

# Opposition Priority Business – Council Meeting 23 March 2016

## The Future of Educational Attainment and Children’s Services in Enfield

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Conservative Group has presented this paper as an opposition priority business because Educational and Service needs for our children is one of the most important and pressing issues the London Borough of Enfield currently faces. The Conservative group feels that this current Labour administration has not done everything in its power to tackle the educational and children’s services needs that face Enfield today. Looking after the education, mental, and physical wellbeing of our young people should be at the zenith of priorities that any administration has, but sadly, this has not been the case since 2010.
- 1.2 Furthermore, the financial situation that Enfield Council now finds itself in could have been avoided in part if measures had been taken sooner in addressing the needs that our younger people have. It is now too late to save the borough from the financial recklessness that has meant an enormous leap in capital expenditure between 2010/11 and 2016/17, and the drastic cuts in Youth Services which will be discussed later.

### **2. Background**

#### **2.1 Free Schools and Academies**

- 2.2 One of the myriad of exceptional policies to come from the Conservative led coalition, between 2010-15 and carried forward by the current Conservative government is the creation of Free Schools and the expansion of Academies, replacing grant maintained schools under Labour. Free Schools and Academies give parents, teachers, charities, businesses, and universities the opportunity to create an exceptional learning environment for our children. Furthermore, these schools also give the responsibility for teaching our children to those who know best, the outstanding teachers in the borough of Enfield.
- 2.3 Free Schools and Academies’ greater level of autonomy also mean that outside of the core subjects of English, Maths and Science they are exempt from teaching the national curriculum. They can set term dates, and teachers pay, which itself allows each Free School to adjust to local demands, and they do not have to fit in with a one size fits all model. Free Schools were legislated for in the Academies Act 2010, an act which now ensures that all new schools either have to be an Academy or a Free School. However, local authorities still have the statutory obligation to meet local demand for school places.

2.4 Importantly, funding for Free Schools comes from central government, meaning no local authority funds are used in the acquisition of the land, or construction of any Free School. This means that the government is actively helping ease the financial burdens on local authorities when it comes to education. Furthermore, pupil funding on an annual basis is set at the same level as for Local Education Authority (LEA) schools. Enfield Council has benefited enormously from Free Schools in every aspect, especially with regards to finances. The examples of Free Schools in Enfield below and the total cost for their land/site acquisition and construction illustrate this point:

- Woodpecker Hall Primary Academy: £5,550,000
- Enfield Heights Academy: £3,410,925
- Kingfisher Hall Primary Academy: £6,206,390

2.5 To date nationally there are 385 Free Schools, and a further 188 with Department of Education (DfE) approval. Enfield has 6 currently educating our children with a further 3 with approval from the DfE. The figures below illustrate how excellent Free Schools are, in providing school places (Capacity) in Enfield:

- Woodpecker Hall Primary Academy: 420
- Enfield Heights Academy: 175
- Kingfisher Hall Primary Academy: 480

2.6 The London Borough of Enfield has taken an active political decision since 2010 to oppose Free Schools and Academies, and have only acquiesced in building them as a result of their statutory obligations under the Academies Act 2010. Current Labour Party policy is to oppose all new Free Schools and to reverse their expansion. This inertia and political mismanagement based on nothing more than ideology, has meant that the borough will face a strain on school places in the coming years, with a significant pressure for school places arising in 2020. If the authority had not been so politically obstinate and actually encouraged Free School providers to open new schools in the borough then Enfield could have not only provided more school places, but also given parents more choice in which schools best fit their child's needs. Lastly, the authority could have saved itself a significant amount of money, using money offered by central government instead of local resources.

2.7 One final conclusion that can be drawn from Labour's decision not to support the proliferation of Free Schools and Academies, is that they have no direct control over them. By having these schools out of the LEA remit, Labour cannot centralise power into their own hands.

### 3. **Capital Expenditure**

3.1 As mentioned above, if Enfield had planned better for school places since 2010 there would not be such a significant increase in capital expenditure in the rush to create school places in the borough. Instead the authority has opened itself up to increased borrowing costs which impact directly on Council Tax, simply because of the lack of political will to create more school places spread over a period of time.

3.2 Capital expenditure for Education and Children Services was £31,131,000 in 2015/16 but is planned to increase drastically to £50,498,000 for the financial year 2016/17. This enormous level of borrowing in one tranche comes with the prospect of significantly higher interest rates. Labour has already bankrupted this country nationally and now seeks to do it on a local level. In fact nationally, the UK spends

more on interest repayments to service the debt Labour ran up, than on the national education budget that is the scale of their financial mismanagement.

4. **Educational attainment**

- 4.1 Enfield as a local authority is doing well in terms of educational attainment at primary school level and the Conservative Group recognises this is a great success. Enfield’s primary schools are currently above the English schools average in Writing, Reading, and Maths at Key stages 1&2.
- 4.2 However, one area of deep concern for the Conservative Group is the high level of absenteeism in Enfield’s primary schools. DfE figures show that Enfield is significantly weaker than the rest of England when it comes to absence rates. As it currently stands the average absence rate in England is 3.9%, whereas in Enfield this rate is 5.2%. The persistent average absence rate in England is 1.9% and in Enfield this figure is 5.1%. This high level of long-term absence of students is shameful, especially when the council has the resources and tools to ameliorate this worrying trend.
- 4.3 The converse is true however when discussing secondary schools. Absence rates at secondary level are at the national average. The Conservative Group is alarmed however by the poor performance rates at secondary school level. To illustrate this point:

	<b>5+ A*-GCSE's or equivalent including English and Maths</b>	<b>A*-C GCSE English and Maths</b>
<b>England state funded schools (Average)</b>	57.1%	59.2%
<b>Enfield (Average)</b>	54.5%	56.3%

- 4.4 These figures should be a concern to the Labour administration and they should do everything in their power to make sure that all our pupils receive a good education. To be below the average in educational attainment at secondary level as an entire authority is unacceptable.
- 4.5 For Enfield to be average is in itself disappointing when it comes to educating our children. Enfield must strive to be better than the average by working with our teachers and parents, to ensure Enfield’s pupils reach their full potential. Being below average is a disgrace and should be addressed immediately.

5. **English as a first and second language in education**

- 5.1 London suffers more acutely from the problems associated with mass immigration than any other part of the UK. One of the issues is the large number of pupils in Enfield’s education system who have English as a second language. There are a majority of pupils in 1,755 schools in the UK where English is not their first language. This presents substantial difficulties for teachers in the classroom. A prominent teachers union, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers have also expressed concerns about the difficulty this issue poses. However, Enfield and all educational authorities have a statutory obligation to teach all young people in our schools. What is deeply concerning is how poorly Enfield does in ensuring those children having English as a second language perform, compared to pupils who

have English as a first language. Enfield's performance is not only poor, but the educational attainment gap between these two groups is the third highest in London. This in itself is a travesty. Below is a table of all London boroughs' educational attainment gap in this area:

	Pupils with English as a first language	Pupils with English as an additional language	Attainment gap
	% achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs	% achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs	
Haringey	73.2%	66.7%	6.5
Brent	72.4%	66.9%	5.5
<b>ENFIELD</b>	<b>70.7%</b>	<b>65.5%</b>	<b>5.2</b>
Ealing	70.5%	65.7%	4.8
Waltham Forest	67.7%	63.4%	4.3
Barnet	76.7%	73.5%	3.2
Croydon	68.3%	67.5%	0.8
Hackney	71.2%	71.0%	0.2
Harrow	71.3%	71.2%	0.1
Hammersmith and Fulham	73.4%	73.6%	-0.2
Redbridge	76.2%	77.6%	-1.4
Camden	67.2%	69.3%	-2.1
Hounslow	73.4%	75.6%	-2.2
Wandsworth	65.7%	68.3%	-2.6
Richmond upon Thames	73.2%	76.5%	-3.3
Havering	68.3%	71.9%	-3.6
Bromley	74.2%	78.7%	-4.5
Lewisham	57.4%	63.3%	-5.9
Newham	61.7%	68.0%	-6.3
Kingston upon Thames	76.4%	83.4%	-7
Hillingdon	65.8%	73.3%	-7.5
Westminster	71.7%	79.3%	-7.6
Lambeth	64.9%	73.2%	-8.3
Greenwich	67.6%	75.9%	-8.3
Sutton	78.7%	88.5%	-9.8
Southwark	67.3%	77.2%	-9.9
Kensington and Chelsea	74.4%	84.4%	-10
Barking and Dagenham	62.1%	72.3%	-10.2
Islington	64.1%	74.3%	-10.2
Bexley	68.3%	78.7%	-10.4
Merton	67.4%	78.1%	-10.7
Tower Hamlets	61.4%	72.1%	-10.7

- 5.2 As shown above, Enfield is the 3<sup>rd</sup> worst performing borough in London in levelling the educational attainment gap between pupils with English as a second language and those with English as their first. Furthermore, there are many London boroughs that actually perform better than Enfield even though they have more pupils with English as a second language, which highlights the shambles Labour have been in running the borough's education system.
- 5.3 This issue must be addressed immediately as we have many schools in the borough of which most pupils do not have English as a second language. For example, over 72% of pupils in 13 schools in the borough have English as a second language. In total there are 37 schools in the borough which have over 50% of pupils with English as a second language.

5.4 The urgency of this matter cannot be overstated, as not only those pupils who have English as a second language suffer from an educational perspective, but also pupils who are native English speakers. It is unfair to both groups that Labour are failing to provide adequate services and support to educational staff to tackle this pressing issue.

## 6. **Youth Services and Youth Centres**

6.1 Broadly speaking the Conservative Group agrees with the approach taken by the Interim Director of Children's Services as a methodology for tackling budget reductions. Statutory Services are allocated funding to ensure the Council's legal obligations are met, after which other services receive an allocation where possible. Our concerns lay in three key areas;

(a) the distinct probability of the false economy of removing funding from Youth Centres;

(b) there appears to be a lack of political will to lobby Government to deal with the conflicting issue of families "having no recourse to public funds" verses the statutory requirements of the Children Act; and

(c) the apparent lack of political will to address the issue of young male Albanian citizens seeking asylum in Enfield. Applications should be strongly vetted to ensure their legitimacy.

## 7. **Youth Centres**

7.1 It is widely accepted that Youth Centres or Youth Clubs have a positive outcome for children and young people.

7.2 UK Youth have identified that the top three benefits of Youth Clubs or Youth Centres are;

1. A safe place to go.
2. Young people live happier and more fulfilling lives
3. Young people develop life skills

The top four issues affecting young people are:

1. Lack of aspiration.
2. Issues at home.
3. Peer pressure.
4. Lack of skills.

7.3 A survey conducted by Berkshire Youth has found that 82 per cent of children and young people who attend youth groups are happy, compared to 74 per cent of non-youth club users across a wide area.

The survey also found that 46 per cent of children and young people, who attend youth groups worry about their future, lower than the 57 per cent of non-youth club users.

In addition, 70 per cent of the 680 young people aged 8 to 18 surveyed, said they had volunteered in some way in an attempt to give something back to their local communities.

The survey is a huge reminder why funding cuts to youth services are so short-sighted. Youth clubs provide healthy, positive activities for young people, increasing their health, wellbeing, aspirations and engagement levels.

- 7.4 The Guardian has recently reported that there is a real risk of increased gang related crime with the demise of adequately and appropriately staffed Youth Centres.

The shift to a volunteer led model is an untested risk which may indeed lead to the closure of the Youth Centres by default. It should be noted that knife crime fell under the previous Conservative administration as a result of increased investment in Youth Services, following the deliberate policy adopted by Labour when they controlled the Borough in the late 1990s of cutting the service.

Youth work offers young people safe spaces to explore their identity, increase their confidence and think through the consequences of their actions. The shift from open access youth work in favour of targeted provision for the few presents a significant risk, not least that a proportion of the many will quickly shift to and swell the numbers of the targeted few, disproportionately driving up cost and eliminating any potential saving.

## **8. No Recourse to Public Finance**

- 8.1 The recent budget papers state “As a local authority we have a statutory responsibility under s17 of the Children’s Act 1989 to support families who have no access to benefits because of their immigration status. As a result Enfield currently supports over 120 families who have had their asylum applications rejected or have overstayed on visas and are awaiting deportation. There is a continuing risk that the numbers of families we are supporting under s17 of the Children’s Act will continue to increase especially if proposed changes to benefits for European nationals mean they lose their entitlement. This pressure is currently being met from corporate contingency as agreed by Cabinet 17th September 2014. Enfield subscribes to the No Recourse to Public Fund Network Connect database allowing for timely information exchange with the Home Office to ensure applications are dealt with as speedily as possible”.

- 8.2 It is widely recognised that this issue disproportionately affects London Boroughs, but within London Enfield is itself disproportionately affected. In fact Enfield as a Borough is responsible for 8% of the total number of families in this category in the whole of London.

- 8.3 There is no mention of lobbying Government for additional funding to recognise that any delay in Home Office process has a continuing negative impact on Council budgets, or a review of Housing Policy to share the burden with other Boroughs. Moreover we have to ask the question why is Enfield a magnet for so many of these families and the Albanians referred to below. Is it because we are seen as a “soft touch”? The likes of Wandsworth somehow manage to avoid the problem on the scale we experience.

## **9. Young Albanian men seeking asylum**

- 9.1 According to information provided to the Opposition Group, there is a cohort of young Albanian men from the same rural part of Albania who are seeking asylum and are centring their residency in Enfield. Whilst the vast majority of these young men appear to be model citizens and are achieving well at school, they are placing a considerable financial burden on the tax payers of Enfield and creating a significant budget pressure.

- 9.2. Some asylum claims are somewhat suspicious and clearly need to be looked at more closely. The Conservative Group will support any lobbying of the relevant agencies to restrict financial support to only those who have a genuine need, on the simple proposition that if we are seen to be lax in granting financial support, more and more will arrive here.

### **Recommendations**

1. That the Council undertake and publish a full financial risk assessment of the effects of the budget reductions to Youth Centres
2. That the Administration reviews its Housing Allocations Policy to ensure it is not disproportionately affected by having to fund those with no recourse to public funds via the Children Act.
3. To lobby central Government to ensure adequate funding for London Local Authorities affected by having to fund those with no recourse to public funds via the Children Act, especially where process delays prolong the financial pressure.
4. The Council will engage with and embrace the Governments Academy and Free School programme to secure sufficient school places for our children.
5. That the Council supports future Free School bids that present themselves to the local authority.
6. That the Administration will begin to plan for future school places in a way that does not impose further unnecessary financial burdens on the taxpayer.
7. That the Council will take firm action to reduce the high rates of school absence.
8. That the Administration will work with the Opposition to find ways of tackling the attainment gap between pupils with English as a first language and pupils with English as a second language.
9. That the Council will actively support any school currently not an academy that wishes to become one.
10. That the Council reports back within one year of this meeting to show what steps have been taken in achieving the goals set out in this OPB.