

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **THURSDAY, 18TH JANUARY, 2024** 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 Aya Elgool, Sarah Jafri, Guy Pope and Dr Rachel Wrangham.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillor Shiva Tiwari.

Co-opted Members Margaret Harvey and Samir Qurashi.

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Sabrina Francis, Cabinet Member for 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 Margaret Harvey, Sarah Jafri and Samir Qurashi.

Apologies for lateness was received from Councillor Boyland.

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.”

Committee reporting

At the last meeting Committee Members discussed the style of reporting to Committee meetings and the changes they wanted to see to enable better scrutiny. In response to the discussion, the Chair wrote to all Committee Members stating that the comments made had been taken on board by officers and changes were being implemented. From January, there would be shorter time for presentations, with occasional exceptions, and more time for questions. From February, trials would begin of changes to the reports, which would include a greater focus on benchmarking, outcomes and feedback from residents.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were no deputations.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 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. YOUNG INSPECTORS REPORT 2023: MY MEETINGS - CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL CARE MEETINGS

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

The Committee was given a briefing on the Young Inspector's report by Elzbieta Chandrasena, Senior Development Officer Participation, and two young people before the formal meeting started. In their presentation they outlined the findings, key messages, and recommendations of the Young Inspector's inspection of children and families experience of social care meetings. Alongside summarising the report, the young people described their personal experiences of social care meetings. Committee Members praised the young people for speaking about their lived experiences of social care meetings and the important recommendations formulated to empower children and young people. During questions, the following was discussed:

- In relation to helping UASC meaningfully participate in social care meetings, a Co-optee asked if UASC could be accompanied by a friend who spoke the same language to help interpret in addition to a professional interpreter. In response, it was confirmed that it was possible. It would also be useful to have the young person's native language as part of the questionnaires and surveys. A Member added that a professional interpreter might not speak the native language or specific dialect of a young person, but instead a common language, and in those cases important context and specific cultural references may be missed during a meeting.
- In relation to section 7, response of the Corporate Parenting Board and how the findings would be taken forward, a Member asked the young people which recommendation they thought was most important. In response, they said that it was most important for the child to be prepared and understand what was in the report before the social care meeting and have assurance there would be no surprising information they were not previously aware of being raised. Adults should chat to the child before the meeting, the child should be made to feel comfortable in the discussion, and adults should ensure the meeting was centred around the child because it was about their life.
- A Member requested the action plan and report on progress in response to the Young Inspector's report recommendations (referenced in section 7.3) could report back to a future Committee.
- A Member asked officers to what extent they were aware of the problems in the system highlighted in the report. In response it was confirmed that all of the issues were known to the service, however the report's findings were a good reminder and would ensure a continual focus. The service had been working to simplify reports and introduced additional checks and balances to ensure reports were timely. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) wrote therapeutic letters to children as a direct line of communication to children and young people. The service would be working with the Council's new social workers on all of the themes raised.

- A Member asked the young people where the ideas for Young Inspector's report topics derived from. In response, they said it was usually the Corporate Board meetings or Children in Care meetings that would suggest a research area.

The Chair and Committee Members thanked the young people for attending.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

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

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

The Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families presented the update paper which covered the following areas: Department for Education (DfE) visit; fostering film project; upcoming care-experienced themed debate; and the Winter Camden Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. In addition, the Cabinet Member said that productive conversations were taking place with Google in potentially sponsoring a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) campus at a Camden Learning Centre.

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

- In relation to the tragic incident in Skegness where a father and son had died, triggering a rapid review from the statutory safeguarding partners, a Member asked how Camden would respond and if there was any leaning for the Council. In response, it was confirmed Camden's independent scrutineer and partners would pay close attention to the rapid review reporting to the national panel and any recommendations and learning resulting from that. Camden reviewed all national reports, panels and any learning that could be taken away.
- To support young people who may be affected by the war in the middle-east, the Cabinet Member stated that Camden Learning were sending new materials to schools, including guidance for assemblies and PSHE lessons (personal, social, health and economic education) to support young people. There was also a planned event for headteachers to share information and additionally Camden Learning would be sending letters to teachers signposting them to Council materials. The local police had been briefed about what the Council was doing and how hate and abusive incidents should be reported.
- In response to a Member asking what the learning capacity would be of the prospective AI campus, it was confirmed that classes of 30 learners would be accommodated for more intensive onsite programmes, but it would also function as an outreach hub designed to work with schools.

The Committee noted the update.

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

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

The Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture presented the update paper which covered the following areas: youth safety; Honest Grind Coffee award; Step into Our Shoes – Camden’s annual public health report launch curated by young people; Regent’s Park Guardians Winter Wellbeing event; National Youth Work Week; Youth Mission session; and the Youth MPs Football event.

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

- A Member praised the Youth Steering Group moving into the next phase of their work, following successful outcomes and progress made since the starting position when the group was established. The Member asked how many and what proportion of young people who interacted with the youth work system went on to become youth workers. In response, the Cabinet Member stated that the Council did as much as they could to find roles for those young people, including apprenticeship opportunities at Camden Council or peer advocates. It was also noted that Camden young people may end up outside of the borough.
- The Youth MP in attendance stated how enjoyable and valuable the Camden Sixth Forms Football event was. They were pleased to have had the opportunity to hold a funded event for young people which accommodated pupils from a mix of schools to speak about mental health. They noted that it had been a challenge to advertise the event across the whole borough. The Cabinet Member stated that in the future they would like to track all opportunities for young people in Camden to support work in making opportunities available to the broadest range of young people.

The Committee noted the update.

10. CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT: APRIL 2022- NOV 2023

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

Brenda Amisi-Hutchinson, Head of Corporate Parenting, introduced the report which provided an overview of the achievement, progress and challenges in meeting the needs of Camden’s children in care and care experienced young people and

covered the following areas: the profile of Camden's looked after children population; improving outcomes – key achievements and areas for focus; workforce; and the key priorities for 2024 and beyond.

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

- A Co-opted Member asked if Camden had any targets to reduce the high number of foster children placed outside of the borough. In response, it was confirmed that Camden placed third in the country on that measure, however the challenge of placing children in-borough was also experienced by other inner London authorities. Where possible, Camden would always try and place children in-borough. It was noted that some children and young people were placed out of borough due to safety and safeguarding concerns, and also through trying to match children to carers to their needs, whether that be culturally, religiously or linguistically. It was noted there was a wider context and a care crisis which Camden had to contend with. The service was also supported by and in conversation with Housing colleagues in supporting foster carers in the borough.
- In relation to care proceedings, a Co-opted Member asked if the Council considered 55% of care proceedings ending up with Supervision Orders a high percentage, when considering how traumatic that process could be for young people. In response, it was confirmed that this was an area of focus for the Council and the decision to take care proceedings was only made when there were no other viable options when measuring up the risks. During a care order, the Council continued to try and reunite families, and sometimes it was only during care proceedings that parents could fully understand the need for change. Kinship carers were another type of carer in the borough, where extended families would care for a child, supporting children remaining in their family networks.
- A Member stated that non-white looked after children were significantly overrepresented in the system and there needed to be a thorough analysis of why that existed in Camden. The Member also stated there may be unconscious bias of white social workers towards non-white families which meant they misunderstood cultural aspects to a family dynamic, which could result in non-white children going into care. The Member stated that Camden should lead on work to address this issue. In response, officers accepted that the numbers of non-white children in care were high. They stated that it would be helpful to present the diversity of Camden as a whole to give more context to the proportionality. Officers stated that UASC were the main group of non-white children who made up a quarter of the care population, and it was a priority for Camden that social workers developed their cultural understanding and were confident to discuss race equality. Officers confirmed they would provide the Committee with a more detailed analysis of the demographics and diversity of looked after children compared to the general population of Camden.

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

- A Member asked officers to explain the benefits of the Council's Pledge to be the Best Black Corporate Parent. Additionally, the Member asked why non-white parents were less likely to seek help from the Council before their children were taken away. In response, officers stated that the pledge centred around ensuring that black children's needs were met when they were in the care system. As an example, since making the pledge, Camden had launched a Replenish Box which enabled carers to focus their conversations on race and ethnicity needs of children and young people by starting conversations about skin and hair care, which could then be developed into other aspects of their identity. Camden was also looking at creating podcasts. Additionally in this area, there was work to reduce the criminalisation of black children and young people.
- A Member asked if there had been any feedback or analysis on what global majority young people felt about having a white or differing cultural background foster carer. In response, officers confirmed they would take that comment on board and think about how to conduct a survey. For each child, every 6 months there was a review of a child's placement, which included the IRO speaking to children about their experiences. In each review meeting there would be a conversation about the child and carer match and a discussion about ways to improve the experience. In addition, in relation to the recruitment of foster carers, Camden was focussing on recruiting more diverse foster carers to ensure more children could be culturally matched with a foster carer. Camden's foster carers and the local networks were a great tool in attracting new carers. Officers confirmed that currently 56% of Camden foster carers were of global majority backgrounds.
- A Member asked how Camden supported UASC mental health, which made a key difference in their life chances and ability to go to university. In response, it was confirmed that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) were co-located with Camden social workers which enabled collaborative working with the service and CAMHS practitioners were able to provide onsite advice, including for out of borough young people. The Camden system was striving to be more trauma informed and for social workers to increase their skills in early intervention.
- In relation to NEET young people (not in education, employment or training), a Member stated that the NEET statistics of care leavers should be used as a success indicator and compared with not previously looked after young people in Camden and other local authorities. The Member stated that Camden should aspire to close the gap as an outcome of the whole care process.
- A Member asked how Camden helped UASC feel safe arriving in Camden and alleviate fear of wrongly being accused of being an adult. In response, it was confirmed that social workers closely supported UASC settling in as soon as possible upon their arrival. In relation to age assessments, the main tools now used worked to link narrative and life story together, and any other relevant information. There was a screening tool to gather information of a young person and their journey, which also assisted in recognising that UASC may present differently in the first few days of arriving. There had to be a considerably strong feeling from service managers to make any physical assessment on a young

person. There was a UASC special project manager who focussed on quality assurance as part of their work.

- In relation to care leavers, officers stated that research showed that the term 'care experienced' was preferred over the term 'care leavers' by care leavers – the current legal definition. Camden offered six inhouse apprenticeships, which paid the London living wage, and intended to mirror the opportunity that young people who were not in care having an opportunity to work in a family business. The levels of EET care experienced young people (in education, employment and training) had increased since last year, after having been identified as a priority in the Youth Mission. The Council had a duty to young people until aged 21, and then young people had the choice whether they wanted to stay in contact. In some cases, Camden staff stayed in contact with young people after they were 25. The Josh McCallister review (independent review on children's social care) said that children should leave care knowing at least two important people. The Council would be working closer with Become, a national charity for children in care and care leavers, in developing Camden's offer of support and better training to Personal Advisors.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

11. AN UPDATE ON CAMDEN'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW EARLY EDUCATION ENTITLEMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY HUBS

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

Debbie Adams, Head of Early Years, introduced the report which covered the following areas: Camden's implementation of the new Early Education entitlements; Camden's Integrated Early Years and Family Hub service; funded delivery strands and Family Hub transformation; Family Hub governance; early education and childcare; Camden Local Inclusion Fund; and maintained nurseries.

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

- In relation to Camden's Local Inclusion Fund (CLIF), a Co-opted Member stated they heard feedback that CLIF was not available when needed the most. Children with profound need were not eligible for this funding unless they were attending an education setting full time.
- In relation to CLIF, a Co-opted Member stated that the wording in the report of 'It is hoped that a new approach will also help limit the significant growth in spend that has happened in the last few years' was the opposite of what they thought was needed and instead it would be desirable to see increased growth in spend

on this service and to increase demand of the service. Early intervention in children's lives prevented problems later in life. In response, it was confirmed that the CLIF budget had doubled over the past few years. Historically CLIF had been funded by the Early Years Designated Schools Grant (DSG), but now it was also funded by the High Needs Block (NHB) because of the increase in demand. The spending had to be manageable going forward for the service in a sustainable way whilst additional needs were exponentially increasing. The Council would be conducting a full needs assessment of the borough around SEND and how resources were spent for high needs. Following that review, there would be recommendations for the Council in how to make best use resources and provide the right support at the right time.

- A Co-opted Member stated they heard feedback from someone within the service that there was a lack of appropriate spaces to for meeting with families, which was also a problem also raised by the Young Inspectors within their report explaining that it was problematic to hold their family meetings within schools. The Co-opted Member asked how the Family Hub was approaching this issue. In response, it was confirmed that the Family Hubs were making spaces for families to meet social workers.
- A Member stated that the Governance Board appeared to be overly complex and urged the service to simplify the structure.
- A Member commented that the Government 2-year-old funding was not fully thought through at central government level, which was now causing difficulty for local services in managing the low level of funding.
- In response to a Member, officers stated that 'Triple P' were parenting programmes with different focusses. Currently Camden was using the programme to focus on 3–4-year-olds who were born during the pandemic, as part of the work to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on those children. Parents attended eight sessions which discussed how parents could develop a child's home learning environment and how to support family workers.

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.

The following was discussed:

- The Executive Director of Children and Learning stated that the Annual Health Report would move from February to July 2024. The Annual Public Health Report on adolescent health would be added to the February agenda.
- A Member requested that persistent absence be added to the forward plan.

- A Member requested the action plan and report on progress in response to the Young Inspector's report recommendations be added to the forward plan.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

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

- 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

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MINUTES END