

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 12 JULY 2022

COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Chair
Councillor Ahmodul Kabir	Vice-Chair
Councillor Ana Miah	
Councillor Shubo Hussain	
Councillor Leelu Ahmed	

Co-optees Present in Person:

Dr Phillip Rice	Church of England Representative
-----------------	----------------------------------

Co-optees In Attendance Virtually:

Joanna Hannan	Representative of Diocese of Westminster
Abena Adeji	Parent Governor
Ashraf Zaman	Parent Governor

Apologies:

Councillor Abdul Wahid
Councillor Amina Ali

Others Present in Person:

Councillor Maium Talukdar	(Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning (Statutory Deputy Mayor))
---------------------------	---

Officers Present in Person:

Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities)
Jaber Khan	(Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate Strategy and Communities Team Strategy)
Sam Nair	Principal Social Worker - Children with Disabilities Team
Steve Nyakatawa	(Director of Education)
James Thomas	(Corporate Director, Children and Culture)
Farhana Zia	(Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Layla Richards (Head of Strategy and Policy – Children and Culture)
Judith St John (Director, Commissioning and Culture, Children’s Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Amina Ali and from Councillor Abdul Wahid.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made by the members.

3. CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE, QUORUM, MEMBERSHIP AND DATES OF MEETINGS 2022/23

Ms Farhana Zia, Democratic Services Officer asked members to note the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee’s terms of reference, membership, quorum and dates of meeting for the municipal year 2022/23.

She informed members the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed the terms of reference at its meeting of 7th June 2022.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note its Terms of reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of future meetings as set out in Appendices 1,2 and 3 in the report; and
2. **AGREED** to hold scheduled meetings of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee at 6:30 p.m.

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Ana Miah nominated Councillor Ahmodul Kabir for the position of vice-chair. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Bodrul Choudhury.

No further nominations were made.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee **RESOVLED** to:

1. Elect Councillor Ahmodul Kabir as the Vice-Chair of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2022-23.

5. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of 28th February 2022 were agreed and approved to be an accurate record of the meeting and were approved by the Sub-Committee.

6. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Overview of Children & Education

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning introduced the item stating the Mayor had made important pledges in relation to the safeguarding of children as well as a commitment to Education in his manifesto. Councillor Talukdar said he was working alongside officers to ensure the pledges made were turned into policy, in order to find working solutions for the residents of Tower Hamlets. He said it was important for scrutiny to scrutinise the policies of the Executive and as such he was happy to attend the meetings of the sub-committee.

Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children and Culture made a presentation providing an overview of the structure of the Directorate, the vision and key priorities for the Directorate. He said that although deprivation in the borough was improving, Tower Hamlets had one of the highest levels of child poverty; with high levels of need for children with special education needs and disability (SEND) and mental health. Mr Thomas said that despite this educational attainment was amongst the best and secondary schools had played a huge role in delivering good outcomes for children. Mr Thomas said that the offer provided by the Council was effective in that there were low levels of children in care.

Mr Thomas went on to explain that some areas of work undertaken by the Directorate was governed by statutory legislation and National policy, such as children safeguarding and education, where services were regulated and inspected. Whereas other areas such as parks, leisure, youth centres the provision was a universal offer. Mr Thomas said at the heart of their work they had a policy of being person-centred and co-production of services.

In response to comments and questions from members the following was noted:

- Mr Thomas said the overarching objective of the Children's Safeguarding partnership was to protect children from harm.
- Mr Thomas explained children services had been judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted five years ago however through the improvement plan and investment, the service had been judged as 'good' two years later.
- Mr Thomas said a further inspection of the service was imminent and as such they had strived to quality assure their work, audit it and conduct peer reviews to scrutinise their services. Mr Thomas said he believed they were making good progress however the service could not be complacent.

- Regarding anti-terrorism work, Mr Thomas said the Council was a key partner in the Prevent programme. He said the board was working to identify early and effectively, individuals that had been groomed and vulnerable to exploitation.
- Mr Thomas said the partnership had put in place a new strategy to tackle the risks associated with drug dealing gangs and the sexual exploitation of girls.
- In response to census data and changes in demography, especially in relation to school closures, Mr Thomas reassured the sub-committee no school closures were planned. He said they were working with schools with falling school rolls and identifying ways to best support them, such as making structural changes and creating federated schools.
 - **ACTION:** The Strategy and Policy Officer to provide a link to the Council website in relation to the latest census data.
- Councillor Talukdar said the aspirations of the Executive was to deliver the pledges made in the manifesto; to ensure every child does well in school right through to achieving good employment. Councillor Talukdar said tackling anti-social behaviour and providing youth clubs were also part of the plan, however the biggest challenge were budgets and finances.

The Chair thanked Councillor Talukdar and Mr James Thomas for their presentation.

6.2 Introduction to Education

Mr Steve Nyakatawa, Director for Education provided the Sub-Committee an overview of his area of responsibility. He explained the structure of his department and the key educational attainment figures that had been achieved, giving a breakdown on attendance, ethnicity and the number of children in school.

The Sub-Committee also heard from Ms Tracy Smith, Director of the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP). Ms Smith explained the purpose of the partnership and how it worked with schools and their leadership teams, to provide challenge, support and analytic data, with the aim to lead on improvements.

Mr Nyakatawa stated that some of the challenges and priorities for the Education service was to deliver SEND improvements and manage increasing levels of demand. He said they also had work to do to improve outcomes for children post 16.

In response to comments and questions from member the following was noted:

- The Council has an online admission's process for parents applying for primary and secondary school places. The objective is to provide parents with their 1st preference and most parents do get this. There may be instances when this is not possible especially with 'in-year' admissions.
- The local area inspection for SEND identified 4 areas of weakness. The written statement of action was agreed in the 1st round and lead officers are leading working groups to drive the improvements needed. The lead officers meet monthly and report to the SEND Improvement Board. The DfE and NHS England also monitor the progress made.
- The 'Let's talk sessions' have led to parents being involved in shaping the 'local offer' and design of services. Social media is being used to communicate with parents.
- Mr Nyakatawa explained the local authority had much more influence over the education of 5–16-year-olds due to their statutory duties but post 16, this was not the case. He said they tried to use their influence and work in partnership however progress was slow. He said some 6th forms are too small and therefore lack the expertise needed to improve attainment for this cohort of students.
- In response to diversity in the school workforce, Ms Smith stated they were attracting and keeping leaders and said the profile of leaders was reflective of the community. She said change was happening, with up-and-coming leaders from diverse backgrounds.

The Chair thanked Mr Steve Nyakatawa and Ms Tracy Smith for their presentation.

6.3 Introduction to Supporting Families

Mr Sam Nair, Head of the Learning Academy and Principal Social Worker gave a presentation on the work of the Supporting Families department, on behalf of Ms Susannah Beasley-Murray.

Mr Nair explained the structure of the department and the areas it covered. He said the department provided a wide range of services from the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which identified children at risk to the Justice and Young People's Service. Mr Nair explained the priorities of the department and the key principles that underpin the work of the department. He provided facts and figures showing the number of children in care, the number in need and the number offered early help. He said it was vital to support families early, to prevent them needing statutory services.

Mr Nair said demand was back at pre-covid levels and as such they continued to focus on key challenges and risks ensuring they had a skilled workforce, which focussed on prevention work as well as ensuring support was there for families who needed it.

In response to comments and questions from members the following was noted:

- Mr Sam Nair stated that children and young people experiencing a mental health crisis would be referred to the CAMHS service for assessment, help and support.
- In answer to why and how the reoffending rate of 25.5% had been achieved, Mr James Thomas said this was due to three factors. He said their assessment process was consistently strong and their relationship-based practice meant they understood the individual needs of each young person. Mr Thomas said they provided quality multi-agency working, with different agencies working together as well as individualised relationship-based casework. Social and youth workers get to know the young person really well and tailor interventions accordingly.

The Chair thanked Mr Nair for his presentation.

6.4 Introduction to Integrated Commissioning and Culture

Ms Judith St John, Director for Commissioning and Culture made the final presentation. She outlined the areas covered by her department and said that whilst her department did not have statutory obligations, they provided an important outlet for people. She said the arts, parks and events held and enjoyed played a pivotal role during the pandemic and lockdown, especially the physical and mental wellbeing of people.

Ms St John said they provided high quality support to services across the Children's Directorate from commissioning and contracting external support to supporting people to stay fit and healthy. She said there was a report going the Cabinet about the seven leisure centres within the borough and how they can be redeveloped. She said her department worked closely to provide support to SEND and mental health needs.

In response to comments and questions from members the following was noted.

- Councillor Shubo Hussain commented that the Grime scene in Tower Hamlets ought to be promoted especially as it was the originator for this music genre. Ms St John agreed and said the Council's Arts and Events Team did promote and celebrate success. She said the council had run a successful programme of events to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh Independence and said they would continue to work to do this. She said it was heartening to see a pledge in the manifesto to invest more in promoting culture and said this was a great opportunity for young people to get involved. She said Tower Hamlets had a very rich cultural history.

The Chair thanked Ms Judith St John for her presentation.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23 PLANNING

Mr Afazul Hoque, Head of Strategy and Communities stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were holding a workshop on the 16th July to formulate its work programme and that of the sub-committees. Mr Hoque asked members of the sub-committee if there were areas and/or topics that the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee wanted to scrutinise as part of their work programme.

Mr Hoque explained that with four more meetings scheduled in the municipal year, the proposal was to have thematic meetings looking at different aspects of the sub-committee's terms of reference and responsibility. He asked if members had a view on this.

In response to comments and questions the following was noted:

- Dr Phillip Rice proposed the sub-committee look at admission catchment areas and why there was an east/west split, in the borough. Mr Hoque thanked Dr Rice for his suggestion and said a briefing session could be provided on this subject.
- Ms Joanna Hannan suggested school budgets relating to SEND ought to be considered as a topic, especially as schools are losing SEND places. She said the sub-committee ought to consider if specialist units were needed.
- Mr Ashraf Zaman suggested the schools PSHE curriculum be scrutinised as many parents felt uneasy about the lack of consultation and collaboration with parents.

The Chair thanked the members of their suggestions.

8. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

There was no other business to be discussed.

The meeting ended at 8.27 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury
Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee