

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.31 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 4 MAY 2023**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL**

**Members Present in Person:**

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury  
Councillor Abdul Wahid  
Councillor Ana Miah  
Councillor Amina Ali  
Councillor Shahaveer Shubo Hussain

**Cooptee's In Attendance in Person:**

Dr Phillip Rice	(Church of England Representative)
Joanna Hannan	(Diocese of Westminster Representative)
Ashraf Zaman	(Parent Governor)

**Cooptee's In Attendance Virtually:**

Nafisa Ahmed	(Parent Governor)
--------------	-------------------

**Officers Present in Person:**

Susannah Beasley-Murray	(Divisional Director of Supporting Families)
James Thomas	(Corporate Director, Children and Culture)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Amina Ali, Cllr Maium Talukdar and Shiblu Miah, Muslim Community Representative.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

**3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the Sub Committee meeting held on 9 February 2023 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

#### **4. CESSC ACTION LOG**

The action log was circulated for attendees.

#### **5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

##### **5.1 Improvements made since Ofsted Inspection and Councils Response to National Review**

James Thomas, Corporate Director of Children and Culture, and Susannah Beasley-Murray, Director of Supporting Families, gave an overview of the Children's Social Care performance, which included improvements made since the Ofsted Inspection.

Further to questions from the sub committee, James Thomas and Susanna Beasley-Murray;

- Clarified that scrutiny sessions such as the Children and Education Sub-committee assist in preparation for Ofsted inspections, as the role of elected members and their level of interest are key components to ensure council safeguarding is actively taking place as corporate parents.
- Explained that the annual Corporate Parenting Board report will be submitted to Cabinet in July.
- Confirmed that a monthly Management Information Report is robustly inspected at the Childrens' Services Improvement Board, to highlight and monitor performance. Audits on focused areas are undertaken with action plans to ensure a high-quality service is provided and protection for children in social care is maintained. Performance Surgeries and Child in Need Summits are also undertaken to monitor progress and performance, which includes feedback from children and families.
- Conceded that further work is required to improve the single assessments not yet completed or outside the one-year timescale. Children who are on child protection or in need plans, should receive family assessments if there are changes in circumstances or within 12 months, however it appears that reviews are undertaken at a child protection conference, or with child in need plans. Auditing updates will be submitted to the Children's Services Improvement Board.
- Clarified that although the Department of Education (DFE) have not yet confirmed the selection process for the 'Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme'. Tower Hamlets would like to be put forward as one of the 12 local authorities to commit to the scheme in September 2023 and discussions are ongoing.

- Noted that the rise of domestic abuse throughout the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, have both impacted the need for more council support, with early help and, or social work assistance.
- Explained that less families require social work assessments as early help is now provided, although more long-term investment is required.
- Clarified that details on the number of children placed with culturally matched foster placements, as well as those not placed will be submitted by 4<sup>th</sup> June to the sub-committee.

**RESOLVED that**

1. A written brief on the number of Children placed with culturally matched foster placements and details on those not placed be submitted by the 4th June 2023 to the sub-committee.
2. That the presentation be noted.

**5.2 Children's Safeguarding Partnership Review**

James Thomas, Corporate Director of Children and Culture, gave the sub-committee an update on the Children's Social Care Review, the Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children's Partnership's (THSCP) work and statutory reviews. This included details on the tripartite partnership arrangement between the council, NHS and police, the key priorities in tackling the exploitation of children, domestic abuse and on-line safety.

The sub-committee also heard from Korkor Caesar, NHS North East London, James Conway, Borough Commander and Laurelle Brown, Independent Scrutineer, who discussed the partnership's priorities, achievements and key challenges in safeguarding children.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, James Thomas, Korkor Caesar James Conway and Susannah Beasley-Murray;

- Confirmed that increasing THSCP's digital presence for 2024 will include updating the website to ensure a toolkit is more accessible for children. Young scrutineers will also play a crucial advisory role.
- Explained that priority areas will be reset in September and may include infant safety, as best practise on safe sleeping with parents and babies requires more promotion by practitioners and families via social media. Data received across the partnership will be submitted at an extraordinary meeting to determine the new priorities to be set.
- Conceded that receiving meaningful data from all three partners is challenging, although this is a requirement for 2024 with improvements

ongoing. Ensuring effective safeguarding of children is a national challenge.

- Confirmed that despite more survey responses received came from primary schools, further awareness from THSCP to both primary and secondary school children is required to mitigate harm online.
- Explained that formal discussions with the GP Care Group in regard to recruitment and retention of health professionals, including school nurses are taking place, although the latter has slightly improved. Partnership conferences allow a greater understanding of frontline staff needs and only enhances safeguarding practices.
- Clarified that there are no children in inadequate placements, although Ofsted is aware of one child placed in an unregulated placement. Children may be placed in residential placements but the majority are placed in foster care.
- Thanked the sub-committee for the ongoing scrutiny and requested THSCP be notified regarding any concerns the members have with any future investigations.
- Confirmed that engagement occurs with Faith groups on both an individual and interface forum level. Consideration will be given to naming the groups and organisations in due course.
- Conceded that resources are limited within the public sector which has affected training and capacity. The ongoing effects of the pandemic are also a factor. At present team mobilisation, as well as an increasing London virtual training offer and multi-agency training is available. A commitment by Scotland Yard has also been given to increase safeguarding provision for the next few years for both this council and Hackney Council.

## **6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT**

None.

As this was the last meeting of municipal year 2022/23, the Chair thanked all sub-committee members, officers and invitees for their assistance, and gave a special thanks to the Care Leavers and Foster Care visits undertaken during Ramadan, which were extremely beneficial

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee