

<b>Committee</b> Overview and Scrutiny	<b>Date</b> 6 <sup>th</sup> April 2010	<b>Classification</b> Unrestricted	<b>Report No.</b>	<b>Agenda Item No.</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Assistant Chief Executive		<b>Title:</b> Scrutiny Challenge Session - Anti-Bullying Initiatives in Schools		
<b>Originating Officer(s):</b> Afazul Hoque Scrutiny Policy Manager		<b>Ward(s) affected: All</b>		

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report updates the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Anti-Bullying Initiatives in Schools held in January 2010.

## 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and agree the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session.

Background papers

N/A

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

Afazul Hoque Ext 4636

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 SECTION 100D (AS AMENDED))  
LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT**

### **3. Introduction**

- 3.1 Bullying can be defined as a physical, psychological or verbal attack against an individual or a group of individuals by a person or group of persons, causing physical or psychological harm to the victim. It is usually conscious and wilful and commonly consists of repeated acts of aggression and/or manipulation. It can take a number of forms – both physical and non physical, either in combination or in isolation. Any bullying, whether physical or non-physical may result in lasting psychological damage to the individual.
- 3.2 The damaging results of bullying are of concern to everyone who works with children and young people in Tower Hamlets. The stress for victims of bullying can have far reaching effects on their personal and social development. It can also impact on the educational achievement of them and their peers. The Institute of Education<sup>1</sup> reports that 46 percent of school non-attendance is related to bullying. It also has an impact upon children and young peoples lives throughout the UK and in the most extreme cases it leads to suicide and some groups are especially vulnerable. Around 90 percent of people with a learning disability experience bullying, 66 percent on a regular basis and nearly three quarters report being bullied in a public place, one quarter of them on buses<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.3 The Children Act 2004 requires Children’s Services Authorities to make arrangements ‘to promote co-operation between the authority, its partners and others with a view to improving the well-being of children in their area. This includes the children’s physical and mental health and emotional well-being, protection from harm and educational and social wellbeing’. While schools must set their own policies appropriate to their particular situations and intakes, it is important that the Local Authority sets a standard and offers a framework for schools to use.
- 3.4 The institutions which deal most effectively with bullying are those which acknowledge it as a real or potential problem. They have policies in place which are known to staff, children, parents and carers. They have a range of strategies to establish a strong anti-bullying ethos and offer support, and, where appropriate, clearly understood sanctions to people who have been bullied and people who have displayed bullying behaviour<sup>3</sup>.

### **4. Purpose**

- 4.1 Challenge sessions are designed as a quick way for a group of members to get to grips with key policy issues and provide a robust check on local policies and services. The purpose of this scrutiny challenge session was to:
- To increase understanding of international, local and school approaches to anti-bullying work.
  - To improve members’ involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.
  - To make recommendations for the further development of an anti-bullying strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ioe.ac.uk](http://www.ioe.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> MENCAP 2004

<sup>3</sup> Tower Hamlets Anti-Bullying Resource Pack

4.2 Members received presentations and written submissions during the course of the session, as outlined below:

- Anti-bullying – national perspective (The Anti-Bullying Alliance)
- Homophobic bullying – national perspective (Stonewall)
- Step Out DVD – Step Forward
- Tower Hamlets school initiatives for anti-bullying
- Tower Hamlets anti-bullying initiative
- Pupils and parents views on anti-bullying in Tower Hamlets

## 5. Background

5.1 The borough's *Report of the Commission into the Public Safety of Young People* (2009) wrote that dealing with bullying was a key factor in order to deal with youth violence and the commissioners considered the borough's anti-bullying initiatives to be central in the whole safety strategy.

5.2 The Council provides extensive anti-bullying support for schools, children and parents. For example, the council:

- provided schools with the *Tower Hamlets Anti-Bullying Resource Pack* that offers advice on how to respond to bullying.
- provides universal and targeted training and/or brokers training to all schools to develop and enhance staff skills in preventing incidents of bullying and responding to bullying when it occurs.
- gives guidance to schools on how they can begin to assess the scale of the problem. To support this, the council offers them the use of a free electronic survey which provides children with an anonymous means of making their views known.
- is affiliated to Stonewall's Education Champions programme to tackle homophobia.
- organised the Anti-bullying week in November 2009, including a film competition.
- launched a pilot anti-bullying helpline run by Step Forward in 2009.
- developed the Anti-bullying policy with a multi-agency working party with support from the regional officer of the Anti-Bullying Alliance and a wide consultation.

5.3 There are 69 primary schools and 15 secondary schools in Tower Hamlets. Primary and secondary schools in the borough have vigorously developed anti-bullying policies. In the summer term of 2009, 29 primary schools have met the school anti-bullying prompt (an increase of 6 since the previous term); 24 primary schools are committed to making adjustment to meet the prompt. 10 secondary schools have met the prompt (increase of 4); 5 secondary schools are not yet fully meeting the prompt.

5.4 The borough's anti-bullying initiatives are highly acclaimed by the stakeholders. The 2009 National Audit Commission survey with Head teachers shows that Tower Hamlets Head Teachers perceive the borough's support for combating bullying is

‘between good and excellent’ (3.03; 1-4 points), which exceeds the participating councils’ average (2.69) and places the borough in the top 25%.

- 5.5 The National Strategy Advisor agreed that the borough’s anti-bullying practice falls within ‘Enhancing’ – the highest of four levels of competence– in the National Strategies self-review framework in 2009. It states, ‘The planned approach developed by the local authority has had a clear impact on reducing incidents of bullying over a sustained period of time’.
- 5.6 In 2008, Tellus3, a survey of children and young people across England by Ofsted, asked 1,274 pupils (Years 6, 8 and 10) in 30 Tower Hamlets schools the following two questions about bullying:
- 1) How often, if at all, have you been bullied at school?
  - 2) How well does your school deal with bullying?
- 5.7 To the first question, 62% responded ‘Never’ (56% national); however, 21% responded ‘Once or more in the last year’ (25% national) and 6% ‘Most days’ (6% national). While 38% of pupils perceived that their schools deal with bullying ‘very well’ or ‘quite well’ (35% national), 28% ‘Not very well’ (28% national) and 15% ‘Badly’ (16% national).

## **6. National Drivers**

- 6.1 Anita Compton from the Anti-Bullying Alliance<sup>4</sup> explained to the meeting that the Alliance brings together 60 organisations into one network with the aim of developing consensus around how to stop and prevent bullying. It aims to influence policy and develop and disseminate best practice. She stated that Tower Hamlets had done some excellent work around reducing bullying and Officers from the borough were fully involved in the Alliance. To deal with bullying effectively it needs to be everyone’s business within the childrens services environment, as it has far reaching effect on young peoples personal and social development.
- 6.2 The meeting was informed that a key priority of the Alliance was to work with parents Guidance is available from the Department of Children, Schools and Families to support local authorities and schools, students and parents. Anita highlighted an example of best practice in Old Ford Primary School which involved working with school staff, students and parents.
- 6.3 The meeting discussed that this was an area that could be further developed within the borough. The Scrutiny Review on Reducing Youth Offending also highlighted bullying as a key cause for a lot of young people committing crime. This was an issue raised with Members of the Working Group by young people and parents who took part in interviews and focus groups held as part of the review. It was therefore agreed that the Council undertake further work with parents and community organisations working with different groups such as faith and third sector organisations.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)

**Recommendation 1**

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate works with schools to develop a mechanism to engage parents in anti-bullying initiatives. Furthermore, it also works with local third sector and faith organisations to raise awareness of dealing and responding to bullying.

- 6.4 Anti-Bullying Week is an annual UK event normally held in November which aims to raise awareness of bullying of children and young people, in schools and elsewhere, and to highlight ways of preventing and responding to it. The key theme for 2009 was Cyber bullying which has been identified as a rapidly emerging phenomenon which is not yet well understood by adults. It is the use of mobile phones, computers and the internet to bully people. Members noted that the Council had already been working with schools to develop appropriate policies and practices to deal with this but felt this needed to be recognised as a major issue in all schools and further work was needed to ensure all schools and youth facilities have developed appropriate measures.

**Recommendation 2**

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate work with local schools and youth to ensure their policies and practices have appropriate measures to deal with cyber bullying.

- 6.5 The meeting heard from Lucy Warwick (Education Champions Co-ordinator, Stonewall<sup>5</sup>). Members' attention was drawn to a report from Stonewall which focused on the experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools. It was noted that almost two thirds of young Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people have experienced bullying. From these ninety two per cent have experienced verbal abuse and forty one per cent physical abuse.
- 6.6 Members considered a second report from Stonewall on how teachers feel about homophobic bullying. This noted that nine in ten secondary school teachers and more than two in five primary school teachers say children and young people, regardless of their sexual orientation, currently experience homophobic bullying. Secondary school teachers also say that homophobic bullying is the second most frequent form of bullying after bullying because of weight.
- 6.7 It was also outlined that nine in ten teachers and non-teaching staff at secondary and primary schools have never received any specific training on how to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying. Half of secondary school teachers who are aware of homophobic bullying in their schools say the vast majority of incidents go unreported. A staff Member from a local primary school who was in attendance confirmed that school tend to deal with it as part of their overall anti-bullying initiatives. She highlighted there is a bigger challenge for the borough due to the diversity of the local population
- 6.8 Members discussed the experience of homophobic bullying generally within the borough. They agreed a key issue is the lack of understanding amongst young people of the impact of their actions. There is a national increase in homophobic

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/>

hate crime but parts of the borough have seen some increase due to various factors including social deprivation. Members also noted that the lack of confidence amongst school staff to deal with homophobic bullying may also increase the problem further. Members therefore suggested that the Council support schools to undertake training and support their staff to raise awareness of homophobic bullying and also how to respond and prevent it. It may be useful to identify specific schools to undertake some initial dedicated support and then use them as best practice to roll out across the borough.

### **Recommendation 3**

That the Childrens, Schools and Families Directorate support local schools to provide training and support to staff to deal with and respond to homophobic bullying.

6.9 Lucy also highlighted issues around homophobic language which tends to be used without thinking and is often ignored by teachers and school staff because either they feel it is difficult to know how to respond or they believe the language is used without any homophobic intent. When this is unchallenged it creates a culture of homophobia and can impact on young peoples sense of belonging, self-esteem and attainment at school. There is guidance and support available from Stonewall to deal with this and they have worked with local authorities to become Stonewall Education Champions. Members noted that Tower Hamlets had been working with Stonewall and this was now part of their Education Champions programme which allows local authorities to work with Stonewall and each other to establish ways in which they can address homophobic bullying and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment for all young people.

## **7. Local Perspective**

7.1 Jennifer Fear, Director of Step Forward a local youth organisation showed a DVD compiled by local youths on issues around homophobic bullying. The organisation provides a number support services for young people which includes managing the borough's anti-bullying helpline, providing 1-2-1 support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people and awareness raising for other young people.

7.2 The DVD highlighted the impact of homophobic bullying on victims and perpetrators and Members felt it was a really useful way of raising awareness amongst young people.

7.3 Kristie Millar, a Behaviour Support Worker from Redland Primary School attended the meeting and outlined some of the work undertaken in her school. She stated that the school had undertaken an enormous amount of work to develop their anti-bullying policy. There have not been many reports of bullying within the school maybe only 4-5 cases in the last 3 years. An important element of their work has been the support received from the Head Teacher.

7.4 The students and parents have also been involved in the development of the policy through active consultation. The result of the consultation had been feedback to all the stakeholders and a policy was agreed for the school. The school now has clear guidelines for reporting bullying as serious incidents which are reported to the school

Governors. There is a process in place to review the policy and ensure it is clear for everyone, in particular the students. It was also noted that the school used the local Imam and elders to get across important messages which they felt worked really well.

- 7.5 Liz Vickerie (Head of the Support for Learning Service) and Liam McQuade (Team Manager, Behaviour Support Team) presented the borough's anti-bullying initiatives and results of local views by parents and pupils. Liz outlined how the service was funded and that they are accountable to the Children's Trust Board. The borough has an Anti-bullying Steering Group which has key officers from across the Children, Schools and Families Directorate including the Youth Offending Team. The Behaviour Support Team has a key role in advising and monitoring policies in schools as well as other settings such as youth clubs and residential children's homes. They also provide guidance and undertake specific case work where the relationship between the school and family break down. In addition they provide guidance resource and co-ordinate the electronic survey of young people.
- 7.6 Members heard that the service was currently funding an anti-bullying helpline which was run by Step Forward. Unfortunately, the take up of this has been very slow and does not provide value for money. The meeting agreed that it would be useful to review this and use this funding to develop other innovative mechanisms to support young people needing help.

**Recommendation 4**

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate review the use of anti-bullying helpline and use funding from this to explore other innovative methods for young people to seek advice on bullying.

- 7.7 The Council provides support to School Governors in their role in reducing bullying and extensive support to schools in developing comprehensive anti-bullying policies. The national "Tellus"<sup>6</sup> Survey which gathers children and young people's views on their life, their school and their local area showed that 62% of Tower Hamlets pupils say they have never been bullied at school which is higher than the national average of 56%. In addition, 38% of local pupils say the school dealt with bullying well or very well compared to 36% nationally. Furthermore a National Audit on Head teachers report also notes the borough's support for anti-bullying is in the top quartile.
- 7.8 In regards to taking forward the borough's work on anti-bullying, Members were informed that further work needed to be undertaken with the few remaining schools where policies still need more work. It was also noted that greater work was needed to firstly understand the issues around bullying for young people with disabilities and this was an issue identified by the service as part of an Equalities Impact Assessment of the Anti-Bullying policy. Members therefore felt it would be useful for the Council to ensure they undertake specific work to deal with bullying amongst disabled young people.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.tellussurvey.org.uk/default.aspx>

**Recommendation 5**

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate undertake further work with schools to ensure they develop greater understanding of the impact of bullying on disabled young people and develop policies to deal with this effectively.

- 7.9 Liam McQuade presented on the electronic survey undertaken in the borough of young peoples view on bullying. Around twenty schools took part which allows rapid analysis of results and establishing baseline. This is a key tool to listen to pupils and parents voices and inform the development of policy making and daily practice.
- 7.10 The meeting noted that there is huge local anxiety amongst young people about bullying and this ensures that the schools need to respond to this by developing appropriate measures to deal with these anxieties. It was agreed that a key issue is changing the culture within schools to ensure the anxiety expressed by young people also reflects the number of cases of reported bullying.
- 7.11 The meeting then discussed that there was a need to ensure work was also undertaken with the private schools in the borough. Members were informed that some of the Islamic Schools were working with the Local Authority but it was difficult to penetrate some of the other schools. It was agreed that this is an area that requires further development.

**Recommendation 6**

That the Children, Schools and Families Directorate works with private schools and other private educational facilities such as Islamic after school classes to develop anti-bullying policies which is consistent with the borough's and national polices.

**8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 The Challenge Session was an opportunity for Members to understand the borough's approach to anti-bullying work. The session enabled Members to ask key questions around policies within local schools and identify any gaps.
- 8.2 Members noted that there has been substantial amount of work undertaken within the borough's schools and there are some very good practice examples. There is a need to undertake further work around specific issues such as homophobic, disability and cyber bullying. It was also noted that parents and the third sector have a key role in developing awareness in dealing and responding to instances of bullying. This session also provided Members who were on the Scrutiny Review on Reducing Youth Offending a greater understanding of how bullying is managed within the borough as they heard first hand from young people the link between bullying and youth crime.

**11. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

- 11.1 This report describes the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Anti-Bullying Initiatives in Schools held in January 2010.



11.2 There are no specific financial implications emanating from this report but in the event that the Council agrees further action in response to this report's recommendations then officers will be obliged to seek the appropriate financial approval before further financial commitments are made.

## **12. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)**

12.1 The Council is required by section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for Cabinet to provide a response.

12.2 The report contains recommendations which are capable of being carried out within the Council's statutory functions. Paragraph 3.3 of the report correctly identifies the Council's duty under section 10 of the Children Act 2004. There is a further obligation on the Council under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 to make arrangements to ensure that its functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. If Cabinet supported the recommendations, it would be for officers to ensure that any action is carried out lawfully.

## **13. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS**

13.1 The Challenge Session considered issues around bullying for specific equalities strands and have made a number of recommendations for further developing policies and practices in schools and youth setting to deal with these effectively. An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken of the borough's anti-bullying policy in February 2009 which has also made a number of recommendations.

## **14. Risk Management**

14.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the Challenge Session report or recommendations.