travel training was progressing well, with 46 children assessed and 37 now independent travellers, with more to be assessed. Independent travellers were reviewed at six and nine month intervals to ensure they remained confident. Not as many children as initially hoped were able to take up independent travel, but were regularly reviewed when they were older.
- Transport requests were reviewed weekly, with 400 assessed since the beginning of year, but there were now 2,400 pupils on EHCPs compared to 1,600 pupils last year. The reason for this increase was partly due to increased age range arising from the Children and Families Act 2014, but also from increased numbers of EHCPs meaning that more children had a right to apply for transport.
- Demand had increased for a number reasons: the better identification of needs or greater awareness of SEND, and funding pressures on schools, requiring schools to get more funding via EHCPs.
- It was too early to report on retention rates and future employment rates until apprenticeships were completed, but these were being monitored and officers would distribute to the Committee.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 required children to stay in education until 19 years of age, so SEND schools now had sixth forms, whilst many SEND pupils were staying in school, getting preparation for adulthood, and all young people had the ability to have a work experience placement.
- 4.1% of children in Lambeth were on EHCPs, compared to 2.9% nationally, with 6.4% of these children educated outside of Lambeth.
- Some children had very specialist needs and there would continue to be a percentage educated outside Lambeth due to economies of scale, but the Vanguard Special Needs School would make a significant difference with its 78 places due to open in January 2020, and more children would be educated in the borough than currently.
- Information on children educated outside Lambeth would be shared with Members and kept under review.
- It was difficult to persuade parents that their SEND children should have independent travel with concerns over safety and violence; not limited just to the transport itself but also the wider journey.
- It was true that there was a feeling that pupils in PRUs were there forever, and it was noted that Dunraven School was managing excluded pupils within the school so that reintegration was easier, and that pupils did not feel estranged or embarrassed.
- Officers would distribute percentages of SEND pupils who were excluded and what actions were being taken on this; however it was noted that SEND was a broad church, with some needs not requiring as much support, misdiagnosed, or that persons were not aware of the available support, so it was difficult to give accurate figures.
- The Education team would challenge schools if they attempted to exclude a SEND child, as it was illegal to exclude a child due to their SEND, but it was often difficult to differentiate SEND pupils from those with additional needs.
- Lambeth had two PRUs (one each for secondary and primary) and commissioned places from the high needs block from them.
- Officers were reviewing alternative ways to support children just before and after exclusion, and was working with the PRUs to look at other models, other school provision, or alternative approaches.
- Officers would prefer no exclusions, although the aim was to ensure that children spent as

little time as possible in PRUs, especially for Key Stage 4 pupils, but it remained up to the PRUs to provide as meaningful an education experience as possible.

- Dunraven School's internal exclusion model was good and many schools had similar internal exclusions, whilst the Norwood School's shared Greenhouse Project aimed to give fresh starts and was very successful. Exclusion was to be avoided or a short period of time outside mainstream school provided instead.
- The PRUs did an outstanding job with young people and whilst some pupils stayed from six months to a year, it was often very helpful to them, so long as they returned to mainstream education.
- The use of PRUs was about balance and whilst officers accepted concerns over the PRUs' image they were working with them to improve that aspect.
- Most primary-age and Key Stage 3 pupils returned to mainstream from the PRU, but schools were less motivated to take back Key Stage 4 pupils due to the loss of time during GCSEs and some of these pupils stayed in the PRU for longer than necessary.
- Lambeth commissioned and monitored PRU places, with assessments often leading to EHCPs and often pupils might be found other specialist places outside the PRUs.
- Additional support was challenging, but Lambeth did commission places from both PRUs, had agreed to uplift both PRUs in the last financial year, and were working with them to commission additional social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) support resources.
- Lambeth was in conversation with the PRUs and the YOS to improve perceptions of them, but it was noted that the PRUs were good at celebrating success and the Scrutiny visit to the PRUs had been successful and received good feedback.
- Officers pledged to improve assistance to Key Stage 4 as leaving the PRU was challenging for them, and it was noted that not stigmatising these pupils was essential for improved outcomes.
- Young people leaving the PRUs were often mentored and sponsored to ensure they had good places to go to, and Lambeth's Outreach team worked closely with them.
- Much educational and psychological support had been provided to the PRUs following the recent devastating death of a pupil, and officers offered their sympathy. However, this had led to a review of the support provided and officers would also review ways to celebrate the YOS and the PRUs, and improve their reputations.
- Officers expected to reach traineeship and apprenticeship targets, with high levels of success over 20 years, discounting a slight dip after the 2014 reforms, and the assessment process had been improved by meeting parents at an earlier date. There were significant numbers of eligible pupils adding pressure on the small team (comprising three coordinators doing assessments for the 10 requests received each week) to keep standards high. This work also included supporting internships, advertising roles, bringing networks together, reaching out to employers, and ensuring that the programme worked well. However, there was a need to increase numbers and additional funds for support in February would enable good offers for all future internships.

In discussion, sub-Committee Members noted the following:

- Many SEND pupils remained undiagnosed or misunderstood, whilst 52% of Lambeth's primary school children did not speak English as a first language.
- Teachers were often undervalued and had various barriers to work at optimum capacity.
- The amazing work of staff at Park Campus was noted, but additional support was needed for PRUs.
- It was important that the stigma of PRUs was challenged, such as when mainstream pupils were threatened with exclusion to them, and additional provision and celebration of the PRUs was needed.

- Stigmatised services, such as the YOS and PRUs, would benefit from tangible and positive visits from the Mayor, Leader, other civic leaders, and linking in other services to improve outcomes.
- The 80% of EHCPs issued in 20 weeks was well above the 60-65% London average, and it was important to understand what Lambeth was doing well and how to protect this success.

The Deputy Leader (Children and Young People) noted that Park Campus PRU was in her ward and she did not consider it to have a bad reputation, but had reputational damage as pupils often stayed there for too long. It was difficult to disseminate and acknowledge the importance of limits to pupils' time there, not just for their education but in social terms, and she expressed her wishes that the Committee review and monitor the average time pupils stayed in the PRU to reassure parents. The Committee also added that it would also like to consider further Dunraven School's exclusion model and its potential to be utilised in other schools.

RESOLVED:

1. Secure measurable targets for SEND pupils for each of the priorities outlined in the Local Area Strategy and receive reports updating on progress of meeting them.
2. Secure comparable data including spend per special school pupil for comparable neighbouring boroughs for each band.
3. Review progress on SEND transport in reducing spend and encouraging the independence of young people travelling.
4. CSSC to receive data on the successful retention of SEND young people on apprenticeships and internships, and Children's Services work to strengthen partnerships with industry and others to increase opportunities.
5. Review numbers of SEND children educated out of borough and the impact of Vanguard in reducing that number.
6. Review exclusion of children with SEN and with language difficulties, particularly at primary level, and the success of internal exclusion models such as Dunraven to avoid external exclusion.
7. Review return of pupils into mainstream schools and review possibility of extra resources for PRUs and celebrating their positive work.
8. Review the average time that pupils are educated at the PRU(s) and monitor this over time to reassure parents that this is for a limited time and that children go back into mainstream education.

5. 2018-19 CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair discussed the work programme and explained that the 19 March 2019 meeting would focus on Children's and Young People's Health and Wellbeing (including mental health and CAMHS) and Progress update on Children's Social Care and improvement journey. There were no further items added to the agenda.

The Chair, Councillor Liz Atkins, recorded Elaine Carter's, Lead Scrutiny Officer's, impending retirement, noting her expertise in making scrutiny far more effective in Lambeth. Many councillors and officers had been in contact regarding Elaine's exemplary work supporting the Council's scrutiny function, with both the Chair and Councillor Ed Davie, former Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, noting her fantastic work over many years, offering their thanks and presenting a gift on behalf of Members. Councillor Dr Mohamed Hashi also noted

Elaine's work for the Black Health and Wellbeing Commission, being instrumental in translating residents' input, including his own, into successful outcomes and future practices.

The Chair, Councillor Liz Atkins, continued by thanking attendees for their participation, and offered season's greetings to all.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 19/03/19 consider:
 - (i) Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing (including mental health and CAMHS); and,
 - (ii) Progress update on Children's Social Care and improvement journey.
2. To note the following recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny (Crime and Disorder) Committee, 1/11/18:
 - To recommend that the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee considers whether the educational/training programmes offered by the Youth Offending Services are sufficiently targeted, up to date and meeting clients' needs.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 8.53 pm

CHAIR

Date of Despatch: Wednesday 23 January 2019

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