

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 22 September 2021 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT in person: Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Jack Lavery, Hilary Moore, and Monsignor Nicholas Rotherham (Catholic Church Representative)

PRESENT online: Councillors Caroline Kalu (Vice-Chair), Colin Elliott, Octavia Holland, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Jacq Paschoud, and Lilian Brooks (Parent Governor - Primary Schools) and Clive Caseley (Parent Governor - Secondary Schools)

Also present: Councillor Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Performance) (Cabinet Member), Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children & Young People), Lucie Heyes (Director of Children's Social Care), Angela Scattergood (Director of Education Services, Education Standards and Inclusion), Mala Dadlani (Group Finance Manager, Children and Young People), Beate Hellawell (Scrutiny Manager) and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Maslin (ex-officio)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 170621

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 17 June 2021 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

Lilian Brooks will be stepping down as co-opted parent governor member for primary schools. The Chair thanked her for her commitment and the way she enriched the committee with comments and insight.

3. Responses to Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses.

4. Financial stabilisation - budget update and medium term plan

4.1 Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director Children & Young People's Services introduced the report. He thanked Mala Dadlani, Strategic Business Partner (CYP) for providing much of the detailed information. With regards to financial stabilisation, there has been significant movement over the year, with a variety of actions that sought to bring the budget under control. It is pleasing that 90% of the required saving for this financial year has already been achieved or is on track to be achieved, with the expectation that all savings will be achieved. There are three high risk areas: placement costs (this will be covered in more detail in the next agenda item); the high needs block from the dedicated schools grant for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and the central services for schools budget highlighted at the end of the report. The first two high risk areas are known risks in most local authorities.

4.2 The following was noted in response to questions from the committee:

1. In the past, Lewisham had a high number of appeals and tribunals regarding educational placements. Whilst detailed information was not available at the meeting, benchmarked against other authorities current figures are low. Parents have rights and as a local authority those rights to appeal are respected, even if it is costly.
2. The ongoing government consultation on the national funding formula is likely to further squeeze Lewisham's central services to schools block funding. Every local authority is affected differently, based on historic decisions made. Once the consultation is completed and government decisions are made, officers will identify the level of cuts that will be needed and then consult with local schools about priorities. Lewisham is likely to be significantly affected, including because there are fewer academies. It may also be the case that funding will move away from London schools.
3. The transport costs presented in the report indicate that significant savings compared to the previous year will have to be achieved. The differential is partly explained by the overspend last year due to the pandemic as children and young people could not share travel. The focus now is on promoting independence and travel training and bringing together children and adult provision. There is therefore a mix of savings and investment.
4. The meeting was reminded that councillors often hear about the impact on carers and parents who have to take children and young people with SEND to different schools than their siblings, and that this can put enormous stress on families. Safety is an additional consideration as fewer children on buses often means more cars at school gates. The meeting was reassured that more children than ever are entitled to travel assistance via school buses and other arrangements. There is a clear commitment to work with parents, but also that resources need to be maximised.
5. The Chair will arrange a meeting with Pinaki Ghoshal to discuss funding concerns around mental health for children and young people in response to media coverage. **ACTION: Chair**

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the committee supports action to ensure that funding for services to schools is not diverted or withdrawn.
3. That the impact on parents and carers will be considered carefully when making any further transport budget cuts.

5. Children's Social Care placements - costs and quality

- 5.1 Lucie Heyes, Director of Children's Social Care, introduced the report. She reminded the committee of the comprehensive improvement programme underway since 2018. The most recent self-assessment review from April 2021 confirmed steady and sustained improvement, although the pace of improvement had slowed due to the pandemic. Ofsted recently returned for

a focused visit around children looked after (CLA) and confirmed that senior leaders had an accurate picture of the service, had already identified the key remaining areas to focus on, and that the improvement journey was on track. An internal audit confirmed that progress had been substantial. Lewisham is currently renewing the statutory placement sufficiency strategy and officers have been focusing on care leaver placements over the last 6 months. The service has only limited control over the increasing cost of placements as it is market-driven. However, due to positive changes in practice, there are now fewer children and young people entering the care system.

5.2 The following was noted in response to questions from the committee:

1. The innovation grant for domestic abuse services has been utilised for the following: A domestic abuse consultation hub that supports social workers with connecting up various services for families; recruitment of some additional specialist professionals; and training for social workers on how to manage risk effectively and safely. The grant sits within a wider piece of work around reducing violence against women and girls, in liaison with housing, violence reduction and the Police.
2. The foster care and recruitment strategy is part of the sufficiency strategy and officers are aiming to complete the work by the end of the calendar year. Work around foster care recruitment is one of the most challenging tasks as a lot of initial expressions of interests are needed to then be able to translate some into successful recruitment of foster carers. A large number of Lewisham residents who are foster carers are working for independent organisations offering similar rates of pay, but are profit-making commercial organisations. The Council needs to become employer of choice more often. There is anecdotal evidence that some independent organisations do some advocacy work which would probably not be appropriate for in-house staff. The Council service gets good feedback from foster carers and they feel well supported. It will be important that word gets out.
3. Considering that there are many out of borough placements and that there is a drive for new housing developments in Lewisham, Section 106 agreements could be considered where families who want to foster can have access to slightly bigger homes than they are entitled to. The Chair agreed to raise this issue with the Cabinet member for Housing and Planning. **ACTION: Chair**
4. Concern was raised that costs for semi-independent accommodation seems to be disproportionately high. This is partly due to demand, partly due to commissioning arrangements not being sufficiently tight, which is being looked into. One positive development is the commissioning of 2-3 single secure placements for very complex situations to help keep individuals safe.
5. All safeguarding enquiries come into the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). All referrals are reviewed within 24 hours. Contact details will be circulated to all committee members. **ACTION: Scrutiny Manager**

6. The service has a lot of resources and expertise for early help and edge of care provision, but it is not always joined up. This will be a priority for the newly appointed director as services are currently dispersed and need better co-ordination.
7. There has been a recent shift from a focus on quality assessments to a focus on planning and a recognition that the quality of care plans need further improvement. A significant training programme has started in July 2021 and will continue until April 2022.
8. The meeting noted that the recent Ofsted visit identified good leadership, which is very positive and encouraging. However, the original rating of Requires Improvement was made back in January 2016, so the Committee wants to see evidence of sustained improvement when it returns to monitor this in March 2022.

6. Select Committee work programme

- 6.1 An additional report on apprenticeships was suggested for the November meeting. **ACTION: Scrutiny Manager**
- 6.2 The play strategy is unlikely to be completed by November and whilst an information update may be useful then, the more detailed scrutiny should be delayed until January.

RESOLVED that the work programme be amended to reflect the following:

1. Add a report on apprenticeships to the November meeting.
2. Retain information reports (to be emailed to members) on attendance and inclusion and the play policy in November.
3. Move the play policy report to January.

The meeting ended at 8.23 pm

Chair:

Date:
