

# MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 24 November 2022 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Luke Warner (Vice-Chair), Yemisi Anifowose, Coral Howard, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Jack Lavery, Carol Webley-Brown and Monsignor N Rothern

ALSO JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Bryan Strom

APOLOGIES: Clive Caseley

ALSO PRESENT: Dawn Atkinson (Lewisham Mayoress), Katy Brown (Advisor to the Young Mayor), Councillor Edison Huynh, Christina Normanto (Lewisham Mayoress), Sara Rahman (Director of Families, Quality & Commissioning), Councillor James Rathbone, Natasha Ricketts (Lewisham Mayoress), Angela Scattergood (Director of Education Services), Marvin Gordon (Young Mayor's Advisor), Jentai Gen-One (Young Mayor's Advisor), Melanie Dawson (Principal Lawyer- Place) and Katie Wood (Scrutiny Manager)

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: Councillor Chris Barham (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), and David Austin (Director of Finance)

NB: Those Councillors listed as joining virtually were not in attendance for the purposes of the meeting being quorate, any decisions taken or to satisfy the requirements of s85 Local Government Act 1972

## 1 Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2022

### 1.1 RESOLVED:

That subject to the addition that Councillor Webley-Brown be marked as having attended the last meeting, the minutes be agreed.

## 2 Declarations of interest

### 2.1 RESOLVED:

Councillor Edison Huynh, who was attending the meeting as a guest, declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 as he was a Council appointed member on the Board of Youth First.

## 3 Cost of living crisis

3.1 Angela Scattergood, Director of Education presented the report to the Committee. Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for CYP was also in attendance.

3.2 The Lewisham Mayoresses: Dawn Atkinson, Natasha Ricketts and Christina Normanto were invited to give evidence to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- They had been running a Community Food Store in Deptford for the last three years and the number of people needing their support was increasing. They currently provided food for over 105 people/families providing food for more than 500 people per week, with 50 more on the waiting list. Emergency cases and referrals had also risen.
  - They were seeing families where the parents were missing meals to provide for their children and not able to afford food for their children. They were also supporting working people such as NHS workers who still needed the service to provide basic necessities for their families.
  - The store had had a uniform and warm clothing drive recently and items had been really needed by their families.
  - The Mayoresses spoke of people who were having to sacrificing their cultural beliefs to be able to provide food for their families even if it did not conform to their usual cultural dietary requirements.
  - The members paid £3.50 per week for access to the service and even that was becoming too much for some of the members.
  - The problem was not confined to Deptford where the Food Store was based but was across Lewisham and London.
  - The Mayoresses stressed that the fact that children in London were going hungry in 2022 was devastating and more needed to be done.
- 3.3 The Young Advisors, Jentai and Marvin were invited to give evidence to the Committee. They highlighted the following key points:
- A lot of school uniform has to be bought from specific shops and can be very expensive which is difficult for young people and their families
  - The quality of the school food for the price was not always very good and the portions were not always adequate size or was food that sometimes young people did not like.
  - Young people needed financial support to help their families.
  - Heating homes is really expensive and the pre-pay meters were needing topping up regularly.
- 3.4 Cllr Howard and Cllr Sorba highlighted the Committee's visit to Watergate School and the challenges faced by staff, parents and young people. A summary of the visit is included in the agenda documentation. Cllr Howard highlighted that transport to and from school was one of the key issues raised as well as the energy costs and accommodation challenges experienced by families.
- 3.5 Following all the presentations the following key points were raised by the Committee.
- The Council had produced webpages including information about support available and information on benefits. These were being publicised to schools. Schools were also one of the biggest referrers to food banks.
  - The Council had undertaken a campaign to promote applying for Free School Meals to families and there had been an increase in numbers who were now eligible and receiving these. Schools were also being resourceful, trying to maximise the resources they had available to support as many people as possible. The Council would continue to review if more could be done on communications on these matters.
  - Members of the Committee raised the issue of the cost of school uniform and asked if schools were carefully considering what needed to have schools logos on for example. The Committee heard this was a decision for individual schools but many were looking to reduce branded items. Many Head Teachers were providing free school uniforms to some families and there were second-hand uniform schemes as well. The Committee and their

guests discussed that this was positive but not necessarily what they were seeing happening and hearing from the people they worked with. Many families continued to struggle to purchase expensive branded school uniform.

- A member of the Committee commented that the scale of the problem was so extensive that he now saw students needing to access soup kitchens and also trying to eat as much as possible at lunch as they may not have food available in the evening.
- The Children and Young People Directorate would consider what follow up could be done following this report to further understand the challenges faced by families and schools.
- The Chair requested that the report and minutes of this meeting be shared with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to contribute to their discussion on the Cost of Living Crisis.
- The report included a lot of qualitative information including anecdotal evidence which was really helpful. In terms of quantitative data, a Council-wide product had been purchased to try and coordinate data from different areas of the Council to help identify and focus resources on where there was most need, to help target results. This was in the context of the limited resources the Council had available so that they could be allocated in the most intelligent way.
- Natasha Ricketts commented on the standard of accommodation that many of their members were living in. This combined with the challenges of heating and providing food for the family was extremely difficult for some people. It was also causing a rise in people experiencing mental health problems including very young children. For example they had worked with children living in houses with severe mould problems.
- Marvin from the Young Advisors, commented that the fact that some young people had no money for a social life was challenging and had a negative effect on their mental health. In some situations, they couldn't let people visit their home either due to their living accommodation.
- A member of the Committee commented on the increase in Special Guardianship Orders that had been listed in the report. The Committee heard that this was as a result of a reduction in the number of children going into care. There was currently 451 children in care compared to 480 last year. Where possible it was always prioritised that children should stay within their wider family network if appropriate with additional support. The Committee requested that there was feedback to Clyde and a discussion regarding this matter as the comments from Clyde listed in 3.1.6 of the report gave a different picture that more support was needed. The Director of Children's Services agreed to look into this in more detail.
- Many schools gave punishments to children for not wearing the uniform correctly. This can cause additional stress and challenges to young people and families.
- Jentai from the Young Advisors commented that at the school he attended there was no school uniform and it reduced the pressure on young people and on families. He felt that at his school no one judged people on what they were wearing and it was really positive for the young people. Marvin from the Young Advisors agreed and said in Year 11 his school just made everyone wear all black uniform so it could be bought cheaply from any store. They both felt schools did not really need uniforms anymore and need to think more about how children feel and the pressure. Members of the Committee agreed and commented they would like to see schools relaxing their uniform practices.
- A member of the committee commented that some children were working long hours whilst at school to help out with family bills and that LB Tower

Hamlets were offering maintenance grants for 16-18 year olds of £10 per week. The Executive Director for Children and Young People commented that it was a very expensive support mechanism in the context of the budgetary pressures and ultimately would be a political decision as to what to prioritise.

- A member of the Committee asked about schools funding following the pay awards and what could be done to support them with financial pressures. The Committee was informed that the Government funding would be clearer following the local government settlement in December. The Council was conscious of the pressures schools were under and were working with them closely.

### 3.6 **RESOLVED:**

That the Lewisham Mayoresses: Dawn Atkinson, Natasha Ricketts and Christina Normanto; and Jentai and Marvin from the Young Advisors be thanked for attending the meeting and for their insights and contribution to the discussion.

That a copy of the Committee report and minutes be sent to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee for inclusion in the information they were considering for their work on the Cost of Living Crisis.

## 4 **Budget Reduction proposals**

4.1 David Austin, Director of Finance introduced the report to the Committee. Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Children and Young People and Sara Rahman, Director of Families, Quality and Commissioning was also in attendance. Councillor Chris Barnham, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People was in attendance online. During the discussion that followed, the following key points were raised:

- Members of the Committee raised concerns regarding the saving proposal COM\_SAV\_08 of cuts to Lewisham libraries opening hours. There was particular concern regarding the role they were playing in “Warm Welcomes” and support being provided to residents during the cost of living crisis and that any cut in hours would be detrimental to this work.
- Regarding All\_SAV\_01. This would be £2 million applied equally across all budgets to help meet the additional costs of the staff pay awards. In CYP Directorate, it would be applied across all budgets and mitigated by leaving posts vacant in certain situations and looking at agency spend and grades of staff. For CYP Directorate the total was £500,000 which was proportionate to the CYP budget within the scale of the Council budget.
- Regarding CYP\_SAV\_04 Youth Services Review, members of the Committee were concerned given that youth services were part of the Council’s early help approach and played a key role in providing support for young people and families. Combined with the cuts to Children’s Services members voiced concern that reducing spend in early help would lead to increased spend at later stages.
- The Committee heard that disinvesting in early help could lead to additional costs, however, focusing on where to spend was crucial and the current proposals was about re-balancing the spend in the context of losing budget to ensure as targeted an approach as

possible. The Department for Education was providing investment for Family Hubs which would increase the overall budget to Children's Services and could allow for more targeted support across all ages.

- A member of the Committee commented that Youth Workers needed long-term contracts and job security. There was a reduction in those training to be Youth Workers nationally. The Council wanted to look at other roles within the Council that Youth Workers might be suitable for such as roles within the Council's Adolescent Strategy.
- **The Committee suspended standing orders.**
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People highlighted the level of cuts to Local Government since 2010. Since 2010 budgets to Sure Start Children Centres had been cut dramatically since 2010. The Council was working to get additional funding to provide the best service possible.
- The funding for the pilot Family Hubs was for a limited time of three years and members of the Committee voiced concerns regarding what would happen after the three year period. The Committee were informed it was very challenging to predict future funding from central government but that the base budget would not necessarily be lost, so in three years' time if the national funding picture was different then new decisions could be made on how to invest.
- The role of Children and Family Centres in supporting families in the cost of living crisis was of deep concern to members of the Committee.
- Discussions were on-going with Youth First on management costs and on targeted versus universal provision. There was also more focus on alternative funding sources.
- Councillor Rathbone was invited to join the Committee to set out the process at Public Accounts Select Committee for any referrals on the budget.
- Members of the Committee were very concerned on the long-term effect of the budget cut to Children's Services on children and their family and on possible increased spending in the future from children's needs not being met and unanimously agreed to refer CYP\_SAV\_04 to Public Accounts Select Committee.
- A reduction in the base budget of a service did not mean there could not be a re-investment in the future if there was a change in the national funding available.
- The Director of Finance would provide some examples to the Committee of where investments had been made to base budgets to reflect changing priorities and responding to new challenges and pressures.
- Members of the Committee were concerned regarding CYP\_SAV\_04 and unanimously agreed to refer to the Public Accounts Select Committee.

#### 4.2 **RESOLVED:**

The Committee requested that the following comments be referred to the Public Accounts Select Committee:

- **CYP\_SAV\_01 – Review of Children Centres Budgets.** The Committee was concerned about the associated risk of the move to

the pilot hub model advocated by government only coming with funding committed for three years and the potential long-term impact of the cut on children and young people and their families. The Committee was concerned that the cut could reduce preventative support and result in more significant pressures on other budgets should peoples' needs then escalate.

- **CYP\_SAV\_04 – Youth Services Budget Review.** The Committee was concerned about the impact of the cut on levels of provision for children and young people in the borough and also for the staff providing these services. The Committee was particularly concerned that the shift to focus Council support on more targeted provision, with a necessary reduction in support for universal provision, and the mitigations outlined in the proposal would make the recruitment of staff harder for providers.
- **COM\_SAV\_08 – Reduction in Opening Hours at Lewisham Libraries.** The Committee was concerned regarding any reduction in opening hours at Lewisham libraries considering the important role libraries played on a range of services and in particular in their part in the response to the cost-of-living crisis and the Council's strategy on "Warm Welcomes".

## 5 Select Committee work programme

5.1 Councillor Luke Sorba introduced the report to the Committee and explained that the Children's Social Care Improvement Report had been postponed until the January meeting and that he therefore proposed that the item on Youth First be moved to the March meeting of the Committee to enable enough time for consideration of each item.

### 5.2 **RESOLVED:**

That the item on Youth First on the Select Committee work programme be moved from the January meeting to the March meeting of the Select Committee.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm

Chair:

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Date:

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