

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 11 JULY 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury (Chair)

Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Councillor Ahmodul Kabir

Councillor Bellal Uddin

Councillor Sabina Akhtar

Councillor Shahaveer Shubo Hussain

Co-Optees Present in Person:

Shiblu Miah (Muslim community representative)

Dr Phillip Rice (Church of England Representative)

Joanna Hannan (Diocese of Westminster Representative)

Ashraf Zaman (Parent Governor)

Co-Optees in Attendance Virtually

Abena Adeji (Parent Governor)

Nafisa Ahmed (Parent Governor)

Officers Present in Person:

James Thomas (Corporate Director, Children and Culture)

Susannah Beasley-Murray (Divisional Director of Supporting Families)

Anna Murphy (Strategy And Policy Officer)

Justina Bridgeman Democratic Services Officer (Committee)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair requested nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub Committee for the municipal year 2023/24. Councillor Bellal Uddin proposed Councillor Shafi Ahmed for the position. This was seconded by Councillor Ahmodul Kabir.

There were no further nominations received.

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

1. Elect Councillor Shafi Ahmed the Vice-Chair of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2023/24.

4. CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE, QUORUM, MEMBERSHIP AND MEETING DATES FOR 2023/24

4.1 Terms of Reference for Children and Education Scrutiny Sub Committee

Justina Bridgeman, Democratic Services Officer, requested members to note the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee's terms of reference, membership, quorum and meeting dates for the municipal year 2023/24. The terms of reference were agreed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 May 2023.

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

1. Note it's terms of reference, quorum, membership and meeting dates as set out in appendices 1,2 and 3 of the report.
2. **Agreed** to hold all Children and Education Scrutiny Sub Committee meetings at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber for the municipal year 2023/24.

5. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Sub Committee meeting held on 4 May 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record of proceedings.

6. CESSC ACTION LOG

The completed action log for 2022/23 was circulated to attendees.

7. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 CABINET MEMBER OVERVIEW OF PRIORITIES FOR 2023/24

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning, sent his apologies and the Chair and sub-committee members agreed to progress to the next item.

7.2 CORPORATE DIRECTOR REFLECTIONS AND PRIORITIES FOR 2023/24

James Thomas, Corporate Director, Children and Culture, provided reflections and lessons learnt from last year and outlined the key priorities for municipal year 2023/24.

Mr. Thomas emphasised how the lasting impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis has affected children within the borough, increasing the level of support required. Although many service areas have returned to pre-pandemic levels, further attention is needed to tackle children's wellbeing, development and education due to the lockdown restrictions. Young children missed key developmental milestones which have had a detrimental effect and requires monitoring.

Mr. Thomas went on to explain the progress made in continual improvement in service areas such as Children's Social Care and Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). A series of LGA Peer Reviews are planned within the service and a SEND review has been scheduled for October 2023. The Continuous Improvement Board will remain focused on attaining the best levels of service for the borough.

Other areas of progress include: continued co-production with children, young people and families. The 'Every Chance for Every Child Forum' which shapes priorities for the year ahead and the three 'Young Scrutineers' who have highlighted issues of peer abuse were noted, as were the 'Let's Talk' SEND Events where parents, education and care professionals give support and discuss concerns. Plans to embed co-production in all areas of the Directorate are ongoing.

The workforce were commended as a valuable and dedicated resource, although recruitment issues are still a concern with locum posts on the rise. Further progress is required to ensure the workforce reflects the community, with more diverse leadership roles made available throughout the Directorate. A stronger drive to employ younger members of the community through apprenticeships and job opportunities should also be considered.

The priorities for this year were outlined, including a commitment to the Mayor's manifesto, accelerating education by investing in youth service

provision, supporting young people to continue further education and tackling the cost of living crisis. The Universal Free School meals programme for secondary schools will begin from September 2023 and the Universal Bursary Grants and Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) are now in effect.

Other priorities include effective use of data and combating poverty within the borough. The main concerns for Tower Hamlets Together (THT) are SEND, Healthy weight, Mental Health and emotional wellbeing. Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership (THSCP) are committed to infant safety, tackling child exploitation, racism, peer harm and promoting online safety.

Mr. Thomas concluded by requesting the sub-committee give consideration to; sixth form performance, poverty and inequality, an annual scrutiny on safeguarding children and mental health and wellbeing.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, James Thomas;

- Clarified that there are a range of services which monitor uptake levels for young residents seeking mental health support. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who work with schools and the local authority provide data. Joint commissioning with the NHS takes place with voluntary organisations such as Bernardo's. Universal services such as schools and youth providers also hold data.
- Conceded that there is no specific mental health provision for young Somali residents but all staff deliver a culturally appropriate service. Plans to commission community specific services are ongoing.
- Explained that a partnership exists with WorkPath who support young people within the borough to give guidance on training and employment. A council training event will take place in October for young borough residents.
- Noted that work to strengthened and mitigate the stigma related to mental health on a cultural level is required, with more messaging and promotional campaigns. This was highlighted by members of the Children and Young Peoples Takeover session, who called for more support and advice and signs of potential risks. Work with Public Health regarding Parent Champion roles is ongoing.
- Explained that uptake levels on the Universal Free Meals initiative is in progress, as are evaluations with the Queen Mary University and the University of Newcastle.
- Clarified that the Learning Academy has enabled more social workers to support young people, with a focus to recruit from the community. Consideration has been given to the social work apprenticeships.

- Noted that systematic external Peer Reviews are crucial to continual service improvement. A recent review looked at the multi-agency safeguarding child protection Hub and provided useful feedback. The Early Help peer review focused on the work undertaken and gave positive feedback.
- Clarified that the Graduate programme is still ongoing its expansion should be considered.
- Explained that the stigma of food banks can be mitigated by increasing smaller scaled sites within schools and make it more comfortable for parents. Other ways may include models which require membership and give the appearance of shops. Although these may request a minimum payment they are heavily subsidised.

The Chair thanked James Thomas for the Corporate overview and priorities and requested that further data and feedback on the Universal Free School Meals initiative be brought back to the sub-committee at a later date.

RESOLVED that

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. Data and feedback from residents on the Universal Free School Meals to sub-committee at a later date.

7.3 CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY REFRESH

Susannah Beasley-Murray, Director of Supporting Families, and Sheleena Powtoo, Improvement Delivery Lead, gave an overview of the key priorities for the five year Corporate Parenting Strategy, to be submitted to Cabinet on 26 July. Details on the Peer Review on Leaving Care with Government Advisor Mark Riddell, and the proposal for Care Experience to be adopted as a protected characteristic were also outlined.

Ms Beasley-Murray informed the sub-committee of the pledge corporate parents and partners have signed and how children in care will be protected, whilst keeping children's key messages at the forefront. The strategy will be launched in October and will set out how a community of carers will be established.

The five main priorities, developed in conjunction with children, stakeholders and foster carers were outlined as:

- A safe and stable home
- Trusted and strong relationships
- Education and aspirations

- Health and emotional Wellbeing
- Co-production

Details on adopting the Care Experience as a protected characteristic show that care leavers are at a disadvantage, with higher outcomes for homelessness, criminality and premature death. This has been introduced at a local level and the recommendation will ensure the care experience characteristic will be included in all equality impact assessments for future policies and services.

Ms Beasley-Murray updated the sub-committee on the Peer Review recommendations from Mark Riddell, National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers (DfE), which took place in May. The presentation will be circulated to sub-committee members outside of the meeting.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Susannah Beasley-Murray;

- Explained that co-production involved a range of holistic activities for children living in care, social workers, parents and personal advisors to design the strategy to capture their views. A parents reference group has also been established.
- Clarified that engagement with ex-carers were included in discussions focusing on money management, housing, education and other support needs.
- Noted that the 'Kit Kat Terrace' care leavers site has some open space and its use is encouraged. Collaboration with the sports, leisure and Parks teams are ongoing to ensure summer activities are available.
- Explained that all departments are committed to provide apprenticeships and there are ongoing discussions with the Department of Work and Pensions to assist care leavers within Kit Kat Terrace. The team of education employment advisors has been expanded to offer support those seeking full time employment.
- Clarified that housing needs for care leavers is a priority and a joint working protocol has been established. Care leaver allowances have been increased in an effort to tackle the cost-of-living crisis and guidance is available on the best ways to budget finances.
- Noted that families are supported by social workers to ensure the family structure is kept intact. The project 'Lifelong Links' aims to support children in care, care leavers and members of the family in the UK and abroad. The Supporting Families Conference will be held on 12 July to empower families and improve services for children in care.

- Added that family group conferences are held to allow extended family members to voice concerns and help shape the decision-making process of children in care. Dedicated advocates for children and families are also made available to speak on their behalf.
- Clarified that research data on care leavers will be made available to sub-committee members outside of the meeting.

[Clerk's Note - The Rees Centre research data is available here:

[Over 7,500 children and young people in care share their views and experiences on contact arrangements with their families — \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)]

- Clarified that young residents and care leavers will be invited to the sub-committee to discuss their experiences.
- Explained that many of the foster carers, are trauma informed and the 'Mocking Bird Hub' exists to ensure carers are clustered in one area with a main therapeutic support link at the centre. All needs of the child are matched to ensure they are protected. There are issues with housing and some foster carers live in neighbouring boroughs. There are ongoing discussions to rectify this.

RESOLVED that

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. To Submit research data on care leavers for sub-committee members outside of the meeting.
3. Young residents and care leavers to be invited to the sub-committee to discuss their experiences.

8. DRAFT SUB-COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Anna Murphy, Strategy and Policy Officer, proposed topics to discuss at the remaining meetings for the 2023/24 municipal year. The Chair informed sub-committee members that the draft will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 24 July for discussion and then submitted to Cabinet for finalisation. The final draft will then return to the OSC in September.

Following the presentation, sub-committee members suggested including discussions on:

- Sixth Form performance, recruitment retention and improvement measures.
- A legacy review on the Sixth Form provision initially held in 2020 and invite residents to discuss progress since then.

Sub-committee members also queried how schools are dealing with gender neutral lavatories.

Officers clarified that the Supporting Families revised strategy is currently in draft and will be made available at the next meeting on 12 October.

A Government review on School curriculums is being undertaken. Sub-committee members were informed that details are pending on its conclusion and it may be prudent to await recommendations if not received by 7 December.

Sub-committee members were requested to include mental health in the February 2024 spotlight on Children's health. A request was also made to include a safeguarding update with the Children's Social Care reform for the May meeting. The Chair noted that Deputy Mayor Maium Talukdar will be hosting a Mental Health Awareness event on 24 July in the council chamber.

RESOLVED that

1. The presentation be noted.

9. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

The Chair requested details on all local universities contributions to the borough in regard to the S106 Planning obligations and gave an open invitation to attend a sub-committee meeting to discuss.

The meeting ended at 8.19 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee