

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON MONDAY, 11TH MARCH, 2024

MEMBERS: Councillors Maria Alexandrou (Chair), Andrew Thorp (Vice Chair), Gunes Akbulut, Mahym Bedekova, Doris Jiagge, Ruby Sampson and Mustafa Cetinkaya

Officers:

Peter Nathan (Director of Education), Anne Stoker (Director of Children and Family Services), Neil Best (Head of Strategic Resourcing Partnerships), Sarah Fryer (Head of Schools Personnel Service), Helen Finnemore (Head of Family Hubs and Start for Life Transformation), Ivana Price (Head of Early Help, Youth and Community Safety), Paul Bishop (Schools Health and Safety Manager), Ian Hewison (Head of Admissions, Attendance & School Place Planning), Rajay Williams (HAF programme coordinator), Jane Creer (Governance Officer)

Also Attending: Local Press representative (part of meeting)

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Nelly Gyosheva who was substituted by Cllr Mustafa Cetinkaya, and from Cllr Ahmet Oykenner.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A non-pecuniary declaration of interest was received from Cllr Mahym Bedekova in respect of Item 6, as her child attended the school holiday activities in the DfE funded Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2023.

4. VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION AGAINST SCHOOL STAFF

Peter Nathan, Director of Education, introduced the report which responded to a Panel Member request – corrected as having been proposed by Cllr Ruby Sampson.

The rise in incidents in the last academic year was noted, and that a working group had been established, and a number of actions had been taken. A Violence and Aggression Against School Staff Policy had been prepared to provide guidance for schools and would shortly be printed and made

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available. A survey of school staff had been circulated: around a thousand responses had been received, which were currently being collated and would be shared in due course. It was noted that nearly a third of all those responding advised that they had not experienced an incident.

Questions were invited from Members.

Members asked to see the Violence and Aggression Against School Staff Policy when finalised.

ACTION: Peter Nathan

Noting that incidents that were reported but resulted in no visible injury could still be painful and serious, in response to Members' queries it was advised that the survey would show more incidents than the figures reported in the report as the survey was broader and many incidents would have been at a level expected to be addressed within the school. It was acknowledged that schools should have risk assessments and appropriate strategies in place, and that good quality training was offered to schools. However there was no requirement for schools, other than community schools, to use the reporting system, or buy back into Schools Health and Safety. The survey was done because of the increased number of incidents, and that schools were experiencing more children with more complex needs coming into the system. Officers advised that there had been a high level of support and engagement from head teachers. An outcome of surveying the data would be to show schools the importance of appropriate staff training.

It was also confirmed by officers that incidents were considerably higher in primary rather than secondary schools. There were more issues with dysregulated younger children. Schools may employ short suspensions, but did not permanently exclude young children. Nurture groups worked to socialise children so they could come back into school. As they got older, children with special needs could often cope with primary school, but then may go on to special schools or units for their secondary education.

Members requested to receive more information about de-escalation training.

ACTION: Peter Nathan

With regard to the survey, it was confirmed that a thousand responses from the approximate 5,500 to 6,000 staff in Enfield was a good return rate.

It was confirmed that the CLASSI reporting system was the Council's system. The data was used as part of children's risk assessments and information would be transferred to a child's new school. When an internal transfer took place, information was shared and protocols were followed.

The Chair thanked officers for providing the update report and for attending the meeting.

The Panel **AGREED** to note the update in response to an item proposed by Cllr Sampson on incidents of violence against staff in school.

5. FAMILY HUBS AND START FOR LIFE TRANSFORMATION

Ivana Price, Head of Early Help, Youth and Community Safety, introduced the report, further to the presentation to the Panel on 23 March 2023.

There had been great progress over the past year. The first hub opened in Ponders End, supporting families, children and young people from pre-birth to age 19, or 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The soft launch of the second hub at Craig Park took place at the beginning of January 2024.

Helen Finnemore, Head of Family Hubs and Start for Life Transformation, highlighted the services at each hub and what was to be mobilised in the coming months. Start for Life would bring a significant transformation of existing services. The Start for Life services were being publicised and information being made available online and in a printed brochure.

Initial data on the impact of youth and family hubs was emerging, which evidenced tangible benefits. Detailed feedback was being sought from families on their experience of using family hubs, plus surveys of those not using hubs. There was significant targeted work to vulnerable families. The Parent / Carer Panel had been recruited to work alongside the development of the hub services.

Questions were invited from Members.

The Chair welcomed the progress achieved. In response to queries regarding the nominations to the Parent / Carer Panel, it was advised that clear guidance was issued from the Department for Education in respect of recruitment, frequency of meetings, and role of the panel. There was clear criteria for the work of the panel and input was representative of the borough. The Chair stressed that it would be important to hear from all types of parents and carers and that it would be helpful for the Scrutiny Panel Members to receive more information on the panel's membership. Officers agreed to share more information, and added that they also employed translators.

ACTION: Helen Finnemore

In response to further queries from Members, it was advised that officers were also working with Housing colleagues to explore bespoke work for families in temporary accommodation to use the hubs. It was also confirmed that a Family Navigator was available at all times at each hub to signpost families and young people to all relevant services for support.

It was advised that the Department for Education agreed the delivery plan with the Council in respect of the transformation and type of programmes expected to be delivered, and that they scrutinised the delivery. Officers had developed a set of internal targets and performance indicators. The first year was important in providing a benchmark.

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It was confirmed that data was being collected on footfall, numbers of children using the hubs, ethnic origin of users and more. Given the limitations on space, there was a need to be selective and to prioritise the service delivery. Members asked about potential for dual purposing space in other buildings. Original plans had proposed spokes linked to family hubs. Close relationships were being developed with third sector partners and officers were pursuing work towards such links and networking.

In response to Members' queries regarding food support, it was advised that signposting to appropriate local partners and services was given, and Family Navigators were knowledgeable of these. Funding criteria for family hubs was strict, but it was an ambition to offer a food pantry from family hubs directly in the future.

The Chair thanked officers for providing the update report and for attending the meeting.

The Panel **AGREED** to note the good progress that has been made in relation to the:

- opening of Ponders End and Craig Park Youth and Family Hubs; and
- mobilisation and commissioning across the six Department of Education funded Start for Life services.

6. HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES & FOOD PROGRAMME (HAF) REVIEW 2021-23

Ivana Price, Head of Early Help, Youth and Community Safety, introduced the report, in respect of progress further to the original report to the Panel in October 2021.

The scheme had gone from strength to strength, with uptake increasing for each holiday period for both primary and secondary ages. There had been significant work around developing infrastructure to help deliver the programmes more effectively. An online booking system had been implemented, and an e-voucher system. More was being provided for children with special educational needs. The majority of providers were located in wards with the highest number of children who are eligible for free school meals benefits. The programmes were still being developed and capacity increased. Funding for the next year had been confirmed, and it had not been reduced.

Questions were invited from Members.

Members asked about data on users, and targeting to vulnerable families. Officers confirmed their work with Housing colleagues to reach families in temporary accommodation, and close work with social workers and benefits team, who helped publicise the programmes. The importance of timely communication to families was acknowledged, but that there were constraints around the point of assessing bids and confirming suppliers.

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In response to Members' queries regarding providers and the introduction of the procurement framework, it was acknowledged that some small providers did not have the capacity to engage with the way the funding was awarded, but officers did provide advice to them regarding the assessment requirements. Briefings and workshops were run for potential and existing providers. Provision for children with SEND needs was deliberately not moved onto the framework. Officers were confident there was good value for money in the provision. The Department for Education had expressed their confidence in the delivery.

Members requested to receive more information, via email, about the criteria and scoring of the providers' applications.

ACTION: Ivana Price

The Chair thanked officers for providing the update report and for attending the meeting.

The Panel **AGREED** to note the overview in relation to the implementation of the Department for Education funded Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

7. PUPIL PLACES UPDATE AND FINANCIAL IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

Noting that no press or public were in attendance at this point in the meeting, Peter Nathan, Director of Education, introduced the report of the Executive Director – People in respect of pupil places and falling school rolls.

The decline in school population was a major issue across London at present. The main reason for the fall in Enfield pupil numbers was a fall in the birth rate, as well as movement of families out of London. It was noted that popular schools tended to hold on to pupils and stay full. A fall below 24 or 25 children per class made it difficult to manage a school due to the impact on school budgets. There was an agreed process for maintained schools in deficit, and officers worked with every school. Collaboration between maintained schools was encouraged, and the Council was not looking to close any schools at the moment. School re-purposing may be used to address the demand for SEN provision. The decline in mainstream pupil places was likely to be a long term issue going forward. The Council's Executive Management Team had asked for a School Places Strategy to be produced by April. The Director of Education had been given appropriate powers to address deficits with schools.

Questions were invited from Members.

Members asked about schools operating at above 100% capacity. It was confirmed that this was allowable: such schools did not have to consider the other schools in the area and may raise their admission numbers if they were attracting pupils. Officers encouraged special schools to operate over capacity as the demand was there.

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In response to Members' queries regarding the situation across London, it was advised that deficits were worse in Inner London and that boroughs including Lambeth, Southwark, Hackney and Islington had closed schools. Only two boroughs out of the 32 had seen an increase in school pupils.

Members were given more detail regarding deficits at particular schools.

In response to Members' questions about data on home-schooled pupils, the current number in the borough was 480 children and this was monitored carefully on a regular basis. Each year contact would be made, to check the progress of the pupil in line with their age and ability, but this was not statutory. Home schooling of a child with an Educational Health Care Plan would not usually be agreed as it would be difficult to meet the needs of the child. The Council may not be aware of a child with no application for nursery or primary school, electively home educated, unless notified to the local authority.

Officers clarified class size averages in primary, secondary and SEN school provision, and associated funding.

It was confirmed that re-purposing of space in schools with capacity was quite common, and all possibilities were explored, including for community uses which could generate income.

Officers clarified that there would be concern around schools which reported deficit balances of 5% and above. Some government funding was available to assist, but there must be a recovery plan in place. Schools with an appropriate business manager tended to respond more effectively. It was confirmed that schools in deficits in Enfield were not all at the 5% and above level, and a significant number were not of concern to officers.

The Chair thanked officers for providing the report and for attending the meeting.

The Panel **AGREED** to note the review of the position with regard to pupil places in the borough and the financial impact on schools of falling rolls.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

NOTED that the Panel's work programme 2023/24 had been completed.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

NOTED the dates of the future meetings will be confirmed following Annual Council on Wednesday 15 May 2024.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.