



Ben Jeffrey -(PFI Monitoring Officer)  
Anna Murphy -(Strategy and Policy Officer)  
Justina Bridgeman -(Democratic Services Officer (Committees))

**Officers Present Virtually:**

Kate Smith -(Head of Healthy Lives)  
Grace Walker -((Interim) Head of Strategy, Commissioning and Youth)

**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 7 December 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record of proceedings.

**4. ACTIONS LOG**

The actions were noted.

**5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

**5.1 Children's Health**

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning introduced the first item. Dr Somen Banerjee, Director of Public Health, and officers, requested sub-committee members to consider how to incorporate a holistic approach to health into the work of the council, including preventative healthy lifestyles.

Dr Somen Banerjee began by emphasising the importance of early years and child health, as the borough has one of the highest levels of child poverty in England. There are also higher levels of unhealthy weight and tooth decay in children and due to the pandemic, an increase in speech and language needs and higher mental health concerns. Details were also given on the current work to reduce and prevent the rise of youth vaping in the borough and the concerns around energy drinks, sugar and caffeine.

Pheobe Kalungi, Public Health Programme Lead for Children and Adolescents, then outlined the targeted high impact areas within child health and development, specifically the health and wellbeing of children aged between 0 and 19 years. This also focuses on improving parental mental health and healthy weight for both parents prior to raising children. This includes more awareness of alcohol consumption and smoking, to reduce the risk of harm to the child and further promoting a reduction in inequalities for mothers from black and ethnic groups.

Other considerations include more support with breastfeeding to begin the process of supplying nutritious and healthy food. Promoting stronger connections with external family members in raising children to live a healthy lifestyle and become confident in speech, language and wellbeing. Ms Kalungi then noted the various promotional health services now available in the borough.

Georgia Ramirez, Public Health Programme Lead, followed with a brief overview on how investments in health and wellbeing are implemented. This includes the maternity services at the Royal London Hospital in conjunction with the UNICEF Baby Friendly initiative specialists. Around £3.5 million has been invested in public health grants for health and wellbeing activities and children and family centres. Sub-committee members were also informed of the accreditation given to the maternity services.

Kate Smith, Head of Healthy Lives, then discussed the Healthy Lives initiative which works in partnership with Public Health, schools and other partners supporting schools to promote healthy environments. Details were given on the Healthy Schools Awards, where LBTH has received more awards than any other London borough from the Mayor of London, and the 'Daily Mile', where children are encouraged to maintain physical activity by leaving their desks for 15 minutes to walk or run. Further work with Contract Services is ongoing to ensure sugar intake is reduced in school deserts and that healthy food is provided for all children.

Grace Walker, Interim Head of Strategy, Commissioning and Youth, noted the current work to promote THRIVE, a person centred needs led approach to good mental health for all residents. Details on the strategic needs health assessment, compiled by partners outlines the boroughs health needs to enable effective assistance. The objectives of the mental health programme will enable early prevention to reduce the need for specialist mental health intervention at a later stage. Support for young residents is available from a range of services in schools, voluntary organisations, partners and online throughout the borough.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Somen Banerjee and Officers:

- Confirmed that a combined effort to combat the supply of vapes to children is ongoing with the 'Combined Drugs Partnership', with Trading Standards, borough schools and Community Safety to warn of the dangers. This includes the illegal supply of vapes laced with drugs

such as 'Spice' and new legislation will prohibit retailers selling and marketing vapes, as they are not recommended for children.

- Noted that a stakeholder workshop took place in November 2023 regarding education, prevention and enforcement to discourage shops to sell sweet tasting vapes, which can entice children. Further workshops will be considered.
- Explained that further work with parents and childminders is ongoing to understand the low uptake of free childcare and early education, as places are available.
- Clarified that the East Safe service supports young people with substance abuse issues and visit schools to promote awareness. The All East service supports older people.
- Noted that concerns around portion sizes for the free school meals initiative have been relayed to the catering services within the borough for consideration, as uptake has increased by around 85-95% in some schools. It was noted that energy drinks are prohibited in schools, although further work on promotional safety campaigns on social media with young residents are being considered. A written brief on the uptake figures will be submitted for the sub-committee for review by the next meeting.
- Confirmed that a written brief on evaluations conducted on the positive impact of Safe East, Healthy Lives and THEWS has made will be sent to the sub-committee for review.
- Explained that collaboration with schools and Kooth, an online counselling service is ongoing within departments to support young people with mental health concerns as well as mindfulness and stress reduction projects and more promotion of family style dining within schools.
- Thanked sub-committee members for their feedback and ongoing support in visiting schools.

**RESOLVED** that;

1. A written multi-agency brief on tackling the issue of 'spice' in vapes within Tower Hamlets be brought back to the sub-committee.
2. An updated evaluation report on child health be brought to a later sub-committee meeting.
3. A written brief on uptake figures for Free School Meals to be submitted to the sub-committee for review by 09 May 2024 meeting.

4. A written brief on evaluations undertaken on the positive impact Safe East, Healthy Lives and THEWS initiatives have made to the borough will be brought to the sub-committee.
5. That the presentation be noted.

## 5.2 School Curriculum

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning introduced the second item, which considered the teaching of RSE and PHSE within the school curriculum. Kate Smith, Head of Healthy Lives, informed members that the Department for Education (DfE) is due to publish the new national guidance with regard to relationship, sex education and health education. It is anticipated that this will include recommendations regarding which topics should be taught at specific year groups.

Ms Smith outlined the current guidance on what should be taught by primary and secondary school end. It was noted that sexual health is not statutory in the primary school curriculum. Sub-committee members were informed of the importance of the DfE's recommendations in teaching RSHE in schools, as well as OFSTED's Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges in 2021, indicating the alarming figures and the need for more reports of inappropriate contact.

The council is committed to combating homophobic behaviour and increasing equalities, and guidance on teaching different types of families should be taken into consideration. In the interests of safeguarding children, the borough currently recommends the basic naming of body parts is also taught at a Key Stage 1, as schools sought advice on this from the council. Medical leaders in the borough also wrote a letter in support of different types of families being taught about within schools and the teaching of the names of sexual body parts.

The borough currently recommends that puberty lessons begin at Year 4,, as it is important for children to understand themselves and any changes in their body. Schools are not obliged to follow borough guidance. It is important that parents are consulted on decisions regarding the RSHE taught to their children.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Lisa Fraser, Director of Education and Kate Smith;

- Clarified that the councils initial RSHE guidance was compiled following a time of safeguarding concerns. Once the updated DfE guidance has been published, Tower Hamlets will be adopting those recommendations. Further details on how parents' complaints in specific faith schools were resolved and how the council engaged with

parents and community groups will be discussed outside of this meeting.

- Confirmed that schools are advised to share RSE resources with parents and the community in order to fully comprehend what borough children will be taught. Parents are advised to discuss any concerns they may have with the school.
- Explained that following the OFSTED Review, more emphasis has been placed on teaching children the importance of appropriate methods of behaviour towards each other and to report any issues faced to school staff. The councils safeguarding team is also on hand to support all schools within the borough.
- Noted that the council expects the new DfE guidance to state the appropriate age in which the teaching of certain RSE subjects should occur. Parents are encouraged to discuss any concerns they may have with schools and support is also available from the council for both parents and schools.

**RESOLVED** that;

1. A written brief on advice given to schools about working with parents and concerns that are raised.
2. That the presentation be noted.

### **5.3 Education PFI Contracts**

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning introduced the last item, which discussed the commissioning of contracts in education and contract management of outsourced services.

Terry Bryan, Service Head, Pupil Access and School Sufficiency, and Ben Jeffery, PFI Monitoring Officer, provided an overview of the varying PFI contracts for 25 borough schools, due to expire in 2027 and how management will continue beyond that. Mr Bryan outlined the methods and contract terms in which public sector bodies use private finance to fund building and refurbishment projects.

Sub-committee members were informed that contracts primarily have three main elements; the output specification, methods of payment and any variations to the contract specific to a particular school, enabling long term guarantee of service maintenance by the private contractor, rather than the council. Additional school expenses were also included, such as necessary work not initially covered in the contract, inflation impacted by the schools capital interest and contract management costs.

Ben Jeffery then outlined the current arrangements of the PFI contracts and how the council will prepare for the expiration of those contracts in 2027. Although some schools are happy with the PFI providers, others have been concerned about the duration of the repairs, performance issues, under delivery of major capital projects, regular staff changes and rising annual charges. Monthly performance meetings with the provider are conducted to identify poor service delivery, and financial penalties are issued to providers and redirected as credit to the schools where violations have occurred.

Regular consultation with schools, annual satisfaction surveys and quarterly and annual health and safety audits are conducted to ensure compliance. The customer satisfaction survey results from 2023 showed an increase in satisfaction compared to 2022.

Preparation for the expiration of contracts began in 2021 in consultation with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA), DfE and schools. Health checks have and will continue to take place, as will a gap analysis and sourcing additional funding. A working group has been established to ensure an effective termination to the contracts. Questionnaires has been sent to schools to establish if they would consider in-house provision going forward, and a working group to include schools will commence later in February to discuss the level of provision required.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Terry Bryan and Ben Jeffrey;

- Acknowledged that schools unitary charges were largely impacted by rising inflation and compounded by a real term reduction in school budgets. The Council is supporting schools with rising costs by providing a contribution through its PFI reserves.
- Noted that cross department collaboration is necessary to ensure resources are available to the children's services.
- Clarified that the council was not aware of any instances where schools have had to cut their PFI services due to budgetary constraints.

**RESOLVED** that;

1. A breakdown on the PFI charges for all borough schools to be presented to the sub-committee for review.
2. A brief overview of the PFI value for money contract terms and council limitations to be presented to the sub-committee for review.
3. That the presentation be noted.

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

None

The meeting ended at 8.27 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee