

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON MONDAY, 18TH DECEMBER, 2023

MEMBERS: Councillors Maria Alexandrou, Andrew Thorp, Nelly Gyosheva, Ahmet Oykener, Ruby Sampson, Hivran Dalkaya, Thomas Fawns and Mohammad Islam (Deputy Mayor)

Officers:

Peter Nathan (Director of Education and Director of Children and Family Services), Angela Bent (Head of Service, Practice Improvement & Partnerships), John Lawrence-Jones ((Service Manager, Children’s Specialist Support), Stacey Gilmour (Governance & Scrutiny Officer).

Also Attending:

Cllr Abdul Abdullahi (Cabinet Member, Children’s Services)
Jaiden John Shaw (Enfield Youth Council Member)
Local Democracy Reporter

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mahym Bedekova, Cllr Gunes Akbulut and Cllr Doris Jagge, who were substituted by Cllr Mohammad Islam, Cllr Hivran Dalkaya and Cllr Thomas Fawns respectively.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received regarding any item on the agenda.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2023.

4. CHILD EXPLOITATION (SEXUAL & CRIMINAL) AND MISSING CHILDREN

Angela Bent, Head of Service, Practice Improvement & Partnerships introduced the report which provided an overview of how Children and Family Services respond to child exploitation and children who are missing. Child exploitation is a form of child abuse and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18. Between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023, a total of 239 children were identified as either experiencing or being at risk of child exploitation in Enfield, 44 were at risk of child sexual exploitation, 175 at risk of child criminal exploitation and 20 were identified as at risk of both.

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Data was provided and it was noted that there had been a year-on-year increase in the number of children on the child exploitation profile, in the year 2022/23 there was a slight drop from 248 to 239. The number of children recorded as missing has remained very similar in the last two years, the spike between 20/21 and 21/22 has been attributed to covid restrictions being lifted meaning more children and young people were more likely to be out and therefore likely to not return home when expected. Further in-depth data was provided in relation to child exploitation and missing children, and it was acknowledged that this complex area of practice requires a comprehensive response from across the partnership. Within Children and Family Services, all teams have a responsibility towards young people who are impacted by these issues and since 2021 there has been a bespoke provision specifically targeted at young people who are at risk of exploitation. It was advised that there is a recognised correlation between children going missing and an increased risk to those children of being exploited. Children and Family Services has adapted its delivery offer to provide a target response to this form of extra familial harm through the development of the Contextual Safeguarding Hub and the Adolescent Safeguarding Teams (AST), whilst recognising that all services work with young people at risk.

Questions were invited from Members:

In response to a question regarding the new centralised process for recording missing episodes Officers advised that this has been developed and will be implemented during December 2023. It is anticipated that this new approach will improve standards around recording missing episodes and offering return home interviews in a timely fashion. This will also enable more comprehensive management oversight of this cohort of young people, which in turn will facilitate scrutiny of the efficacy of the process.

Following a further question regarding the return home interviews, Officers explained that these were very individual and were beneficial in gaining an understanding of what is going on for that young person, and how the service can be better placed to support them. It was also recognised that the young person is more likely to share their issues if the interviews are facilitated at the earliest opportunity. Additionally, the Hub have developed an enhanced pathway for the most vulnerable young people who are missing and at risk of extra-familial harm. In this context, the Hub cross reference children who have exploitation markers, using data from the Safeguarding Adolescents from Exploitation (SAFE) and Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panels, with the children who go missing most regularly to identify those who would benefit from additional support. The missing children co-ordinators are proactive in contacting these children before they go missing to build trust, rapport, and confidence in the service.

In response to a further question, it was confirmed that plans are in place to strengthen how services capture feedback from young people and their families within children's social care and the Youth Development Service, to ensure that service users perspectives are understood and factored into

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service development considerations. The Safeguarding Adolescent Strategy Action Plan is being developed and will be over seen by the Safeguarding Partnership.

Further discussions took place regarding other targeted response offers and it was advised that within the Youth Development Service, the Contextual Safeguarding Youth Workers provide wellbeing workshops to schools to raise awareness of different types of extra-familial harm. The service also provides a range of other interventions that include support around extra-familial exploitation risks. These include community outreach work, such as youth workers focusing on 'hotspot areas', which are identified as having high rates of youth anti-social behaviour and/or crime. Youth workers walk around these locations speaking to young people they come across, exploring any worries, and signposting them to positive activities. Safeguarding work also takes place in schools which supports students to safely transit from school to home.

In response to further questions from Members, Officers advised that in trying to meet an aim to make youth centre services more mobile, the Council launched its new youth bus in November 2022. This is a mobile provision that enables young people to access information, advice and guidance, free activities, advocacy, and early help support on their doorstep. The service has since drawn impressive figures, contributing to the increase in engagement.

The panel acknowledged that as well as delivering the statutory services, it was important that the local authority work with the voluntary sector to reach out and engage with the thousands of volunteers across the borough who deliver amazing support and work.

The Chair thanked Officers for attending the meeting and for providing a very thorough report.

The panel **AGREED** to note the report.

5. **UNIVERSAL PRIMARY FREE SCHOOL MEALS - UPDATE**

Cllr Abdul Abdullahi introduced the item and said that this policy is a step in the right direction especially during these challenging times with the cost-of-living crisis which has impacted many families. Free school meals can save families as much as £450 per child per year, which is a huge support and ensures that no child goes hungry at school. Cllr Abdullahi congratulated the Mayor of London for introducing this policy which is very much welcomed and hoped that it would continue.

Peter Nathan, Director of Education provided further information relating to the introduction of free school meals for all pupils of primary school age which has been introduced by the Mayor of London. This has been introduced for one school year only namely 2023/24 and covers all primary aged children in London although this report considers its impact in Enfield.

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Questions were invited from Members.

In response to a question regarding the funding allocation it was advised that Enfield will receive £5.5m, delivered in tranches throughout the year, to distribute to the borough's primary school, the first tranche of which has already been paid out to schools. This has been allocated based on census data at the rate of £2.65p per meal per child which is higher than the rate received by schools from the DfE which is currently £2.53.

In respect of logistical concerns about the introduction of this scheme it was confirmed that schools across Enfield have managed the process of a considerable number of extra children having school dinners very well and Headteachers in Enfield seem to have just got on with the job of implementation with relatively little fuss and there has been no come back to the key officer responsible for Enfield.

In response to queries regarding feedback on the scheme a request was sent out by the Director of Education and some detailed responses were provided by 15 schools with further feedback provided at a borough-wide headteacher briefing. All headteachers welcomed the scheme with all schools seeing a welcome uptake in children having a hot meal which was the intention of the Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) scheme. In one school, children having a hot meal doubled from 300 a day to 600, in another the percentage increased from 60% to 90% of pupils per day, and in another it increased from 63% to 81%. It is expected the numbers will rise further with the onset of winter with some children moving away from packed lunches.

Further details were discussed in respect of some of the challenges faced by schools which included some additional cost issues such as needing a lot more cutlery and plates. Most schools have also had to extend their dinner break times to allow for more children. This means for example having three sittings for lunch instead of two with lunch times starting at 11:30am and not finishing until after 1pm, raising concern that some children may not have their first meal of the day until the afternoon. There is also an additional cost implication here too as dinner supervisors are needed to work extra time. At a time when school finances are stretched, this is an additional financial problem for schools not covered by the grant. Further practical issues include inadequate space in dinner halls to accommodate the increase in numbers eating as well as the impact on kitchen staff producing the meals.

In response to a question regarding additional funding for Special Needs Primary Schools who may need to prepare food in a certain way, it was confirmed that the Director of Education would be writing to these schools shortly as there was some additional funding available.

In conclusion it was acknowledged that there are concerns for the future of the scheme as there is no confirmation from the Mayor of London that it will be repeated, and expectations are now raised following this year's success. If it is to continue, there could be some capital implications in terms of school kitchen development as needed in some schools, therefore the earlier that

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schools are made aware of the plans for the future, the easier it will be to plan moving forward.

The Chair thanked Officers for a very thorough report.

The Panel **AGREED** to note the report.

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

NOTED the Children, Young People & Education Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for 2023/24.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

NOTED the dates of future meetings as follows:

- Monday 11 March 2024.

This meeting will commence at 7:00pm and will be held in the Conference Room at the Civic Centre.