

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 12 January 2023 at 7.00 pm

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

ALSO JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Councillors Yemisi Anifowose and Bryan Strom

APOLOGIES: Councillors Jack Lavery, Oluwafela Ajayi, Clive Caseley and Erica Wooff

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children & Young People), Lucie Heyes (Assistant Director of Children's Social Care), Nidhi Patil (Scrutiny Manager) and Susan Rowe (Lewisham Education Group)

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: Matthew Henaughan, Angela Scattergood and Sandra Roberts

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 24 November 2022

- 1.1. RESOLVED: that subject to the addition of Melanie Dawson's name (Principal Lawyer- Place) to the list of people 'Also Present' at the last meeting, the minutes be agreed.
- 1.2. A member of the Committee pointed out that under section 3.5 of the minutes, the Director of Children's Services had agreed to look into the increase in Special Guardianship Orders and provide more information to the Committee which the Committee hadn't received yet. The Executive Director for Children & Young People stated that he would ensure this information was circulated.

2. Declarations of interest

None.

The Chair informed the committee that the items on the agenda would be considered in the following order- Tackling Race Inequality in Education, School Places Planning Update, Select Committee Work Programme and then Children's Social Care.

3. Tackling Race Inequality in Education

Angela Scattergood (Director of Education Services) and Sandra Roberts (Director of Lewisham Learning) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 3.1. The steering group on 'Tackling Race Inequality' was being led by head-teachers and over the course of 18 months had evolved to include governors and other key stakeholders. This steering group had done extensive work with children and young people to ensure their voices were heard and their views were included as part of the plan being developed to tackle race inequality. There would be a particular focus on Black Caribbean boys, but the plan would cover all race inequality.
- 3.2. Officers wanted to highlight point 4.4 in the report which talked about the midterm review of the programme that was commissioned by the steering group. Michael Keating, an expert consultant was brought in for this review and he was really happy with the progress that had been made by the steering group so far.
- 3.3. The Young Mayor's team had been working with young people in the borough to produce a small film. This film would be premiering at the Lewisham Migration Museum on the 23rd of February 2023 and members of the Committee were invited to attend. Teachers had been working on a resource pack that would be accompanying the film.

Committee members were invited to ask questions. The following key points were noted:

- 3.4. The Committee was concerned that according to the report, attainment had improved in Lewisham overall but there had been a widening attainment gap between Black Caribbean children and the Lewisham average. There also seemed to be a geographic disparity when looking at attainment with certain schools having a wider attainment gap than others.
- 3.5. Officers informed the committee that the data around attainment was not validated. Validated data would be coming to the Committee in March 2023 as part of the School Standards report which would provide for a more accurate analysis. Nevertheless, it was clear that some geographic areas had been more adversely affected by Covid-19 compared to others, and this was reflected in the figures. However, it was noted that this wasn't always the case as there were some large variations between different schools in the same geographic areas. Officers were looking at the correlation between gender, ethnicity, disadvantaged background, geographic area & level of engagement and how that affected attainment.
- 3.6. Susan Rowe from Lewisham Education Group and Lewisham Black Parent Forum was invited to address the Committee.
The Lewisham Education Group had collectively reviewed Michael Keating's interim report and had some concerns mainly around how the data was gathered and the fact that a lot of leads working on embedding racial equality in schools weren't getting sufficient support from the School Heads. Also, even though 100% of the schools in the borough had signed up to the Race Equality Pledge, further training was needed to raise awareness amongst children about what this pledge actually meant. There

was a need for more community groups to start working with the children rather than work happening just through schools.

- 3.7. Susan spoke to the committee about understanding the cultural differences between black children from African backgrounds and those from Caribbean backgrounds. Families with a Caribbean background, the Windrush generation and their families, had been in the UK for a longer time and had endured a different level of long-term racism and poverty. She felt that African families were generally still very much a tight family unit with a strongly embedded focus on education. Understanding these cultural difference was crucial in helping children from these backgrounds.
- 3.8. Susan Rowe also spoke about the LYLA (Lewisham Young Leader's Academy) and how that had benefitted a lot of young people by giving them the chance to dream big and giving them different opportunities to explore. It was mentioned that the Committee would be going to visit LYLA in St. Dunstan's College on the 21st of January 2023.
- 3.9. Officers informed the Committee that a 'Community Conversation Spaces Framework' had been developed to enable regular communication between school leaders and communities. A 'Governor's toolkit' had also been developed by a group of committed governors who wanted to ensure every governor, new or experienced, had the support to understand their school's journey to meeting the Race Equality Pledge.
- 3.10. Each school improvement partner met with the school 3 times a year to look at how the school was implementing the Race Equality Pledge. The Tackling Race Inequality steering group had asked that comments from each school improvement partner be collated and presented to the group so that they could analyse how each individual school was doing when it came to implementing the pledge.
- 3.11. The response rate of the survey carried out by 'The Centre for Education and Youth' to help evaluate Lewisham Learning's work on tackling race inequality had doubled to 40% this year compared to last year.
- 3.12. It was discussed that work to tackle racial inequality also needed to focus on beyond the school factors. Officers confirmed that a well-rounded approach was being taken that encompassed early help and preventative services.
- 3.13. Earlier in data reporting, only the term 'Black' was used to denote children from both Black African background and Black Caribbean background but now data reporting had evolved, and it was recognised as important to drill down into the subsets of data instead of labelling them all as one.

RESOLVED:

- That the report be noted.

4. School Places Planning Update

Angela Scattergood (Director of Education Services) and Matthew Henaughan (Head of Business Infrastructure, Compliance and Education Operations) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 4.1. It was reported that pupil numbers were cyclical and kept in-line with long-term trends. Overall population growth in Lewisham meant the school cohort would be growing as well. However, currently numbers in primary schools were down which was mainly driven by the falling birth-rate. Officers had been working with primary schools to reduce the supply of places.
- 4.1. Even though the pupil numbers were down in primary schools, the current primary cohort in reception this year was above forecast.
- 4.1. Secondary schools in Lewisham were increasingly becoming schools of choice. The current Year 7 cohort was the largest cohort for a Lewisham school in the past 20 years.
- 4.1. There was an ongoing focus on providing more SEND spaces within the borough.
- 4.1. The Greenvale school expansion was now complete. The Committee was invited to visit this school which offered a total of 230 places for secondary aged children with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and/or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD).

Committee members were invited to ask questions. The following key points were noted:

- 4.1. There had been large growth areas in Lewisham in terms of new housing particularly in the central corridor and the north-west of the borough. Previously there had been an expansion programme for spaces in primary & secondary schools in the north-west of the borough because of the planning applications for large scale developments such as Convoy's wharf, New Bermondsey etc. Due to various economic factors, it had taken a long time for these developments to come around and as a result the Council already had some surplus school places in these growth areas.
- 4.1. Officers in education services work closely with colleagues in the Council's planning team to ensure that planning applications were considered as part of forecasting spaces in schools in those geographic areas.
- 4.1. Officers were trying to utilise the spare physical capacity that we had in schools to provide either resource bases (which was one element that sat between mainstream provision and a special school) or utilising the space as a satellite to the special school.
- 4.1. London Councils had published the forecast about falling reception rolls over the next 4 years which showcased a 7% drop in London. Although that may seem to be a threat to the viability of certain primaries, it was an opportunity to match supply and demand for SEND provisions.
- 4.1. Schools where the potential number of children on roll didn't align with the published admissions number (PAN) were considered to be 'at risk'. There were currently 5 schools in Lewisham in this category. However, being at-risk didn't mean the schools were in danger of closing down but that conversations needed to be had with these schools about their position so that proactive choices could be made about their future.
- 4.1. The Committee was pleased to note the encouraging statistics around the take-up of places in Lewisham's secondary schools.

- 4.1. Councillor Chris Barnham, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Performance addressed the Committee. He stated that the report by London Councils on the school places and falling reception rolls highlighted a London-wide issue and that all London boroughs agreed that more action on this was needed from the Government.

RESOLVED:

- That the Committee noted the report and welcomed the encouraging statistics around the increasing take-up of places in Lewisham's secondary schools.

5. Children's Social Care Report

Lucie Heyes (Director of Children Social Care) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 5.1. This update report last came to the Committee in September 2021. Since then, officers had seen an increase in demand, with 300 more children in the system at any time, compared to pre-Covid figures. Along with an increase in the volume of cases, there had also been an increase in the complexity and seriousness of the cases with 40% increase in the number of children on child protection plans in the last 18 months.
- 5.2. Owing to the national shortage of social workers, there were a number of vacancies in Children Social Care resulting in high caseloads for the existing staff. There were 26 vacant case-holding social work posts which was equivalent to 400 children who couldn't be put into normal caseload arrangements.
- 5.3. There was a national crisis in the looked after children's placements market where demand massively outstripped supply and that was leading to spiralling costs and significant pressure on the placements budget.
- 5.4. Lewisham had the second highest rate of children in care in London and the fifth highest rate of care leavers in London.
- 5.5. Increase in the complexity of placements in Lewisham meant that the number of children that were in care placements that cost the Council £10,000 per week had increased from three to eight in the last 6 months. The annual costs of each of these eight placements was £0.5 million.
- 5.6. Quality of services provided by Lewisham had now been externally validated thrice in the last 18 months- Ofsted inspected the looked after children service in July 2021, Mark Riddell's visit (DfE advisor on care leavers) in July 2022 and the recent JTAI inspection on child protection services.
- 5.7. Investment made into the Meliot family support centre and signs of safety framework had reduced the number of children in court and entries to care.
- 5.8. 70% of the workforce in Children Social Care was permanent.
- 5.9. Officers stated that work on the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Placement Sufficiency Strategy would show some results in 2023-24.

- 5.10. Nationally, a favourable announcement about the independent childcare review and some additional possible restrictions on agency working were expected.
- 5.11. Child protection cases that earlier took about 26 weeks in the court were now taking 46 weeks, meaning children were in care longer and court costs were higher. Family courts were now taking some proactive action to reduce these delays.

Lucie Heyes (Director of Children Social Care) and Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children and Young People) responded to questions from the members of the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- 5.12. The Committee recognised the high volume and the complexity of the work that was being managed by the officers in Children Social Care and wanted to understand how it could support officers. Officers stated that the formal response to the National Social Care Review from the Secretary of State would be helpful in this regard, and support from all quarters in ensuring that this was forthcoming would be welcome.
- 5.13. There had been an increase in the number of children going into very expensive placements with the critical issue being that of supply and demand. On the 11th of January 2023, a report went to the Mayor & Cabinet regarding Lewisham joining a pan-London arrangement to establish a secure welfare accommodation within London. Currently there is no such accommodation in London.
- 5.14. Increasing the number of foster carers was an important part of the Placement Sufficiency strategy. 75% of Lewisham's children in care were of secondary school age and it was difficult to find foster carers for that age group.
- 5.15. The Cost-of-Living crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic had both had an impact on children's social care in terms of an increase in demand. However, the increase in demand had not translated into a greater number of children coming into care.
- 5.16. The Chair of the Committee stated that sometimes there was a false equivalence when replacing face-to-face services with virtual services as they are not directly equivalent. Therefore, the Chair fully supported the resumption of in-person learning and development activities. Officers agreed with the Chair and informed the Committee that they hadn't faced any resistance from staff about return to in-person learning and activities.

Following this discussion, the Committee entered a Part 2 session. This session was classed as Part 2 since it involved a discussion around the recent JTAI inspection, the report for which had not been published at the time of the meeting. This report has since been published and therefore the minutes of the Part 2 session can be made public. The following key points were noted in the Part 2 session:

- 5.17. The Joint Targeted Area Inspection in November 2022 was an intensive 3-week inspection that looked at child protection services and included

both off-site & on-site work. Officers were notified about the inspection on Monday 7th of November 2022 and the inspection began on Tuesday 8th of November 2022.

- 5.18. Officers felt that the feedback was generally positive, and that Lewisham was very self-aware of its position.
- 5.19. If there were areas with particularly bad performance, that would lead to priority actions being recommended but officers felt that there would not be any priority actions for Lewisham.
- 5.20. Officers felt that the inspection recognised the strengths of the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and complimented the Council's relationship with schools.
- 5.21. The Committee voted to suspend standing orders.**
- 5.22. Officers also felt that there had been positive feedback on the early help work and that the inspection recognised strong partnership working.
- 5.23. Officers felt that the recommendations from the inspection would include things that they were already working on improving.
- 5.24. The Committee noted that it was reassuring to hear the positive feedback around the MASH since it had been a problematic element in the past.

RESOLVED:

- That the report be noted.

6. Select Committee work programme

The Committee considered the work programme. The following was noted:

- 7.1. In relation to the agenda item on 'Cost-of-living' listed on the work programme that the committee considered at its last meeting, a member of the Committee had some specific questions that they wanted to pose to the officers. The Chair of CYPSC agreed that if those comments were shared with him, he could then pass them on to the Chair of OSC for consideration at the OSC meeting on the 21st of February 2023.

RESOLVED:

- That the agenda for the next meeting on the 15th of March 2023 be agreed.

The meeting ended at 9.36 pm

Chair:

Date:
