

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.37 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2022

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

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury
Councillor Ahmodul Kabir
Councillor Abdul Wahid
Councillor Ana Miah

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Shubo Hussain

Co-optees Present in Person:

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| Shiblu Miah | Muslim Community Representative |
| Dr Phillip Rice | Church of England Representative |
| Joanna Hannan | Representative of Diocese of Westminster |
| Ashraf Zaman | Parent Governor |

Co-optees In Attendance Virtually:

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| Abena Adeji | Parent Governor |
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Apologies:

Councillor Leelu Ahmed

Officers Present in Person:

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| Abzel Ali | Youth Service |
| Jim Melton | Metropolitan Police |
| Susannah Beasley-Murray | (Divisional Director of Supporting Families) |
| Kelly Duggan | HOS Youth Justice & Young People's Service • LBTH - Childrens Services |
| Luke Norbury | Deputy Head of Youth Justice Service |
| Abdul Quddas | Deputy Head of Early Help & CFS |
| James Thomas | (Corporate Director, Children and Culture) |
| Farhana Zia | (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance) |

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leelu Ahmed and from Councillor Maium Talukdar, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Abdul Wahid declared that he worked for the Youth Service many years ago but was no longer involved in youth work.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of 12th July 2022 were agreed and approved to be an accurate record of the meeting and were approved by the Sub-Committee.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Spotlight on Youth Justice

Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children and Culture introduced the presentation stating that Children who become involved in anti-social behaviour and criminal activities are one of the Council's most significant statutory responsibilities. He said the arrangement for the Youth Justice Service were set down in strict legislation and statutory guidance, with a multi-disciplinary service, involving the police and other stakeholders, contributing to its effectiveness.

Mr Thomas then handed over to Ms Susannah Beasley-Murray, Director of Supporting Families, who provided an overview of the Youth Justice Service. Ms Beasley-Murray was supported by Ms Kelly Duggan, Head of Youth Justice Service and Mr Luke Norbury, Deputy Head of Youth Justice Service.

The presentation provided a detailed analysis of the work of the Youth Justice Service, outlining the key performance indicators that the service is measured against as well as data on performance and impacts of interventions. Ms Duggan stated they were part of the pilot project where youngsters in youth custody would be referred to residential units rather than prison. She said the accommodation was in Newham and Tower Hamlets was one of six borough's working together on the accommodation project. She said they were working with 81 children as at September 2022 and the main types of offences related to violence against the person at 50%, with burglary and Fraud & forgery at 11%. Ms Duggan said drug related offences were statistically low at 6%, but the borough did have a problem with drug dealing

and grooming of children. She said this was more within the borough and across London rather than cross county lines.

Ms Duggan said 277 children were at risk of harm, with 47 being identified as being at high risk and harm. Ms Duggan outlined what the Service was doing to tackle exploitation and how they work with other agencies, via multi-disciplinary teams to develop intelligence and provide intensive support to children on a one-to-one basis. Mr Norbury added they had used feedback from Youth Justice Children to understand what intervention worked best and were working in partnership to offer a holistic and targeted service to young people to prevent offending and at-risk behaviour.

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

- The resettlement unit based in Newham was a six-bed facility with funding for three years. The Youth Justice Board were the main funders although each borough is also expected to make a small contribution towards it. Beds as part of the pilot cost approximately £140 per night compared with £350 per night for a bed at a custody facility.
- Safeguarding children from county lines was a vital part of the work the Youth Justice Service undertakes. Education is key for this. The child exploitation team works with those who are at low to high risk on a one-to-one basis. The data and intelligence collated via the multi-agency approach ensures that the team is aware of the emerging themes and is constantly questioning how it can disrupt the flow of drugs and limit the exposure of children who are victims of grooming, rather than criminals.
- In respect to partnership working, Ms Beasley-Murray stated that they were working with the Courts, health partners and the voluntary sector in 'breaking the cycle' to reduce harm and risk to children. Ms Duggan added they use the 'Trusted Adult Model' so the young person can have dialogue with the adult that they most trust, rather than being passed from professional to professional.
- Ms Beasley-Murray confirmed resources were pooled together to ensure the best use of resources and information. She said the exploitation team was co-located with the police and worked in unison with the community safety teams. She said MACE was co-chaired with the police, where data was scrutinised as well as individual cases discussed.
- Ms Beasley-Murray said family involvement was key in helping young people not to become involved in crime and/or re-offend. She said the pressures were external from outside the home, but extended families, community and places of worship played an important role to steering youngster away from crime. She said the Council's Youth Service and Early Help teams worked with families to identify at risk children and provide intensive interventions.

- In regard to if the service had adequate staffing, Ms Beasley-Murray said whilst there were 81 children at risk as at September, the work undertaken by practitioners was very intensive, with some children requiring contact 7 days a week and others perhaps 3 days a week. She said the service was busy as a result.
- Ms Duggan added that the work of practitioners in the Youth Justice Service was slightly different to the work undertaken by Youth workers. She said caseworkers were passionate about their work and provided tailored support from ensuring the young person was up and ready for the day to supporting and building on their strengths.
- Mr James Thomas said that whilst the borough had a high rate of child poverty this did not automatically translate into higher crime rates. He said they were very committed to ensuring the Children and Families partnership continued to support families through the cost-of-living crisis and those entitled to free school meals were claiming this.
- **ACTION:** Ms Beasley-Murray to provide a written response to Councillor Kabir's question relating to new responsibilities around keeping children in education, training and employment.

The Chair thanked Mr James Thomas and the Youth Justice Service for their presentation.

4.2 HM Inspection of Probation report

Mr James Thomas, Corporate Director for Children and Culture introduced this presentation stating the outcome of the inspection published in July 2022 was disappointing. He said it reflected services were not good enough at the point of inspection. Mr Thomas said a new leadership team had taken over with himself leading the Justice Service Management Board and new appointments of Ms Beasley-Murray as the Director of Supporting Families and Ms Kelly Duggan as Head of the Youth Justice Service.

Mr Thomas handed over to Ms Beasley-Murray who talked about the changes made in consideration of the seven recommendations made by the Inspectorate. She said the membership of the Board had been reviewed with an executive and operational board in place. She said this would help to ensure the actions on the improvement plan could be pushed forward and managers at the right level of seniority were actively seeking better outcomes for YJS children.

Ms Beasley-Murray continued to state they had made changes to policy and procedures to ensure all data and management information was accurate and reliable, which helped with informed decision-making. She said they had reviewed the out-of-court provision and had improved the quality of assessment of at-risk children.

Ms Kelly Duggan stated the statutory one-year Youth Justice Plan had been devised and submitted to the Youth Justice Board along with the comprehensive improvement plan outlining how the service was intending to improve its activity over the next two years. She said a YJS disproportionality action plan had also been included as part of the improvement plan.

Ms Duggan stated there were six priority areas for focus and they were working with staff, partners and YJS children to improve governance and leadership. Mr Luke Norbury showed how the service would track its delivery of the improvement plan and how they were learning from best practice, with better trained staff.

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

- Referring to the out-of-court provision, Dr Rice asked what exactly was going on. Ms Duggan responded stating that there were many small things that led to the bigger issue; from the lack of focus and trust within the service to staff relying on Youth Condition Cautions – (the more stringent recourse than triage and Youth cautions – which are voluntary) for decision making. She said they had re-trained staff and had built their confidence so that better decisions and outcomes can be achieved for children. She said they were changing the method of assessment.
- In respect to how the actions from the improvement plan had been communicated to staff, Mr Luke Norbury stated that they had involved staff from the onset to help devise, engage and own the improvement plan. He said the governance structure had been improved, with visibility of senior managers and daily communication within teams, plus dissemination of information through newsletters and emails. Ms Beasley-Murray added that there was an expectation for improvement, and this was also communicated and discussed through staff appraisals.
- Ms Duggan confirmed the external assessors would be assisting the areas where the service has scored lowest. She said there were numerous areas that required improvement.
- Mr Thomas said one way to strengthen the governance arrangements was to have representation of young people on the Youth Justice Executive Board. He said it was important to hear the voices of young people be that from them attending meetings or providing a video recording. He said young people found video interviews to be less daunting than attending in person. He said it was vital the ‘voice of the child’ was captured more systematically in everything they did. Ms Beasley-Murray added they were looking to set up a Youth Justice Council like the Young Mayor’s youth council, to engage regular voices representing young people.
- Ms Duggan stated she did have adequate resources to deliver the improvement plan and said significant work had been done to improve

staff morale. She said the service was on a journey of improvement and clear leadership and staff involvement was key to this. She said staff had been involved from the onset and team building through a team away-day, regular supervision and appraisal all helped to improve morale.

The Chair thanked Mr James Thomas and the Youth Justice Service for their presentation.

5. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

There was no other business to be discussed.

6. CESSC WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23

The Chair, Councillor Choudhury referred members to the sub-committee's work programme for 2022-23 and asked members if they had any comments or questions relating to the work scheduled for the sub-committee to scrutinise.

- No comment or questions were asked in relation to the work programme.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. **NOTE** and **AGREE** the work programme for 2022-23.

The meeting ended at 8.14 p.m.

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