

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **THURSDAY, 9TH NOVEMBER, 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, Matt Cooper, Julian Fulbrook, Sylvia McNamara, Tom Simon and Nanouche Umeadi

Co-opted Members Margaret Harvey, Sarah Jafri and Dr Rachel Wrangham.

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT**

Councillor Shiva Tiwari.

Co-opted Members Aya Elgool, Reverend Guy Pope and Samir Qurashi.

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Councillors Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families  
Councillor Sabrina Francis, Cabinet Member Young People and Culture

**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 from Councillor Shiva Tiwari and Co-opted Members Reverend Guy Pope and Samir Qurashi.

### **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.”

#### **Ofsted visit**

The Executive Director for Children and Learning stated that Ofsted had visited Camden children’s services on week the commencing 30 November week for a two-day focused visit to review Camden’s work with children subject to children in need and child protection plans. The visit was not graded, however Camden would be provided with a narrative letter which would set out any learning points for the Council. The feedback from the visit was positive, particularly noting the commitment, passion, and the conscientiousness of Camden’s social workers.

#### **4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)**

There were no deputations.

#### **5. MINUTES**

A Member noted that item 10, Camden Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy Update, should include the question asked about the gender trends of SEND provision.

#### **RESOLVED –**

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2023, as amended, 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. 2023 ANNUAL SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING REPORT**

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

The Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation summarised the report which provided the annual analysis and interpretation of information relating to

both primary and secondary school provision in Camden. The review incorporated all underlying demographic data including the following: existing provision and capacity, actual registered births and fertility, the latest Greater London Authority (GLA) forecasts for births and their relationship to school rolls; and the additional pupils associated with new housing developments. This annual analysis was used to support informed decision-making about the future organisation of school places. It was noted that this year had seen an increase in numbers which marked the end of a depressive period reported in the previous year years, however ongoing stability should be taken with caution. Primary and secondary schools faced different challenges and were affected differently by key variables. The Council had to be active and innovative in making sure the system was stable going forward.

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

- In the context of Form Entries (FE) reducing across Camden, it was acknowledged that any discussions on deciding which secondary schools FEs could be removed would need to be in partnership, transparent and clear on the outset. However, there would be different conversations with each school as those decisions were not simple and there were currently four secondary schools with 4FE, which meant they were already at a financially critical stage. It was confirmed there were different collaborate strategies in supporting this trend, for example the post-16 LaSWAP (La Sainte Union, William Ellis, Acland Burghley and Parliament Hill schools) Sixth Form Consortium.
- In relation to the cause of falling rolls, officers confirmed that the impact of falling pupil rolls works differently in primary and secondary schools, for example at secondary there was the role of parental preference. Ofsted ratings and mobility were factors, meaning some schools were more effective increasing their viability. Many external factors were out of the Council's control. Additionally, it was confirmed that the birth rate measured the number of children born in Camden hospitals. By children reaching school age, children born in the borough may have moved outside of Camden due to a number of reasons.
- In relation to private education, officers confirmed that the Council did not have individual data on whether children born in the borough went on to attend a private school, adding some data did not correlate to tell the full story.
- In relation to SEND place planning provision, a Co-opted Member asked how the Council would plan for appropriate and sufficient provision of school places for children with different types and increasing demand of need, and how would any gaps in provision be identified. In response, it was confirmed that the Council was committed to SEND school place planning. A High Needs Block (HNB) subgroup had been established and Education colleagues would be working with Health colleagues, further developing the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), to understand the needs in the system and to identify gaps in provision. The JSNA would help reform the HNB and identify which areas needed investment or expanding. The headlines of SEND development would feed into a number of governance

channels and the SEND annual report would be available to the Committee in April 2024.

- In response to a Member querying the effect of building development on child yield, officers confirmed that Education colleagues worked with the Planning Authority to forecast child yield. Any calculation took into account the building development timeline, number and type of units, contractual state, and the historical analysis of similar building child yield. The child yield also accounted for the percentage of children in new developments expected to enrol into private sector education. It was confirmed that the key variable to child yield was birth rate, more than migration and housing developments. Although, if significant developments were to be abandoned a gap in the forecast would be created, but there would be time to respond to the changes in estimates of future reception intake.
- A Member asked how the Council determined what future SEND provision school places were required when a baby was born and how that was incorporated into place planning. It was confirmed that Education worked closely with Public Health colleagues on the increase in SEND needs and part of their considerations was that percentage increase in population would not correlate equally to the increase in SEND needs and was a more complex story. Public Health studied population needs and there were early identification assessments through Early Years. There were a range of actions the system could do to identify different needs, ranging from profound need, prebirth assessments and speech and language needs. The aim of the system was to ensure intervention was in place at the earliest opportunity and before school transitions.
- Camden had the second lowest fertility rate recorded in any local authority area in the country.
- In relation to Appendix B Table 2B, Members asked what the Council's plans were to respond to the number of schools showing a red traffic light rating due to a surplus of school places equal or over 10.01%. In response, it was confirmed that the table set out last years' data which showed two schools which had since closed (St. Dominic's and St. Michaels). The Council was speaking directly to other schools to discuss reducing pupil admissions which would upgrade the red grades. Due to the now better position of pupil numbers, the issue was now in a less existential context, however still had to be addressed as an ongoing discussion. The Council would continue to support schools in how they managed on a reduced budget and retain flexibility if demand increased, whilst maintaining high quality outcomes. Next years' report would show improved traffic light positions. In response to a Member asking if Abacus Academy school was viable in projections, officers stated that any decisions or organisational changes for academies were for the Department for Education (DfE), even though the school was still a part of Camden Learning. It was noted that the proportion of empty spaces at the school were in higher year groups and not lower.
- Officers confirmed they would be establishing an ongoing school place planning group for school leaders, involving Camden Learning, to interrogate the topic and share their views on structural changes and collaborative arrangements. Their first meeting would be held in spring 2024.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

**8. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BEST START FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: NOVEMBER 2023**

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

The Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families summarised their annual report, which covered the following areas in detail: schools and Camden Learning; improving the health of children and families (including school meals, physical fitness and activities); adult community learning and the virtual school; children's services and safeguarding; mental health of children and families; support for students with SEND and the Children and Young People with Disabilities Service (CYPDS); corporate parenting and voices of families and children; Early Years; special update on Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC); and the formal major decisions taken (in the last 12 months) and available forthcoming decisions. The Cabinet Member presented particular focus on the following areas: increasing school governor and school leadership diversity; falling school rolls; digital learning; post pandemic results and the disadvantage gap; social work; the Ofsted visit; RAAC; youth service plan; improving the offer to care leavers; healthy living in schools offer; and the SEND strategy.

The Cabinet Member thanked their Cabinet Officer, Nathan Koskella, for their support in preparing the portfolio report, and thanked the Committee for their vital ongoing input to the scrutiny process.

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

- In relation to attendance, a Member asked if the school attendance campaign was improving, which was a local and national priority. The Cabinet Member stated that school attendance was a priority and a part of the youth mission; currently there were 4,000 persistent absentees in Camden. As part of the work there was a back-to-school media campaign using the tagline 'Every School Day Counts'. This involved posters in schools, leaflets for parents, bus stop posters and social media posts. Parents attitudes towards attendance were eroded during the pandemic and the Council would be continuing to work in this area. Camden Learning has appointed three new officers who would work with schools to support them, with some schools funding those roles themselves.
- In relation to Camden's attendance campaign, a Co-opted Member stated that national research showed that the tagline 'Every School Day Counts' was not working, because parents perceived it as a hollow message, and asked why Camden was continuing to push the message despite the research. The Co-opted Member stated that they knew many parents who wanted nothing more than to send their children to school but needed support with their children's

SEND needs. In response, it was confirmed there were family support workers enlisted who would be providing proactive outreach to building relationships with families to address school absenteeism. It was noted this was a resource intensive approach, therefore wider campaigns had to form a large part of the attendance strategy; if there were more resources, additional money would be channelled into pastoral care. Officers stated that the Council recognised there were some families who faced significant challenges, where young people's mental health and wellbeing issues were prevalent post-Covid. There was great work taking place in schools and early help in linking the system together and developing a local practice framework for a holistic view of persistent absenteeism, which was also a national priority. To follow, a Member praised the great work of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS).

- In relation to Ofsted ratings, a Member asked what the Council was doing to support schools who were not achieving the expected level. In response, it was confirmed that there were Learning Hubs, professional partner programmes for schools, and project boards for senior leadership teams. The Cabinet Member stated that improvement of underachieving schools was important to prevent young people moving into private sector education. In response to a query on head teacher involvement, it was confirmed teachers responded well to support and outside programmes. All primary schools were rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding', and secondary schools existed in a system of peer support and planning.
- Officers confirmed they would provide the Committee with a written response setting out what Camden Learning was doing support schools who were underachieving.

### **Action By – CEO Camden Learning**

- A Members asked what areas the Council would like to spend money on if more government funding was available. The Cabinet Member replied they would look to improving the school estate and building conditions, roll out of more family support workers, and expand the pastoral care offer in secondary schools beyond tutor group and PSHE classes.
- In relation to elective home education (EHE), a Member asked how Camden was responding to the increasing trend of home schooling. The Cabinet Member stated that EHE was a challenge for local authorities, with 300-330 EHE children in the borough currently known to the Council. The Council sent out surveys to parents to ask them why they opted for EHE, to find out the more granular reasons, but many parents did not respond, and others reported that it was a lifestyle choice. Some families used the materials provided by the Council and could demonstrate their ability to provide EHE, however there were also families of concern who did not interact with the Council leading to potential safeguarding fears. The Council needed to make additional checks on some families to ensure there were appropriate arrangements for the child. There had been plans for new legislation as part of the Schools Bill to strengthen local authorities powers in overseeing arrangements, however it did not end up coming into force.
- In relation to EHE, a Co-opted Member asked if children in EHE could access the same benefits they would if the attended school. It was confirmed that

children off-roll and could not claim benefits such as free school meals. It was noted that there were groups of parents who shared home schooling resources. A Co-opted Member stated that EHE parents may have incentives to engage with the Council if they had access to the same benefits as children on-roll.

- In relation to private section education, a Member asked how Council was progressing in attracting more children to Camden schools from the private sector. It was confirmed that was an area of focus and there had been progress since the pandemic, seen by the proportion of pupils attending private school provision reducing from the Covid peak of 38% towards the pre-Covid levels of 32%. There was more work to do in this area and Camden Learning had recruited a digital officer to support online campaigning; recently there was a successful Moving On event held at the Francis Crick Institute, which was hugely oversubscribed; and some schools were taking it upon themselves to advertise their schools, with one example of a school using impressive drone footage. It was noted that Camden was a net importer of pupils. A Member commented that Camden Learning should have a marketing budget and assign marketing experts to schools in order to compete with the private sector.
- A Member raised the issue of schools having barriers in rebranding if they had a historically lower reputation to other schools. They also noted that there were differences in the reputation of boys and girls schools had in Camden. The Cabinet Member responded that sometimes parents read a simplified Ofsted judgement which did not account for the complexities of the inspection. Parents were now able to use the internet and social media to do their own research and understand a richer idea of a school. In addition, the power of a school visit was effective in capturing the interest of children and parents. Meet the Parents was an initiative which ran events where prospective families met with parents and students who attended their local schools to speak about their experiences.
- A Member stated there was disparity between the south and the north of the borough of children being able to access Camden schools, where children in the south often had to enrol schools in other boroughs. The Member suggested that successful secondary schools should extend their provision and expand to new sites in the south.
- In response to a Co-opted Member, the Cabinet Member agreed to the present comparable London boroughs disadvantage gap in future reports, in addition to national and regional differences. It was noted that the disadvantage gap was narrower in Camden compared to nationally, however the Council would benefit from more granular reporting as the disadvantage gap for primary was increasing in Camden.
- In relation to section 5.4, Early Help Family Support, it was confirmed that Camden's figure of 54% of all children's front door contacts being passed to early help last year was higher compared to other authorities. Officers confirmed they would provide statistics and trends on how Camden compared to other London boroughs on the number of family contacts who are referred to Early Help Family Support.

**Action By - Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding**

- A Co-opted Member asked if there were the right school places for the number of SEND children in the borough, stating that the Royal Free School which had special provision did not have enough places to meet demand. In response, it was confirmed that SEND place planning and HNB provision work was taking place, whilst considering the JSNA.
- In relation to section 8.2, Our Thorough Review of Offer for Care-Experienced Young People, it was confirmed that this was an area of continued focus, and the Council would build on the current offer, as part of the youth mission. Care experienced people were proven to have disproportionately worse outcomes later in life. Camden offered care leavers council tax exemption and ring-fenced apprenticeships, but they wanted to go further by, as part of the review and amongst other initiatives, making care status a protected characteristic.

## **RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

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

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

The paper and verbal summary from the Cabinet Member gave updates in the following areas: Camden's Youth Justice service - The Youth Justice Plan and priorities for 2023 – 2025; update on children looked after and disproportionality action plans; Youth Safety Steering Group; Detached Team; The London Borough Apprenticeship Awards; and the new MET for London community event - 5 September 2023.

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 the MET for London Turnaround Plan, it was confirmed the London Plan would come before the MET Camden specific plan. One community crime fighting pledge was to 'recruit additional Police Community Support officers (PCSO's) and put them in local neighbourhoods to deliver the priorities for London' and a Member asked if it was possible to ask the MET to hire more people from Camden who understood the area. In response, it was stated that a PCSO role was not always seen as a desirable job, and it was hard to find local people. This issue had been raised with the MET and for issue that to be considered in the local workshops and final report.
- The Cabinet Member stated that Black History season was taking place until 12 December and there was a huge listing of mostly free events. The season hosted many challenging pieces of work and events were being held many spaces around the borough.
- In relation to the middle east conflict, a Co-opted Member stated that the Israel-Gaza war had been immensely triggering for some refugee families and was sparking re-lived trauma. They noted specifically that Islamophobia was



on the rise. The Co-opted Member asked what the Council was doing to support those families and young people of those with backgrounds linked to the conflict and if there were any discussions on the topic in the Youth Charter. They also noted that Prevent speaking to families that could be triggering of trauma. In response, it was stated that the last Youth Charter was in September before the conflict began, but they were aiming for discussions. There were workshops with young people focussing on how the Police interacted with them. Camden was focussing on how to support communities during the middle east war and senior leaders were visiting residents and communities. The aim was for young people to feel safe and feel confident to discuss issues safely and for schools to be safe.

- In relation to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) health outcomes, a Member noted that BAME people were underrepresented in seeking and accessing health and wellbeing services. Some health professionals did not recognise that trauma presented differently on BAME people, who might have experienced traumatic events in their home country, and additionally may feel the need to conceal their trauma in the UK. GPs should be trained to recognise the signs and not contribute to any attitudes that it is the fault of BAME people for not seeking help sooner. Those groups were also more likely to be experienced poverty which also greatly contributed to worse health outcomes. In addition, a Co-opted Member stated that those factors also contributed to pupil absenteeism, which required provision of holistic support and a trauma informed approach. The Cabinet Member agreed that trauma informed work was an approach that recognised more complex life journeys and experiences.
- In relation to youth safety, a Member asked why the 'keeping young people safe' risk on the Council's risk register had been de-escalated. In response, it was confirmed that de-escalation meant that good impact and progress had been made, where the severity and frequency of instances occurring in Camden since the youth safety initiatives were put into place had significantly decreased, therefore the risk had decreased on the scale of corporate urgency. The Council was still committed to youth safety, and it remained on the register. Officer confirmed they would provide further information on why the 'keeping young people safe' risk on the Principal Risk Report 2023, considered by the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee on 8 November 2023, had been de-escalated from principal risk status.

### **Action By – Executive Director Children & Learning**

The Committee noted the update.

## **10. LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN CHILDREN'S STATUTORY SERVICES COMPLAINTS REPORT 2022/23**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding.

The Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding summarised the report. The Council had a single policy and procedure for managing complaints,

which included the statutory Social Services complaints process, following the introduction of a new Council-wide system. The service focussed on resolving issues informally outside of the formal complaints procedure. It was noted that there had been a time-lag in complaints being responded to in 2021 due to a key colleague sadly falling ill. Based on the reports of young people and advocates, over the reporting period, the main issues identified were Housing, concerns about allocated social workers and personal advisors, and finance benefits and debt. The report covered the following areas: the complaints procedure; context - services users and provision; overview of complaints data; volume and performance data by service area; outcomes by service area; complaint source; types of complaint; case studies; learning outcomes; Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) cases and comments; Compliments; comments from the service; and the Coram Voice Advocacy Service Annual Report 2022/23.

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

- A Member asked if service users were confident in the complaints process working fairly. In response, it was confirmed that it was a constant endeavour of the service to maintain a fair process and was always looking in how to improve systems. The low number of formal complaints could be accounted to the service offering proper opportunities for families to raise issues before the formal complaint stage. The service had invested in an advocate role which they were appointing soon and a named person to send complaints to. They would be procuring an advocacy contract in April.
- In relation to the types of complaints based on the process and communication failures since the new complaints system had been in place for 1.5 years, it was confirmed that the new complaints system was Council-wide and there was a period to account for where colleagues were being trained on the new system and the allocation of complaints was not always accurate, slowing down the process. The delays and timely responses were now improving. There would always be some complaints, which was important for the service to learn and improve and be open to scrutiny and concern from families.
- It was confirmed that the main issues affecting young people ages 17-25 were: the time it took to secure permanent accommodation; a young person not being ready to manage their own tenancy and tasks that came with independence; and issues of debt when starting work.
- In relation to section 4.13, Children's Safeguarding and Social Work (CSSW) Summary, a Member asked if the corporate target was realistic for the service, due to the complexity of some cases, and if the targets would ever be achieved. In response, it was confirmed that despite the targets being set Council-wide, it was important for the service to be ambitious. It was noted there would be improvements shown in the next iteration of the report. The nature of the complaints meant that there were often complexities to getting a fast resolution, which could be seen in case studies which told a story rather than a hard pass or fail in response target.
- A Member stated that alongside the positives that could be drawn out from the learning, it must be noted that a high threshold of frustration must be reached for a family to make a formal complaint. Members asked for a breakdown of

specific issues and complaints. Officers confirmed in the next iteration of the report they would set out the type of cases more explicitly and in a more meaningful way to demonstrate the complexities.

- A Co-opted Member asked if complaints could be made by schools, and not just individuals, and if they could complaint about structural issues. In response, it was confirmed that complaints could be made by professionals, however it would be hoped that concerns were addressed at board level or through senior officers rather than the corporate complaints process. It was confirmed that professionals could raise concern about structures, however there were existing forums to work through strategic issues. There was work taking place to see if there were themes which required structural responses, and there could be reporting how processes changed following those responsive restructures. The Council worked with the statutory strategic partners as part of the quality assurance work, expanding feedback data and capturing a greater picture of thematic issues.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

**11. SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) PROVISION SCRUTINY PANEL - TERMS OF REFERENCE AMENDMENT**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor McNamara summarised the amendment to the SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel terms of reference, editing the key line of enquiry in relation to good value, recommended by the Panel following their first formal meeting on 4 October 2023.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

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

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Children and Learning.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

**13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES**

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

- 19 December 2023
- 18 January 2024
- 26 February 2024
- 13 March 2024 (additional meeting)

**14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIR DECIDES TO CONSIDER AS URGENT**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.

**CHAIR**

**Contact Officer: Anoushka Clayton-Walshe**

**Telephone No: 020 7974 8543**

**E-Mail: [anoushka.clayton-walshe@camden.gov.uk](mailto:anoushka.clayton-walshe@camden.gov.uk)**

**MINUTES END**