

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 11TH JULY, 2023** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Jenny Headlam-Wells (Chair), Lotis Bautista, Linda Chung (substitute) Matt Cooper, Julian Fulbrook and Sylvia McNamara

Co-opted Members Margaret Harvey, Nadia Hussain, Sarah Jafri, Reverend Guy Pope, Samir Qurashi and Dr Rachel Wrangham

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Shah Miah, Tom Simon and Shiva Tiwari

Co-opted Member Aya Egool

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received Councillors Tom Simon and Shiva Tiwari and Co-opted Member Aya Elgool.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

There were no declarations.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

Broadcast of the meeting

The Chair made the following announcement: "In addition to the rights by law that the public and press have to record this meeting, I would like to remind everyone that this meeting is being broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and can be viewed on our website for twelve months after the meeting. After that time, webcasts are archived and can be made available upon request."

If you have asked to address the meeting, you are deemed to be consenting to having your contributions recorded and broadcast, including video when switched on, and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.”

Organisational Changes Update

The Committee was updated on the following changes to the Council’s organisational structure since the last meeting:

- The former Executive Director Supporting People, Martin Pratt, had retired. Following his departure, there were a number of changes involving senior roles within the current Supporting People directorate taking place, with some services moving into the portfolios of different Directors.
- In place of the previous Executive Director Supporting People, there were now two new Executive Director roles – an Executive Director Children and Learning and an Executive Director Adults and Health Integration.
- The new Executive Director Children and Learning, Tim Aldridge, would be joining the Council on 29 August and would attend the next Committee meeting on 7 September. In the interim period, Rashida Baig was the interim Statutory Director of Children’s Services.
- The former Director of Early Intervention and Prevention, Eve Stickler, had also retired. Following her departure, Early Years, Family Support, Early Help, and the Integrated Youth Support Service had now become part of a new division reporting to Rashida Baig, joining the social care and safeguarding services currently in Rashida Baig’s area, called Children's Safeguarding and Family Help.
- Pauline Maddison had finished her interim post at Camden, and now Vikram Hansrani had started in his position of Director for Education Commissioning and Inclusion, with his portfolio including: commissioning Camden Learning, school organisation, the Virtual School for Looked After Children, Adult and Community Learning and the Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Intervention Service.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were no deputations.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

6. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED –

THAT the terms of reference be noted.

8. UPDATE OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BEST START FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Consideration was given to the update of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families.

The paper and verbal summary gave updates in the following areas:

- Education Strategy Board
- Children's Trust Partnership Board
- School Breakfasts
- Universal Free School Meals in Primaries
- Digital advertising campaign for secondary school students
- Family Hubs and Children's Centres
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- School Future Options Group

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and invited questions and comments from the Committee. In addition to the paper, the following was discussed:

- In relation to School Breakfasts, Members noted that provision of food to children was a priority, given how food cost inflation affected families and feeding children helped school attendance. A deputation had been recently presented to Full Council about the provision of plant-based meals in schools, and it was noted that even with the challenges, the mission of encouraging healthy eating in schools should not be lost. In response, the Cabinet Member stated that a full review and consultation of the food contract offer to Camden schools would be taking place next year which would consider the healthy offer to pupils and the meat/plant-based balance of schools meals. A Member stated that residents were lobbying in their ward for the provision of vegan meals, however there needed to be work on surveying what children would enjoy eating.
- In response to a Co-opted Member raising concern over the lack of transitional support for young people moving from secondary school to college in comparison to the attention and support focussed on Primary to secondary transitions, the Cabinet Member confirmed they would like to discuss the topic outside of the meeting to hear thoughts and feedback from Camden Youth MPs on how the current offer could be improved.
- In relation to Free School Meals (FSM), a Co-opted Member stated that the Camden Youth Council (CYC) was working to lobby government to expand provisions and lower qualifying thresholds for secondary school and college pupils to access FSM. A Co-opted Member asked if the Council had any plans to

extend FSM provisions to that age group outside of national policy, or changing local thresholds. In response, it was confirmed there were no current plans and it was the Greater London Authority (GLA) funding the FSM provision for primary age children. The Cabinet Member stated they would like to discuss FSMs further with Camden Youth MPS.

- Members asked for an update on the Council's work to look at why parents choose private schools over Camden schools for their secondary transition children. In response, it was confirmed that the Council was setting up focus groups with primary school transition groups in schools; an online survey had been launched; Meet the Parents had been commissioned to arrange Camden secondary school parents and children to host discussions at primary schools; and a Moving On event was being advertised online to promote Camden schools.

The Committee noted the update.

9. UPDATE OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE & CULTURE

Consideration was given to the update of the Cabinet Member for Young People & Culture.

The paper and verbal summary gave updates in the following areas:

- Camden Apprenticeship Awards
- Roundtable with the Hon. Corey Lane, Minister of State from Barbados
- Launch of Creators House
- Honest Grind
- Google, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) Pledge employer
- RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) involvement in the borough
- Donmar Warehouse
- The Camden Schools Music Festival
- Camden Youth Council Shout Out and Social Action Grants
- Roundhouse Works
- Shakespeare in Schools
- Youth Safety

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- In relation to apprenticeship offers in the borough, it was confirmed that apprenticeship places took time to be prepared because businesses had to be ready to take on the young people and ensure they were valuable opportunities. The Cabinet Member invited a Parent Governor Co-opted Member to speak to him outside of the meeting to discuss a student's experience of the Google apprenticeship.
- In relation to the Camden Schools Music Festival, a Member noted that the service provided young people with a pathway to learning and suggested the

service could set out to the Council how they could be further supported in their mission in challenging financial times.

- It was confirmed by the Cabinet Member that young people were given a voice and stake in the Council through the channels of the Camden CYC, Camden Youth MPs, and the Growing Up in Camden Survey. For example, the actions resulting from the survey responses included changes to youth club opening hours and upgrading spaces for young people in libraries.
- In response to a Member asking how the Council was responding to youth vaping and smoking health concerns, the Cabinet Member stated that vaping was being addressed within the whole Camden health approach and they agreed to provide a written response. A Co-opted Member stated that schools were teaching pupils about vaping and smoking as part of PHSE lessons.

Action By – Cabinet Member for Young People & Culture

The Committee noted the update.

10. SCHOOLS, HIGH NEEDS AND EARLY YEARS OUTTURN AND FUNDING UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation.

The Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion and the Team Leader Schools and Designated Schools Grant (DSG) provided an overview of the report, which had been considered by Schools Forum in June 2023 as part of its duty to monitor spending on schools and the financial health of the education sector across the borough. The report provided an update on the financial outturn position for 2022/23, the current funding position, existing spending pressures, the current funding arrangements for the next few years from the current planned transition to a 'hard' national funding formula (NFF). The report outlined the measures that the authority, in conjunction with schools, headteachers and Camden Learning had taken to support schools through this transition and to help schools to continue to prepare for reductions in real terms funding.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- In relation to section 4.3 (f) Teachers Pay award from September 2023, the Government agreed pay rise had increased to 6.5% since the publication of the report.
- In relation to section 2.1 Early Years funding position, Members questioned why there were lower than expected drawdowns in Early Years and High Needs projects, when needs were increasing, and asked if it was related to delayed Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) assessments. In response, officers stated that an unspent £0.483m from the High Needs (HN) DSG was contributed to the Camden's Local Inclusion Fund (CLIF) this financial year, which funded supporting Early Years settings to meet the needs of children with

SEND. Officers confirmed they were profiling areas to mitigate challenges for children moving into statutory school age and were working with Early Years colleagues.

- In relation to section 6.1 NFF, officers confirmed Camden was c.30% worse-off in funding compared to c.10 years ago and it was the decision of Government on how the NFF was calculated.
- In relation to section 7 NFF beyond 2024/25, officers stated that the Education Schools Funding Agency (ESFA) would indicate the national schools budget towards the end of July 2023. Schools were increasingly having to trust their own judgment on predicting inflation and how that would affect their budgets and the Council would provide advice to schools. Officers noted that it was a risk that schools would make incorrect assumptions and unnecessary cuts, and the Council advised schools to be cautious.
- In relation to Table 3a Extract, Proposed HN Additional Spend in 2023/24, a Co-opted Member asked for more information on external provisions. Officers responded stating that to set a plan for future provisions the Council had to ensure there was data and a strategy to support it. The £1.2 million detailed in the table was related to additional capacity within the system. Peter Grey, external national expert of children's services and Director of Strategic Services for Children & Young People, compiled a paper on behalf of Camden which concluded that additional support would be required to support mainstream schools with in-house HN support, and that there should be an increase in local HN capacity. Through the Schools Forum, a HN sub-group was currently being developed which would comprise of Schools Forum members (headteachers and school governors) and Council officers to devise how to best utilise HN funding. Officers confirmed there had been an increase in the need for SEND independent schools. It was noted that the money underspent in HN had not been cumulating for years, and had only become more apparent in the past few years, significantly due to spending constraints during the pandemic.
- A Co-opted Member stated that schools were reporting the desperate need for faster Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, whilst there were significant HN underspends. In response, officers stated that the Camden SEND assessment approach was recognised by the DfE to be leading and innovative because it used other approaches in addition to EHCPs, such as clusters (groups of schools across the borough working on strong SEND frameworks and outcomes for children and young people) and Exceptional Needs Grants (ENG)(additional top-up funding used to meet the needs of Camden children in Camden mainstream schools where they had more complex SEND needs). Officers noted that 99% of EHCPs were completed within 20 weeks, however another factor to consider, as well as completion time, was the quality of the plans, quality assurance of the assessment and then the actual provision of the plan. Officers noted there was a lot of activity in the area of developing SEND provision locally and nationally.
- In response to a Member asking if there was any data on how many teachers and teaching assistants Camden had lost in the past few years, officers responded that the concern had to be considered in an inner-city and national context. There were falling pupil rolls in inner-city London due to cost of living pressures. The Building Back Stronger Education Strategy and the move towards a confederated

schools system would support schools with the challenges, in consultation with school leaders and governors.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee:

- a) Note the 2022/23 outturn for all the blocks of the DSG as set out in section 1;
- b) Note the current 2023/24 level of funding (section 2) and the range of current pressures and future funding challenges for schools' funding (section 3) and also the current and proposed next steps in the transition towards the "hard" national funding formula in section 4 and 5; and
- c) Note the most recent grant announcements since February 2023 from the ESFA relating to Afghanistan Resettlement (Education) Grant 2022 to 2023 and the GLA universal grants for Free School Meals for primary pupils from September 2023 (section 6).

11. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4/END OF YEAR 2022-23

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Directors of Supporting People, Supporting Communities and Corporate Services.

The Director of Safeguarding and Family Help & Interim Director of Children's Services (DCS) summarised performance indicators that fell within the Children, Schools and Families outcome area.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- In relation to 2.1.3 Looked After Children (LAC), Members asked if the demographics of foster carers were shifting and if the cost of housing in the borough effected younger prospective carers ability to foster. In response, it was confirmed that the Council welcomed any age of foster carer and individual discussions with prospective carers took place to explore what was possible for them. There were also retention and reward schemes in place, which included avenues for foster carers to qualify for larger housing units in the borough and financial rewards for referring new carers who completed their assessments. The Council marketed foster caring through social media and events.
- In relation to 2.2.1 SEND, it was confirmed that autism innovation work was taking place through the Building Bridges project. This project was to support autistic children who were not picked up through existing services and needed more support. Officers confirmed they would provide further information on Building Bridges to the Committee.

Action By - Director of Safeguarding and Family Help & Interim DCS

- In relation to 2.3.2 School Exclusions and statistics on page 116 of the agenda, officers confirmed they would share information to the Committee on the trends and reasons for children getting to the point of an exclusion in secondary schools.

Action By - Director of Safeguarding and Family Help & Interim DCS

- In relation to housing on page 127 of the agenda, statistics demonstrating the number of households in temporary accommodation, it was confirmed by officers that the Director of Housing was focussing on how to support families in temporary accommodation and would be taking a paper to the Corporate Management Team setting out how the Council could address the issue and to propose a strategic approach. Officers confirmed they would provide further information on the number of children who were living in temporary housing in the borough.

Action By - Director of Safeguarding and Family Help & Interim DCS

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

12. AWARD OF THE CAMDEN LEARNING COMMISSION (SP/2023/12)

Consideration was given to the report of the Leader of the Council.

The Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion summarised the report which set out the proposal to Cabinet to agree to recommission Camden Learning to undertake School Improvement and wider education services for Camden Council from September 2023 until August 2026.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- It was confirmed that the legal status of Camden Learning was a schools company and a separate legal entity to the Council. Camden Learning was a non-profit joint venture company and Camden Council was represented on the Camden Learning Board. It was an ambition for Camden Learning to trade its activity beyond the borough's borders and use any profits to reinvest in Camden Learning. The financial status of Camden Learning would be continually monitored and assessed annually and as part of Camden's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- In relation to Appendix 1 and Camden's improvement targets, officers confirmed the targets were focussed on the Building Back Stronger Education Strategy targets.
- A Co-opted Member stated that given the Achievements & Standards 2022/23 paper's focus on underachieving ethnic groups, the targets to improve those outcomes were not reflected in Appendix 1 as expected. In response, it was

explained there was a continued focus on improving performance gaps and addressing the disparity between different socioeconomic groups. On this iteration of the commission, there was increased focus on SEND, however focus on other areas, such as pupil performance and school performance, were maintained. Another Co-opted Member stated the document would benefit from another headline addressing disproportionality.

- A Co-opted Member commented that the targets in Appendix 1 felt not ambitious enough for secondary and above age groups and suggested the targets could fit better with the Education Strategy. In response, it was stated that it was Camden Learning's responsibility that schools got back on track, which was testament within the schools reports and Camden Learning's offer on school improvement. The detailed targets within the Education Strategy were scheduled to be reported to the September Committee, which would provide the metrics on interests raised and represent a more general health of the system as a whole. The targets had been drawn in consultation with Camden Learning and would be built upon in future iterations, which was a collaborative and maturing relationship. Officers noted the comments from Co-opted Members and how they could present Camden Learning reports going forward.
- A Member asked what the timeframes were to complete the targets, consequences if they were not met, and how Members would know if they were not being met. In response, officers stated that performance and targets were constantly reviewed through live and annual reporting and qualitative data alongside Board meetings throughout the year. There were key accountable officers for each target area and they were moving towards an additional quarterly report assessment process.
- A Member queried the faith schools position on the Camden Learning offer and how the Council was involving faith schools in the Camden Learning processes. The Church of England (C of E) Diocese representative Co-opted Member stated that C of E schools valued the offer and support from Camden Learning and they were not looking to opt-out. The Catholic Diocese representative Co-opted Member stated that in their view Camden Catholic schools valued Camden Learning and would want to continue to buy-in to the service, however it would be the decision of the Catholic Academy Trust (CAT) the schools would eventually join.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

13. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER 2023/24

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Safeguarding and Family Help & interim DCS.

A Co-opted Member requested an item that addressed closing the attainment gap. Officers agreed to include further detail on that subject within the Achievement and Standards Report 2023-24 at the February 2024 Committee.

A Member proposed that the Committee commissioned a scrutiny panel focussed on SEND priorities and suggested the following key lines of enquiry areas: assessment timing, variance across age groups, the impact of Covid-19 on mental health for SEND families, parental support, and teacher experiences. The Committee agreed the subject area and that a formal proposal paper report to the September 2023 Committee.

RESOLVED -

THAT the report be noted.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

The following remaining meeting dates of the municipal year were noted:

- 7 September 2023
- 9 November 2023
- 19 December 2023
- 18 January 2024
- 26 February 2024
- 13 March 2024 (additional meeting)

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIR DECIDES TO CONSIDER AS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END