

# MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 21 November 2024 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Liz Johnston-Franklin (Vice-Chair), Coral Howard, Ayesha Lahai-Taylor, Jacq Paschoud, S. Dixon and Mons Nicholas Rother.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Yemisi Anifowose and Hilary Moore.

ALSO PRESENT: Benjamin Awkal (Scrutiny Manager), Councillor Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Keith Cohen (Head of Lewisham YOS), Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children & Young People) and Sara Rahman (Director of Families, Quality and Commissioning), Keith Cohen (Youth Justice Service Manager) and Benjamin Awkal (Scrutiny Manager).

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: Councillor Rudi Schmidt and Nick Penny (Head of Service 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 previous meeting

### RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2024 be agreed as an accurate record.

## 2. Declarations of interest

### RESOLVED

That the following declarations be noted:

1. In relation to items 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9, Cllr Jacq Paschoud declared she was a non-council-appointed governor of a school trust.
2. Sabrina Dixon declared she was employed by Social Inclusion Recovery Group, which worked with the families of children suspended or excluded from school.

NB: Cllr Lahai-Taylor later declared she was a council-appointed school governor.

## 3. Responses to Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

There were none.

## 4. Budget Reductions

### Witnesses

Chris Barnham, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Children and Young People

Nick Penny, Head of Service Finance

2.1. Cllr Lahai-Taylor declared she was a council-appointed school governor.

### Key points from discussion

- 2.2. Proposal CYP02 entailed no reduction in support for early career teachers; the council was no longer able to provide the function as regulatory change had shifted the responsibility to schools.
- 2.3. Proposal CYP03 entailed no reduction in school repairs and maintenance; £50k of Department for Education Capital Grant was to be used rather than General Fund revenue.
- 2.4. The 2025/26 recurring £100k youth services back-office saving under CYP06 would not entail a reduction in frontline delivery. However, the £200k recurring saving from 2026/27 risked a reduction in frontline delivery if anticipated additional external funding or provision were not forthcoming in 2025/26.
- 2.5. Since Youth First had been established as a mutual in 2016, it had remained almost entirely council funded and created its own back-office infrastructure. That back-office infrastructure existed in the council and presented the opportunity to realise savings without impacting frontline services.
- 2.6. Children's services were a significant contributor of pressure to the council's budget and Youth Services was one of the few areas Children and Young People's Services was able to offer savings.
- 2.7. Circa £5m of external funding was received by independent youth work providers in the borough, many of whom operated without receiving any council funding. It was hoped that additional activity could be generated by better supporting independent providers operating in Lewisham or interested in operating in Lewisham by providing enabling infrastructure for the youth system. Additional government funding for youth provision was expected, which would be channelled to providers via the proposed youth alliance.
- 2.8. The council's underutilised youth centres were to be made available to independent providers to increase provision. Honor Oak Youth Club had been refurbished recently and Riverside Youth Centre was undergoing a programme of significant refurbishment. Further, the recently recruited Strategic Youth Offer Manager was to support providers to find spaces from which they could deliver.
- 2.9. It was noted that some external providers charged for their services and thus may not truly replace the proposed reduction in directly delivered open-access services. A youth services directory was to be created to make it easier to find youth services. The Chair suggested concessionary rates or free access could be introduced for certain cohorts.
- 2.10. There was an aim to make services more targeted via the Youth Strategy while continuing to provide open-access services.

- 2.11. The process of transferring services from Youth First into the council had begun recently; the number of staff likely to transfer over was not yet known. By April, staff were likely to have transferred to the council, but this was not expected to affect frontline delivery. Changes to frontline services were likely to begin in the Summer as the initial phases of the proposed Youth Strategy were implemented.
- 2.12. There were areas, particularly in the south of the borough, where there was almost no youth provision.
- 2.13. There were examples of successful partnership working between youth providers around council-owned youth centres. For example, Ecosystem Coldharbour in Brixton.
- 2.14. The Executive Director was confident that the youth service could be redesigned and relaunched between April and June as a similar process had been delivered in a similar timeframe when Children's Centres were merged with Family Hubs.
- 2.15. Grant funding opportunities for youth services were being explored.
- 2.16. Membership of the proposed youth alliance was to be open to all local youth service providers. It was hoped representatives of organisations from across the borough and the spectrum of youth services and from organisations that were most successful at attracting external funding and generating provision would put themselves forward.
- 2.17. Proposal CYP05 entailed no reduction in the number of qualified social workers (QSWs) employed by the council, as many QSWs were agency workers.
- 2.18. As the number of children on Child Protection plans was reduced, fewer social workers were required. The saving was incidental to children's services' approach of supporting children earlier.
- 2.19. The Executive Director was confident that increasing reliance on Family Practitioners would not be detrimental to the quality of care received by young people. The council's children's social care workforce already contained Family Practitioners, who were working successfully. There was also an aspiration for qualified youth workers to work with adolescents engaged by children's services.
- 2.20. The rate of pay for a Family Practitioner was not significantly lower than for a newly qualified social worker.
- 2.21. Children's services were frequently inspected and any issues with the type of work Family Practitioners were undertaking would be quickly identified.
- 2.22. The parking permit incentive for QSWs was a legacy initiative. Few other staff received parking permits, and not all social workers did. The Zipcar scheme provided staff with free access to vehicles as required. Initial conversations with staff suggested removing the parking permits would not be a significant issue for staff.
- 2.23. Proposal CYP08 was a cost-reduction opportunity arising from falling numbers of young people entering care as a result of preventative work and the development of in-house residential care to facilitate the increased placement of children in care within the borough in accordance with the council's Placement Sufficiency Strategy.

- 2.24. Proposal CR07 entailed a reduction excess capacity in the in-house passenger transport team. It would not present a barrier to implementing the recommendation of the recent SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Area Inspection that more children with SEND be educated in the borough. The service had excess capacity of three buses. By reducing capacity by two, four posts could be deleted and the higher costs of the two vehicles saved.
- 2.25. Committee members highlighted the value of attended transport for young people with SEND and that the number of young people with SEND and the complexity of their needs were increasing.

### **ACTION**

That, re CYP08, the total amount of cost reduction and its composition be clarified to the Committee in writing before the 28 November meeting of the Public Accounts Select Committee.

### **RESOLVED**

To recommend –

1. That the proposed withdrawal of qualified social worker parking permits under saving proposal CYP05 be reviewed.
2. That the concerns raised by the Committee in respect of reduction CR07 be considered by officers: the changing needs of young people; the value of professional attendants; and the disadvantages of using more smaller vehicles.

And to refer the following to the Public Accounts Select Committee:

- The Committee's view is that the 2026/27 Youth Service saving should not be progressed during the current budget cycle and, if it is to be progressed, should be brought back next year with further information on the year-two plans for youth services.

## **5. Youth Justice Service Inspection Findings**

### **Witnesses**

Cllr Chris Barnham, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Children and Young People

Sara Rahman, Director of Families, Quality and Commissioning

Maleeka Dachi, Head of Integrated Adolescent Safeguarding Service

Keith Cohen, Youth Justice Service Manager

### **Key points from discussion**

- 5.1. Work had already commenced in relation to the six areas for improvement identified by the Inspectorate.
- 5.2. The number of young people entering custody had reduced significantly. Conditions in the secure estate were challenging for children who experienced imprisonment.
- 5.3. The Service had scored highly in respect of planning and implementation. There were improvements to be made regarding the breadth of the information and how it was analysed during assessments.

- 5.4. Risk assessment needed to improve in relation to ensuring victim and public safety post-court.
- 5.5. The Service worked with Bromley Youth Court to ensure children were treated with respect, including by having informal discussions with, and providing training to, the Bench Chair and Magistrates.
- 5.6. Issues identified by the Inspectorate regarding cross-border information sharing were likely to relate to cases where there were tensions around suspected exploitation and where the Service wanted to ensure that its protocols in respect of managing risk were upheld.
- 5.7. The Integrated Adolescent and Youth Justice Partnership Board was only established in January and the new board was at an early stage of its development.
- 5.8. The local National Referral Mechanism pilot enabled young people who were victims of exploitation to be diverted from entering the criminal justice system.
- 5.9. There was a significant amount of preventative activity. The Youth Justice Service had been supporting schools to be trauma-informed. Contextual Safeguarding Hubs were about to be launched in schools to enable lower-level concerns to be managed earlier. The Youth Justice Service had an education, employment and training panel and links with the Virtual School and was to have a close relationship with Family Hubs and Youth Hubs. Education partners sat on the Youth Justice Board Sub-Group and Multi-Agency Child Exploitation panels.

*Standing orders were suspended at 9.29 pm.*

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**6. School Standards (unvalidated)**

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**7. Attendance and Children Missing Education**

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**8. Exclusions and Managed Transfers**

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**9. Admissions and Fair Access Arrangements**

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**10. Select Committee work programme**

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.32 pm

Chair:

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Date:

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