

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.33 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury (Chair)

Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Councillor Bellal Uddin

Councillor Sabina Akhtar

Councillor Shahaveer Shubo Hussain

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

Co-optee's Present in Person:

Dr Phillip Rice (Church of England Representative)

Joanna Hannan (Diocese of Westminster Representative)

Co-optee's in Attendance Virtually:

Ashraf Zaman (Parent Governor)

Nasifa Ahmed (Parent Governor)

Officers Present in Person:

Pauline Maddison (Acting Director of Education)

Filuck Miah (Strategy and Policy Officer, Strategy, Improvement and Transformation Service)

Justina Bridgeman Democratic Services Officer (Committee)

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Lisa Fraser (Acting Corporate Director, Children's Services)

Jenny Pittam (Interim Head Contract Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ahmodul Kabir.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Sub Committee meeting held on 12 October 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record of proceedings.

Chairs Update

- Abena Adeji has resigned as Parent Governor in October. Governor Services is currently arranging a replacement and the deadline is 18 December. The Chair thanked Abena for her contribution to the sub-committee.
- The Chair raised concerns regarding the failure to receive agenda papers on time. Officers were requested to comply with the report deadline schedules and ensure all presentations and reports are submitted prior to publishing going forward.

4. ACTION LOG UPDATE

None

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Free School Meals for all Children

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning, introduced Lisa Fraser, Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services and Jenny Pittam, Head of Contract Services, who provided the sub-committee with an update on the Mayor's Universal Free School Meals policy (FSM) for all key stage 3 and key stage 4 secondary school pupils.

The programme, launched in three phases, included commissioning suppliers and held discussions with head teachers, parents and pupils. Student behaviour improved in 16 participating schools from 56% in March to 68% in October. The scheme is expected to save families around £550 a year and bring in an extra £1.2 million towards school budgets for 824 participating students.

Jenny Pittam informed members on the upcoming project evaluations, including the University of Newcastle's assessment on student's dietary intake, which is due to occur over the next year. The Act Early Partnership have also received a £250,000 grant to extend the School Food Improvement programme for the next two years, in collaboration with Queen Mary University Hospital. The Health Determinants Collaborative will shortly study data to recognise the outcomes on children's weight and education. FSMs will also be included.

Head teachers initial concerns with the FSM programme were noted as were details of the automatic enrolment scheme, which currently assists approximately 850 children. Ongoing evaluations and surveys on the programme will continue in phase four, to ensure correct meal packages are being offered and continual monitoring of uptake levels.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Lisa Fraser and Jenny Pittam;

- Explained that an analysis was conducted with the revenues, benefits, and Children's services to ensure that schools received additional aid, such as a uniform grant and holiday funds from Pupil Premium funding allocations.
- Confirmed that contract caterers engaged with parents, issuing surveys to establish the type of meal deals provided and costings, to ensure they are balanced and nutritious. A written brief will be circulated including the type of options available and costs per meal to sub-committee members for review.

RESOLVED that;

1. A written brief on free school meal deals, including the type of options available and costs per meal to be brought to sub-committee members for review.
2. That the presentation be noted.

5.2 Sixth Form Performance

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning, introduced Lisa Fraser, Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services, and Dr Tina Soda, Interim Head of Special Educational Needs, who gave an overview of the changes and progress made since the previous deep dive into sixth form borough provision, including university access.

Ms Fraser informed the sub-committee that the provisional key stage 4 outcome details are general in nature, as data regarding the neighbouring borough performance varied during the pandemic. National outcome levels have fallen since 2022, although Applied General levels have risen 9 points, which is higher than the national average. A Level and academic study

outcomes are lower now in 2023 than last year. It was noted that four of the schools in the top 5% nationally for progressing children to key stage 5 are in Tower Hamlets.

Further work is required to access apprenticeship programmes specifically for young people who decide not to enter the workforce, continue further education or enrol in internship programmes. Current data on the lack of 6th form BTEC course is being sourced, although evidence suggests that many young people are choosing vocational courses. The closure of businesses due to the pandemic may be a possible reason for the decrease. A review of the current 6th Form offer is in progress, as work in the SEN and Careers young work path services for post 16 year olds, not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is ongoing. Members were also updated on support from the London East Alternative Provision (LEAP) to reduce the high NEET figures.

Dr Tina Soda then noted the number of young people with live health and care plans (HCP) is currently 4,400 compared to 3,462 the previous year. Forty percent of 16-25 year olds with HCP's are still either in education, college or training providers, due to the various colleges available with vocational programmes. The Sensory Impairment Hub in Spitalfields allows more young people to stay within the borough.

Details on current workstreams from the social mobilities team to increase uptake levels were mentioned. Members were also informed of an apprenticeship scheme for young people with SEN, which opened in February this year, with a second planned for 2024. A SEN sufficiency report will outline plans to fill the post 19 gaps, and an audit is underway for the Preparing for Adulthood pathway

Engagement with local businesses to expand the scheme is ongoing, and promotional campaigns and open evenings for five LBTH broad sector internships are in progress, to encourage Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO's), carers, advisors and youth workers to participate.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Lisa Fraser and Dr Tina Soda;

- Confirmed that further details on young people with EHCP no longer studying BTEC Courses will be circulated to the sub-committee for review
- Confirmed that details on the numbers of young people who are NEET including those on remand will be circulated to the sub-committee for review.
- Clarified that investment has been made to increase standards in pedagogy and practice in key stages two and four. A specialised subject knowledge is required for A Level teaching.

- Explained that a review will be taking place to further understand and support students who are unable to take out loans due to religious beliefs. Benefits are impacted when students with EHCP opt for apprenticeship schemes, as they receive wages. A 'Better Off' assessment is undertaken to establish if they are eligible for other benefits whilst employed.
- Confirmed that enhancing key stage 5 outcomes will include Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP) working with specialist linguistics and language networks to ensure progress across the borough.
- Noted that discussions with all young people on the Post 16 needs list have taken place to establish their aspirations as they transition into adulthood. A written brief will be circulated to members for review including the number of families.

RESOLVED that;

1. Further details on young people with EHCP no longer studying BTEC Courses to be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
2. Details on the numbers of young people who are NEET including those on remand to be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
3. A written brief on details and numbers on the Post 16 needs list to be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
4. That the presentation be noted.

5.3 SEND and Education and Healthcare Plans

Pauline Maddison, Interim Director of Education, Dr Tina Soda, Acting Head of Special Educational Needs and Michael McKeaveney, SEN Team Manager, provided an update on SEND provision and transport, as well as details on the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) forecasting and demand management.

Pauline Maddison began the presentation with details of the school census data from 2022 and 2023, which showed 5.9% of pupils require EHCPs. The national average is 4.3%. The majority of students are either in mainstream or specialist schools which is preferred, as Independent schools are more costly. Sub-committee members were informed that there are significant delays in speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

An inclusion framework will be established with parents, schools, carers and stakeholders, to ensure mainstream schools provide accessible and targeted support. The implementation of the plan is scheduled for March 2024 and

discussions to develop a training offer for staff to guarantee consistency in schools are also taking place.

Mr. McKeaveney then discussed the monthly improvements within EHCPs beginning at 33% at the start of the year to 60% now, putting Tower Hamlets in the top third, above the national average of around 50%. This is due in part to added investment in the service. Further work on a rapid improvement plan will be initiated to ensure performance levels remain high.

Sub-committee members were informed of the challenges within the service, such as issues in receiving health advice. This is being addressed with additional speech and language therapists recruited to work with school based providers.

Dr Soda then touched on the quality of provision for the EHC service plans and slight irregularities noted by the recent LGA Peer Review. The review also focused on; the transitional journey of children and young people moving through education, effective leadership and governance, the progress made on written statement of action (WSOA) and a financial plan with alternative provision.

Priority will be given to improve co-production in the plans with more engagement with children, families, stakeholders and schools, to ensure specific and measurable achievements are made more swiftly.

LGA Recommendations included; reviewing the remit of the SEND Improvement Board as it was deemed too wide, the co-production of a revised SEND strategy, strengthening the WSOA to test the impact of the progress, improve information sharing with partners to ensure a common understanding of priorities and to continue to improve the quality and timelines of EHCPs.

Sub-Committee members were informed that currently there are 4,406 open EHCPs in the borough, with approximately 50-90 monthly requests received. The Delivering Better Value Project (DBVP) expects this figure to rise to around 6,750 by 2028, increasing the pressure on services.

Improvement measures include a targeted approach with earlier intervention, and a grant to be issued shortly from the DBVP, to be used to develop a SEND triage system for universal support. More robust signposting of services will also be included and the LGA recommendations will be actioned.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Dr Tina Soda and Michael McKeaveney;

- Explained that pupils receiving EHCPs will be placed in the most suitable setting via the sense efficiency workstream, which should conclude by January 2024. Some students may be placed in mainstream schools although consideration will be given to expand specialist provision and placements.

- Clarified that the borough receives element two funding for SEN support which is the second best funded in the country. Work with BARTS is ongoing for speech and language therapy provision to combat the shortage and further details will be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
- Conceded that further work on measuring satisfaction for children and young people is required, to understand the impact as they transition through education. More engagement with young people to evaluate their EHCPs will take place.
- Confirmed that the 'Let's Talk SEND' events enable children and families to raise concerns and receive advice. Surveys are also given to measure their understanding of care plans and thoughts on the process at the annual review stage.

RESOLVED that;

1. Details on speech and language therapy provision in conjunction with BARTS will be brought to the sub-committee for review.
2. That the presentation be noted

6. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

None.

The meeting ended at 8.29 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee