

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

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

**HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2019**

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL MULBERRY PLACE**

**Members Present:**

Councillor Sufia Alam (Chair)  
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan  
(Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Shah Ameen  
Councillor Kyrsten Perry  
Councillor Andrew Wood  
Councillor Mohammed Pappu  
Councillor Helal Uddin

**Co-opted Members Present:**

Neil Cunningham  
Joanna Hannan  
Fatiha Kassouri  
Dr Phillip Rice

- Parent Governors
- Representative of Diocese of Westminster
- Parent Governors
- (Church of England Representative)

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor Marc Francis  
Councillor Danny Hassell

**Others Present:**

Vivian Akinremi  
Tamanna Parveen  
Tamanna Begum  
Hannah Hussein  
Kanizah Khan  
Zahra Halim  
Khadra Said  
Leia Wasike-Ginn  
Charlie Davis  
Ayesha Rafiqul  
Cadidjatu Jalo  
Khadija Begum

- Deputy Young Mayor and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing
- Haileybury Youth Centre
- Haileybury Youth Centre
- Haileybury Youth Centre
- Haileybury Youth Centre
- Haileybury Youth Centre
- Youth Participation Officer
- Spotlight Youth Centre
- Spotlight Youth Centre
- Spotlight Youth Centre
- Spotlight Youth Centre
- Spotlight Youth Centre

**Officers Present:**

Jonathan Solomons  
Richard Baldwin  
Magdalene Bannis-Roy

- (Strategy and Policy Manager - Children and Culture)
- (Divisional Director, Children's Social Care)
- Youth Services Strategic Transformation Development Lead

Elizabeth Freer	– (Strategy and Policy Manager, Children and Culture)
Pauline Hoare	– (Head of the Intergrated Early Years Service)
Mohammed Jolil	– (Interim Head of Early Help)
Debbie Jones	– (Corporate Director, Children and Culture)
Ronke Martins-Taylor	– (Divisional Director, Youth & Commissioning)
Christine McInnes	– (Divisional Director, Education and Partnership, Children's)
Layla Richards	– (Head of Strategy and Policy – Children and Culture)
Charlotte Saini	– (Strategy, Policy and Performance Manager Children & Culture)
Abzal Ali	– Hubs Operation Manager, Youth Service Team

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests, although Councillor Helal Uddin declared for item 4.1 that his employer, the Bromley by Bow Centre worked closely with Poplar HARCA which was a housing provider in the borough who funded the Spotlight Youth Service.

### 3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting from the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2019 were agreed and approved as an accurate record of the meeting save for the following amendments:

#### **SEND INSPECTION**

Page 13 – Following the action point it should be **NOTED**

Members **AGREED** further information was required to complete the deep dive into SEND services. The Sub-Committee requested information regarding the financial breakdown, the workforce and the consultation. It requested an updated SEND action plan dashboard and equalities impact study. Members agreed this should be shared with Sub-Committee at a future meeting.

#### **SEND CONSULTATION AND OUTCOMES**

Page 13 - Following the second bullet point, a further bullet point be added stating:

- In response to the issues outlined by the Support for Learning Service, Ms McInnes said the service had not been reviewed for 23 years. The law and practice for SEND had changed. The service had not delivered to all categories of need and was patchy across the borough. Some schools were receiving more input than others. Ms McInnes said it was not an equitable service providing across Early Years to age 25 and only operated during term time. She said this had to change.

#### **4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

##### **4.1 Youth Service Provision for Girls**

Prior to the Sub-Committee receiving a report on Youth Service Provision for Girls, presentations were made by the girls group of Haileybury Youth Centre and the Spotlight Youth Centre.

##### **Haileybury Youth Centre**

Kanizah Khan, Zahra Halim and Hannah Hussein informed Members why they got involved with the Haileybury Youth Centre, the types of activities they had undertaken and the benefits of socialising and mixing with other young people.

Points to note from the presentation:

- Girls encouraged by friends and family to join the Youth Club
- Has helped improve their confidence and allows them to be smart with their time
- Have taken part in experiences, they would never have done. For example, the ADSAN Leadership course and a residential trip to Wales.
- One day a week is allocated to girls, with approximately 10 attendees.
- They recommend the Youth Club should be promoted in schools and to parents and there should be a balance of activities for both boys and girls to get involved in.

In response to questions from Members the following was noted:

- Some of the girls had joined the Youth Club after hearing about it at a summer fayre. They believed the promotion of the Youth Club in schools and to parents would encourage more girls to attend.
- The girls expressed their gratitude for the Youth Club and said it provided a great opportunity to experience new activities and have something to do with their time in the holidays.
- In response to if social media would be an appropriate tool to advertise the activities of the youth club, the girls who were of a younger age bracket 11 -14 years, said their preference would be

face to face engagement. Youth workers should attend schools and convince parents of the benefits of the Youth Club.

- The girls said they had developed good relationships with their youth workers. They felt confident in discussing problems they had with their youth worker, who provided them with support and advice.

The Chair, thanked the girls from Haileybury Youth Centre for their presentation.

### **Spotlight Youth Centre**

Cadidjatu Jalo, Ayesha Rafiqul, Leia Wasike-Ginn and Charlie Davis from Spotlight Youth Club gave a presentation on their experiences of being part of a Youth Club and how it had opened doors to activities they would otherwise never have considered.

Points to note from the Presentation:

- Spotlight Youth Centre had provided them with opportunities to pursue their interests such as music, politics and debating, the environment as well as arts and crafts.
- They had learnt new skills and had taken part in sports which they may not have tried before, such as boxing. They had been involved in community projects to feed the homeless.
- The girls said breaking down gender stereotypes was crucial in order to make the Youth Club welcoming for girls. They said it was important to change the mind-sets and behaviours of young people and also parents. Youth Clubs were safe places for young people to engage and grow as citizens of their community.

In response to questions from Members the following was noted:

- The girls from the Spotlight Youth Club said there were advantages to both bigger and fewer clubs as well as those which are smaller. If youth clubs were provided on a larger scale, they had the potential of being popular, better staffed and known to young people who would spread the word on how good they are. However consideration ought to be given to smaller youth clubs where staff can provide pastoral care and support young people who are experiencing difficulties. The girls concurred it would be better to have a mix of both.
- In response to what could be done to encourage participation by young girls at Youth Centres, the girls from Spotlight who were of an older age range (15-18 years) said they would prefer communication through social media. All made extensive use of Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter and felt that this would be more appropriate way to make contact rather than face to face or via schools. They said young people were more likely to join a club or get involved in activities if communication was through these channels as they are more likely to follow the opinion of their peers rather than teachers or parents.

- They recommended the advertising of youth clubs and the activities it provided needed to tackle gender stereotypes. For example, advertising boxing ought to show both boys and girls, so the gender stereotype can be broken down.

The Chair, thanked the girls from the Spotlight Youth Club for their presentation.

### **Youth Council and Young Mayors Team**

Ms Vivian Akinremi, Youth Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing gave a presentation on how she became involved with the Youth Council and the Young Mayors Team. Initially she had doubts about the role and did not know what to expect. However as she progressed through the selection process and competed with other candidates she became more aware of how politics and decision making worked. Ms Akinremi said she ran her campaign on things that mattered to her such as Mental Health, Career pathways for young people and safe places for young people to hang out, like Youth Centres. She was very proud of her accomplishment as the first black woman representing the borough and attending City Hall and Houses of Parliament. Ms Akinremi said her role was enjoyable and rewarding and she would encourage other young people to consider politics are a career choice.

In answer to questions from Members the following was noted:

- Mental Health had always been an issue close to her heart and she was determined to breakdown the stigma associated with mental health. As a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board she voices her opinions on health issues that affect young people. She said being an advocate for mental health, she attended various events and schools to talk to young people about mental health.

The Chair thanked Ms Vivien Akenremi for her presentation and said the Sub-Committee was impressed by the contributions made by all the young girls who had attended the meeting

Ms Ronke Martins-Taylor, Divisional Director Youth and Commissioning presented her report which outlined the current offer from the Tower Hamlets Youth Service and services commissioned from other youth service providers.

Ms Martins-Taylor said it was encouraging to hear from the young people in attendance at the meeting, the positive effect youth workers can have on young people. She said although youth clubs were male dominated, the suggestions on how the Youth Service can reach out and advertise youth clubs to parents was something the Service was working towards with the Council's communications team. Ms Martins-Taylor said the ratio of male to female Youth Workers also needed to improve and volunteering was one way of achieving this.

In response to questions from Members the following was noted:

- The male to female ratio of Youth Workers could possibly be improved with bigger and fewer youth clubs. The Youth Service is looking to put in place a volunteering scheme which would allow people to get a taster for youth work and what it involves.
- There is a review of Youth Services taking place at present, and data is being analysed to see what the needs are in each area. The review will look at how best to combine resources and work in partnership with other departments such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Teams in Community Safety. The review is expected to conclude in February 2020 with a report going to Cabinet.
- It was suggested by Members the volunteering scheme should be incentivised, so young people choosing a career path into youth work ought to be paid a salary at the higher end of the age bracket. Outreach work in communities seeking Adult volunteers was also suggested as an alternative. Ms Martins-Taylor said the Review would look at all possibilities and was not wedded to one model or another.
- In response to how the Youth Service was engaging with young people with SEND needs, Ms Martins-Taylor said the Tower project was an example of how it was providing services to SEND children. She acknowledged more needed to be done to ensure mainstream clubs were inclusive of SEND Children. She said there was a strategy to make sure youth clubs are accessible to everyone.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

**NOTE** the content of the report and consider the offer in relation to girls and young women.

#### **4.2 Children's Social Care & Early Help – 6 months post inspection update**

Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People presented the post inspection update report from Ofsted, relating to Children's Social Care and Early Help Service.

Councillor Hassell said following the 'inadequate' rating Children Services had received in 2017, the Service had worked hard to improve and had developed a detailed improvement plan. The most recent inspection took place in June 2019 and demonstrated significant improvement with Children's Services, which is now rated as 'Good'.

However, the Service continues to face several issues and challenges such as financial pressures, the recruitment and retention of staff, the levels of demand and ensuring that improvements in the quality of practice are sustained.

Councillor Hassell said the budget for the Service would need to be right sized, as part of the budget process, to ensure it had the right level of funding for the levels of demand the service was experiencing. Regarding the recruitment and retention of staff, good progress had been made, with a reduction of agency staff by fifty percent. Levels of demand remains high which is to be expected in an inner London borough with our demographics. Ofsted had concurred that the level of demand that is experienced was to be expected.

Councillor Hassell said it was vital the Service continued on this trajectory of improvement.

In response to questions from Members of the Sub-Committee the following was noted:

- In reference to the table on page 33, Members of the sub-committee enquired why there had been a big increase in the number of Looked after Children whose assessments needed to be reviewed - referencing 5.10 in the table. Councillor Hassell said the increase was due to the fact that a large number of assessments were due to be reviewed at the same time; however a significant effort had been made to ensure that this figure was addressed. He said considerable data sat behind the spreadsheet which he would further enquire about and report back to the Sub-Committee.
- In response to what had been learnt from the past and how the service would be protected against budget cuts, Councillor Hassell said the knowledge and practice of social workers had improved and developed and this had a significant impact on the services provided. Regarding the budget, Councillor Hassell said a case would be made as part of the budget process.
- Ms Debbie Jones added it was important not to become complacent and take the foot off the pedal. She said the Service could not afford to go backwards and had to continue of this path of improvement.
- Councillor Perry commended the Service for what it had achieved and said she feared the transformation would stall if funding was not adequate. She asked if the Service had enough money to deliver the improvements it wanted. Councillor Alam echoed this, asking what approach had been taken to right size the budget. Ms Debbie Jones said there is an overspend, in the Children's Directorate. It was not possible to know in 2017, where in the journey the Service would be or what demand would be like. The budget needs to be looked at and the service needs to benchmark itself against comparators.
- In response to if the Early Help Services are able to cope with additional demand, Ms Jones said social workers were working in

partnership with others and an Early Help pilot was looking at innovative ways to make the early help offer more responsive.

- The Exploitation Team is working with families and individuals who are at risk of exploitation. This is a challenging area as the threat is constantly moving and evolving. Work has evolved to include knife crime and county lines and the team has been restructured to take into account the rising demand.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

**NOTE** the contents of the report

#### **4.3 Victoria Park 1 O'clock Club**

Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People introduced the report stating this had been added to the agenda in response to a number of Member Enquiries relating to the closure of the Victoria Park One O'clock Club building and the scope for continued use of the building and activities provided for early years children within Victoria Park.

Councillor Hassell said the report outlined the history of the use of the building, the rationale for the decisions made and the collected record of the decision making process including information provided through responses to member enquiries.

Councillor Hassell said there were a number of issues regarding the suitability of the building for an Early Years setting. He referred to page 52 of the agenda which provided the history behind the stay and play sessions, the restructure and consultation process from 2011 onwards. Councillor Hassell said the decision to close the facility was taken after consultation with residents and service users. The building was not a value for money investment for further capital expenditure and as such it was agreed to be surplus to requirement.

Councillor Hassell referred to Appendix 15 and said outcomes for children had improved significantly with the Early Year offer being taken up by hard to reach families in more settings.

Ms Christine McInnes, Service Head for Education and Partnership referred to page 93 of the agenda pack and said it was important to understand the wider context of how the decision was made and the rationale behind it. She said the take up for early learning for 2, 3, and 4 year olds was relatively low and therefore money was invested to improve the Children Centres and the quality of service provided therein.

Information regarding the changes being proposed was in the public domain and pages 105 to 109 show the purpose of the consultation. Ms McInnes said there was no attempt to mislead the public. The key features on page 107 and



the map on page 109 clearly show the impact the changes would have. She said as far back as 2016, the Victoria Park facility was at risk of closure. The briefing from the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2016 at pages 167-180, shows the feedback from the consultation and how Olga School (Overland Children Centre) had come on stream. At that stage, it was clear there were insufficient number of staff to deliver early year provision through both Victoria Park and the Olga School sites. Appendix 7 and 8, pages 183 to 193 provide further information which was considered before a decision to close the Victoria Park facility was made.

Ms McInnes said the restructure of the Early Year Service had been successful, with improved quality of provision and better outreach to families. She said having Health Visitors in each Children Centre meant services were coordinated and accessible to more people. The decision to close the Victoria Park One O'clock Club was absolutely the right decision. She said no complaints had been received from service users or indeed local residents. The issue of dissatisfaction had only been raised through Member Enquiries.

Councillor Marc Francis, Member for Bow East ward was invited by the Chair, Councillor Sufia Alam to speak at the meeting.

Councillor Francis said the picture put forward by Councillor Hassell and Ms McInnes was a partial one and he welcomed the opportunity to state his case. Councillor Francis said the Victoria Park One O'clock Club had been set up fifty years ago and was given to the Council by the GLC (Greater London Council). The decision to close the Club in 2016 is simply not true.

The 2016 consultation put forward proposals for closure, but with capital investment the stay and play sessions could have continued at the Victoria Park setting. He said whilst the building itself is small there is a large outside space which families enjoyed and valued. Over the years, the community facility had not been invested in and was run down. Councillor Francis referred to the pictorial graphs on pages 64 and 65 of the agenda and said the decision making process had to be questioned. He argued the closure was a key decision for the Council to make and therefore should not have been a delegated to Officers.

The following points were noted, during the debate of this item:

- Councillor Hassell verified legal advice confirmed the decision to close the Victoria Park facility and provide services through the Olga School setting were not deemed to be a key decision. Councillor Hassell said he would share the advice with members of the sub-committee.
- Ms McInnes said Early Years provision is highly regulated and strict regulations must be adhered to. The location of the One O'clock Club, with its small footprint providing for a maximum of ten children meant any extension of the building would have been at considerable cost to the Council.
- Ms McInnes said the question comes back to if the building would provide value of money and clearly it wasn't going to do that. The

facilities within the building such as the toilets were not DDA compliant, so further investment of capital would have been required to make it usable. The cost outweighed the value for money consideration and as such the building has been given over to the Parks and Leisure Service who have repurposed it for horticultural provision.

- Ms McInnes said Appendix 15 showed how the restructure of the service had resulted in the service reaching more families with improved outcomes, so therefore it was the correct decision to close the Victoria Park facility.
- Councillor Francis suggested the decision to close the Victoria Park facility had been made with a 'nod and wink' to Officers. Ms McInnes said the inference Officers had colluded in making the decision to close the Victoria Park facility was not true and invited Councillor Francis to withdraw this remark, which he declined to do. The decision had been made following consultation with service users and in consultation with the Cabinet and portfolio lead for Children and Health, at the time, back in 2016.
- With regard to the capital bid, Councillor Danny Hassell stated the footprint of the building had been mapped and the building was offered for tender to the voluntary sector. However, no bids were received.
- Councillor Hassell stated that the closure of the building had not impacted on the services provided. The Early Years Service remained committed to providing 'stay and play' sessions in the Park, throughout the year at no additional cost to families. Councillor Hassell said former Cabinet Members had come to a decision given the change in information when the detailed survey of the building and the mapped floorplan led them to conclude the building would not provide value for money, through further capital investment.
- Ms Debbie Jones, Corporate Director for Children and Culture said the debate had made serious allegations against her staff which she strongly objected to. She said her staff should be given the opportunity to counter the allegations made. She said she had hoped the publication of the agenda report would help to address the concerns raised by Councillor Francis.
- Councillor Salva-Macallen said she had read the papers intently and believed this to be a key decision. She referred to Appendix 12, page 225 and Appendix 14 page 235, point 3.2 and stated it was unclear at what point Children's Services had decided the building was 'no longer required'. Councillor Salva-Macallen referred to the briefings at Appendix 7, page 183 and Appendix 8, page 193 and said she felt the closure of the building would constitute as a key decision.
- Ms Christine McInnes responded saying if Members wished to reopen the Victoria Park facility, they would need to be clear on where else a cut in service ought to be made. Ms McInnes said sessions from Victoria Park would only cater for ten children at a time and the legal advice obtained from the Divisional Director for Legal Services clearly outlined that this was not a key decision. Ms McInnes said she'd be happy to share the advice from legal with members of the Sub-Committee.

- Councillor Francis countered the email from legal is dated 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019 after changes were made to the constitution on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019. He said it was important for a political conversation to take place regarding the closure as it affected more than one ward.
- Councillor Salva-Macallan suggested the issue be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to discuss the legal arguments of when and if the decision to close the facility fell in the remit of being a key decision or not.
- Mr Mohammed Jolil, Interim Head of Early Help, addressed the Sub-Committee stating that he had been present throughout the whole restructure process. A reduction in staff meant a decision regarding the practicality of running stay and play sessions from the Victoria Park facility had to be made; especially in light of the building catering for only ten children. Mr Jolil said the vision of integrated health services within Children Centres and reaching out to more families was part of the consultation process which had been positively received by service users and the wider community. Regardless of the capital bid and issues with the building not being DDA compliant, there were additional reoccurring costs to maintain the felt covering in the grounds. This required re-felting every year due to tree roots making it unsafe for children to use. Mr Jolil said the closure of the building had not impacted on the number of stay and play sessions held in the Park and overall the move to the Olga School site had been a success.
- Councillor Wood questioned why the building could not be extended or rebuilt. He cited an example in his own ward where a park building had been redeveloped to include a café. Councillor Hassell responded stating this was a Crown estate building so different rules applied. The issue remained as to if the building would provide value for money and its suitability to provide Early Year provision from it.

Councillor Gabriela Salva-Macallan, proposed and Councillor Andrew Wood seconded the decision to suspend standing orders and to extend the meeting by fifteen minutes from 9:30 p.m. to 9:45 p.m.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

**MOVE** the proposal and agreed to suspend standing orders until 9:45 p.m.

- Dr Rice queried the capital expenditure for renovating the building and asked why it was not possible to make it a viable facility. Councillor Hassell referred Members to page 217 stating the estimated costing was set out in the table therein. He said the capital bid for repairing the roof was approximately £55,000 and a further £35,000 would have been required to make it compliant with Early Year standards. Hence a total of £85,000 was required, which would be subject to inflation. He asked Members to bear in mind that these are estimated figures so the cost could be more.

- Councillor Salva-Macallan reiterated her suggestion to request the legal advice as to whether this was a key decision was referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Ms Christine McInnes and Ms Debbie Jones made clear that any decision to overturn the decision already made would require an alternative facility to be identified for closure.
- Councillor Perry stated it was important for Members to keep perspective, because going forward Members will be making decisions regarding the Council's budget and therefore it must be done with honesty and integrity.

Councillor Sufia Alam, Chair of Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee, thanked everyone for their contribution and the frank and open debate on the issue. She said no disrespect was intended to Officers and the crux of the debate had been about if the decision made to close the One O'clock club was a key decision or not. Councillor Alam asked members if they concurred to referring this question to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further debate.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Refer the matter of whether the decision to close the One O'clock Club in Victoria Park, was a key decision or not, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and;
2. Agreed the legal advice received ought to be made available to members of the Sub-Committee as well as members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, when this is discussed further.

**5. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT**

The Chair reminded Members the next meeting of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee was scheduled for Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

The meeting ended at 9.35 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Sufia Alam  
Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee