

# **MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, 4 March 2021 at 7.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Caroline Kalu (Vice-Chair), Octavia Holland, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Hilary Moore, Jacq Paschoud, Lionel Openshaw, and Oluwafela Ajayi (Parent Governor - Special Schools), Lilian Brooks (Parent Governor - Primary Schools) and Monsignor Nicholas Rotherham (Catholic Church Representative)

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Colin Elliott

**ALSO PRESENT:** Emma Aye-Kumi (Scrutiny Manager), Councillor Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Performance), Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children & Young People), Lucie Heyes (Assistant Director of Children's Social Care), Fenella Beckman (Director of Housing), Catherine Bunten (Commissioning Manager), Nikki Sealy (Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service Manager), Theo Bonner (Property Negotiator, Strategic Housing) and Ellie Eghtedar (Interim SMG Housing Needs and Refugee Services)

## **1. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021**

1.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the last meeting be agreed as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

## **2. Declarations of interest**

2.1 The following non-pecuniary, non-prejudicial interests were declared:

1. Cllr Luke Sorba is the Lewisham Council appointee to the Council of Governors for the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust
2. Cllr Jacq Paschoud is a Member of Socialist Health Association, and a Trustee of a short breaks provider in Lewisham
3. Cllr Liz Johnston-Franklin is the Council representative on the Youth First Board.

## **3. Responses to Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet**

3.1 Items 3 and 4 were considered together. See Item 4.

## **4. Follow up to children in temporary accommodation in-depth review**

- 4.1 The Chair invited Pinaki Ghoshal – Executive Director for Children and Young People to give a brief introduction. Pinaki was accompanied by Fen Beckman – Executive Director for Housing and colleagues from the Housing directorate.
- 4.2 The following was noted in discussion:
1. One member was surprised to hear that not many families with school aged children were placed out of the borough as this was a common problem in the schools in her ward (Bellingham). Even where a family was rehoused within the borough, poor transport connections could make the journey to school very difficult, impacting on attendance.
  2. When placing families in temporary accommodation, consideration was given to the ages of the children, especially those in critical school years. Families with younger children that were not in school tended to be placed out of borough, but sometimes emergency need and lack of suitable accommodation in the preferred area necessitated moving families out of borough or far from school. The housing service endeavours to support children who are settled and doing well in school to stay there.
  3. The Committee requested a more up to date ethnic breakdown of the families currently in temporary accommodation. Officers did not have this information to hand but would supply it by email following the meeting. **ACTION**
  4. Members also asked for an update on how many families with children were currently in temporary accommodation with shared kitchens and bathrooms. Again, this would be supplied after the meeting. At the date of the meeting, 2 families were in temporary accommodation with shared facilities for more than 6 weeks. One of the families was due to move that day. **ACTION**
  5. The housing and safeguarding coordinator pilot had been successful and a joint team was being created with Children’s Social Care.
  6. Concerns were raised about the number of empty homes in the borough. Tackling empty homes is a corporate priority for the council, with a dedicated empty homes officer engaged in identifying empty homes, tracking down the landlord/ owner, and working with them to bring properties back into use. There can often be complicated matters such as probate or family disputes. Empty homes grants are available to encourage landlords to improve empty properties and rent them back to the council. Sometimes, what appears to be an empty home is not in fact an empty home as defined in the legislation, and therefore the council would have no power to use it.
  7. During the pandemic, property checks on temporary accommodation have not been possible at the same levels as pre-covid. Normally, properties are subject to regular audit to make sure that the homes are of the right quality. During the pandemic, people have not wanted council officers in their homes and it has not been possible to visit as many. Officers will respond to reported problems and visits will pick up pace as restrictions lift.
  8. Concerns were raised that only offering repairs requests via an online route may make it hard for some tenants to report problems as not everybody is comfortable or able to go online.
  9. Where families are moved out of the borough, they are signposted to local schools, doctor etc. Unfortunately the council has to work within budget and property in the borough is very expensive.

#### 4.3 RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted;
2. That the committee be provided with a breakdown of the ethnicities of families currently in temporary accommodation.

#### 5. **Safeguarding including child exploitation**

5.1 Lucie Heyes introduced the report. She acknowledged that when she took up her post in late 2018 there had been an Ofsted inspection that highlighted issues with the front door. She reported that even with a 15% increase in demand at the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) front door, performance had not been affected by Covid-19. Even without additional staffing to deal with the increased pressure, recent performance had been consistently good and of improved quality.

5.2 The following was noted in discussion:

1. Members were pleased to note the improvements.
2. Demand had followed the opening and closure of schools. The service anticipated an increase in referrals after 8 March, due to greater visibility of children generally, not just in school. As more families are experiencing financial hardship, demand will increase. Not all contacts will require a statutory service - many will be signposted to early help - but demand will be higher.
3. One Member commented that regarding the figures stated in the report - 333 Children in Need are Children With Complex Needs, of which 45 are Children Looked After – 45/333 seemed like a high number being looked after by the local authority and was wondering if this was due to a failing in support for families with children with complex needs. Officers agreed to look into this as no benchmark was readily available. It was noted that there is also a large number of children with complex needs who are not Children in Need **ACTION**
4. The quality of Child In Need (CIN) plans was identified as an issue by Ofsted. CIN Plans are the lowest level of intervention and do not have a statutory basis, therefore there is less in-built external scrutiny and review. Work had been undertaken to introduce different layers of scrutiny for CIN cases and plans by introducing independent audit/ case mapping discussions triggered at a certain point for every CIN. The service was developing a practice development programme to improve the quality of workforce development and improving plans. The municipal year 2020-21 was going to be a year of focus on practice development. Covid-19 caused the programme to be paused, however the vaccination roll out was going well and it was hoping that recovery planning would begin shortly.
5. Members noted that 67% of young people in Lewisham are BAME compared with 46% of the whole Lewisham population, therefore using the comparator of the under 25s population would give a better gauge of disproportionality.
6. The Safe Space Team conducts return home interviews. Previously this had been outsourced but bringing it in-house made connections to young people and local intelligence gathering easier. The service had improved and was being further developed. Soft intelligence was always stronger where children go missing from home than when Children Looked After go missing. The

service was looking to strengthen that area where children go missing from their placement.

7. Rates of children and young people going missing have fallen during lockdown.

5.3 RESOLVED that

1. The report be noted.
2. Officers look into the reasons for the seemingly high number of looked after children with complex needs.

## 6. **Early Help and Prevention**

6.1 Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Children and Young People, introduced the item, accompanied by Catherine Bunten, Service Manager - CYP Joint Commissioning and Resources, and Nikki Sealy, Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service Manager.

6.2 The following was noted in response to questions from the committee:

1. The family thrive service was being designed in the knowledge of the fact that BAME young people are underrepresented in CAMHS. The service design would seek to target groups who were less likely to receive CAMHS support further down the line.
2. The design specifics of family hubs were yet to be decided. More work was needed to understand the need across the borough.
3. The reduction in the Health Visiting budget was significantly less than the vacancies in the service, so no cuts in provision were expected. The value of the cut was ring-fenced within the public health budget, and would be used in early help and intervention.
4. Family hubs would not be limited to physical spaces, but also virtual. The offer needed to be as visual and accessible as possible.
5. A transition service was being set up to support families with young people with SEND moving between the different frameworks. An example was given of moving from CAMHS at Kaleidoscope to the Ladywell Unit and how intimidating that could be, particularly for young people with learning disabilities. It was hoped that this service would help to mitigate the 'cliff edge' that families feel that they face when their child turns 18.
6. Contract arrangements with the youth service provider, Youth First, were now progressing after delays from both sides. The national lockdown had slowed things further and there were still some pensions issues to resolve. Youth First was working towards charity status and was trying to make sure on 1 April everything would be in place so that Youth First could fulfil its contractual obligations.

6.3 RESOLVED that the report be noted.

## 7. **Select Committee work programme**

- 7.1 The Chair reported that this was the last meeting of the Committee in this municipal year. Dates of future meetings would be agreed, along with Committee membership, at the AGM on 26 May, with the next CYP Select Committee meeting likely following in June.
- 7.2 The Chair proposed that a single item meeting be arranged for the window between the elections in early May and the AGM. He suggested that this meeting might look at evaluating the effect of the restrictions and return to school might have had on children’s mental health and the demand for services. Furthermore, such a meeting could look at where the £250,000 contingency fund arising from the budgetary review of the council’s contribution to SLAM could best be spent.
- 7.3 Committee Members felt that May would be too soon to accurately assess the impact as there would naturally be a period of adjustment which did not necessarily lead to lasting distress.
- 7.4 In addition, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Performance cautioned against looking at demand only at the acute CAMHS end but rather looking at child and adolescent mental health in the round, including demand for early help services, accessibility, performance of providers.
- 7.5 One Member felt it would be better to look at how the return to education had gone with a view to sharing experiences from across the range of schools and colleges.
- 7.6 The Chair had made a Freedom of Information request to SLaM for data, which he hoped would be available in time for the next meeting.
- 7.7 There were no other suggestions for items to put forward for the work programme in the next municipal year, apart from Elective Home Education, which the Committee had previously agreed to recommend.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. The report be noted.
- 2. The first meeting of the newly constituted committee should look at how full school reopening and unlocking has affected children and young people.
- 3. That “Elective Home Education, including unregistered education settings” and “Child and adolescent emotional wellbeing and mental health following schools closures” be recommended for inclusion in the work programme for 2021-2022.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

Chair:

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Date:

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