

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Agenda

Tuesday, 12 July 2022 at 6.30 p.m.
**Committee Room One - Town Hall, Mulberry
Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London, E14 2BG**

Members:

Chair: Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Vice Chair:

Councillor Abdul Wahid, Councillor Ahmodul Kabir, Councillor Ana Miah, Councillor Amina Ali, Councillor Shubo Hussain and Councillor Leelu Ahmed

Co-opted Members:

Dr Phillip Rice (Church of England Representative), Joanna Hannan (Representative of Diocese of Westminster), (Vacant) (Muslim Faith Community Representative), Abena Adeji (Parent Governor), Ashraf Zaman (Parent Governor) and (Vacant) (Parent Governor (Vacant))

Substitutes: Councillor Harun Miah, Councillor Kamrul Hussain, Councillor Amin Rahman, Councillor Mufeedah Bustin, Councillor Asma Islam and Councillor Amy Lee

[The quorum for the Sub-Committee is 3 voting Members]

Contact for further enquiries:

Democratic Services,
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020 7364 0842

1st Floor, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, E14 2BG

<http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk>



Public Information

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A Guide to Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee has been established to scrutinise the provision, planning and management of children and young people's services – including children's social care; safeguarding children; children in care; SEN and education inclusion, troubled families and the Youth Offending Service (YOS) education, learning and schools; youth services; early years; education capital estate and youth & play services.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee will discharge the Council's statutory functions to undertake overview and scrutiny, insofar as these pertain to Children's and Education matters. This will include:

- a) Reviewing and/or scrutinising decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of the Council's children social care and education functions;
- b) Advising the Mayor or Cabinet of key issues/questions arising in relation to children and education reports due to be considered by the Mayor or Cabinet;
- c) Making reports and/or recommendations to the Council and/or Mayor or Cabinet in connection with the discharge of children and education functions;
- d) Delivering (c) by organising an annual work programme, drawing on the knowledge and priorities of the Council, registered providers and other stakeholders, that will identify relevant topics or issues that can be properly scrutinised;
- e) Holding service providers to account, where recent performance fails to meet the recognised standard, by looking at relevant evidence and make recommendations for service improvements;
- f) Considering children and education matters affecting the area or its inhabitants, including where these matters have been brought to the attention of the sub-committee by tenant and resident associations, or members of the general public; and
- g) The sub-committee will report annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on its work.

Public Engagement

Meetings of the committee are open to the public to attend, and a timetable for meeting dates and deadlines can be found on the council's website.

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Tuesday, 12 July 2022

6.30 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (PAGES 7 - 8)

Members are reminded to consider the categories of interest, identified in the Code of Conduct for Members to determine: whether they have an interest in any agenda item and any action they should take. For further details, see the attached note from the Monitoring Officer.

Members are also reminded to declare the nature of the interest at the earliest opportunity and the agenda item it relates to. Please note that ultimately it is the Members' responsibility to identify any interests and also update their register of interest form as required by the Code.

If in doubt as to the nature of an interest, you are advised to seek advice prior the meeting by contacting the Monitoring Officer or Democratic Services.

3. Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of Meetings 2022/23

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

5. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (PAGES 19 - 30)

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the held on 28th February 2022.

6. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Overview of Children & Education

6.2 Introduction to Education

6.3 Introduction to Supporting Families

6.4 Introduction to Integrated Commissioning and Culture



7. **Work Programme 2022/23 planning**

8. **ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT**

Next Meeting of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Thursday, 13 October 2022 at 6.30 p.m. to be held in Committee Room One - Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London, E14 2BG



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Town Hall
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
E14 2BG

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Agenda Item 2

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AT MEETINGS– NOTE FROM THE MONITORING OFFICER

This note is for guidance only. For further details please consult the Code of Conduct for Members at Part C, Section 31 of the Council's Constitution

(i) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)

You have a DPI in any item of business on the agenda where it relates to the categories listed in **Appendix A** to this guidance. Please note that a DPI includes: (i) Your own relevant interests; (ii) Those of your spouse or civil partner; (iii) A person with whom the Member is living as husband/wife/civil partners. Other individuals, e.g. Children, siblings and flatmates do not need to be considered. Failure to disclose or register a DPI (within 28 days) is a criminal offence.

Members with a DPI, (unless granted a dispensation) must not seek to improperly influence the decision, must declare the nature of the interest and leave the meeting room (including the public gallery) during the consideration and decision on the item – unless exercising their right to address the Committee.

DPI Dispensations and Sensitive Interests. In certain circumstances, Members may make a request to the Monitoring Officer for a dispensation or for an interest to be treated as sensitive.

(ii) Non - DPI Interests that the Council has decided should be registered – (Non - DPIs)

You will have 'Non DPI Interest' in any item on the agenda, where it relates to (i) the offer of gifts or hospitality, (with an estimated value of at least £25) (ii) Council Appointments or nominations to bodies (iii) Membership of any body exercising a function of a public nature, a charitable purpose or aimed at influencing public opinion.

Members must declare the nature of the interest, but may stay in the meeting room and participate in the consideration of the matter and vote on it **unless:**

- A reasonable person would think that your interest is so significant that it would be likely to impair your judgement of the public interest. **If so, you must withdraw and take no part in the consideration or discussion of the matter.**

(iii) Declarations of Interests not included in the Register of Members' Interest.

Occasions may arise where a matter under consideration would, or would be likely to, **affect the wellbeing of you, your family, or close associate(s) more than it would anyone else living in the local area** but which is not required to be included in the Register of Members' Interests. In such matters, Members must consider the information set out in paragraph (ii) above regarding Non DPI - interests and apply the test, set out in this paragraph.

Guidance on Predetermination and Bias

Member's attention is drawn to the guidance on predetermination and bias, particularly the need to consider the merits of the case with an open mind, as set out in the Planning and Licensing Codes of Conduct, (Part C, Section 34 and 35 of the Constitution). For further advice on the possibility of bias or predetermination, you are advised to seek advice prior to the meeting.

Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992 - Declarations which restrict Members in Council Tax arrears, for at least a two months from voting

In such circumstances the member may not vote on any reports and motions with respect to the matter.

Further Advice contact: Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, Tel: 0207 364 4800.

APPENDIX A: Definition of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

(Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012, Reg 2 and Schedule)

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vacation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by the Member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of the Member. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority— (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to the Member's knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the relevant authority; and (b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where— (a) that body (to the Member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and (b) either— (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee</p> <p>Tuesday, 12th July 2022</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of: Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Classification: Open (Unrestricted)</p>
<p>Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of Meetings 2022/23</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Farhana Zia
Wards affected	All wards

Executive Summary

This report sets out the Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of Meetings of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the Municipal Year 2022-23 for the information of Members of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Recommendations:

The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Note its Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of future meetings as set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to this report.
2. Determine the preferred time at which the scheduled meetings will start

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The report is brought annually to assist new and returning Members by informing them of the framework of the Committee set out in the Council's Constitution.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The report asks Members solely to confirm its constitutional arrangements and therefore they are not required to consider any alternative options.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 Each year, following the establishment of the Committee at the Council's Annual Meeting, it is customary that the newly established committee or sub committee considers its procedural arrangements.

Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee Arrangements

- 3.2 At the Annual General Meeting of the full Council held on 25th May 2021, the Authority approved proportionality, establishment of the Committees and Panels of the Council and appointment of Members thereto. It delegated authority to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) to establish its sub-committees.
- 3.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on the 7th June 2022 and agreed to set up three sub-committees, including this one. The Committee also agreed the terms of reference, chairs and membership for all three sub-committees.
- 3.4 The membership of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2022/23 is set out at Appendix 2 to the report.
- 3.5 As reported in more detail to OSC on 7 June, the sub committee's membership includes five statutory education co-optees. Four of the statutory education co-optee positions were appointed by the OSC on 7 June; one position remains to be filled. The sub committee's membership also includes a Muslim representative role for which recruitment is underway. In accordance with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, all education co-optees (including the Muslim representative) can speak on all matters and can vote on education matters only.
- 3.6 Having been established by Council, it is customary that the sub committee (at its first meeting of the municipal year) notes its terms of reference and quorum. These are set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- 3.7 The Committee's meetings for the remainder of the year, as agreed at the same meeting of the Council, are also provided at Appendix 3.
- 3.8 Meetings are scheduled to take place at 6:30 p.m. except where the meeting falls within the month of Ramadan where they will aim to take place at 5:30 p.m. The sub committee may wish to discuss an appropriate start time that suits its Members at the first meeting.
- 3.9 It may be necessary to convene additional meetings of the sub committee should urgent business arise. Officers will consult with the Chair and Members as appropriate.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 When drawing up the schedule of dates, consideration was given to avoiding school holiday dates and known dates of religious holidays and other important dates where at all possible.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment

- 5.2 Not applicable to this report.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 This report recommends that the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee note its Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership, and Dates of future meetings as set out in Appendices 1 – 3. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1. The Council is required to establish an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discharge the functions under sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000. Establishment of the Children and Education sub-committee is consistent with Paragraph 9 of Part A, and Paragraph 19.6 of Part B of the Council's Constitution. The proposed membership of the sub-committee complies with the requirements of Schedule A1 to the Local Government Act 2000.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- [Establishment of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees and Appointment of Members to those Sub-Committees, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 7 June 2022.](#)

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Terms of Reference.

- Appendix 2 –Membership of Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee
- Appendix 3 – Meeting procedure and dates of meeting.

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- None.

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

<p>Summary Description: The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee has been established to scrutinise the provision, planning and management of children and young people's services – including children's social care; safeguarding children; children in care; SEN and education inclusion, troubled families and the Youth Offending Service (YOS) education, learning and schools; youth services; early years; education capital estate and youth & play services.</p>	
<p>Membership: 6 non-executive councillors – the chair and five councillors; and 6 co-opted members (consisting of: - a Church of England and a Roman Catholic representative; 3 Parent Governor representatives under paragraph 7 of Schedule A1 to the Local Government Act 2000; and a Muslim faith representative).</p>	
Functions	Delegation of Functions
<p>1. Reviewing and/or scrutinising decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of the Council's children social care and education functions;</p>	None
<p>2. Advising the Mayor or Cabinet of key issues/questions arising in relation to children and education reports due to be considered by the Mayor or Cabinet;</p>	None
<p>3. Making reports and/or recommendations to the Council and/or Mayor or Cabinet in connection with the discharge of children and education functions;</p>	None
<p>4. Delivering (3) by organising an annual work programme, drawing on the knowledge and priorities of the Council, registered providers and other stakeholders, that will identify relevant topics or issues that can be properly scrutinised;</p>	None
<p>5. Holding service providers to account, where recent performance</p>	None

<p>fails to meet the recognised standard, by looking at relevant evidence and make recommendations for service improvements;</p>	
<p>6. Considering children and education matters affecting the area or its inhabitants, including where these matters have been brought to the attention of the sub-committee by tenant and resident associations, or members of the general public; and</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>7. The sub-committee will report annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on its work.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Quorum: Three voting Members</p>	
<p>Additional Information: Is contained in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution Part A Section 9 (Overview and Scrutiny) Constitution Part B Section 30 (Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules) Constitution Part D Section 53 (Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Procedure Rules) 	

SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP 2022-2023

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub Committee (Seven non-executive members of the Council plus six co-opted members) Can be drawn from all non-executive members. Lead Scrutiny Member for Children & Education will chair			
<i>Aspire Group (4)</i>	<i>Labour Group (3)</i>	<i>Ungrouped (0)</i>	<i>Co-Opted Members (for information – to be appointed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee)</i>
Cllr Bodrul Choudhury Cllr Abdul Wahid Cllr Ahmodul Kabir Cllr Ana Miah Substitutes (up to 3 members):- Cllr Harun Miah Cllr Kamrul Hussain Cllr Amin Rahman	Cllr Amina Ali Cllr Shubo Hussain Cllr Leelu Ahmed Substitutes (up to 3 members):- Cllr Asma Islam Cllr Amy Lee Cllr Mufedah Bustin	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joanna Hannan • Philip Rice • Abena Adeji • Ashraf Zaman Others to be appointed following nomination/recruitment exercise.

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**CHILDREN AND EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE**

**MEETING PROCEDURE AND SCHEDULE OF MEETING DATES
2022-2023**

1. Chair and Membership

- 1.1 Sub-Committees will be chaired by a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. For this Sub-Committee it will be the Lead Scrutiny Member for Children and Education for 2022-23. The membership of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee has been determined by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Frequency of meetings

- 2.1 The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee will meet 5 times this year. The following dates are available in the Corporate Diary for 2022/23:

- Tuesday, 12th July 2022
- Thursday, 13th October 2022
- Thursday, 8th December 2022
- Thursday, 9th February 2023
- Thursday, 4th May 2023

Meetings are scheduled to take place at 6.30pm. The Sub-Committee may arrange other meetings as and when necessary to consider any urgent issues as well as arranging meetings for detailed scrutiny reviews and challenge sessions.

Support to the Sub-Committee

- 4.1 The Divisional Director for Strategy, Policy and Performance, will be the senior officer lead and champion the work of the Sub-Committee.
- 4.2 The servicing of meetings will be undertaken by the Council's Democratic Services Team which will include:
- (a) Meeting room bookings, refreshments
 - (b) Agenda preparation and dispatch
 - (c) Taking minutes and recording of actions/decisions

(d) Dissemination of minutes and decisions

The Children and Culture Strategy and Policy Team will provide policy support to the Sub-Committee which will include:

(e) Research and analysis

(f) Work programme development

(g) Support with undertaking reviews and challenge sessions

(h) Drafting review reports and challenge sessions

5. Proceedings

5.1 The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee will generally meet in public and conduct its proceedings in accordance with the rules and procedure contained in the Council's Constitution such as the:

(a) Council Procedure Rules;

(b) Access to Information Procedure Rules, and

(c) The Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Daniel Kerr	(Strategy and Policy Manager)
Steve Nyakatawa	(Director of Education)
John O'Shea	Support and Learning Service, Early Years
Tony Parker	(Head of Service for the Children's Joint Commissioning Team)
Layla Richards	(Head of Strategy and Policy – Children and Culture)
James Thomas	(Corporate Director, Children and Culture)
Warwick Tomsett	Joint Director, Integrated Commissioning
Susannah Beasley-Murray	Director of Supporting Families
Jill McGinley	Head of Parent and Family Support
Jenny Miller	Manager, Family Information and Support Service

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Helal Uddin, sub-committee member and Cllr Asma Begum, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet member for Children, Youth Services and Equalities.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of 21st October and 8th December 2021 were agreed to be an accurate record of the meetings and were approved by the Sub-Committee.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Covid 19 Update

The Sub-Committee received a verbal update in relation to the continued impact Covid-19 was having on children and young people in Tower Hamlets.

Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children & Culture introduced the item and stated all services were working in partnership to deliver the 'bounce back' strategic initiative. He said there were three distinct themes, (1) Bounce back with learning (2) Bounce back through play and (3) Bounce back with support.

Mr Thomas said they were in the recovery stage from the Omicron variant of Covid-19, and as Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership's silver group they

were looking closely at the impact the recent strain was having on social care services as well as schools. He said they needed to understand the demand and needs of children and families. He said there were five areas they were focussing on: (1) Early years and the lack of opportunities to socialise (2) mental health and emotional wellbeing (3) Domestic abuse and violence (4) family poverty and (5) SEND children and families.

Mr Steve Nyakatawa, Director of Education then provided the Sub-Committee with an update on the impact the latest variant was having on Education. Mr Nyakatawa said one of the key pressures was the absence of staff during the term and the shortage of agency staff to cover those absences. He said he was pleased no schools had been closed during the autumn term, with senior leadership teams reconfiguring classes and taking on teaching roles. He said schools were perusing the 'Every Child Online' campaign to ensure the issue of digital poverty was being addressed. Mr Nyakatawa said the Tower Hamlets Emotional Wellbeing Service had been providing support to children and schools.

Mr Nyakatawa stated they were working with the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP) to identify and support children with gaps in their reading and maths. He said THEP was supporting school leaders to address these gaps as well as support children taking exams over the Summer.

The Sub-Committee then heard from Ms Beasley- Murray Director of Supporting Families who stated that she had seen clear examples of good practice, since joining Tower Hamlets. She said the feedback from families, chairs and social workers was positive and showed how creatively everyone was working to protect and safeguard children. She said performance had dipped over Christmas due to the Omicron variant, with 77.6% of visits being completed within four weeks however this had recovered in January 2022 to 90%. Likewise, child protection visits had slightly dipped from 94.4% within 10 working days but had now recovered to 96.6%. Ms Beasley-Murray said they continued to put focus on performance and sickness rates and would be monitoring caseloads and impact on staff. Ms Beasley-Murray said the recruitment and retention of staff, whilst not an issue during the pandemic, was seeing a shift with many members of staff deciding to take a career break or return to visit family over an extended period. Ms Beasley-Murray said this shift was not unique to Tower Hamlets however they would work with the Social Work Academy to ensure staffing levels were maintained.

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

- The Chair stated it was apparent the pandemic had had a huge impact on children and young people as well as on the workforce. She said this would have a lasting impact for a long time and thanked Officers for highlighting the issues.
- In response to what staffing levels would be like for February/March 2022, Mr Thomas responded stating the impact of staffing absences

had eased over the second half of January however in terms of staff turnover, the Supporting Families Team was still in a favourable position. The locum rates were below the London average.

- Ms Beasley-Murray added the recruitment and retention of new qualified social workers and those with one or two-years' experience and Team Managers was stable. She said social workers with five or more years of experience were the ones who were leaving the service. She said five people in the MASH and assessment teams had given their notice. She said they were looking to recruit permanent staff and said staff were encouraged to move cross specialism within social work.
- Councillor Wood stated that whilst it was helpful to hear a verbal update on the recruitment and retention of staff, he would like to see a report to the sub-committee, on a regular basis on how stable the workforce is, with figures and percentages provided showing the increase or decrease and the effect this was having in delivering social work to families in need.
- Councillor Salva-Macallan, agreed with Councillor Wood and said a dashboard highlighting the recruitment and retention of social workers was required especially given the proposed cuts to specialist posts such as those supporting African families and Muslim communities. She asked if the risk, because of the cuts is being measured. Mr Thomas said there wasn't any additional instability to specialist roles, despite the overall reduction in capacity. He said they had not moved rapidly to make a cut and were assessing the situation.
- Councillor Bex White said the dashboard was being worked on by the Directorate and information would be provided to members of the sub-committee, in the new municipal year.
- **ACTION:** Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children and Culture to provide a note to the Sub-Committee members on staffing levels and the impact the pandemic has had within the next two to three weeks.

The Chair summarised the main point of the discussion as follows:

1. The Children's Directorate had worked extremely hard over the pandemic to help support families in need and would continue to do so. The Corporate Director to provide a written update to Members of the Sub-Committee in relation to the staffing levels for teams within the Directorate.

4.2 Special Education Needs and Disability

The Chair Councillor Bex White appraised the Sub-Committee with the aims of the scrutiny session and said the Sub-Committee would first hear from services users; second comment on the written statement of action, following

the Ofsted Inspection and ways to improve the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) and thirdly the Directorate's action plan.

The Sub-Committee then heard from Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children and Culture who stated that meeting the needs of children and young people especially those with Special Educational Needs and Disability was an absolute priority for the Safeguarding partnership. Mr Thomas said a joined-up system which met the range of need was crucial. He said as the Chair of the SEND Improvement Board, it was vital the voices of children and young people were at the centre of the improvement work. He said whilst positive outcomes, in particular educational outcomes were above the national average, improvement was required in relation to EHCP plans. He said many services fell short of expectation and work of underway to improve the user experience.

Service Users Perspective

The Sub-Committee received a presentation from Ms Sornnaly Hossain, a Young Person with SEND and a member of 'Our Time Youth Forum.' Ms Hossain was supported by Ms Jenny Miller, manager of the Family Information and Support Service.

The main points to note were:

- Ms Sornnaly Hossain explained the achievements of the forum and the different activities the forum has been involved in. The presentation highlighted the challenges faced by SEND young people and the future aims of the forum.
- She said it was vital the voices of young people with SEND were heard and were listened to when shaping new policies or services.
- Ms Hossain highlighted the ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) cards the Our Time Forum had designed in collaboration with the Council and NHS.

The Sub-Committee then heard from Ms Sam Gager, Chair of the Independent Parent and Carer Forum.

The main points made by Ms Gager were:

- Parents of SEND children were at breaking point, because of the curtailments made to services during the pandemic and lockdown. She said many parents were finding it hard to cope with the daily pressures of managing and caring for SEND children.
- She said the Council needed to re-examine the respite offer available to parents. She said provision should be tailored to meet the different requirements and needs of every family, rather than be a 'one size fits all' solution.

- Ms Gager said it was important for parent representation on the various different Boards and forums, especially on CAMHS services so the voice of parents and children with SEND is heard.

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

- In response to what Councillors could do to help the Our Time Forum in their campaign for change, Ms Hossain said many children with SEND were isolated and therefore it would help if Councillors promoted inclusion and worked to dispel the ignorance about children with SEND conditions. She said bullying was a major trigger behind exclusion and more needed to be done to highlight this. Another factor which held back SEND children was access to work. Many employers were not positive and did not offer equal opportunities to those with disabilities.
- Councillor Salva Macallan said it was clear from the Ofsted Inspection that the voice of young people and their parents was required, to co-produce change and design of services. Councillor Salva Macallan asked if two places on the SEND Improvement Board for young people and parents were enough especially when addressing the action plan. Ms Miller responded saying they worked with the Our Time Forum members to collate views and felt they had representation at higher levels of the partnership. Ms Gager echoed this saying her Forum represented smaller groups. Having too many parents involved would overwhelm the work of the Improvement Board. Although parents should be invited when looking at specific topics and/or conditions.
- In response to if a list was available of all the small groups that feed into the Parent Forum, Ms Gager said, one had been stated pre-Covid but hadn't been maintained. Ms Gager said they were driving change through the Forum, and it was difficult to police individual groups. She said they sign posted people to relevant groups and organisations.
- Ms Hossain explained how she became involved with the 'Our Time Forum' and how she encourages others to join.
- Ms Gager further explained the improvements she envisaged in terms of respite. She said a physical centre for parents to meet was a good idea and a short break offering whole family respite had its place and purpose. However, she also believed more could be done by offering families flexible respite, such as free or discounted cinema and theatre tickets, that parents could use to unwind or spend time with other children/siblings within the family unit.
- **ACTION:** Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children and Culture to provide the Sub-Committee with a note outlining the respite care currently available.
- Mr Thomas said the Directorate was looking to recommission its respite offer and realised its relevance especially following the pandemic and how vital it is to ensure families have the support they need.
- Ms Gager echoed Ms Hossain's point about access to employment and said most employers do not understand the need of those with SEND

or cannot make physical changes to the workspace to accommodate young people with SEND.

The Chair thanked Ms Sonnaly Hossain and Ms Sam Gager for attending the Sub-Committee and expressing their views in relation to the SEND service.

SEND Inspection and Improvement work

The Sub-Committee heard from Mr Steve Nyakatawa, Director for Education, who provided an update about the remedial action taken to address the outcome of the Local Area inspection.

Mr Nyakatawa made a presentation to the Sub-Committee outlining the findings of the of the Local Area Inspection, the strengths and weakness identified by the inspectorate as well as the steps taken to address the recommendations made in the report. Mr Nyakatawa said there were four areas highlighted in the Written Statement of Action, that require improvement: (1) Quality and oversight of EHC Plans including the annual review process, (2) ASD assessment and diagnosis waiting times, (3) Speech and language provision, and (4) Communication between area leaders and parents. He said Senior leaders accepted the findings within the inspection letter and had redoubled their commitment to improvement.

Mr John O'Shea, Head of SEND provided a detailed explanation on the steps take to address the quality and oversight of EHC Plans including the annual review process. He said the Chair had alluded to the EHCP Plans of those who already had a Plan and if these were to be reviewed. Mr O'Shea reassured the Sub-Committee that these were being reviewed to ensure they met the current needs of SEND children and were being updated accordingly. He said the issue identified by the inspector related to the conversion of the old 'statements' to the EHCP plans and work was underway to address this. He said they were looking at the quality assurance and annual review processes so that they were robust and met current standards and expectations.

Mr Tony Parker, Interim Head of Children's Commissioning then addressed the Sub-Committee explaining the steps which had been taken to reduce the waiting times for ASD assessment and to review & improve the full holistic pathway for children and families pre, during and post diagnosis. Mr Parker said the ASD Pathway Review Group had two subgroups which included parent representatives. He said the CCG had invested an additional £278k over two years to support the ASDAS to increase capacity to complete the assessments backlog and reduce the overall waiting times for children and families which were greatly impacted by Covid-19 pandemic.

Lastly, Mr Nyakatawa, provided the Sub-Committee with an update on how the action plan included a workstream addressing communication with parents and local area leaders. He said a clear communication strategy which

encompassed the Local Offer, social media, Let's Talk SEND, SEND Newsletter (with spotlight contributions from parents/carers) and parents/carers' 'evenings' for children at key transition points, were all ways in which the Directorate hoped to improve communication with users and parents.

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

- The Chair asked what support was provided by the Speech and Language Service to parents, where children have a known condition that affects their speech and language development. Mr Tony Parker responded saying the under 5's were provided with targeted support through children and family centres. He said families were supported when a diagnosis is made.
- Regarding the example specifically given by the Chair, relating to Downs Syndrome Mr James Dodds, Head of Children Communication Therapy and Clinical Lead for SEND, at Barts Health said there was a clear referral pathway, although more needed to be done to ensure clinical staff at hospitals were engaging with community teams. He said this was not consistent and required improvement.
- The Chair enquired who would be responsible for the overall communication between teams. She asked how the barriers were to be overcome. Mr Dodds responded stating it was for the NHS to coordinate and ensure there was a clear pathway to referral as well as sufficient community support. Mr Parker added it was a partnership which involved parent groups and as such the workstream was looking to improve the user experience of speech and language services.
- In response to how families are made aware of the support available, Mr Parker said services were primarily promoted through the 'local offer'. He said the website was being updated and was the one source of information. He said families were also being briefed on what was available through the Let's Talk SEND campaign and SEND newsletter.
- In response to if the 'growth' referred to in the Written Statement of Action was permanent staff or temporary, to deal with the backlog of ECHP's, Mr James Thomas said this was permanent for one year, for the catch-up work that was needed. He said much depended on the Council Budget which was being decided on.
- In response the 20-week target, Mr O'Shea said this had slipped owing to capacity issues as well as the impact of Covid-19. He said the improvement plan was specifically looking to reduce the backlog from 2019.
- **ACTION:** Councillor Salva Macallan asked if the Sub-Committee could receive a report detailing the number of ECHP plans outstanding, the timeline involved to resolve them, and the remedial action taken to update them. She said it was important for the Sub-Committee to

understand if the investment in permanent staff ought to be a short-term, or long-term endeavour.

- Referring to Appendix 2, of the Ofsted report, relating to governance Councillor Salva Macallan noted the Schools Forum were reporting to the SEND Improvement Board. She asked if the Schools Forum reported to the 'Tower Hamlets Together' partnership especially as the Schools Forum were responsible for the High-End Need funding. She said it was important for the partnership to have oversight of this budget. Mr James Thomas responded stating the SEND Improvement Board reported to the 'Tower Hamlets Together' partnership including information on budgets relating to high-end need. He said the partnership had oversight and scrutiny of those budgets.
- In response to if the SEND Improvement Board had the right balance of representation of the 'parent voice', and if a printed list of parent groups feeding into the Board could be provided, Mr James Thomas said the Board had been working with Ms Gager to strengthen the support provided to her Forum and her outreach work. He said she worked with varied groups which reported into the Parent Carer Group, but more could be done to work directly with groups.
- Mr Steve Nyakatawa, confirmed the Written Statement of Action had been circulated to staff groups. He said this had been done through communication from the Senior Leadership Team, as well as staff events. He said it had been shared widely across the Council.

The Chair thanked the attendees for their contribution to the meeting and said their input had been invaluable in helping members understand the outcomes of the SEND local area inspection and the actions taken to remedy the recommendation made within the report.

The Chair summarised the main points of discussion as follows:

1. The need to have a comprehensive list of the respite care offered to families with SEND children.
2. To recognise the important work the 'Our Time Forum' does, in terms of raising awareness and campaigning for children and young people with SEND needs.
3. The action plan detailing the SEND improvement work to be re-examined by the Sub-Committee in six-months' time to track the progress being made.
4. ECHP's and Workforce data indicator to be added to the dashboard being prepared by the Directorate.
5. To note the significance of bi-lingual staff in communicating with communities with SEND needs.
6. The NHS to redesign the referral pathways for speech and language, so to ensure they are engaging with community groups and centres.
7. To provide a snapshot of parent groups and how they feed into the Parent Forum.

8. Support required for SEND young people and their access to meaningful employment. The Sub-Committee to look at this in the next municipal year.
9. A watch to be kept on ASD investment made by Barts Health and if this has helped to reduce the backlog in assessments and waiting times.

5. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

The Chair asked Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children and Culture to provide a brief update in relation to the Independent Enquiry into Child Sex Abuse (IECSA).

Mr Thomas informed the Sub-Committee that IECSA had published a report in February reporting on child sexual exploitation by organised networks and web-based abuse. He said the review involved work done by councils and police, in six authorities during for 2017 2019. He said the report found significant weaknesses for that period. Mr Thomas reminded members that the Council had achieved a inadequate rating in the 2017 Ofsted inspection. He said IECSA recognised the positive improvements that had been made since then and said that tackling Child Sex Abuse, was a key priority for the Safeguarding Partnership, along with domestic abuse and violence and online safety.

Mr Thomas said the Safeguarding Partnership had signed off the Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation strategy in Autumn 2020, with a dedicated child exploitation team involving multi-agencies. He said the partnership would be discussing the IECSA report at its next executive meeting in March and will consider the recommendations made in the report. He said it was clear they needed to further improve data collection and understand the issue locally, with particular focus on risk to children with disabilities.

The Chair recommended that the Sub-Committee look at the findings of the IECSA report and the response in the next municipal year, once Officers had had the chance to consider it.

The Chair thanked the Members and Officers of the Sub-Committee for their contributions over the year and said she believed the Sub-Committee had worked hard to make a difference to the lives of Children, young people and their families.

The meeting ended at 6.49 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bex White
Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

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