

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 26 January 2022 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Caroline Kalu (Vice-Chair), Liz Johnston-Franklin, Hilary Moore, Jacq Paschoud, Monsignor N Rotheron (Catholic Church Representative) and Erica Wooff (CofE Representative) and

APOLOGIES: Councillors Colin Elliott

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 25/11/21

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 25 November 2021 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

The Chair formally welcomed Bryan Strom (Parent Governor, Primary Schools) as newly co-opted member.

Matters arising: The Chair confirmed that an informal meeting with the Young Mayor and advisors (21 February 22, 6-7pm), an informal visit to a Nurture provision (1 February 22, 11am) and an informal virtual meeting with apprentices (10 February 22, 10-11am) had been organised for members of the committee. The committee wanted it noted that the recent letter from Ofsted following their annual conversation with senior leaders was a welcome reminder of the significant improvement journey that Children's Social Care has been on and that officers should be commended for it.

2. Declarations of interest

Cllr Johnston-Franklin declared an interest in item 6 as she is the Council representative on the Youth First Board which is mentioned in the play strategy report.

3. Responses to Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses.

4. Budget Reductions Report

4.1 Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director Children & Young People's Services, introduced the report and the meeting discussed three additional budget cut proposals that were recommended.

4.2 It was confirmed that the proposed specialist social care support review (C-35) would not result in redundancies or cuts to provision.

4.3 Clarification was received that the children's centre implicated in the review of commercial opportunities (D-13) had not been in operation since 2016. The private nursery already operating in the building wants to expand into the empty space. The new services will add to the quality of the commercial nursery's offer to their families, but it will not be a free service to the community. It will generate additional income for the Council as well as reduce operational costs. Legal advice is currently being sought to ensure compliance. The committee expressed concern that members might have been misled by the text of the proposal. They wanted reassurance that the space and facilities offered to the local community from a commercial nursery would remain affordable.

4.4 Work on the reduction in cost of commissioned care leaver housing (C-36) has already started by moving away from spot-purchasing and by achieving improved commissioning arrangements that will not impact on quality. The service is reasonably confident that the savings can be achieved, based on work already completed. It is unlikely that a young person would have to move from their current accommodation to a new one. The meeting wanted to underline that care leavers who are already in established homes should not be moved out of them.

RESOLVED

1. That the proposed budget cuts be noted.
2. That committee members' desire be noted that facilities offered to local community groups by a commercial nursery should remain affordable.
3. That care leavers in established homes should not be adversely affected by the reduction in cost of commissioned care leaver housing.

5. Tackling Race Inequality in Schools

5.1 Sandra Roberts, Director Lewisham Learning, introduced the report and outlined achievements and progress so far. Whilst data around impact was currently limited, it is hoped that the next update can provide this. Naheeda Maharasingham outlined some of the soft evidence for the significant commitment of schools to this potentially uncomfortable journey. This includes a very well attended conference, enthusiasm for accessing training offers from school staff and governors, and buy-in to community conversations that will be cascaded later this year. The committee welcomed the update and expressed their wish to have more 3 soft/qualitative data included in future reports, for example in the details around positive engagement with the pledge, rather than simply that all schools had signed it.

5.2 The 'fixed period' exclusion measure used in the report follows national guidance and is measured in morning and afternoon sessions. The service will challenge schools where there is a concern that less stringent measures are employed.

5.3 The exclusion figures are returned according to statutory requirements. The Covid-related disruption makes the reduction in exclusions difficult to interpret, and

there is anecdotal evidence that persistent disruptive behaviour might have been exacerbated by Covid.

5.4 Whilst the service is aware of local groups that want to introduce a complete ban on exclusions in Lewisham schools, the current Education Act gives head teachers the right to do so.

5.5 The significantly higher rate of boys recorded as 'Children Missing Education' this year is assumed to be a one-off rather than a trend.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That future reports should provide qualitative as well as quantitative data when reporting on impact, outcomes and progress made.

6. Adventure Playgrounds and Play Strategy Update

6.1 Sara Rahman, Director of Families, Quality and Commissioning introduced the report and confirmed that London Play was providing professional expertise to support the development of the strategy. Members of the committee emphasised that they wanted to be part of the process and didn't want any surprises.

6.2 Members of the committee highlighted the long and proud history of the adventure playgrounds (APG) in Lewisham and expressed concern about the currently very brief opening times and the move to sessional offers. There was also concern around maintenance and upkeep and seeing some APGs in a state of disrepair. Members highlighted that contact with a supervising adult gives an opportunity for a youth worker to pick up on problems a child or young person might have. Other members noted that traditional APGs might be outdated in more ways than one, that many children don't want to be supervised when playing, and that risk-taking is an important aspect of play. The scope of the strategy is wider than APGs and developing the strategy offers an opportunity to be more aspirational.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the committee has a commitment from officers to be fully consulted and updated as the play strategy takes shape, and that Ward Councillors will be approached for opportunities to be actively engaged in the process.

7. Select Committee work programme

7.1 The Chair introduced the report and requested that the scheduled information report on school standards should become a substantive item for the next committee meeting. ACTION: Scrutiny Manager

7.2 Two forthcoming information reports (Corporate Parenting and Looked After Children Annual Report; Safeguarding Annual Report) will now be sent out in April

or May 2022, rather than in March 2022 as originally planned, to coincide with the established data reporting cycle. ACTION: Scrutiny Manager

7.3 The Chair confirmed the intention to nominate a climate change champion for the committee in response to a request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This is an informal and evolving appointment. Cllr Jack Lavery was nominated by the committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the work programme be amended to reflect the following:
 - The annual school standards report will become a substantive item for the next committee meeting.
 - Two forthcoming information reports will be sent to members in April or May 2022.
2. That Cllr Jack Lavery be nominated as Climate Change Champion.

8. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

None.

The meeting ended at 9.06 pm

Chair:

Date:
