

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **WEDNESDAY, 13TH MARCH, 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, Sylvia McNamara, Tom Simon, Margaret Harvey, Reverend Guy Pope and Dr Rachel Wrangham

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Matt Cooper, Julian Fulbrook, Shiva Tiwari and Nanouche Umeadi.

Co-opted Members Aya Elgool, Sarah Jafri and Samir Quarshi.

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 for absence had been received by Councillors Matt Cooper, Julian Fulbrook, Shiva Tiwari, Nanouche Umeadi and Co-opted Members Aya Elgool, Sarah Jafri and Samir Quarshi.

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.”

Thank you to the Youth MPs

The Camden Youth MP’s term sitting on the Committee had ended and the next election would be held in April 2024. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair gave thanks for their valuable contributions over the last two years and wished them good luck in their next steps.

Annual Work Programme Planning Meeting

The Committee’s annual work programme planning meeting would take place on 20 May. More information about the session would be circulated to Committee Members in due course.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were no deputations.

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

There was no urgent business.

6. CABINET ADVISER REPORT ON OPENING UP ACCESS TO SPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Adviser on Opening Up Access to Sport for Young People.

Councillor Camron Aref-Adib, Cabinet Adviser on Opening Up Access to Sport for Young People, outlined the report which contained his research findings and policy recommendations. The report covered the following areas: Camden’s current sport offer; analysis of the data comparing demographics and other local authorities; identified barriers to sports for different groups; and the recommendations from the Cabinet Advisor.

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

- A Member stated that it would be helpful to make decisions in this area using more granular data, such as looking at the trends of children dropping out of activities between primary and secondary school and differences between ethnic groups. In response, the Cabinet Advisor stated that from his research the granular data looking at ethnicity of 147 pupils was a too small sample size to make conclusions. The Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire would be interesting to study any gradual drop-off of activities between years 6 to 7.
- A Member stated that the shortage of space to play sports in the borough had been a long-term challenge. The Member noted that it would be good if multi-use game areas (MUGAs) were made more attractive to use, because they were often uninviting tarmacked areas.
- A Co-opted Member noted the report moved between referencing categories of physical activity and sports in their analysis and recommendations, and there were few references to exercise in general. They noted that those categories were distinct and that sports compared to exercise tended to be male dominated and had ethnic disparities of participation. In response, the Cabinet Advisor stated that in his research and the data from Sports England focussed on sports. He agreed there was an important distinction and noted that five out of the recommendations were focussed on sport and were concretely achievable goals.
- A Co-opted Member stated the findings and recommendations identified inequality, however there was not a specific directive to encourage more girls to be involved in sports. In the Co-opted Member's view, MUGAs were areas where boys tended to spend time, not usually girls, and it was often particular types of boys who liked to play football in these spaces. In the report there was little focus on playgrounds for children which would increase accessibility for younger children. The Co-opted Member asked if there were any recommendations that could be made which focussed on girls, the participation of non-white girls, and were more inclusive of SEND children. The Co-opted Member noted that the resources needed to increase SEND child participation was higher, and asked if there were any ideas on how the Council could respond to that challenge. In response, the Cabinet Advisor stated there was more work to be done around MUGAs being male-dominated spaces, but noted that in reality for many children playing on estates from low-income families, MUGAs were an avenue into participating in physical activity and to play sport. Additionally, the feedback from girls was that football was the highest rated sport they wanted to participate in most.
- The Cabinet Advsor stated that a striking piece of feedback was the number of young people who wanted astroturf on the MUGAs, which was higher quality ground, because they did not want to play certain types of sports on tarmac. Arising from the research was that some pitches were in such bad condition they were no longer usable for activities. In terms of funding to resurface areas, there were many pressures already on the Housing Revenue Account, therefore funding streams for games spaces often had to be found in other places, potentially through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding or the Football Foundation.
- A Co-opted Member stated that Cantelowes Gardens Skate Park was a very popular park for young people and suggested that the lighting be kept on later

than the current switch off time of 8pm, so that young people could use the skate park later into the evening. In response, the Cabinet Advisor agreed that lighting was important.

- A Co-opted Member asked if there was any data on the number of children who were able swim by the end of primary school, noting that it was a critical life skill.
- A Co-opted Member suggested the Council consider speaking to the City of London about accessing grounds for sports and activities on Hampstead Heath. In response, the Cabinet Advisor stated that discussions had taken place however the drainage on the pitches was now so poor they were not suitable for football. The Cabinet Advisor noted that Regents Park school had implemented hybrid football pitches which were more resilient to damage and weather.
- In relation to section 6.2, the recommendation to remodel the Camden Active Mark (CAM) to help with access and affordability, a Member asked how that would impact children with special needs and disabilities (SEND). In response, the Cabinet Advisor stated that CAM would help SEND children and there were institutions such as the London Inclusion Sports Academy who did fantastic work on access. A lot of sports networks were quite informal, but as activities became more formalised, offers of priority access would improve.
- A Member noted that access was one of the biggest challenges for children with SEND participating in activities, where it had to be considered that many SEND children required transport to activities, one-to-one support, support staying safe and support in how to make friends.
- A Member said that parents feedback praised the offer at Talacre, however it was only held during school holidays and it would benefit from scaling up, increasing variety of activities and more consideration of the range of needs of SEND children. The Member asked if there were any additional funding streams which could be explored. The Cabinet Advisor noted that Talacre offer was paid for through 'Levelling up' funding and was a successful example of provision and hugely oversubscribed.
- A Member stated there was reference to local clubs in the report when speaking about access and affordability. The Member asked if there was any microdata available about the current provision by local clubs, because it seemed they were providing a lot of access to provision and appeared to take on the costs themselves to provide free activities. The Member also asked what role local clubs could play going forward and if there should be a recommendation referencing them specifically. The Member stated there seemed to be an imbalance in how money was being spent on different provisions and there should be a review on how funding was allocated.
- In relation to section 6.3.4-6.3.7, the Cabinet Advsor confirmed he would like to see the project scaled up to other primary schools.
- The Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture praise the Cabinet Advisor's research and final report, which presented the good work already taking place and areas that needed focus and more thinking. The Cabinet Member's formal response would touch on the areas raised in the report and comments from the Committee.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee

- 1) note the report of Councillor Camron Aref-Adib, Cabinet Adviser for Youth Mission; and
- 2) discuss and comment on the recommendations made by the Cabinet Adviser, which will be incorporated in a report to Cabinet.

7. CABINET MEMBER FOR BEST START FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES' RESPONSE ON THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY YEARS AND KEY STAGE 1 CHILDREN IN CAMDEN

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

Debbie Adams, Head of Early Years, summarised the Cabinet Member's responses to the recommendations from the scrutiny panel which investigated the impact of Covid-19 on the language development of Early Years and Key Stage 1 children in Camden. The Cabinet Member had sent apologies for this meeting but would be setting up a session for interested Members to discuss the response report.

The Chair stated that informal responses to the scrutiny panel report had also been recently received from Helen Hayes MP (Shadow Minister for Children and Early Years) and from David Johnston OBE MP (Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing), on behalf of Gillian Keegan MP (Secretary of State for Education). The responses had been circulated to Committee Members.

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

- In relation to the response to the scrutiny panel's recommendation 1, a Co-opted Member asked how schools were chosen to participate and if only maintained schools were included. It was confirmed that the nine schools invited to be involved in the project were carefully selected from across a range of deprivation levels. Due to the success and benefits to schools, schools had been encouraging other schools to get involved in Phase 2 of the screening tool work, including PVI (Private, Voluntary and Independent) nurseries.
- In relation to the response to the scrutiny panel's recommendation 3, it was confirmed that the Council did not support the recommendation precisely, however the important role for volunteers was recognised in the form of Parent Champions who represented the community. In response to a question, it was confirmed that Parent Champions were DPS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checked, received special training, and were supported and supervised in a formal scheme.
- In relation to the response to the scrutiny panel's recommendation 6, a Co-opted Member asked how the 'Best Start or Baby' scheme performance would be evaluated and who was accessing the service. In response, it was confirmed that

Best Start for Baby was universally offered to children in Camden. The Council was able to access child health records and identify children who had not accessed any services. Through the Family Hub Outreach Strategy, there was a small team of officers who contacted families to check in on the wellbeing of a child. Before the statutory school age there were children who were not visible to services and this scheme would reach those families. In evaluating the impact, the benefits they were trying to achieve through the scheme were lifelong outcomes. In this age group it was difficult to prove cause and effect from schemes like this, but in their work they were trying to develop secure attachments for children which would hopefully prevent issues later down the line, therefore a longitudinal study would be needed to determine the impact.

- A Member noted that the answers to the recommendations focussed on 0-5 year olds when many children who were in reception during lockdown were now in key stage 2 (KS2). In response, it was confirmed that the funding which had become available to the service was for children born during the pandemic, but officers understood the impact from the pandemic spanned over older age ranges. There was some work in schools, such as the Kids Talk project where parents were invited to sessions which focussed on encouraging development of a good home learning environment and was attended by a significant number of parents.
- In relation to the response to the scrutiny panel's recommendation 4, a Member noted that the report stated that 21% of speech and language therapist posts were vacant and the situation was a wider national issue. The Member suggested that Camden should consider employing a number of their own therapists and sell their services to schools directly. In response, it was acknowledged there was a national shortage in the profession and more training into the profession was needed. Officers confirmed they would relay the suggestion to the Cabinet Member.
- In relation to the response to the scrutiny panel's recommendation 8, a Member asked what work was taking place to manage the growing demand for SEND.
- In relation to the response to the scrutiny panel's recommendation 13, a Co-opted Member asked how the specialist research project referred to could be funded.
- A Member asked officers which recommendation they thought could make the most difference to Camden children. In response, it was confirmed that it was hard to exactly pinpoint what could make the most difference, however there was a lot of work going on in this space. That work included new birth visits and early communication support, all Health Visitors undergoing the new birth observation training, and consistent messaging across mediums and practitioners. Camden Kids Talk launched in 2021 which had made an impact because it was not just centred around one intervention but a theory of change and collective responsibility, which meant the training was a broad offer to all practitioners working with children in the borough (e.g. midwives, health visitors, early year practitioners, family workers etc). There had also been a skills audit for staff. This year there would be a profile data collection carried out at the end of the Reception year which would track the benefits of the three years of interventions.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

8. CABINET ADVISER REPORT ON CHILD HUNGER AND EXPANDING FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Adviser on Child Hunger and Expanding Free School Meals.

Councillor Sharon Hardwick, Cabinet Adviser on Child Hunger and Expanding Free School Meals, outlined the report which contained her research findings and policy recommendations on how Camden Council could better serve Camden secondary school pupils and families through the wider uptake of free school meals (FSM). The report covered the following areas: FSM eligibility; the workshop with schools; Camden's Test and Learn pilot scheme; visit to a Camden secondary school to speak to school and food provider staff; barriers to FSM uptake; and the recommendations from the Cabinet Advisor. The Cabinet Advisor also spoke about her own experiences of FSM.

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

- In relation to the Cabinet Advisor's recommendation 5, FSM allowance top-up, a Co-opted Member asked what would be the likelihood of the proposals being accepted in the context of the MTFs. In response, it was confirmed there was short term funding available for some of the projects and if they were to extend further they would implement test and learn schemes to evaluate the impact and whether to make the case for longer-term funding.
- In relation to the Cabinet Advisor's recommendation 7, a Member asked how the FSM criteria could be expanded to raise levels of eligibility within Camden. In response, it was confirmed that the criteria scheme was nationally set but Camden could look into a route to supplement the offer and explore lobbying. The Cabinet Advisor noted that a key task was to ensure those who were eligible were taking up the offer.
- In relation to the Cabinet Advisor's recommendation 5, a Member asked if barriers to accessing food changed between key stages, for example older children not wanting to spend their lunchbreaks in the school canteen. In response, the Cabinet Advisor stated that canteens were not always welcoming spaces, sometimes crowded and noisy areas, and they were not big enough to fit a large proportion of the school during a break time. The Cabinet Advisor had discussed with the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families that canteens should be made more fit for purpose and be more attractive areas. To make those improvements, co-creation with young people would be necessary. Officers noted the following points to consider on the subject: the issue of long canteen queues at lunchtime; the autonomy of young people was a key consideration when making decisions; the issues in eligibility of FSM and then whether the young people who do take up the offer ate their food; and the importance of how nutritious the food was on offer.
- A Member noted that there were many children attending Camden schools who did not live in Camden, and vice versa of Camden children attending out of borough schools, which would create potential challenges in providing a universal offer to Camden children if the Council was to supplement the national scheme.

In response, it was confirmed that any scheme to target just Camden children would be a complex system and in practical terms difficult to operate.

- In relation to the Council making follow up contact to parents to see if their financial circumstances had changed, a Member asked if it was the case that a family could only apply for FSM before the October cut-off date, and if their circumstances changed after that cut-off date they would have to wait until the following year to access the FSM. In response, it was confirmed this message had also been feedback by school and pastoral leads. Given this situation there was other help which could be signposted, such as school uniform banks and information sharing in how to access other services and eligibility for benefits or funding. It was noted that these challenges were a part of a wider story on poverty. There were drives to make the systems of help more intuitive and able check in on those families on the borderline.
- A Co-opted Member asked if the Council had any data on children who took up FSM but then did not eat the food on offer. In response, officers said there was a deep dive which involved children and young people, looking into why some children did not eat their meal. Some of the feedback was related to the quality of the food offer. Officers confirmed they would provide the Committee with a breakdown of children and young people who were known to not eat their FSM.

Action By – Executive Director Children and Learning

- In relation to the Cabinet Advisor's recommendation 9, a Co-opted Member praised the idea of extending the school breakfast offer to morning breaktime because there were many children who preferred to eat a meal at morning break, noting some schools did not allow spending of FSM credit at breaktime. Revoking this rule may enable more children to eat their meal. Additionally, the Co-opted Member noted that it was not possible to currently spend FSM credit on snacks and there did not appear to be a reason for this and it was unclear which rules were government set or within Camden's control. In response, officers acknowledged this fair challenge and stated they would investigate how flexible the rules were. They were hearing from children and young people about what they wanted the offer to look like and the Council would be working with schools. It was additionally noted there were good examples of schools getting it right.
- A Member suggested that the application for FSM could be a part of the admission process, which may increase take up.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee

1. note and comment on the report, including recommendations; and
2. note the proposal to bring a Cabinet Report as a response to the recommendations made by the Cabinet Adviser within the next year.

9. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) PROVISION PANEL UPDATE

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

Councillor Sylvia McNamara, Chair of the Panel, introduced and summarised the report which gave an update of the progress of the Panel's work, including: the analytical framework, findings from interviews, and the next steps of the Panel. It was noted that having spoken to a number of parents, it was clear their experiences were a painful and distressing subject and the Panel were listening and motivated to move things forward. The Panel would be soon forming positive local recommendations aimed at areas within the Council's control.

The Chair thanked Councillor Sylvia McNamara for the update report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- The Panel had recently hosted three meetings with parents of SEND children, where 13-15 parents attended each session, however that was still a tiny proportion of the number of parents of SEND children in the borough. They were looking to send a questionnaire to all parents with children who had an EHCP or ENG in the borough because it was essential every parent should be contacted.
- Looking at parent journeys, the Panel was working to understand the barriers and carefully think what solutions could be devised, such as empathy training.
- During interviews, many parents had expressed how good the MOSAIC (Making Our Services All Integrated in Camden) service was. However, the service was now at breaking point having absorbed a 300% increase in demand since 2018, which meant now a significant amount of their resources were used on assessments.
- Following discussions at the Committee the previous year, it was confirmed that there were now more girls on waiting lists and being diagnosed with SEND – where before the concern was there was a hidden population of SEND girls undetected and not receiving support. There were many reasons early intervention was not happening with girls in a way that girls needed, which was distressing for families.
- The Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion stated that colleagues welcomed the report and the Panel's work would support work in ensuring a coherent SEND strategy and an implementation plan which had a depth of research from families, schools and children and young people. Some of the feedback from the Panel resonated with the self-evaluation work taking place, thinking on how to address waiting times and how to continually improve the quality of the work.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

10. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER 2023/24 AND PROVISIONAL WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

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

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee

- 1) note the Committee's Work Programme for 2023-24;
- 2) note the Committee's Action Tracker; and
- 3) consider and note the Committee's Provisional Work Programme for 2024-2025 and propose any amendments.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

The provision meetings dates for the 2024-25 municipal year, as listed in the agenda, were noted.

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

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END