

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 23 January 2020 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Caroline Kalu (Vice-Chair), Colin Elliott, Octavia Holland, Coral Howard, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Jacq Paschoud, John Paschoud, Lilian Brooks (Parent Governor Representative - Primary Schools), Gail Exon (Church Representative) and Monsignor N Rotheron (Church Representative)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Paul Maslin and Hilary Moore

ALSO PRESENT: Emma Aye-Kumi (Scrutiny Manager), Councillor Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for School Performance and Children's Services), Pauline Maddison (Interim Executive Director Children and Young People), Risthardh Hare and Lucie Heyes (Assistant Director of Children's Social Care)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2019

RESOLVED that, subject to all references to "Rockbourne Park" being replaced with "Rockbourne Youth Centre", the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2019 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

None.

3. Responses to Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

None due.

4. Children's Social Care post Ofsted report

4.1 Lucie Heyes, Director of Children's Social Care (CSC), introduced the report and clarified that the report reflected the current position rather than that of 5 months ago when the inspection took place.

4.2 In response to questions from the Committee it was noted that:

1. The service was 1 year into a 3 year improvement programme, and this was the most difficult part of the improvement journey.
2. Achieving 100% consistency would be hard to achieve.
3. Ofsted had recognised that improvements were being made. The service had made good progress in the timescale.
4. Problems with the corporate ICT provision were impacting negatively on service delivery.

5. Service-specific ICT issues were being managed and were reducing. The case management system was being redesigned and an ICT Board had been set up.
6. In response to Ofsted's finding that internal audits had been too positive, internal plans had been reviewed to address this. Audit now involved a moderation process to ensure better accuracy of self-assessments.
7. A Domestic Violence (DV) specialist social worker was being recruited. This would also enable DV upskilling within the existing workforce.
8. DV affects the whole community, not just children. CSC works with Community Safety, and DV is part of the Early Help (EH) Strategy as well as the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, which is currently under review.
9. The Committee was advised to look at DV as an item for the work programme in the next municipal year, perhaps jointly with the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee.
10. There is a strong link between social worker caseloads and retention. Caseloads were high at the time of the inspection. Caseloads fluctuate quickly, depending on the number of MASH referrals and thresholds, and can vary by 200 children from one month to the next. Meanwhile staffing levels are static. Caseloads are monitored weekly, and further work is being done to reduce workloads.
11. Caseloads are being monitored to see if resource needs to be moved.
12. A peer review was scheduled for early 2021.
13. It was anticipated that a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) would take place later this year.
14. Consideration was being given to bringing Family Support Services (FSS) in-house. At present, there was no specific FSS. A wide range of edge-of-care family support was being spot purchased from a range of providers. Creating an in-house FSS would mean better quality assurance.
15. Work needed to be done on the cost implications (both set-up and ongoing) of bringing the FSS in-house.
16. The quality of written plans, whether Child in Need, Child Protection or Care plans, is not always clear and understandable by the family. The issue is how it is written rather than the quality of the information. Plans are monitored through internal audit, then feedback is sought from the family. The Independent Child Protection Chair and the Independent Reviewing Officer also scrutinise the quality of the plans.
17. The **minimum** frequency of visits under each of the plans is as follows:
 - a. Child in Need – every 4 weeks
 - b. Child Protection – every 10 working days
 - c. Child Looked After – depends on the stability of the placement. Usually 4 weekly but can be extended to 6-8 weekly with the agreement of the child and carer.
18. External services in the community can be useful in terms of preventative work and meeting cultural needs, but less useful for child protection work, which is usually mandated whereas voluntary organisations do not have the same legal obligations.

4.3 RESOLVED that:

1. The report be noted.

2. Domestic Violence be suggested as an item for the CYP Select Committee's work programme in the municipal year 2020/21.

5. How living in temporary accommodation affects children and young people

5.1 Lee Georgiou, Service Manager – Housing Needs and Refugee Services, introduced himself to the Committee and made the following points:

1. The service aims to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place, in accordance with the aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). The introduction of the HRA has necessitated a culture change within the service.
2. Demand for housing services is unprecedented. Applications requiring assessment have doubled. There are currently around 2600 households awaiting a housing plan. The administration of the assessment process is onerous.
3. The number of households in temporary accommodation is increasing and there is insufficient social housing to meet demand, despite purchasing social housing through Lewisham Homes and the private market.
4. Following the successful delivery of good quality temporary accommodation at PLACE Ladywell, PLACE Deptford is being created.
5. Pressure on the service is immense.

5.2 A discussion followed in which it was noted:

1. Housing had received funding for trailblazing work with service delivery partners, including schools. Recently, housing officers had attended Lewisham's head teacher forum to share contact information, structure chart, and to answer any questions.
2. Schools are often the main source of support for homeless families, and as such they need to know how to access housing help for families.
3. Housing officers acknowledged that sometimes the language used isn't helpful to families, for example "temporary accommodation" could mean interim, emergency, or longer term. Families need clearer information to make informed decisions.
4. The Housing department is working hard to change the misinformation that circulates in the community. The council has a statutory duty to prevent homelessness, which kicks in at 56 days before eviction. Some residents still think they need to wait for bailiffs to arrive before the council will offer support.
5. Members had experienced a range of difficulties when trying to contact named housing officers, including dead phone numbers, phones ringing out, mailboxes full and unable to take messages, having to ask the Operator to email caseworkers to request that they empty their voicemail. Members stressed that service users need to be able to leave voicemail.
6. The Committee heard that caseworkers are often out visiting properties therefore service users are asked to email so officers can call back when they are in the office. The Corporate Call Centre also takes calls.
7. The Service Manager committed to updating the staff director and reminding staff that their voicemail must be regularly cleared to enable service users to leave messages.

8. Members asked how many children were in nightly paid accommodation currently, and what could be done to reduce the number of households with children living in accommodation with shared facilities. Figures would be analysed and supplied after the meeting.
9. Nightly paid accommodation is the most expensive and least suitable type of accommodation for families. Every effort was being made to limit its use and to convert or make more suitable accommodation available.
10. Data on ethnicity of households in temporary accommodation, particularly those placed out of borough, and reasons for homelessness was requested.
11. Members reported that for families with small children, waiting for long periods at the Housing Options Centre can be very difficult, particularly if they do not get the information they need. Schools could be a better source of information and support if they knew who to contact, and how.
12. The triage process has been reviewed and an appointment system is in place. There had been some steps to provide the service in more child-friendly locations in the community, such as Downham Leisure Centre but issues around confidentiality and appropriateness of settings has limited the roll out.
13. The service was undergoing a culture change, moving away from 'gate-keeping' to building relationships and trying to intervene early.
14. The service does not recommend that families in interim accommodation move their children to a closer school. For these families, the service can exercise discretion about whether to support travel costs.
15. One of the main reasons for homelessness is leaving friends or family accommodation. In these cases, the service has mediators who can help to work through relationship issues. However, the situation often arises because children have grown up but cannot afford to rent on their own and the family home becomes overcrowded.
16. Whereas the impact of moving into temporary accommodation out of borough is massive, most people settle within 6 months and do not want to come back to the borough.
17. "intentionally homeless" is a legal definition that applies where people have done or failed to do something with the result that they become homeless, for examples not paying affordable rent and becoming evicted, or a parent entering the criminal justice system. Such households are supported in that they have 28 days to find alternative accommodation and receive help with a deposit.
18. The report would return to the next meeting with a set of draft recommendations. Members should email any suggestions to the Scrutiny Manager.
19. The Chair urged Committee Members to bear in mind the impact of homelessness on families in terms of Members' work when social housing developments are proposed in the borough.

5.3 RESOLVED that:

1. The report be noted;
2. That the Service Manager – Housing Needs and Refugee Services

- a. ensures that caseworkers' voicemail inboxes are able to receive messages.
- b. provides the Committee with up to date figures showing:
 - i. the number of children currently in nightly paid shared-facility accommodation;
 - ii. Ethnic breakdown of families in TA, and by location
 - iii. Data on reasons for homelessness
- c. Update the staff directory to ensure the switchboard has working phone numbers for caseworkers

6. Exclusion of the press and public

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of item 7 because it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3,4 and 5 or part 1 of Schedule 12A of the act, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the exemption.

7. Early Help Review

- 7.1 Risthardh Hare, Service Manager – Early Help introduced the item. The Committee was invited to ask questions and the following was noted in:
1. Members of the Committee once again requested that a needs assessment be carried out to inform the shaping of the Early Help (EH) service.
 2. An initial needs assessment had been carried out as had consultation with community stakeholders. Members stressed the need to triangulate resident views with an evidence based needs assessment.
 3. Officers were committed to the Committee's continued involvement in the pre-decision work on EH.
 4. Currently there is no strategic identity to EH in Lewisham. The intention was to create a brand through iThrive, and to integrate services.
 5. Officers circulate a briefing on Riverside Youth Club and the Youth Service in due course.

- 7.2 The time being 9:25pm it was MOVED, SECONDED and RESOLVED that standing orders be suspended to allow for the completion of committee business.

6. EH would need a robust universal offer with a clear identity.
7. A further update to be provided to the Committee in the new municipal year.

- 7.3 RESOLVED that:
1. the contents of the report be noted
 2. a further item on Early Help return to committee in the municipal year 2020/21

8. Select Committee work programme

- 8.1 It was noted that:

1. Members requested that the item on Unregulated Education Settings that had been received in December, return in March, with an officer present to answer questions.
2. The report should cover unregulated settings, Alternative Provision (AP) and Elective Home Education (EHE).
3. Members asked that the report give an understanding of Lewisham figures, how this compares with London/ statistical neighbours/ other boroughs and any concerns the Committee should be aware of.
4. The follow up item on the in-depth review of exclusions from school should include a table of recommendations and actions against each one. Members had found this format easy to follow when reviewing progress following previous in-depth reviews.
5. The item “How living in Temporary Accommodation affects children” should return in March with a draft set of recommendations.
6. Members of the Committee would shortly receive an invitation to attend Housing Select Committee on 12 March at 7:30pm, at which they could feed into the discussion homelessness reduction.

8.2 RESOLVED that

1. the items for consideration at the next meeting be as follows:
 - a. Safeguarding Services 6 monthly report and update on the new safeguarding arrangements
 - b. Exclusions from school indepth review follow up – to include a table setting out the recommendations and actions taken against each one
 - c. Annual schools standards report 2018/19
 - d. Unregulated education settings, alternative provision and elective home education – how Lewisham compares with other boroughs and London generally, highlighting any concerns. Officer attendance required.
 - e. Children in Temporary Accommodation draft recommendations
 - f. Corporate Parenting and LAC annual report (for information – officer attendance not required).
2. Members of the Committee are invited to attend Housing Select Committee on 12 March at 7:30pm

9. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

9.1 RESOLVED that a referral be made to Mayor and Cabinet as follows:

ICT problems have been a recurring issue at CYP Select Committee, affecting service delivery. The Committee has heard on numerous occasions through the course of this municipal year that problems with the ICT affects Children’s Social Care, as well as other services that the Committee scrutinises.

The Children and Young People’s Select Committee recommends that the Mayor and Cabinet takes urgent action to address the recurring problems with the corporate ICT.

9.2 The meeting ended at 9.42 pm

Chair:

Date:
