

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 17TH JANUARY, 2023** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, Crowndale Centre, 218 Eversholt Street, London, NW1 1BD

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Jenny Headlam-Wells (Chair), Lotis Bautista, Matt Cooper, Sylvia McNamara and Andrew Parkinson

Co-opted Members Margaret Harvey, Reverend Guy Pope and Samir Qurashi

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Julian Fulbrook, Shah Miah and Shiva Tiwari

Co-opted Members Aya Egool, 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 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. GUIDANCE ON HYBRID MEETINGS

RESOLVED –

THAT the procedures on hybrid meetings be agreed.

2. APOLOGIES

Councillors Julian Fulbrook, Shah Miah and Shiva Tiwari.

Co-opted Members Aya Egool, Sarah Jafri and Dr Rachel Wrangham.

3. 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.

4. 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."

5. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were no deputations.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meetings held on 14 November 2022 and 13 December 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

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

There was no urgent business.

8. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE & CULTURE: JANUARY 2023

Consideration was given to the annual report of the Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture. The report outlined updates in the following areas:

- Our Camden Integrated Youth Support Service
- Children's Commissioning Work Updates
- Our New in 2022 Camden Culture Service
- Our Camden Libraries
- Other Updates and Highlights from the Past Year

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the presentation and opened the Committee to comments and questions. The following was discussed:

- A Member commented that the MET Police was not always observed to work well internally. The Member asked if the right colleagues of the MET Police were in

- meetings with the Council and other bodies to effectively influence outcomes and follow up actions. In response, Councillor Francis stated that it felt like the right people and that youth safety counted on professional relationships and engagement. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that there were occasionally setbacks in those relationships and working between teams within organisations.
- It was highlighted that best and impactful practice from Camden was its work in youth early help and participation. When young people aged out of one programme, there was another programme to follow to continue provisions. Importance and priority was placed on building resilient families and working with organisational partners.
 - In relation to the reduction of the Camden Youth Council (CYC) budget, the Cabinet Member stated that there had been £20,000 allocated to the CYC, however acknowledging the amount had reduced in response to the financial challenges of the local authority. As a suggestion to mitigate the effect, it was suggested the CYC could join up with other organisations who had similar aims and priorities to pool resources and strengthen campaigns.
 - In relation to the Avalon Project on section 2.35, it was confirmed that the project provided an opportunity to learn a different set of skills with experienced leads. The offer included a motorcycle fixing centre, electrician courses and a roastery.
 - In relation to the Hive Programme in section 3.3-3.5, it was confirmed that it had been co-designed by young people in 2015 as part of the Minding the Gap Programme to meet the mental health needs of young people transitioning between ages 16-24. Previously, adult mental health services were not meeting the needs of young people of those ages, who reported stigmatisation. Hive, a collaboration of Council, NHS and third sector provision, acted as a universal front door for young people for mental and physical health needs. The service was being recommissioned as part of the normal procurement cycle.
 - In relation to the children's offer in libraries in section 5.5-5.6, the Cabinet Member confirmed that she had been impressed with the early years offers. This included Rhyme Time, Storytelling and many other activities aimed at young age groups to encourage them into libraries, which had seen increases in attendance. In addition, she said that it was sometimes simple provisions that drew in young people into libraries such as plugs, additional tables and a safe space outside of teaching hours. The Chair noted that some libraries and children's centres were warm hubs in the borough.
 - It was noted by Members that there was a cohort of young children who did not attend nursery, sometimes because of anxiety from covid, and were now language delayed. A community model could support those children. It was noted that the Early Years' service had strong links with library services and there was real benefit to those connections.

RESOLVED -

THAT the report be noted.

9. YOUNG INSPECTORS REPORT 2022 – INSPECTION OF KINSHIP CARE SUPPORT SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Children’s Safeguarding and Social Work.

The Senior Development Officer Participation Officer, accompanied by a young inspector, summarised the report which outlined the findings, key messages, and recommendations of the Young Inspectors’ inspection of Camden kinship care support services. In addition to the report, the young person explained that as well as the producing valuable recommendations to improve the service, how the experience of taking part in the project gave them the opportunity for personal development by making new friends, building confidence to express their views, and realising and progressing new life skills.

The Chair praised the Young Inspectors Report and thanked the young person for attending the meeting. The Chair opened the Committee to comments and questions and the following was discussed:

- Members praised the practice and methodology use by the inspections and the valuable outcomes produced. It was further stated by officers that the Young Inspectors were shaping the services from a service user and independent approach, which was invaluable feedback and gave a fresh perspective that might not otherwise be captured. Ofsted had recognised the high quality of work the Young Inspectors produced.
- In relation to the recommendation from the 2021 report, that an app was developed, in section 2.2, the Committee was told that this app provided guidance to care leavers on Housing, Financial Support, Benefits, Leaving Care at 18 and Education, Employment and Training. The app, Pocket PA, was created by care leavers in the borough.
- In response to a Member asking how the work of the Young Inspectors evolved over the 14 years of running, it was stated that the journey was different each year. There was a different topic and set of young people each year, incorporating learning from previous years; ways of working as a group and building on methods of how to organise this type of project. The direction of the topics was influenced the young people and service managers, which may be guided by which services were already trying to make improvements.
- It was confirmed that Camden wanted to be an early adopter of the recommendations from the Independent Review of Social Care (2022), in regard to kinship care.

RESOLVED -

THAT the report be noted.

10. ANNUAL REPORT AND STRATEGIC PLAN FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS 2021-22

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Supporting People.

The Head of Service for Practice Development presented the annual report which provided an overview of the achievement, progress and challenges in meeting the needs of Camden's looked after children and care leavers in 2021/22. The report also set out the priorities for 2022/23.

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

- It was clarified that 'The Houses', referenced on page 91 of the agenda, related to the 'Care Compact', a thematic pan-London care leavers offer. This addressed a consistent offer relating to housing, health, education and training, transport, finance, and mentoring. Each local authority was responsible for providing a comprehensive offer to care leavers known as the 'Local Offer' and the compact was designed to support consistency .
- Camden's Local Offer is currently being refreshed
- A Member asked what the process was on how to become a foster carer in the borough. It was explained that there had recently been a foster carers consultation event with existing foster careers. Prospective carers may see an advert on a bus or social media, or speak to an existing carer, and then express interest to the Council. Then, an assessment process might take as long as six months – which by the nature of the role had to be thorough. There had been feedback that the process could be off-putting to prospective foster carers and there were discussions on how to make it more straight forward, where possible. It was noted that foster carer allowances were amongst the highest in London, and that Camden provided carers with a high level of social worker support. A lack of in-house foster carers, which was a national issue, increased the use of agency carers and residential placements resulting in higher costs and a less local and responsive service for children. The Council was always looking for ideas on how to recruit and retain foster carers and this was a priority in the Corporate Parenting action plan.
- In response to a question asking what was the demographic of foster carers, in relation to diversity, it was confirmed that Camden foster carers were over 50% black and from a diverse range of ethnic groups. It was not always possible to match the background of foster carers and children, but the Council actively recruited for diversity to fulfil this as far as possible. A commitment of the Corporate Parenting Strategy was to 'being the best black corporate parent to our black children'. It was important for foster carers to be trained and actively supported to understand the needs of black children in a holistic way, including discussions on racism, culture and connections. Officers stated they would provide further data on the diversity of Camden's foster carers.

Action by - Director of Children's Safeguarding and Social Work

- It was confirmed that housing provision for care leavers was included in Camden's Housing Allocation Scheme and there was a clear offer of support to those young people, including supported tenancies within the borough. Care leavers transitioned through Camden's Young People's pathway according to their level of independence, and were able to re-join if they dropped out - which could be for a number of reasons, including moving in with friends or going to university.
- It was noted by a Member how few young children were in the care system and asked why that was the case. They secondly asked if that freed finances for the local authority to support other parts of the care system. In response, it was stated that Camden had a strong early help offer and was effective at keeping children out of care through family support and pre-proceedings work. Camden drew on family networks and wherever possible placed children with 'connected people', creating permanence with family members and maintained their sense of identity
- In relation to attendance figures in section 3.3 and 3.3.1, a Member stated that it would be helpful to understand the benchmarks of attendance and how these compared to Camden's statistical neighbours and nationally. It was confirmed that Members would be provided with further information on the benchmarking of attendance statistics for looked after children.

Action by - Director of Children's Safeguarding and Social Work

RESOLVED -

THAT the report be noted.

**11. REVIEW OF THE CAMDEN MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY
(CS/2023/20)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living.

The Executive Director Supporting People summarised the key points of the paper relating to the Committee's remit, such as investing resources to households during the cost of living crisis and the continuing work on prevention and early intervention arrangements. There was a projected Council budget deficit of £40 million by 2024/25, and difficult decisions would need to be taken over that period. The Committee should note the proposed changes to the Camden Learning budget, a significant but manageable reduction of 10%, which was within the business plan. Camden Learning were already exploring ways to supplement their income. Secondly, any reduction in children's social care and early help services would be made cautiously and systematically to areas of excess capacity. The Council would maintain strong investment in early intervention and prevention.

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

- It was explained that the number of delegations of decision to officers was due to the approach needed on the children's services budgets of carefully reviewing the interdependencies of services before making any significant changes. It was further confirmed that officers would be reviewing each part of the system and looking for savings where there was an excessive reliance on external care and agency staff. There were aspects of this process to see where efficiencies could be made within departments in relation to recruitment and retention, while considering the continuing lowering number of children in the borough. They would continue to be looking to attract investment into Camden's children's services from central government.
- A Committee Member stated that schools in the borough were entering partnerships to share expertise across schools. It was confirmed that this approach was within Camden's Education Strategy, Building Back Stronger, in working towards greater collaborate working. It was recognised there were immense pressures in the system and collaboration and partnership would be crucial to mitigate and buffer external challenges, where possible.
- A Member noted that many schools were experiencing huge financial challenges, particularly due to the wider economic context, and asked how Camden's children were being affected and how that was being monitored. In response, it was stated there were significant stresses on the system, additionally noting the number of one form entry primary schools in the borough. There were signs to monitor the effects; including monitoring budget deficits, where schools had to make decisions to reduce their capacity which may lead to lowering of provisions and standards, and measuring the impact on children with higher levels of challenges. Challenges were felt mostly by the least resilient families.
- The Committee was told that through the implementation of the Education Strategy of using system federating, pooling resources and working alongside communities and families and to focus on things were important to Camden, that ambition would be preserved. Camden would continue lobbying central government for more resourcing for education, while finding local solutions within the means of the Council.

RESOLVED -

THAT the report be noted.

12. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2: 2022-23

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

The Executive Director Supporting People drew attention to the aspects of the report which related to the remit of the Committee, outlined in sections 4.1-4.3.

RESOLVED -

THAT the report be noted.

13. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER 2022/23

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Supporting People. The Executive Director Supporting People outlined the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

RESOLVED -

THAT that the report be noted.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

The final scheduled meeting date for municipal year 2022-23, 20 February 2023, was noted.

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

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END