

Report for Cabinet

Title	Author	Cabinet date
Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, 1 st October 2013	Cllr Motin Uz-Zaman, chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	9 th October 2013

Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 1st October. The meeting focused on education, social care and wellbeing and considered the following items:

- Education, Social Care and Wellbeing Directorate spotlight
- A presentation on early years provision for eligible two year olds
- An update on progress in implementing the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Children's Centres from 2011-12
- Electoral Matters Update

Detail of the Committee's discussions on each item are set out below.

The new Corporate Director for education, social care and wellbeing (Robert McCulloch-Graham), the former Interim Corporate Director (Anne Canning), the Head of Learning and Achievement Early Years (Monica Forty) and the Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing attended Committee. John Williams, Service Head for Democratic Services, presented the Electoral Matters update.

Education, Social Care and Wellbeing Directorate spotlight

Cllr Abdul Asad and Anne Canning presented the key challenges facing the new Directorate over the next few years. These were identified as **pupil projection planning; integrated care for children with disabilities; and managing the Troubled Families programme**. She then went on to talk about the challenges of working with **free schools and academies** and highlighted some of the schools which had been recently been established or converted and some which are in the pipeline and advised the Committee of the strong interest in setting up in the borough.

The Committee were keen to explore the challenges that the Directorate identified. Some of the areas of particular interest were:

- **Free Schools and Academies:** Members were keen to understand the impact of these schools on community schools. The Committee heard how the Directorate engages with these schools on issues such as admissions and other collaborative work, however this can be challenging as the council has no legal powers over the schools in these areas.
- **Troubled Families Programme:** Members were pleased to hear that the council will be meeting its targets which have been revised by the Government because they were unrealistic. The Committee heard how the council has done very well nationally in this area, and the work that has been going on for several years in this area is now being recognised. Members were particularly pleased to hear that both Health and the local Job Centre Plus were involved with the project.

- **Health and Wellbeing Board:** Members were concerned that a formal Health and Wellbeing Board had still not been established and that the shadow board was not open to the public. The Committee were pleased to hear that discussions were underway to formalise the Board, and a commitment to ensure that all papers were circulated to the Committee for the purposes of Health Scrutiny, as a matter of course.

Early Years provision for eligible two year olds

The Committee had a very interesting presentation by the Head of Learning and Achievement Early Years (Monica Forty) on explaining the early learning provision for eligible two year olds. She advised Members that it was **unlikely that the Government pledge to provide 15 hours for all Eligible two year olds could be fulfilled** by the beginning of next academic year. Members were concerned to hear this and asked that they **investigate whether any of the assets that the Council holds would be suitable childcare venues**. Members were also concerned to hear that there was a **shortage of suitably qualified childcare staff in the borough** and the Committee asked that collaboration with training providers such as Skillsmatch and local colleges to fill this gap was given priority, especially as this would also help to get local people into jobs. Members heard that managing parental expectations would be one of the biggest challenges over the next year.

An update on progress in implementing the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Children's Centres from 2011-12

The Committee received a progress update report to a scrutiny review which was taken to Scrutiny and Cabinet in December 2012. The update report relates to some outstanding recommendations from the scrutiny review "**Reviewing the impact of the Children's Centres restructure**".

Electoral Matters Update

We also received the Electoral Matters Update report. The report focussed on issues concerning **electoral registration and the conduct of elections**. Members were specifically keen to hear about **the work of the service in mitigating any fraudulent activity, especially with regard to postal votes**.

The Committee were particularly keen to be reassured that the registration **checks by the service to mitigate fraudulent activity** were rigorous enough. They heard that there were several systems in place, including:

- Ensuring the **police know when postal votes are being hand delivered**, ensuring that they are posted through letter boxes, and where possible, not using the postal service to deliver postal votes;
- **Reviewing requests for deletions and additions to the register**, data matching exercises with records such as council tax - National Fraud Initiative data and Single Person Discount.
- Sending confirmation letters out in February 2014 asking residents to confirm information held on the revised register. **Analysing registration changes** by wards.

The Committee heard about the efforts of the Electoral Registration Service to gain **access to private gated blocks**, including visiting the block with a THEO and contacting managing agents warning them of the **prosecution for non-compliance for access**.

With regard to the **local protocol**, Members were keen to understand how this would help given that there is no lawful requirement to sign up. The Committee also heard about the **extensive publicity campaign which will be undertaken in the run up to the election period**, Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that the consequences of undertaking fraudulent activity was a major part of the campaign.

Finally, Members were keen to ensure that more Police would be involved on election day rather than the THEOs.

The Committee asked to be kept up to date with the progress of this important work.