

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.34 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 9 MAY 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Councillor Bellal Uddin

Councillor Leelu Ahmed

Councillor Sabina Akhtar

Councillor Shahaveer Shubo Hussain

Shiblu Miah (Muslim community Representative)

Dr Phillip Rice (Church of England Representative)

Joanna Hannan (Diocese of Westminster Representative)

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Ahmodul Kabir

Ashraf Zaman (Parent Governor)

Officers Present in Person:

Steve Reddy (Corporate Director Children's Services)

Simon Jones (Head of Leisure Operations)

Amelie Gonguet (Public Health Manager, Leisure Insourcing)

Anna Murphy (Strategy and Policy Officer)

Justina Bridgeman (Democratic Services Officer, Committees)

Officers in Attendance Virtually:

Dr Tina Sode (Head of Special Educational Needs Education)

Invited Guests:

Korkor Ceasar (Chair of Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children's Partnership THSCP)

Ralph Coates (Detective Superintendent, Metropolitan Police)

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 8 February 2024 were approved and signed as a correct record of proceedings.

Chair's Update

- Noted that Abena Adeji stepped down as Parent Governor in October 2023. Abena was thanked for her valuable contribution. Hasan Chowdhury will be replacing and will be formerly introduced at the first meeting for municipal year 2024/25.

4. ACTION LOG

The action log was circulated for attendees.

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Scrutiny Government Reforms: Children's Social Care Update - For noting only

The update report was noted. Members were informed that the item will return to a subsequent sub-committee meeting and a written response to any questions will be circulated by officers.

5.2 Tracking: Recommendations: Increasing Women and Girls Access to Sports and Physical Activities in LBTH

Councillor Iqbal Hossain, Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation, introduced the first item, and noted the leisure service was brought back into council management at the start of May. The sub-committee received an updated action plan last year, highlighting the progress made to increase access to sport and physical activities in the borough for women and girls, who are less likely to be physically active than boys. Following a series of consultations and community engagement activities; including discussions with over 1,200 women and girls during International Women's Week, key themes were utilised to shape the service.

Initiatives for the action plan delivery for scrutiny recommendations include the 'Be Well' programme of services, aimed at promoting fitness through health, wellness and play with swimming classes, fitness instructor courses and apprenticeship opportunities. Councillor Hossain noted that the Women's Inclusive Team and violence against women and Girls Team contributed to the development of the new programmes. The aim is to collaborate with London Sport on a London wide networking session, so additional ideas can be shared to increase the participation of women and girls in sports. The possibility for further projects with external partners such as Sport England and resources are ongoing.

Simon Jones, the Head of Leisure Operations, stated that the service was officially insourced last week and all six leisure centres reopened on 7 May. The booking system transferred to the new leisure management system, 4GLOBAL which will assist in sports participation to increase physical activity. Mr Jones stated that 200 former GLL Better Leisure staff have been integrated into the service and new initiatives will be implemented, A careers fair will take place this month to recruit female lifeguards. Other council departments are collaborating including youth services, young carers and public health.

Councillor Mauim Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning, then informed Members that as part of the sports strategy, six coaches have been recruited to deliver sports and physical activities within the borough's primary and secondary schools. Engagement with around 1,515 young people, primarily girls will take place to increase sports participation. Further updates will be brought back to the sub-committee.

Further to questions from the Sub-committee, Councillor Iqbal Hossain, Simon Jones and Ameilia Gonguet, Public Health Manager, Leisure Insourcing;

- Confirmed that swim clinics will be implemented to target residents who don't swim often or cannot swim for advice on techniques or beginner swimming lessons. A staggered timetable is being created and the programme will be launched in the first week of June, which will include

sessions for school children and adults and water safety sessions. Consideration will also be given to establish creche facilities for parents using the centres. Further details will be posted on the website in due course.

- Clarified that lighting issues outside the leisure centres are being addressed following safety concerns raised by residents and feedback from the Community Safety staff.
- Explained that the payments will be made available for residents to 'pay as you go' or pre-book women only appointments to services.
- Confirmed that community engagement with women and girls is ongoing within the public health department, healthy communities and sports and activity teams to ensure the service reflects their needs. Feedback can be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
- Noted that clarification on why membership has declined from 27% to 24% against a target of 25% for residents under 15, will be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
- Confirmed that a partnership approach with schools, youth services, leisure facilities and coaches will be implemented to ensure the best outcomes for young residents.
- Explained that discussions with sixth form schools and colleges are ongoing to promote training and apprenticeship courses in the leisure industry for young women and girls. Consideration will also be given to allow local residents, who are personal trainers an opportunity to establish their own businesses as well as other employment opportunities, such as food and beverages.
- Confirmed that details on impact of women and girls Sports and Physical Activity Collective Networks meeting will be forwarded for review. Final details on the percentage of women employed by TUPE are yet to be disclosed, however, details will be presented to the sub-committee for review.

The Children and Education Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**;

1. That a written brief to clarify why membership has declined from 27% to 24% for residents under 15 to be forwarded to the sub-committee for review.
2. That Officers collaborate with Joanna Hannan for contacts from the School Games organisers who are funded by Sports England for additional partnership opportunities.

3. That details on impact of women and girls Sports and Physical Activity Collective Networks meeting to be forwarded to the sub-committee for review.
4. That a brief overview of the percentage of women staff members to be sent to the Sub-Committee for review once all details have been revealed.
5. That the presentation be noted.

5.3 SEND and Inclusion Strategy

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning introduced the second item, and Steve Reddy, Corporate Director for Children's Services and Tina Sode, Head of Special Educational Needs Education, outlined the partnership with SEND and Inclusion Strategy.

Councillor Talukdar informed Sub-committee Members of the draft strategy, which was considered at the Health and Wellbeing Board earlier in April. A strategy workshop was also held in January, with young residents parents and professionals able to develop the strategy. A consultation is now taking place to ensure stakeholders are given the opportunity to express their views, as the primary objective is to support children and young people with SEND and the current improvement programme. The Deputy Mayor outlined the six priorities and requested Members to give feedback on the draft.

Mr Reddy drew the sub-committees attention to the appendices accompanying the report. which provided analysis, wider research, comparative data, and the various needs for children and young people with SEND. Mr Reddy then reiterated Councillor Talukdar's request for feedback and comments.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Steve Reddy and Dr Tina Sode;

- Acknowledged that the specific analysis on the interconnected nature of race and gender of young people from minority backgrounds has not yet been conducted, although it will be considered to improve and streamline the various educational and health care plans.
- Explained that the draft strategy is based on feedback from young residents, families, and stakeholders in order to effectively respond and support young people. The six priorities are based on feedback received as well as the Green Paper recommendations. A Peer Review was conducted on the service and collaboration with the Department of Education (DfE) provided a better understanding of how other boroughs manage their services.

- Clarified that the public health team are drafting a detailed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) in regard to underdiagnosed SEND's in terms of gender, although there are higher numbers of boys with Education, Health Care plans (EHCP) than girls. Details will be shared with sub-committee.
- Confirmed that requests have been made to families and carers from the Parents Carer Forum, the Somali Parent Group representatives and attendees at the Special Educational Needs Conference (SENCO) to encourage the completion of the survey. This will ensure communities that are hard to reach are made aware that their feedback is important.

The Children and Education Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**;

1. That details on JSNA in relation to undiagnosed SEND's in relation to gender will be forwarded to the sub-committee once the draft is completed.
2. That the presentation be noted.

5.4 Children's Safeguarding Work

Councillor Maium Talukdar, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning introduced the last item, and Steve Reddy, Corporate Director of Children Services, Korkor Ceasar, Chair of Tower Hamlets Children's Safeguarding Partnership (THCSP), and Det. Chief Inspector Ralph Coates were also present to give overviews.

Mr Reddy outlined the structure, and the subgroups, including quality assurance, the learning development group and improvements to the Review Working group, which reports to the National panel on more serious cases. Members were informed on the development of education partners and how they are represented within the partnership.

Korkor Cesear, discussed the important critical friend approach that Independent Scrutiny provides the THCSP. Members were informed of key achievements and the work the Young Scrutineers contributed to at an Anti-Racial Conference during Safeguarding month. Details on the new priority areas and the introduction of 30 minutes webinars for Rapid Reviews were also outlined.

Det Supt Ralph Coates defined his role as Delivery Group Lead, responsible for the multi-agency improvement projects and the significant progress made within six months, with collaboration from the Young Scrutineers and the serious case reviews. The Serious Incident Notification Process (SIN), where Health, education, and police agencies meet to discuss a specific incident to determine if it warrants a rapid review or serious case review, has also been effective.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Det Supt Coates and Korkor Caesar;

- Clarified that each priority has a sub category such as adultification in Education. The aim for anti-racism is to compile a statement, signed off by all agencies on THCSP concerns.
- Explained that the Peer on Peer Harm focus relates to education, particularly on line threats from adults or other young people. The Education Safeguarding Forum would provide statistics on sexual assault harassment in schools. These details can be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
- A dashboard is currently being compiled by the independent scrutineer through a Task and Finish Group.
- Acknowledged that recruitment processes require enhancement and that interviews for new support officers are ongoing.
- Clarified that Community Safety Partnership are responsible for the safety of young people and collaborate with social services and the police in and out of the home. Routine intelligence is used to combat issues near schools.
- Noted that there are no statistical trends around particular ethnicities who go missing from care via those from home, although more males are subject to exploitation than females. There is a general increase in neglect which has been reflected in the cost of living workstream currently being undertaken by partners supporting families and the council.
- Confirmed that data on the number of young people who agree to return home can be shared with Members.

The Children and Education Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**;

1. That a written brief on Peer to Peer Harm statistics on sexual assault harassment in schools to be presented to the sub-committee for review.
2. That the presentation be noted.

6. SCRUTINY CHALLENGE SESSION

6.1 Healthy Weight Recommendations

The Chair provided reflections on the scrutiny challenge session report, which took place in November 2023 and then gave an overview of the recommendations eight recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

Monitor the uptake of Free School Meals to identify and remove barriers and ensure all children can access these.

Recommendation 2:

Ensure that youth services meet our aims around healthy eating, including through their food offer, inclusion of physical activity and training for youth workers.

Recommendation 3:

Ensure children are engaged in food production from growing to cooking to eating, including sharing best practice from the Healthy Families Programme.

Recommendation 4:

Work in partnership across the council and externally i.e., with schools to maximise children's access to green spaces, exercise and sports facilities. Consider any opportunities which may arise through the in-sourcing of leisure services.

Recommendation 5:

Consider using food ambassadors to promote healthy eating and provide information on recipes which are culturally relevant. Understand that food and eating are individually and culturally specific and sensitive.

Recommendation 6:

Review existing social spaces for young people in the borough and investigate any levers the council has to provide or encourage the provision of social spaces for young people that are not food outlets. Continue efforts to make fast food outlets healthier.

Recommendation 7:

Ensure that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities can benefit from healthy food provision and access sports and exercise where there are additional barriers. Utilising tools such as EIAs to identify potential risks and barriers to this group.

Recommendation 8:

Research the needs of underweight children and those who may have eating disorders, especially being conscious of the potential impact of messaging on these groups.

Following the overview, Members;

- Noted the proximity of fast food restaurants to schools is a hinderance to the initiative, as unhealthy food is often cheaper. Further work is required in regard to the location of unhealthy food establishments to schools. The Chair informed Members that work is ongoing within Council departments to elevate concerns.
- Observed that healthier foods available in shops are more expensive than unhealthy choices, which discourages children from purchasing.
- Expressed that many children are still hungry after eating healthier foods in schools and many do not like the choices available, so they will still purchase unhealthy foods after school.

The recommendations were approved by the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee. The report will be submitted to the Mayor and Cabinet for an executive response to the recommendations and remarks made at this meeting. Anna Murphy, Strategy and Policy Officer, stated that members will receive an action plan in the municipal year 2024/25 to address the recommendations.

The Children and Education Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**;

1. That the report will be submitted to the Mayor and Cabinet for executive response to the recommendations.
2. That the presentation be noted and recommendations **APPROVED** subject to minor amendments noted at this meeting.

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

The Chair congratulated all Members, co-optees, officers, and partners for participating in the sub-committee meetings and reflected on the key areas of the Council's agenda. This included the implementation of the Universal School Meals initiative, the hard work of the Youth Service and the preparation of the Children's Services Inspection.

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee