

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.34 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Abdul Mannan (Chair)

Councillor Abdul Malik

Councillor Suluk Ahmed

Councillor Shahaveer Shubo
Hussain

Councillor Rebaka Sultana

Councillor Leelu Ahmed

Other Members Present in Person:

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

Co-optees Present in Person:

Shiblu Miah (Muslim community representative)

Dr Phillip Rice (Church of England Representative)

Joanna Hannan (Diocese of Westminster Representative)

Hasan Chowdhury (Parent Governor)

Co-optees In Attendance Virtually:

Ashraf Zaman (Parent Governor)

Officers Present in Person:

Steve Reddy (Corporate Director, Children's Services)

Susannah Beasley-Murray (Divisional Director of Supporting Families)

Zaid Ul-Islam	(Strategy & Policy Officer)
Sheleena Powtoo	(Improvement Delivery Lead)
Mohammed Jolil	(Interim Head of Early Help)
Justina Bridgeman	Democratic Services Officer (Committee)

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Lisa Fraser	(Director of Education)
Pauline Maddison	(Director of Education)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests received.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Sub Committee meeting held On 11 July 2024 were approved and signed as a correct record of proceedings.

4. CESSC ACTION LOG

The actions were noted.

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Early Help Offer

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning, introduced the first item which reviewed the progress in developing an early help offer for families with partners, including the family hub and 'Start for Life' programmes. These are intended to improve families' lives, reduce inequalities, and foster a supportive environment for children to thrive with integrated support services.

Councillor Talukdar focused on three key themes; the service integration, which offers comprehensive support from birth to two years, Community engagement, which actively involves families to tailor the services to their needs and positive outcomes and significant improvements for family well-being and child development.

Mohammed Jolil, Head of Early Help & Children & Families, gave an update on all Family Hubs located in the borough. These are accessible community spaces where families can receive a range of services.

Mr Jolil then noted that 4,000 families attended the launch of the family hubs and over 80 partners took part in the delivery. Details on the level of engagement since 2023 were noted including, 43 promotional outreach events, 419 events and articles posted on the website, 161 meetings held to promote the service, 200 staff, partners and volunteers trained on the Shared Behaviours framework and 348 staff were given additional training on subjects such as oral health, substance misuse and young carers awareness.

It was noted that visits by various government departments and dignitaries have taken place, notably Dame Andrea Leadsom, former Minister of Health who launched the hubs, the Office of Health and Health Improvement Disparities, who attended to view the work on perinatal mental health and breastfeeding support. The Secretary of Education, the Foreign Office and Commonwealth who accompanied a delegate from the Ukraine have also visited.

Details of the impact the hubs have had on families were outlined, including the number of early help assessments conducted, staff training updates and the numbers of families who have received parenting support. Sub-committee Members were informed that the Family Hub network includes 37 community partners collaborating across the borough. Regular satisfaction surveys are conducted and findings show that 98% of families who visited felt welcomed, with 78% of those feeling satisfied with the services provided.

Members were told of the next steps and noted the service is on course to meet the government's recommendations to ensure that minimum requirements are met by March 2025. Details of key milestones for completing and implementations include;

- A multi-agency Data Sharing Agreement
- An Outreach Strategy for Community Engagement
- A Communications Strategy
- An Outcomes Framework
- Changes to data gathering
- Changes required to deliver expectations across all Family Hubs.

Lastly, Mr Jolil presented a video to outline some of the work done in the children and family centres, as well as testimonials from families using the services.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Councillor Maium Talukdar, Mohamed Jolil and Susanna Beasley-Murray, Director, Children's Social Care;

- Explained that Dame Andrea Leadsom requested the visit to the centres as she was interested in the health and perinatal work undertaken. Similarly the Foreign Office requested a Ukrainian delegate to attend. None of the visitors were asked to attend.
- Clarified that each of the centres has a universal service running daily. This enables staff to identify children who may require additional assistance or referrals, such as children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- Noted that there are 16 Family Hub sites, including the smaller 'spokes' where families can access support. This has been achieved by collaborating with voluntary sector partners buildings.
- Confirmed that Tower Hamlets Council has received funding for the Family Hubs in part from Public Health. Work is ongoing to ensure the website is more user friendly.
- Explained that work is ongoing within the centres, to assist children who have experienced language difficulties since the pandemic.
- Clarified that the 'Positive Change Centre' primarily support perpetrators, victims and children dealing with domestic abuse. There is also an early intervention programme within the Family Hubs and the children and family centres. Training is available for practitioners and social workers to assist families dealing with this issue. Funding has been set aside for family conflict resolution.

The Chair thanked Officers for the good work undertaken from the Early Help team and for arranging a visit for Members to one of the Family Hub sites.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**:

1. That the presentation be noted.

5.2 Inspection Preparation: Children's Social Care

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning, introduced the second item, which outlined the ongoing preparations for the upcoming OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Officers are fully prepared for the inspection and are anticipating the arrival.

Susannah Beasley-Murray, Director of Children's Services, noted that Tower Hamlets Council are the last London authority not to have had an inspection. Details of the two week process were then outlined to Members. This includes the initial OFSTED call on a Monday to initiate the inspection for the following week, the collation of required documents and data for an online audit meeting and finally the inspection itself, where four inspectors will arrive.

Members were informed that the inspection will only take two weeks as Tower Hamlets were rated Good at the 2019 inspection, rather than three weeks for local authorities rated inadequate or requiring improvement.

The inspection will also involve discussions with social workers, early help practitioners and partners regarding the quality of work and how it is divided by each area. The main areas of focus will be:

- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection, including early help and safeguarding.
- The experiences and progress of children in care.
- The progress of care leavers.
- The corporate and political leadership for children in care.

Ms Beasley-Murray then outlined the practice framework and the vision for the service, which is that the best place for children is to be raised within their own families, intermediate or wider whenever it is safe to do so. Tower Hamlets has less children in care than other local authorities and staff have manageable caseloads, which enables greater outcomes for children and families.

Members then heard details of the service strengths, including workforce excellence, the 'Better Together' practice framework with partners and staff, a supportive and challenging cultural approach to care, a strong and effective leadership and a focus on early intervention. Areas of focus remain combating domestic abuse, safeguarding harm outside the home and neglect within it and also strengthening partnerships with other organisations.

Ms Beasley-Murray then observed the ongoing support for career development of black and global majority professionals, the transition to adulthood for care leavers, children with SEND and with mental health concerns. All inspections from other local authorities are reviewed to understand and improve on some of the themes noted. This includes how young carers are supported, the issues facing 16-17 year old homeless residents, unregulated placements and the exploitation and missing children, to name a few.

Members were informed of the Annual Engagement meeting with a senior OFSTED Inspector and Local Authority staff earlier this year in March, in which the updated self-evaluation was presented. No significant concerns were raised and it was stated that this upcoming ILACS inspection would be short. Ms Beasley-Murray reminded the sub-committee on the previous Peer Reviews held in 2023 and earlier this year, where Mark Riddell, Government Advisor on Care Leavers, noted the service progress as aspirational.

Details of the updated improvement plan were outlined as were the five key priorities:

- Providing effective help and protection.

- Helping, supporting and protecting adolescents.
- Improving the experience and progress of children we care for and for those leaving care.
- Making good decisions, understanding learning and achieving consistency
- Leadership and governance that promotes a high support, high challenge culture.

These are monitored by the Children's Service Continuous Improvement Board who review all data and spotlight any key concerns. Fortnightly meetings on inspection preparation, called 'Better Together' meetings are held to focus on continual improvement delivery are also conducted, as well as a staff audit programme for different areas of the service and monthly performance surgeries.

Data of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, were also outlined, as were the performance data on Children cared for during August 2024.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, the Officers;

- Explained that the legislation changes related to supported living accommodation now means that 16-17 year olds are required to be OFSTED regulated. Providers had to register by October end and 26 children who were not fully registered have now been reviewed by independent Officers, social workers and Heads of service.
- Confirmed that the numbers of care leavers employed by the Council through apprenticeships will be forwarded to the sub-committee outside of this meeting.
- Clarified that the positive partnership with the Children's Safeguarding Board and representation from a senior health colleagues, the Police and the Borough Commander, ensures all agencies work together in the right way to safeguard children. The Annual Children's Safeguarding Report will be forwarded to the sub-committee for review.
- Noted that an internal Neglect Toolkit has been developed for staff to assess and intervene with families where there are cases of child neglect. This is a multi-agency toolkit for health professionals, staff working with children and the Police.
- Explained that ongoing work with the Sunrise Child Sexual Abuse Hub takes place and staff are trained to be advocates for children where there have been allegations of child sexual abuse. Reports are lower than most local authorities with three cases in the last six months.
- Confirmed that the Strategic Exploitation Board, support workers specialising in child exploitation and the police work together to explore

the themes and reduce the number of children who are missing or at risk of exploitation. The data is submitted at monthly meetings.

- Explained that the Children's Partnership includes the voluntary sector, an Interfaith Coordinator and a Tower Hamlets designated Officer who are all available to give the community a greater understanding of child harm. Partner training on harm outside the home and contextual safeguarding also takes place.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**:

1. That details of the number of Care Leavers employed by the Council through apprenticeship programmes to be circulated to the sub-committee.
2. That the Annual Children's Safeguarding Report will be forwarded to the sub-committee for review.
3. That the presentation be noted.

5.3 SEND Inspection Preparation & Improvement Update

Lisa Fraser, Director of Education introduced the last item, an update on the progress delivering the SEND Improvement programme and readiness for the Area SEND Inspection, including performance against key measures such as the timeliness of EHCPs.

Pauline Maddison, Education Associate, noted that Tower Hamlets Council is one of two London authorities not to have had an inspection. This is set to be more intensive than the previous one in 2021, it could be held any time from now until the end of 2025 and is expected to include experiences of parents and children and Leap London's alternative provision, which was rated outstanding.

Details of themes from recent inspections were shared with Members, including:

- EHCP timeliness and quality; absence of child and young person voice.
- annual review timeliness and quality; many EHCPs out of date.
- long waiting times for neurodevelopmental and specialist health assessment.
- lack of multi-agency working and information sharing.
- fewer families benefitting from antenatal and 2-2.5-year-old review visits.
- lack of effective preparing for adulthood support.

Members were then given details of how the Council are preparing for the upcoming inspection. This included establishing a multi-agency inspection preparation group, regularly updating the risk log, collating Annex A data, a

multi-agency audit team confirmed with a trial run scheduled, a data led approach for both operational and strategic reporting and a pledge to a system based recording.

Ms Maddison then discussed the progress against Tower Hamlets Written Statement of Action, which outlined the improvements made since 2021. This included, in part, numerous meetings with the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England, the improvement in health statistics and engagement with parents and the 'Let's Talk SEND' events. 55 schools signed up to Verbo, a speech and language programme, where parents and schools can now track their children's speech and language development.

Members were updated on the areas of focus, including a SEND Inclusion Strategy and a 12-month delivery plan, which will be submitted to Cabinet on 18 October 2024 and the Health and Wellbeing Board in December. A consultation on an inclusion framework will be circulated to parents with Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP) and SEND and also a SEND front door for information and support, which will allow parents to view the complete support pathways available. It was noted that the London East Alternative Provision was rated Outstanding by OFSTED.

Ms Maddison went on to note the impact the service is having and the number of plans achieved in 20 weeks. Work is required to improve the 34% figure. Tower Hamlets has the highest level of SEND inclusion in the country, with 6.8% of children participating and achieving above the national average. Similarly the SEND suspension exclusion rates are less than the national average.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Councillor Maium Talukdar and Officers:

- Observed that the figures in the presentation only compare national local authorities EHCP's, they do not consider internal exclusion rooms. OFSTED reports will usually indicate these numbers.
- Clarified that a written Statement of Actions Plan will be forwarded to sub-committee Members for review.
- Acknowledged that there are resource issues related to the high demand for EHCP's which means that there are delays within the service. Additional staffing has been sought and the procedures around quality have been reviewed. A Task and Finish Group will also be established to provide additional resources to combat the increased demand.
- Clarified that early intervention is a crucial element to ensuring children are assessed quickly. The assessment process is lengthy and expensive. Discussions are currently taking place with schools in regards to meeting the high demand for SEND and inclusion plans. This is a national issue.

- Confirmed that parents who are dissatisfied with the EHCP provision given by schools or the Council, can contact the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) who are available to support and advise them.
- Noted that the Inclusion Framework targets children with mild to moderate SEND. Although all schools in the borough do well engaging with children, training opportunities are available for teachers to improve their skills.
- Explained that EHCP's allows children to express their views and aspirations. A Parent Coordinator will shortly be appointed to ensure children and parents have a greater understanding of the assessment process.
- Noted that the gender imbalance of children with SEND reflects the national findings, which indicates that girls have undiagnosed special educational needs and disabilities.
- Observed that numerous Councils are facing bankruptcy due to the rising costs of SEND staffing and transportation as service demand increases. Tower Hamlets has a combination of in-house Council and Commission transportation.
- Confirmed that the development review of more efficient and cheaper forms of transport routes is currently being conducted and details will be brought back to the sub-committee once completed.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**:

1. That a written Statement of Actions Plan will be forwarded to sub-committee Members for review.
2. That the presentation be noted.

6. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

The Chair informed Members that Councillor Bellal Uddin, the Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub-committee Chair, will be undertaking a scrutiny review on maternity services and support for new parents in November. This was initially noted at the Members Work Programme Development Session. Councillor Uddin would like to hold evidence sessions during November 2024 and possibly in late February or early March 2025 and urged Members to attend.

Zaid ul-Islam, Strategy and Policy Officer informed Members that a visit to Kit Kat Terrace will be arranged in due course and urged Members to attend when notification is given.

The meeting ended at 8.36 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Abdul Mannan

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee