

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 10TH DECEMBER, 2024** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Lotis Bautista (Chair), Julian Fulbrook, Jenny Headlam-Wells, Patricia Leman, Sylvia McNamara, Tom Simon and Nanouche Umeadi.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillor Matt Cooper and Co-opted Members Zarin Bakhshzaad, Margaret Harvey, Sarah Jafri, and Dr Rachel Wrangham.

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families
Councillor Sabrina Francis, Cabinet Member for Jobs, 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 were received from Zarin Bakhshzaad, Councillor Matt Cooper and Dr Rachel Wrangham.

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 announced the following: "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 six 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 being filmed and to the use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If you are addressing the Committee your contribution will be recorded and broadcast.”

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were no deputations.

5. MINUTES

As matters arising, a Member asked for an update on when further information would be shared with the Committee on strategic place planning, as discussed on item 8 at the previous meeting (2024 School Place Planning Report). Officers acknowledged the feedback at the previous meeting regarding the integration of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school place planning into the wider place planning work. They assured the Committee that discussions on this topic were ongoing, including within the School Place Planning Group (which involved school leaders and teachers) and the Place Planning Board (chaired by the Executive Director Children and Learning). It was explained that any recommendations for proposed changes would follow the standard democratic processes, and the Committee would have an opportunity to review proposals at the appropriate time. It was emphasised the importance of involving officers from across Council departments to assess the wider impacts of place planning decisions to mitigate negative effects on communities and to optimise the use of community assets. It was also highlighted the role of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on SEND place planning, which would be considered as part of future plans. The next update would be provided in autumn 2025 and no further updates were available at this stage. Officers clarified that no formal decisions would be made ahead of September 2025, the timeline was much longer, and any plan would be shared with the Committee well in advance of any proposals being formally agreed.

RESOLVED -

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2024 be agreed as an accurate record.

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

There was no urgent business.

7. CAMDEN SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (CSCP) - ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

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

Tim Aldridge (Executive Director Children and Learning) presented the report. Other partners in attendance were David Pennington (Director of Safeguarding, North Central London Integrated Care System), Emma Barker (Detective Superintendent, Central North Basic Command Unit), Stephen Hall (Chief Executive Officer, Camden Learning) and Robert McCulloch-Graham (Camden's Independent Scrutineer). The report provided a strategic oversight of the quality and performance of the multiagency safeguarding efforts and an assessment of local services performance and effectiveness, highlighting areas of strength and weakness. The report also outlined how the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements were evaluated and detailed the actions being taken to enhance safeguarding practices aiming to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

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

- In relation to the second key question for the Committee in section 2, a Member asked what the impacts of a collaborative working culture and an open and transparent safeguarding culture were. They also asked if partners were aware if safeguarding issues decreased as a result from collaborative working. The following responses was given:
 - It was confirmed that the report demonstrated how statutory duties were being met and highlighted the importance of collaboration. However, it was noted that external drivers, such as the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and poverty, had significantly contributed to harm in communities – which were factors beyond the partnership's control. While the partnership could not guarantee any reduction in incidents, it remained committed to better identifying, responding to, and preventing issues from worsening.
 - The importance of learning together as a partnership and understanding complex areas such as neglect was emphasised, particularly in distinguishing between families who were struggling and those unable to manage adequately.
 - Encouraging collaboration across services and fostering an environment where individuals felt confident in reporting concerns, including a willingness to challenge others and accept accountability, was also highlighted as crucial and considered vital for improving safeguarding outcomes.
 - Evidence of the partnership's effectiveness could be observed in reviews, feedback on incidents and near misses, which helped inform future proactive responses.
 - The importance of transparency and shared values within the partnership was important and Camden's culture of openness was evident in its meetings and

responses to incidents. The complexity of safeguarding and the various external factors influencing outcomes were acknowledged, with an emphasis that, while no guarantees could be made, a lack of transparency could lead to poor practice.

- Camden had a strong national reputation for its safeguarding culture however there was a need for continued vigilance to maintain positive relationships and community impact, given that staff and circumstances could change over time.
- A Member noted that while the report mentioned sexual and physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect might be harder for young people to identify in their own situation, as they might not have had the necessary terminology to recognise these issues. Officers explained that the Department for Education (DfE) provided clear legal definitions of neglect, and that pan-London child protection procedures were in place. Neglect referred to children suffering significant harm from their living circumstance and their quality of care did not support them to thrive. There were different types of harm, such as parental mental health issues and domestic abuse, which often overlapped and could not be considered in isolation. Officers acknowledged the complexity of the issue, noting that it had sometimes been difficult to assess the severity of a family's situation and its impact on children. Officers highlighted the importance of staff training, multi-agency discussions, and appropriate professional supervision, as well as the need for time to reflect on cases. It was emphasised that everyone had a responsibility to identify and report neglect. Teaching staff on the frontline also received messaging about support in understanding how to report concerns and ensure children had safe ways to speak up and a safe avenue to communicate with a trusted adult.
- A Member asked what the findings from the health-related behaviour questionnaire were which led to the CSCP commissioning new training on understanding and safeguarding LGBTQ+ children and young people.
- A Member asked for more information about the partnerships approach to intersectionality. In response it was explained that, regardless of discipline, part of professional development involved understanding the community being served. Camden was home to people from diverse backgrounds, each with intersectional identities. It was important not to make assumptions about a family's experiences or perspectives, and that professionals should work with families to understand their diverse histories to support their ability to access services. While not always straightforward, it was emphasised that addressing these issues had been a key aspect of supervision, training, and learning from case reviews, particularly when insufficient attention had been given to someone's protected characteristics. A focus on intersectionality was part of multi-agency meetings and ongoing work, including social workers learning about systemic family therapy. Across the partnership there was a challenge of supporting everyone to remain professionally curious, noting that this required continuous effort. Many individuals had only partial viewpoints of a situation, and it was important to find ways for partners to share the right and correct information to achieve better outcomes.

- A Member highlighted that being curious and courageous seemed like a big challenge and asked how these qualities could be demonstrated in practice. The following responses were given:
 - Officers responded that from a social worker's perspective, this area was about how well-prepared social workers were when engaging with families, especially in multi-agency discussions. It was emphasised that curiosity involved how social workers engaged with families, the building of empathy and trust, while ensuring that families understood the intent behind their questions, which should not feel prying or unhelpful. Courage was required when working with families by asking questions that may seem intrusive, and when engaging in professional conversations, particularly when there was conflict or differing opinions among disciplines. Social workers needed the courage to challenge their own understanding and to ensure they were addressing situations with the right intent.
 - It was stated that within the Metropolitan Police Services (MPS) Children's Strategy, the Child First policy included clear objectives focused on treating the child as a priority, listening to the child's voice, and encouraging professional curiosity. A comprehensive training programme had been established for new MPS staff to ensure consistency and expertise when interacting with children and there was now a greater emphasis on upskilling MPS officers. There had been a significant increase in the number of officers in MPS child protection teams, with minimal vacancies, and that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had nearly 100% of its posts filled. In response to a Member asking if the new training had impacted how officers dealt with young people in Camden, it was explained that impacts could be seen in examples of improvements in handling cases involving missing children, which had previously been flagged as a government concern. It was noted that there had been training rolled out to strengthen a higher recognition of risk for high-risk children. The latest government report on the subject was due to be published in January 2025 and positive feedback of the MPS was expected.
- A Member asked what the difference and relation was between relational safeguarding and systemic social work. Officers explained that relational safeguarding was an approach used across partnerships, enhancing strong relationships between agencies and communities to achieve better outcomes. Trust, clear expectations, and the ability to challenge were key to creating an effective environment. Systemic practice was a set of tools within the broader approach, focusing on how to understand and hypothesise about families through a systemic family approach. This approach included direct work tools, which were particularly useful for frontline social workers. In the Council, a new Director for Relational Practice had joined in June 2024 and had published a new practice framework. The Director had already met with many practitioners in the Children and Learning directorate and were building a team of relationally trained practitioners to support the effort to apply the relational practice model coherently.
- A Member noted that while the CSCP appeared to be cost-effective, its success relied on the involvement of partners, many of whom were also facing their own

financial challenges. They asked whether this financial strain could undermine the effectiveness of the work carried out by partners. The following responses were given:

- It was confirmed that the cost-of-living crisis had increased safeguarding concerns, and while all partners remained fully committed to safeguarding, they were being asked to do more with fewer resources.
- An example was shared that a group of GPs in Camden who were under pressure in primary care but still prioritised safeguarding. These GPs, who were safeguarding leads, took time out of their practice to discuss safeguarding issues, focussed on asking curious questions and looking ahead to how early intervention could help. Part of supporting curiosity involved prompting professionals to ask about domestic abuse and suicide, ensuring that all systems could help keep safeguarding at the forefront.
- It was noted that the Police Commissioner had announced that exploitation would remain a high priority for the MPS, supported by investment in safeguarding teams and public protection being protected from government cuts.
- There was a commitment to maintain funding within the partnership, though it was acknowledged it would be affected in different ways. The Council was prioritising safeguarding, investing in strengthening the practice model, which would translate into improved practice and reduction in risk.
- The high costs of getting things wrong in safeguarding was emphasised, as the demand for services would increase significantly if safeguarding efforts at an earlier stage failed. The importance of securing funding for prevention and early intervention was emphasised, as stopping funding would ultimately be at the peril of the services.

RESOLVED -

THAT the Committee:

1. Comment on and note the outcomes achieved by the CSCP set out in the 2023-24 Annual Report (Appendix 1) and the CSCP objectives set out in the Business Plan (Appendix 2)
2. Provide feedback to the local statutory safeguarding partners for children.
3. Note the report.

8. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, YOUNG PEOPLE & CULTURE: DECEMBER 2024

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture.

Councillor Sabrina Francis (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture) introduced and summarised the report. The report covered the following areas in the portfolio: key initiatives and strategic priorities aimed at taking an early intervention and prevention approach to youth violence while addressing disproportionality, the

voice of children and families, the culture offer, responding to social inequality, and an inclusive economy and jobs.

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

- A Member requested more information about Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilots. The Cabinet Member explained that the initiative was in its early stages, with five cohorts identified, highlighting that young people in care could benefit the most. Officers referenced the UBI scheme in Wales for care leavers, stating that they were still learning from its outcomes. An external organisation had been commissioned to explore what a UBI pilot could look like for Camden, focusing on a subset of care leavers. The pilot would aim to assess the impact of UBI on improving outcomes, ensuring more effective use of resources, and influencing life courses. Over the coming months, options would be developed, leading to a decision on whether to proceed. It was also noted that the pilot could attract national or philanthropic interest and played a part of Camden's mission to research innovative approaches.
- A Member raised concerns about the increasing number of families in temporary accommodation and asked whether this affected the Jobs, Young People & Culture portfolio. The Cabinet Member stated that housing significantly impacted young people's outcomes and noted that senior officers had been invited to the Camden Missions meetings to address the issue. The Cabinet Member explained that a sense of space could influence autonomy and behaviour of a young person, highlighting the interconnectedness of Housing with all portfolios.
- A Member highlighted the importance of youth clubs and youth workers, referencing encouraging research that suggested youth clubs remained highly relevant and impactful. They asked how youth work was recognised in Camden. The Cabinet Member praised the breadth of services that youth clubs across Camden offered and acknowledged the long service of many youth workers, some with up to 25 years' experience. There had been a focus on developing youth clubs as hubs where young people could access advice, recognising the importance of 'third spaces' where young people could gather. Officers noted that Camden had maintained investment in youth services, particularly when many local authorities had been unable to do so, which enabled the borough to retain highly experienced staff. In youth work there had been a shift towards a greater focus on youth safety, with joint working between youth clubs and youth safety initiatives and other parts of London had shown interest in Camden's model. The Cabinet Member added that Camden had introduced youth work apprenticeships to elevate the importance of youth work and there were many young people who aspired to return to work as youth workers within their own borough.
- In relation to section 5.20, Family Case work, a Member asked how many children did not succeed in being referred to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) either via schools or the Youth Early Help services route. Officers said that data showed that more children were being supported through referrals, with processes working both ways - youth services referring to MASH and MASH

referring back to youth services, as well as to voluntary and community sector (VCS).

- A Member stressed the importance of improving support for SEND young people to access apprenticeships, warning that a lack of opportunities could lead to long-term unemployment. The Cabinet Member confirmed that SEND young people were a key cohort within the Youth Mission and were being prioritised. SEND apprenticeships were a priority group for improving opportunities, with a focus not only on council-led initiatives but also on engaging partners to identify what additional support they could provide. Officers further suggested exploring initiatives companies in Camden could support young people with additional needs.
- A Member raised concerns about school exclusions, noting that they were disproportionately affecting Global Majority children and were primarily linked to one school. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the issue, highlighting that there was an officer Disproportionality Lead. Officers emphasised that the issue was taken seriously, noting that while the numbers were low, they remained concerning and work was taking place with all Camden schools through Camden Learning. Through the Inclusion Forum there was greater challenge and discussions between schools, and school leaders were committed to addressing the issue. The Cabinet Member added that a better cultural and lived experienced understanding from professionals often achieved better outcomes for children, however, it was noted that exclusions typically occurred due to exceptional circumstances.
- A Member requested further information on the work being done with schools to address exclusions, including the factors involved and the necessary interventions. The Cabinet Member explained that there was a Disproportionality Lead working directly with schools, and the Youth Justice Board was also engaged with the schools in question. Camden was fortunate to have Camden Learning and officers highlighted the ongoing staff training on adultification and disproportionality. A report on exclusions had been presented at the last meeting and officers offered to provide more detailed information if specific questions arose. In response to Members, officers agreed to provide further information, narrative and analysis about the school in the borough which had a disproportionately high number of exclusions and to provide detail about what specific interventions were in place with the school to reduce that number.

Action By: Chief Executive Officer, Camden Learning

RESOLVED -

THAT the Committee comment on and note the report.

9. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BEST START FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: DECEMBER 2024

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

Councillor Marcus Boyland (Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families) introduced and summarised the report. The report covered the following areas in the portfolio: key initiatives and strategic priorities aimed at improving the lives and wellbeing of children and families across the borough, schools and Camden Learning, improving the health of children and families, adult community learning and the Virtual School, Children's Services and safeguarding, support for students with SEND and the Children and Young People with Disabilities Service (CYPDS), corporate parenting and voices of families and children, and Early Years and Family Hubs.

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

- A Member highlighted the potential benefits of collaborating with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to use their data to activate auto-enrolment to increase and streamline the Free School Meals (FSM) uptake and they asked for a timeframe for when this might be possible. The Cabinet Member explained an IT project of that nature could take some time to implement. There were challenges in IT systems in schools being outdated, which made it harder to obtain a full picture of which families were eligible. Despite this, Members were reassured that other measures were being taken to encourage parents to sign up for Pupil Premium which supported FSM uptake and schools had put significant effort into securing this funding stream.
- In response to Members, officers agreed to provide further information on any specific support the Council provided, or could consider providing, to families who were living in temporary accommodation to help children attend school, particularly any details about support for families who had to move out of borough.

Action By: Executive Director, Children and Learning

- In relation to initiatives aimed at improving school attendance, a Member suggested that one effective approach could be making school a more desirable place to attend. The Cabinet Member explained that attendance in Camden was low performing compared to other London boroughs. The Children's Trust Partnership Board, a multi-agency partnership with representatives from the Council, schools, VCS, and Health established to improve outcomes for children and young people in Camden, was dedicated to addressing this challenge, alongside exclusions and concerns about Elective Home Education (EHE). For the Board, officers created data heat maps which mapped the borough to identify

areas with the worst attendance, and this showed that areas around estates had the worst outcomes. Further analysis of attendance focused on children with SEND, care-experienced children, and children who had come into contact with social workers, among other vulnerable groups. An initiative from schools was testing the effectiveness of different messaging to families in improving attendance. The Cabinet Member also noted a theme in addressing the issue was around children feeling belonging and asking what motivated children to attend school, which could be hindered by strict penalties relating to uniform or punctuality. A Member emphasised that while the feeling of belonging might sound like a soft concept, it had a huge impact on young people, such as when children felt they could participate in activities such as sports, or when the curriculum celebrated their identity.

- A Member raised concerns about parents struggling to get their Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) packages paid for due to administrative issues and asked whether this could be addressed.
- A Member welcomed positive progress in the work on report cards in Camden, which provided a more comprehensive assessment of schools beyond Ofsted and highlighted schools real strengths.
- A Member praised the outstanding work on early help and the development of family hubs but stressed the need for more support across other age groups.
- In relation to SEND services, a Member acknowledged the achievements but raised concerns about the 96-week wait for diagnoses, describing the significant pain experienced by children and families. The Member noted the lack of mention of this issue and limited information on speech therapy in the report. The Cabinet Member responded that the 96-week wait had been widely discussed and confirmed that they had written to the Integrated Care Board (ICB). The ICB was considering increasing investment in Camden to add an additional £900,000 per year, and the Cabinet Member expressed confidence that the ICB had taken concerns seriously. The Member requested that the next iteration of this report addressed these issues in greater detail, including updates on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) assessments and speech and language therapist provisions.
- A Member raised concerns about school attendance, particularly at the secondary level, highlighting Camden's rate of 24% compared to 23.9% in London and 19.6% nationally. They queried whether attendance rates were better in Camden's more affluent wards. The Cabinet Member explained that areas within the borough which required greater investment often faced more challenges, with attendance rates being lower on estates. However, attendance in primary schools was showing improvement and becoming more positive. To better understand the underlying issues, a health-related questionnaire was being introduced. The Cabinet Member also highlighted the involvement of Fitzrovia Youth in Action (FYA), a youth-led VCS organisation, which had created a video commissioned by Camden Learning. The video, made by children for children, aimed to encourage attendance and was part of broader efforts to address school attendance issues.
- A Member highlighted the importance of celebrating the positive relationship between Camden schools and the Council, noting that schools in other local

authorities sometimes lost confidence in their council which could lead to academisation. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the challenges faced by schools across the city and credited his predecessors for the hard work over the years which helped keep Camden schools together. To sustain this progress, the Cabinet Member stressed the importance of being present figures, meeting with headteachers, and engaging with Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Efforts included increasing involvement in Camden Learning, strengthening networks, supporting cluster groups, and promoting peer reviews and federations. The governor network was also highlighted as playing a key role in maintaining these positive relationships.

- Members requested that for a more detailed data breakdown and analysis be provided, including a heatmap, in the next iteration of the attendance report to the Committee. Members noted that while the current graphs provided a broad view of London, they wanted finer details to differentiate between Camden schools to identify specific issues and foster targeted discussion.

RESOLVED -

THAT the Committee comment on and note the report.

10. INSIGHT, LEARNING AND IMPACT REPORT - QUARTER 2 2024/25

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Directors of Adults and Health, Children and Learning, Supporting Communities and Corporate Services.

Tim Aldridge (Executive Director Children and Learning) summarised areas of the report which related to the Children and Learning directorate. This included outlining the summaries of the challenges, opportunities and learning for the relevant services.

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

- In response to Members, officers agreed to provide further information about how the family therapy offer worked in conjunction with MASH.

Action By: Executive Director Children and Learning

- A Member asked whether ESOL teaching (English for Speakers of Other Languages) was being combined with vocational skills and development opportunities. Officers confirmed that this approach was part of the adult community learning pathway, explaining that ESOL often served as a first step and gateway to other opportunities.
- A Member noted that while the comments on the Looked After Children dashboard indicated stability, the data showed a steady increase since 2019/20 and they asked for an explanation of that trend. Officers responded that the

increase could be attributed to a combination of factors, including the ongoing effects of the pandemic, social care issues such as neglect and domestic abuse, and the cost-of-living crisis. Families under pressure from poverty faced increased disadvantages, which often drove poorer outcomes. Officers acknowledged the small but notable increase and explained that the Council was focusing on early intervention to address the issue. This included safeguarding measures via the Front Door service and support from the Edge of Care Service. It was also highlighted that a disproportionate number of children entering care were from Black and Asian communities and emphasised the need to work harder and intervene earlier to support these families.

RESOLVED -

THAT the Committee comment on and note the report.

11. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER 2024/25

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

Tim Aldridge, Executive Director Children and Learning, summarised the work programme.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

The next meeting would be on 14 January 2025. The remaining meeting dates for the 2024/25 municipal were noted.

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

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END