

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY, 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2020

MEMBERS: Councillors Achilleas Georgiou (Chair) Mahym Bedekova (Vice Chair), Birsen Demirel, Ergun Eren, James Hockney, Ahmet Oykener and Glynis Vince

Officers: Tony Theodoulou, Executive Director People, Andy Ellis, Governance & Scrutiny Officer and Susan O'Connell, Governance & Scrutiny Officer

Also Attending: Cllr Rick Jewell, Cabinet Member for Children's Services. Cllr Mahtub Uddin, Cabinet Member for Public Health, 4 members of the youth Parliament and 3 members of the public.

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone present to the first meeting of the Children Young People and Education Scrutiny Panel. He was pleased to welcome the four members of the Youth Parliament who had joined the meeting. Apologies had been received from Councillors Bernie Lappage and Egin Erbil.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3. LOCAL PRIORITIES FOR 2020/21

The Chair invited Councillor Rick Jewell (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) and Tony Theodoulou (Executive Director People) to present to the Panel the local priorities for 2020/21.

Councillor Jewell began by recording his thanks to everyone for their work over the last three to four months; recognising the work of teachers, support workers within schools, carers, foster parents, council officers, volunteers in the Youth Offending Service and within the schools and community, parents children and young people, young leader and youth parliament members in the borough. Covid 19 had brought about real changes and challenges to everyday life. Councillor Georgiou seconded this and recorded his personal thanks and that of the Panel.

The key priorities are highlighted within the report and are as follows:

- Covid-19 recovery – pupil physical and emotional well-being.
- Improve school attainment and reduce exclusion from school.
- School Attendance – post lockdown
- School Ofsted Judgements
- EHCP pathway review
- Increase local education provision for children with SEND
- Recovery of social work services post lockdown

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- Effectiveness of Early Help & Prevention services
- Improving Outcomes for LAC & Care Leavers
- Joint Service for Disabled Children – service developments
- Self-Evaluation of social care services
- Protect the most vulnerable residents in the borough from suffering abuse or neglect
- Scrutiny Reports – LADO/ Fostering/ Adoption/Annual Safeguarding Partnership Report
- Transition of Children's Services to Dugdale Centre
- Enhance the involvement of Young people within our decision-making structure where possible ie shadow cabinets, mystery shopper type roles.
- Reviewing our Youth Offending Service (YOS) ie feedback from young people and parents etc
- Improving the role of our volunteers within the YOS and input into decision making where possible.
- Youth Services

The following points were highlighted by the Cabinet Member and Executive Director

1. The priorities have had to be adapted to post Covid 19 recovery and how young people's education is looked at. These will be fluid going forward depending on how things progress especially is there are further lockdown procedures and schools have issues.
2. Schools have not yet been back a week and 10 schools have been affected by either confirmed or suspected Covid 19. In some schools this has meant that some children have had to be sent home already to isolate for two weeks. It maybe that this will be another year of disrupted education for children. This year's cohort could experience similar disruptions to their education.
3. Attendance at school maybe an area that scrutiny would be interested in. Some parents have been desperate for their children to go back to school. Some children have yet to return to school. There has already been an increase in parents who are choosing to home educate their children and this maybe a concern, but this is too early to say at present. The local authority does have statutory duties towards children who are home educated.
4. Schools are the biggest priority, helping schools to provide education to young children in very challenging circumstances. Since the national lockdown the work of the department has been focussed on supporting headteachers who have had to contend with some extremely difficult issues such as union issues, anxiety of staff, parents and children. There have been weekly meetings with Headteachers. There are inherent contradictions in government advice which cannot be avoided such as only 6 people can be together, yet they can fill up a school bus and sit next to each other. As the infection rate is increasing in the borough the expectation is that more schools will be impacted by the rising infection rate.

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5. Councillor Uddin, Cabinet Member for Public Health had circulated his priorities around children and young people to the Panel members ahead of the meeting.
6. Cllr Ergin Erbil, the Associate Cabinet Member focussing on children and young people in the borough had given his apologies for this meeting. This could be picked up a future meeting to hear from him what his priorities are and how he will be working with the Panel and the Cabinet Member.

The following comments, questions and queries were raised:

1. In response to a query on the challenges in meeting the priorities members were advised that the challenge is the council having the capacity to respond to everything that is going on.
2. Members said that whilst it was good that children have gone back to school, there is difference between approaches that schools have taken. Examples were cited of schools where masks are worn and social distancing is observed, but in other schools there is no social distancing or face masks. What can be done to make sure children and young people are safe? Officers advised that the government advice is that masks are not mandatory in schools. In the event that the infection rate increases that might change. All headteachers have discretion on the use of masks. What the government have advised is that if a school is in an area where the infection rate is particularly high then masks must be worn in corridors or anywhere where children can congregate, but they do not have to wear them inside the classroom and neither do teachers.
3. One of the things that the Panel will need to look at is post Covid 19 or living through Covid 19
4. Members of the Youth Parliament felt it was important to look at the mental health effect on young people. Members said that its effects on some of our foster's carers was also important as social workers have been unable to do some visits.
5. Youth Parliament members were asked to comment on enhancing the involvement of young people in decision making and going back to school what are the affects on young people. Youth parliament advised that at one of their early meetings shadowing councillors was discussed and most members supported this. If a shadow youth process was introduced, there would be lots of interest and applications for this from youth parliament members. The Chair agreed to take this back to Overview & Scrutiny Committee members for them to reach out to Youth Parliament members as a way of shadowing and Cabinet Members.
6. With regards to going back to school, this has not been an easy process, there is a lot of stress around the many rules that are in place. Student mental health should be a big priority. The Cabinet Member advised that there were quite a lot of services and organisation who have tried to reach out to young people who were suffering with mental health during Covid. This may have not caught everyone and may have not been advertised widely enough if the Youth Parliament members were not aware of this. The Executive Director advised that should this be an area that the Panel would like to focus on. Head teachers could be invited to

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explain how they take into account potential mental health problems of students as they returned to school

7. Further to a query as to whether teachers have training or support on how to support children on mental health issues especially with children with disabilities, underlining health conditions or autism. The Executive Director advised that there are a number of counselling organisations in the borough. There is a protocol that has been sent to all headteachers called Enfield Thrives together. During the lockdown the schools were responsible for keeping in contact with pupils especially those that they were concerned about. Schools are really experienced at dealing with mental health, some schools have dedicated mental health workers within them
8. The Chair had written to members for their ideas for possible inclusion the work programme. The suggestions for further discussion at this meeting are: continuation and conclusion of the Exclusions workstream; Children's poverty with a suggestion to particularly look at hunger; opening of schools re Covid 19 and gangs and violence and the youth service.
9. Picking up on the children's poverty suggestion there was a report back in January called the Enfield Poverty and Inequality Commission; All things being equal. There are recommendations in this to do with children and a lot of this is around schools. How do the council's priorities align with the recommendations from the commission? Officers advised that the recommendations are there to be implemented. There are challenges now given the financial situation. Some of the recommendations call for investment, however given the financial restraints it is more realistic in some cases to look at protection rather than investment. Should the panel decide this is a focus the recommendation could be reported back on.
10. Members reflected on children across the borough and how much education had been missed that more affluent parents may have been able to provide tutors access to more resources and that this may potentially put those most in need even further behind. How will we as a borough ensure that children not only catch up on their education and how those most in need and from poorer backgrounds get the additional resources they need. Officers advised that during national lockdown Ofsted school inspections were suspended. Ofsted offered inspectors to local authorities to assist. In North Central London (Barnet, Enfield, Camden & Islington, Hackney and Haringey) there were two Ofsted inspectors who researched this issue and they have produced a very comprehensive research document which could be shared with the panel.
11. Members referred to the Timson Review on Exclusions which made over 30 recommendations around exclusion including areas of social mobility and could explore the direction of travel on this report. Officers advised that reducing school exclusions is one the list of priorities and in Enfield exclusions have reduced two years in a row in Enfield.
12. Members discussed continuation and conclusion of the exclusions workstream. They could have this item on their work programme with a report coming to the Committee. The Panel will want to look at

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exclusions and will need to decide how they want to deal with this. A Youth Parliament member advised that some schools cannot have any internal exclusions at present. After three warnings repeated behaviour will not be tolerated and pupils will be sent home. It was felt that without internal exclusions there may be a possible increase in exclusions if pupils keep misbehaving.

13. Regarding poverty, a youth parliament member advised that going back to school this year, there had been a much bigger equipment list in terms of stuff that students needed to provide for themselves and the cost could be an issue for some pupils. Is there or could there be some sort of voucher scheme to assist those on free school meals with equipment costs. Officers advised that there had been a government scheme during lockdown where approximately 2k laptops had been distributed for eligible students. This only covered certain year groups and many more requests had been received. There was a particular issue for families who had one computer but had multiple children who needed to access a computer for their virtual learning.

4. PLANNING THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21

The Chair formally invited members of the Panel and the Youth Parliament to raise any specific areas of interest. The Chair reminded members of the issues that have already been raised; issues around working with Covid 19 and going back to school; mental health; children and poverty/ Poverty and Inequality report; exclusions; attendance/ home education and supporting schools and Headteachers.

Further suggestions and discussions took place on:

1. Fostering- the effect of Covid on Foster carers and the possible effect on social workers. This has been a very difficult time.
2. Poverty should definitely be included on the work programme, working through Covid and post Covid must also be included. With regard to exclusions a suggestion was made to look at the work undertaken by the exclusions workstream.
3. Provision for children with special educational needs- looking at areas of pressure and cost such as sending children out of the borough
4. Youth gangs and violence, aware that the Crime Scrutiny Panel looks at this as a bigger picture. It was suggested that the panel look at the work undertaken on the Vulnerable Young Peoples Group. There was a further suggestion to look at this in a different way perhaps looking at what the local authority is doing around prevention/diversion. It was felt that there was not enough provision for young people. What can the local authority do to create a better environment for young people so that they do not get involved in gangs. This could all come together under youth provision and environment. Officers could provide details of what is available in the borough for young people to do. In 2016 with austerity there were substantial cuts to youth services expenditure with a reduction of £1.7 million which is about 80% of the budget. Since then the youth service has been steadily rebuilding getting

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money through grants raising income through hiring of youth centres to keep youth services in the borough going. The panel could look at terms of reference for this item including the work of the Vulnerable Children Group. A further suggestion was made to look at from the school's perspective what is there already and what could there be more of.

The Chair then drew together the themes from the discussion as follows:

1. Fostering
2. Mental Health
3. Exclusions
4. Covid 19 (opening of schools and working in a Covid 19 environment)
5. Supporting Schools and Heads of schools
6. Poverty and Inequality Commission (particularly the recommendations relating to children and young people report)
7. Special Educational Needs (focus on out of borough and costs)
8. Vulnerable children and young people youth provision and environment (within this Youth Parliament members asked what the council could do to assist young people getting jobs in addition to the government's Kickstart project, and look at what young people are doing outside school in terms of clubs and extracurricular activities as Covid had effected what is available.

Members supported these items and the Chair will take these away and work through this and liaise with officers to see how they could fit into the work programme.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference were noted.

6. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted.