



CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday 30 June 2021 at 7.00 pm

Committee Room (B6) - Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton, London, SW2 1RW

Members Present: Councillor Liz Atkins (Substitute), Councillor Malcolm Clark, Councillor Joe Corry-Roake, Councillor Nicole Griffiths, Councillor Joshua Lindsey (Chair) and Councillor Jane Pickard

Apologies: Councillor Mohamed Jaser, Baboucarr Jallow, Simon Funnell, Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer, and Frank Roberts

Also present online: Councillor Marcia Cameron

1 Declarations of Pecuniary Interest

There were none.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2021 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

3 SEND and Inclusion Strategy

The report was introduced by Councillor Edward Davie, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People; Abrilli Phillip, Director of Education and Learning; and Jo Sullivan-Lyons, Assistant Director Education Strategy, Access and Inclusion, who noted:

- The Strategy aimed to ensure all could succeed in life and demonstrated Lambeth's commitment for all to achieve their full potential.
- It had been created with the borough's parents, carers, children, and professionals, through wide consultation.
- Lambeth's recent Ofsted report was positive and noted areas for further improvement alongside what the Council did well, and this Strategy built on these strengths as well as the identified areas for development.
- Lambeth had a proportionally large group of children with special educational needs compared to the national average and it was important to identify those needs early.

The Sub-Committee next heard from Rosemary Merricks, Lambeth Parent Forum and parent; and, Joanna Tarrant, Headteacher, Elm Court and The Livity Schools, who noted that:

- Families' experiences were often different from the intentions of the Council and it was recognised that they wanted change immediately but that this was not always possible.

- Early identification was key and this was needed across the board.
- All children and young people deserved the same from life as others could expect, and SEND persons were as much a part of the community as everyone else.
- Programmes to date, such as the South London Careers Hub where three Elm Court students had been offered a place, benefitted young persons' development.
- All special schools were looking at fulfilling opportunities, such as work experiences, whilst some special schools had implemented virtual work experiences to mitigate issues created by lockdown.
- Covid-19 had raised problems for employer-run enterprise opportunities and other post-19 provision.
- Further opportunities and co-working with employers and voluntary organisations were required and these needed to link-up when pupils left school, with greater support from the Council.
- SEND funding was being reviewed by the Department for Education.
- The improvements in EHCPs were praised, with further improvements to be detailed in the Action Plan.
- There had been improvements in SEND, but it was difficult for parents to be patient.
- Students had missed school during closures and feedback from those coming back were that they wanted to be on site, with attendance at Elm Court School higher than it had ever been.
- Remote learning had presented challenges for all students, not just for SEND children, but SEND students had found it particularly challenging as most required a hands-on learning approach.
- A London-wide survey had uncovered that digital poverty and access had been issues for many.
- The Covid-19 pandemic had been extremely difficult for parents, particularly those with SEND children, and it was noted that a number of schools' support had been of the highest quality.

During this item, at 19:21, Councillor Malcolm Clark joined the meeting and subsequently noted that he did not have any declarations of interest in any agenda items under consideration.

In response to questions from members, the Cabinet Member and officers answered:

- Next steps were a fundamental area for Children's Services, and they were alongside Adult Services to promote engagement and opportunities for the SEND cohort, whilst ensuring that these were properly monitored.
- Opportunities such as volunteering and supported internships gave confidence to students to be successful in later life.
- The Council was reviewing baselines and ensuring third parties understood the high aspirations.
- Enabling young people into long-term employment was a key strand of the Strategy.
- The Action Plan detailed types of educational and training opportunities, a commitment to measure impacts and meet targets, and would be a dynamic document under constant review.
- Lambeth was offering a range of living arrangements, many of them semi-independent, and required providers to offer key-skills training to promote independence as far as possible. The importance of offering independent living to as many young persons as possible was noted.
- Semi-independent living was available for young people who received support for the duration of their lives.

- Lambeth had commissioned excellent housing providers who could aid progression to adulthood.
- Thanks were given for the Sub-Committee's praise of the progress made to date.
- The implementation of the EHCP Hub would ensure that EHCP applications and annual reviews were transparent to professionals, schools, parents and carers; and would enable significant improvements.
- The agenda pack had stated that EHCPs were referred to as 'Education and Health Care Plans', but should be 'Education, Health and Care Plans'; noting that children required all aspects to work harmoniously to deliver on goals.
- The CCG had an Early Intervention Health Visitor for vulnerable families who would aid in early identification and accessing early years providers.
- Accountability was first at the operational level, with an Inclusion Operational Board driving implementation and where partners were held to account. The SEND Partnership Board took all strategic decisions to ensure success.
- A data dashboard was being developed to allow transparency regarding the Strategy's impact.
- There was concern about the number of families accessing free childcare provision, which had declined due to Covid-19 and was historically low, but Lambeth was now up to the national average (70%). This could help mitigate the effects of deprivation and give a better start to life, whilst picking up SEND needs early, and the Council needed to further support families' access.
- Black families were underrepresented in the formal public consultation process, and the Council intended to consult with them further so that their voices were heard and their opinions were taken into account, especially as they were overrepresented in the SEND cohort.
- Lambeth had an ambition to be a child friendly community, with children's voices central to the Strategy, and it was essential to listen to all children. This has not been satisfactory for SEND children previously and was an ongoing improvement which the Strategy had as a priority.
- The Council had used HealthWatch to aid the Strategy's development through focus groups and had explicitly embedded this in the Action Plan via the Inclusive Engagement Forum for future service and implementation design reviews.
- The Strategy's first principle was being 'person-centred' and, as such, culturally responsive. A further programme of work, developed with carers and led by the principal psychologist, would deliver culturally responsible services.
- Lambeth had reviewed both pre- and post- pandemic baselines, noting identification of challenges for SEND children and access to learning support, which applied to most children. However, the assessing of learning needs was well-handled by Lambeth's schools, although this could be further improved across the spectrum.
- The Action Plan was currently in draft but would include targets.
- Data regarding disproportionality would be included within the final Strategy when published.
- The SEND Code of Practice 2014 provided statutory criteria for EHCP assessment completion timescales, and Lambeth's Annual Review compared favourably to other local authorities.
- Consultation took many forms, including with the public between February-April, and with HealthWatch commissioned over six months to aid in this and in the writing of the Strategy and Action Plan. Consultation had been based on and guided by data.
- There were statutory duties for partners to enact the Strategy and formed part of existing funding arrangements for partners; but there was no dedicated funding as these were

statutory obligations.

- Funding remained challenging, with the Dedicated Schools Grant reduced, Lambeth schools seeing no real terms increase in 11 years, whilst facing difficult demographic challenges such as the 25% fall in birth-rate, further exacerbated by zero European-born children being in current admissions data and Covid-19 seeing families move out of London.
- Funding was challenging for schools as the Council could not control demand but had to treat all children with needs without receiving increased funding commensurate with those needs.
- The Strategy was specifically based on early intervention and not just in early years, with EHCPs possible to start from birth to 25 years of age. Where additional provision was needed, funding could be received to enable supporting children in early year settings even without EHCP plans via the Early Years Inclusion Fund.
- Officers understood frustrations arising from complexities of SEND for those in education and learning, but the Council had an excellent Early Years' team and was looking to develop the Area SEND coordinator (SENCO) role further, especially in relation to nurseries.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Sub-Committee reviewed and provided comment on the report prior to consideration by Cabinet.
2. To promote opportunities with employers and voluntary organisations to aid pathways to adulthood and identify employees' support needs.
3. To provide a measurable set of targets for the Strategy's Action Plan, including outcomes for young people transitioning to adulthood, aiding independent living and improved links with employers and housing providers.
4. To ensure the Strategy had adequate and early identification provisions, particularly for early years; whilst detailing improvements of families' use of early years settings, the role of health visitors, and how Lambeth was to approach these.
5. To review and monitor EHCPs, principally on ongoing maintenance, accountability and practical implementation.
6. That the committee members receive a separate briefing on EHCPs with the Assistant Director Education Strategy, Access and Inclusion.
7. To share an initial summary of and later the full Action Plan indicating success criteria and targets with Members.
8. To ensure the voices of young people, particularly SEND, and all communities, particularly young black persons, were continuously heard, represented and included in the Action Plan.
9. To consider opportunities to share good practice with neighbouring local authorities, and detail cross-borough working with and comparisons to, neighbouring boroughs' strategies.
10. To consult with nursery managers and staff on real needs and that nursery providers were included in the Action Plan.
11. To include lessons learnt during lockdown and discuss with families and the most vulnerable children impacted by the pandemic; and reflect these in the Action Plan.
12. To note the current funding challenges posed by central government and demonstrate strong outcomes for children with SEND in the final decision report.
13. To identify the level of need and use this information to lobby central Government on increased SEND parameters and provide the resources necessary to implement wider SEND responsibilities.

4 Impact of the London-wide Regional Adoption Agency

The report was introduced by Councillor Edward Davie, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People; Alex Kubeyinje, Director: Children's Social Care; Shkelqim Luma, Service Manager, CSC; and Nina Sio-Lokam, Agency Advisor & Permanency Lead, CSC, who noted:

- Lambeth's adoption services were rated as inadequate in 2015, but subsequent improvements had been made and the Council was continuing to build on these.
- When dealing with small numbers, statistics could be skewed by one or two cases.
- Local authorities needed to exhaust all potential avenues of permanency before adopting outside of the family group, presenting issues to quickly resolving adoptions.
- The Cabinet Member noted that the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) had merit when creating efficiencies but had yet to be fully convinced it was delivering as well it could.

The Sub-Committee next heard from two non-Lambeth adopters; and, Susanna Daus, Head of Service (Adoption), Southwark, who noted that:

- Lambeth was part of nine local authorities in Adopt London South (ALS), working in collaboration to provide a more consistent service and to promote adoption in London.
- ALS found families for children across the region; supporting early permanence and shortening times; recruiting adopters; attracting and providing support and advice to parents and children through the 'letterbox' service and signposting to support services at any age.
- ALS could also access files from other local authorities to pass onto adoptee as requested.
- ALS gave advice for anyone affected by adoption.
- The adopters viewed their social worker as part of their family, praising the close bond formed, especially when considering social workers' other commitments and noted that they deserved more acknowledgement in their essential work.
- Much time was taken by social workers getting to understand adopters as people.
- Pooling London boroughs made it easier to find a child closer to home, lowering costs for adopters and allowing more time to assimilate information during the matching phase.
- It was requested that discounts or support be offered to access adoption-orientated courses, or that these were offered as part of the adoption process, especially for those on lower incomes.
- Adopters often struggled with financial burdens, with many employers not offering several months off work with pay or only meeting statutory obligations, which could deter many potential adopters.
- The LGBTQ+ community, especially those also in the BAME cohort, could be better informed of adoption, noting that promotions at events such as Black Gay Pride would help.
- Many children in care were from a BAME background and this needed to be better represented in both adoption agencies and adopters.

Sub-Committee members congratulated the adopters on almost completing their journey and wished them the best for their future family.

In response to questions from Members, the Cabinet Member, officers, and external invitees answered:

- The adopters did not note any negative experiences so far during their adoption journey and reiterated their praise of the support received.

- There was considerable pressure in CAHMS due to the high demand imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and delaying all proceedings to permanency and viability assessments.
- The main indicator of service delivery was a child remaining in care prior to adoption, and Lambeth aimed to reduce this from the current 14 to four months. Officers noted that this was the one of the primary areas of future improvements needed, but delays could arise outside of their control, such as from the Courts or care planning.
- Applications were prioritised based on the needs of children, which helped secure permanence, and was not based on the desires of adoptees.
- ALS had the discretion to pay adoption allowances, although not all needed allowances.
- Most children needing adoption have had adverse experiences or early trauma in their lives and so required special support, which could be regarded as making them difficult to place.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Sub-Committee noted this report regarding the effectiveness of the London Regional Adoption Agency Adopt London South since its establishment in September 2019.
2. To review the financial cost of courses and, where possible, include the most well-regarded courses as part of the support package for prospective adopters.
3. To review allowances for employers, especially to support BAME adoptees, and, if sufficient allowances were in place, to help adoptive families minimise financial impacts.
4. To encourage employers to provide adequate adoptive leave, such as mirroring maternity leave arrangements.
5. To monitor the post-adoption programme, noting the ongoing pressure on CAMHS.
6. To monitor Lambeth young people's health and wellbeing across the borough's partnerships as adoption numbers were low in Lambeth and the time children remained in care was still high.
7. To monitor performance and to regularly report back to the Sub-Committee.
8. To continually review barriers to adoption, recruitment strategies, and to ensure that those seeking to adopt met and reflected the needs of children.
9. To use outreach techniques (e.g., event attendance) to reach specific audiences, particularly underrepresented audiences.
10. To work across Children's Services to consider permanency at point of contact.

5 Supporting Families Programme

During discussion of this item the guillotine fell at 9.00 pm.

RESOLVED: That the meeting continue for a further period of up to 30 minutes.

This report was introduced by Cllr Edward Davie, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People; Alex Kubeyinje, Director: Children's Social Care; Brenda McInerney, AD: Early Help, Access and Assessment, CSC; and Kulsuma Faiz, Troubled Families Co-ordinator, CSC, who noted:

- The Government's Supporting Families Programme was previously called the Troubled Families Programme, with Lambeth previously calling this the Aspirational Families Programme.

- The wider Early Help Strategy was being prepared and detailed the need to work better with partners and other universal services.
- The Council had drawn down on £1.5m of the Grant in 2021 to fund community early help services to deliver targeted family support and provide further support to partners.
- Covid-19 had led to significant operational changes, such as weekend working, working more closely with education welfare services, and providing a helpline for families; whilst also impacting on DWP employment providers, but Lambeth had helped a number of families into continuous employment.

In response to questions from members, the Cabinet Member and officers answered:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had raised the following questions which officers had answered outside the meeting:
 - How the data maturity milestones are progressing in Lambeth and if there are any barriers?
 - How the Lambeth locality model had progressed and adapted to Covid-19 challenges?
 - How Lambeth intended to develop their Supporting Families database to support Early Help, develop needs analysis and support preventative approaches?
- MHCLG had changed the way to attach value to the programme, setting targets and increasing the number of families; which meant increasingly complex needs and more challenge to meet targets.
- The Programme was an evidence-driven process, but it was challenging to get this data and further work on developing a data warehouse, improving data pathways and linking with the wider Digital Transformation Strategy, was required. This also needed to be in tune with partners and commissioning colleagues, through a data sharing agreement.
- The Covid-19 pandemic had impacted community working and meant that the Council could not reach out in the way it desired, but had created locality managers and hyper-local working, noting that this was mostly virtual at present. Some localities would have an Early Help Strategic Group to strengthen working arrangements and a Locality Panel to deliver help in a suitable way, such as at ward level, but required the involvement of small community groups such as in Tulse Hill.
- Data and case studies would be provided to the Sub-Committee for their further information.
- Sustained change was needed by families, however the Council needed to evidence progress to continue to provide support through the Programme but would continue to work with families as needed after that had concluded.
- Officers were content to report back after the wider Early Help Strategy was enacted.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Sub-Committee noted the progress made to date in delivering the objectives of the national programme.
2. That the Sub-Committee noted the recently announced change in the name of the National Programme since April 2021 - it is now called the Supporting Families Programme.
3. That the Sub-Committee discussed the proposed developments that will help us to deliver progress for families on the programme objectives.
4. To provide detail on improved working arrangements with partners.
5. To provide the Sub-Committee with the written response(s) to MHCLG questions within 28 days.
6. To regularly monitor data maturity milestones to improve reporting.
7. To improve data- and resource- sharing links with providers.

8. To implement lessons learnt and focus on partner working arrangement.
9. To extend and strengthen Locality Panels and ensure ward councillors were involved and contacted to identify local groups.
10. To strengthen data monitoring and continue to support families after Programme.

6 Work Programme

The Chair noted that the work programme report would be discussed offline in detail by the Sub-Committee at a work programming session and updated for the next meeting.

RESOLVED: To consider and approve the work programme as currently drafted (Appendix 1) and identify and prioritise matters for future scrutiny of Children's Services.

The meeting ended at 9.27 pm

CHAIR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-
COMMITTEE
Tuesday 7 December 2021

Date of Despatch: Monday 12 July 2021

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