

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 23 November 2023 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Luke Warner (Vice-Chair), Yemisi Anifowose, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Hilary Moore, Jacq Paschoud and Monsignor N Rother.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Jack Lavery and Clive Caseley.

ALSO PRESENT: Pinaki Ghoshal (Director for Children and Young People), Lucie Heyes (Director of Children's Social Care), Anthony Doudle (Head of Lewisham Learning), Ruth Griffiths (Head of Access, Inclusion and Participation), Benjamin Awkal (Scrutiny Manager), Olivia Mardling (Young Advisor), Kehinde Onasanya (Young Advisor) and Susan Rowe (Lewisham Education Group and Lewisham Black Parent Forum).

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: Sara Rahman (Director of Families, Quality and Commissioning).

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 19 September 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2023 be agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

There were none.

3. Holistic School Improvement

Witnesses

Pinaki Ghoshal, Director for Children and Young People
Ruth Griffiths, Head of Access, Inclusion and Participation
Anthony Doudle, Head of Lewisham Learning

Susan Rowe, Lewisham Education Group and Lewisham Black Parent Forum

Key points from discussion

The Children and Young People Directorate Officers introduced the item. Key points included:

- 3.1. Lewisham pupils exhibited good behaviours for learning, were receiving a quality, well-taught curriculum, and demonstrated respect for one another and school staff.

- 3.2. Assessment against the Good Level of Development Framework needed to be more consistent.
- 3.3. More support was to be provided for Key Stage 2 pupils exceeding the expected standard, particularly in writing so that those pupils' performance mirrored national performance outcomes.
- 3.4. Phonics in Year 1 needed to improve.
- 3.5. Key Stage 4 outcomes had largely returned to 2019 levels.
- 3.6. Since the report had been drafted, CTK Aquinas had received an Ofsted grading of Good.
- 3.7. The proportion of schools rated Good or better given in the report was inaccurate: the actual figure was 97.1 per cent.
- 3.8. The Council played an important role in careers guidance (the statutory responsibility of schools), particularly in relation to the work experience programme, in which all schools still engaged.
- 3.9. Lewisham had consistent safeguarding practice, and structures which enabled collaboration.
- 3.10. An audit of schools' behaviour policies had been undertaken in connection with the Tackling Race Inequality in Education Programme. Next steps were being considered.

The Committee then put questions to the witnesses. Key points from the discussion included:

- 3.11. Initial Key Stage 5 results for vocational courses were positive.
- 3.12. The proportion of Key Stage 1 pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths had been revised up to 60 per cent due to continuing validation. Final validated results would be provided to the Committee in March.
- 3.13. SATs papers had assessed knowledge pupils were expected to acquire in Years 3 and 4, when there were Covid-19 lockdowns. There was an expectation that outcomes would return to pre-2019 levels.
- 3.14. Phonics had also been impacted by Covid-19 lockdowns, when it had been taught online to Reception pupils. The rate of subsequent improvement was quick and outcomes were approaching the pre-2019 level of 84 per cent. Year on year improvement was expected, Lewisham had well-taught, high quality programmes which began when pupils were in Reception and were underpinned by robust professional development.
- 3.15. Safeguarding training for Governors was provided throughout the year by the Access, Inclusion and Participation (AIP) Service, but take-up could be better. The Service promoted training opportunities through governor and designated safeguarding lead networks and during visits to schools.
- 3.16. The audit of behaviour policies was triangulated with AIP's understanding of their application in schools. In some cases, where policies seemed lacking, good and inclusive practice had been found in reality.
- 3.17. The process for the planned consultation regarding behaviour policies needed to be developed and discussed with the Tackling Race Inequality in Education Steering Group, which had commissioned the review. The review needed to be conducted in collaboration with schools, parents and pupils.

- Potential outputs might be a pledge for schools to sign up to or an exemplar policy.
- 3.18. Behaviour policies were largely legacy documents developed over a number of years, and predated the Education Strategy. As part of the wider Tackling Race Inequality in Education programme, the Council wanted to engage schools in a conversation regarding what it is like to be a child in Lewisham and the system's collective responsibilities towards children are. The Council could not direct schools but could provide coordination and leadership.
 - 3.19. The Young Advisors reported that behaviour management in schools was inconsistent – both within and between schools; and that teachers sometimes wanted to deter poor behaviour by punitively responding to instances of poor behaviour, which sometimes didn't take into consideration that pupils were children.
 - 3.20. There was sometimes a disparity between behavioural expectations at school and home.
 - 3.21. Historically, Newly Qualified Teachers had received one year of training after qualifying. Now, Early Career Teachers received two years of post-qualification training, which usually incorporated the impacts of trauma on behaviour. This better prepared new teachers and encouraged more consistent behaviour management. Poor behaviour contributed to by trauma should not be excused and consequences and boundaries remained necessary, but it was important understand what trauma has done to a young person and how that might manifest as poor behaviour.
 - 3.22. The sharing of information about vulnerable pupils at transition from Primary to Secondary Phase was improved. However, some other practices remained inconsistent.
 - 3.23. Nationally, young carers had lower attainment at GCSE, reported high levels of stress and received insufficient support from schools and colleges. Identifying young carers was a challenge. The Head of Lewisham Learning undertook to consider the issue. The new provider of support for young carers had recently met with headteachers.
 - 3.24. A Young Advisor reported that the safeguarding training provided to pupils could be inadequate. The importance of contextual safeguarding was promoted to schools by the Council. There was a self-audit process for schools; and AIP conducted audits which engaged pupils, teachers and governors. The Safeguarding Children Partnership ensured that there was a minimum standard of education provided to all children and young people in Lewisham on safeguarding and keeping themselves safe.
 - 3.25. It was difficult to capture the extracurricular offer in schools and how it impacted pupil experience and attainment. Ofsted comments from full inspections were insightful. It was clear from visits to schools that there was a high-quality music and art offer.
 - 3.26. It was noted that a case study in the report showed a school had visited a church and a synagogue but not a mosque.
 - 3.27. The Chair noted that he and the Vice-Chair would consider site visits and witnesses re holistic school improvement subsequent to the meeting.

ACTION

The Head of Access, Inclusion and Participation to share Key Stage 5 vocational results.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

4. Children's Social Care Improvement

Witnesses

Pinaki Ghoshal, Director for Children and Young People

Lucie Heyes, Director of Children's Social Care

Sara Rahman, Director of Families, Quality and Commissioning

Key points from discussion

The Director of Children's Social Care introduced the report. Key points included:

- 4.1. The report was based on the Council's 2022/23 Ofsted self-assessment. In the first half of the year, children's services had continued to be adversely affected by the legacy of the pandemic, experiencing increased demand in combination with significant workforce challenges, including high turnover, vacancies and caseloads. Towards the end of 2022, services began to recover: demand had levelled off (at higher rate than before the Covid-19 pandemic) and the workforce had stabilised, although it was inexperienced (a mitigating strategy was in place to address associated risks).
- 4.2. Two thirds to three quarters of practice was believed to be Good, up from 15 per cent in 2018. Fewer children were on child protection plans, fewer children were being removed from their families, and fewer children were in care. This was largely due to investment in services to prevent high levels of statutory interventions and the Signs of Safety practice model enabling more children to stay with their families. Caseloads were reasonable with strong management oversight in place. There was a healthy practice culture. The Joint Targeted Area Inspection on safeguarding in November 2022 had recognised improvement across children's services and its health and police partners.
- 4.3. Early Help was at an earlier stage of its improvement journey than Children's Social Care.

The Committee then put questions to the witnesses. Key points from the discussion included:

- 4.4. The staff turnover rate was better when the London boroughs formula was applied.
- 4.5. The education, training and employment rate for care leavers (58 per cent) was significantly lower than for the wider cohort of young people but not dissimilar to the rate for care leavers in other boroughs. The target was 75 per cent. A new support offer for care leavers was being commissioned with the intention of launching in January.
- 4.6. Due to the high number of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) in the workforce, additional management oversight panels and coaching had been implemented. More-senior social workers ('consultant social workers')

based in the Academy were supporting NQSWs' Assessed and Supported Year in Employment to reduce the burden on managers. Team managers' experiences of supporting such high numbers of NQSWs was being considered.

- 4.7. Children's Social Care expected it was at the peak of staff inexperience, which it expected to begin to fall in six to twelve months. The attrition rate for NQSWs was around 40 per cent. Many NQSWs had their first professional experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, when staff were working remotely, providing them with less rich pre-qualification experience. Services were, therefore, seeking to diversify their recruitment of NQSWs and introduce more family practitioners, who tended to have more life and professional experience. A recently launched recruitment campaign was aimed at experienced social workers, as there was a large pool of NQSWs to draw from.
- 4.8. The latest children's services workforce survey found staff morale to be high, which was important given recruitment and retention challenges. There was a safe environment for staff with a no blame culture, appropriate support and challenge, and offering professional autonomy.
- 4.9. There was often lots of support available to care experienced young people in further education; this should be promoted to encourage declaration of their status when entering further education or changing setting. Guidance could also be provided to settings to encourage sensitive conversations about care experience.
- 4.10. Personal advisors were able to provide targeted support to young people who had been in the care of Lewisham Council. It was harder to know whether young people being educated in the borough had been in the care of other boroughs, as the quality of information shared under the relevant protocols was not always good.
- 4.11. The London Care Leavers Compact was seeking to agree a pan-London offer for care leavers entailing reciprocal arrangements around housing, council tax and care experience being treated as a protected characteristic.
- 4.12. The new Integrated Adolescent Service comprised Safe Spaces and the Youth Justice Service. There was an aspiration for the Service to refer young people to youth services and provide targeted youth work, such as mentoring, for the most at risk young people.
- 4.13. It was increasingly difficult to find appropriate and reasonably priced placements for looked-after children. The number of children in the highest cost placements had risen significantly in the past 18 months and could rise or fall in future; every child entering or leaving such placements had a significant budgetary impact.
- 4.14. The Council was exploring creating in-house provision to support the most complex children.
- 4.15. Due to the level of demand for residential placements for the most traumatised and complex young people, providers were able to select the least challenging young people, in addition to charging high fees. Providers were increasingly risk adverse and using higher staffing ratios. Many young people in high-cost placements were subject to deprivation of liberty orders.

- 4.16. The regulation of semi-independent placements for 16- and 17-year-olds had increased the cost of such placements.
- 4.17. The development of the Integrated Adolescent Service and the Sufficiency Strategy aimed to prevent young people entering care in the first place.
- 4.18. Sharing costs with health partners where young people's health needs were driving high placement costs was being explored.
- 4.19. Complex factors relating to criminal exploitation also featured among the most complex looked-after children.
- 4.20. There was a dedicated unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) service comprising specialist social workers. UASC were not generally challenging to place. Culturally appropriate placements were arranged where possible.
- 4.21. Being in the Commissioning Alliance was preferable to acting independently but had not delivered savings, due to market volatility, but may have avoided costs. Being part of the Alliance was providing more placement options.
- 4.22. The recent increases in girls and 13-year-old children going missing from home were fairly new phenomena. Data on missing children was better than previously, and the number of young people completing return home interviews had increased. Missing child cases were to be audited by the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation partnership. All young people who went missing were offered a return home interview within 24 hours of returning home. Children who had multiple missing incidents in a short period needed to be distinguished in the reporting system. There were also young people who didn't engage in return home interviews and missing incidents where there weren't high levels of risk, e.g. where a child was reported missing by a worried parent but then returned home.

Standing orders were suspended until 9.45 pm at 9.23 pm.

- 4.23. Key areas affecting recruitment and retention were pay, terms and conditions and the authority's Ofsted grading. A social worker pay benchmarking exercise was being undertaken.
- 4.24. The high number of UASC presenting in Kent was not driving a significant increase in UASC cases in Lewisham. The maximum head count experienced was 45-55 young people. As a Borough of Sanctuary, the Council had reached out to struggling boroughs at times.
- 4.25. The in-house fostering recruitment campaign had been relaunched with refreshed marketing material. A fostering hub was being established using Department for Education funding: foster carers would be employed to act as the foster carer recruitment team.

ACTIONS

1. The Director of Children's Social Care to provide the method for calculating the staff turnover rate.
2. The Director of Children's Social Care to provide an updated version of the table at paragraph 7.20 of the report.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

5. Dedicated Schools Grant

5.1. The Chair invited the Committee to send any written questions regarding the report to the Directorate via the Scrutiny Manager.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

6. Select Committee work programme

RESOLVED

That updates on the Family Hubs programme and the outcome of the Adventure Playground tendering process be provided to the January 2024 meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.36 pm.

Chair:

Date:
