

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 16TH JULY, 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, Tom Simon, and Shiva Tiwari.

Co-opted Members Dr Rachel Wrangham and Zarin Bakhshzaad (Camden Youth Council representative).

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Matt Cooper, Sylvia McNamara, and Nanouche Umeadi.

Co-opted Members Margaret Harvey and Sarah Jafri.

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. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matt Cooper, Sylvia McNamara and Nanouche Umeadi, and Co-opted Members Sarah Jafri and Margaret Harvey.

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.”

Welcome to the new Camden Youth MP and Deputy Youth MPs

The Chair welcomed the new Camden Youth MP, Zarin Bakhshzaad, and Deputy Youth MPs, Harvey O’Brien and Niesha Akyeampong. The Children, Schools, and Families Scrutiny Committee had a co-opted member position for a Camden Youth Council Member, and it was customary to invite the Youth MP to attend meetings. Any CYC member was able to substitute the Youth MP where required, or any additional CYC members were warmly welcome to attend to observe any meeting.

Thanks to the Church of England Diocesan Board Nominated Co-Opted Member who has resigned from the Committee

The Chair stated that Guy Pope had resigned from the Committee after 25 years and thanked him for his contributions on behalf of the Committee. The London Diocesan Board for Schools had been contacted for a new nomination.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were no deputations.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED -

THAT the minutes of the meetings held on 26 February 2024 and 13 March 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. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED -

THAT the terms of reference be noted.

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

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

The Cabinet Member updated the Committee on the following areas relating to their portfolio: the SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) Inclusion Board and the SEND Strategy, the Children's Trust Partnership Board in May on Mental Health, the reopening of Joseph House, a visit from Mark Riddell and the Department for Education, and school meals future options.

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

- A Co-opted Member stated that Cabinet Member updates generally shared successes in the portfolio, but they would like more challenges to be shared, as described in the purpose of the update paragraphs in section 1.1.
- In relation to section 2.2, SEND, a Co-opted Member asked for information on how much funding would be available for SEND activities and how many spaces it would equate to; how the quality of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) was being monitored; and how SEND outcomes were being tracked. In response, it was confirmed that SEND was a national challenge with national thinking about plans and strategy management. In response to falling school rolls and work with primary schools, the Council was reviewing pupil access and admission numbers and speaking to schools about where there were shortfalls and how their finances and curriculum were being affected. The SEND Inclusion Board would be reviewing the latest data and then also looking at the recent JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) which related to SEND provision. It was noted there were reports listed in the upcoming work programme which would include more granular detail about successes, challenges, voices and outcomes in this area.
- In relation to section 6, school meals future options, a Member noted that there were great opportunities for the Council if they were to bring meals provision in-house, such as increasing the healthy eating agenda. However, the quality of the service had to be high throughout the whole system from nursery upwards. The low uptake of free school meals, which currently stood at 60% for those eligible, was an expected consequence of low-quality meal provision. In response to Members, officers confirmed that a future update could be given to the Committee on the school meals re-procurement work.

Action By – Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion

- In relation to section 4, officers confirmed that Joseph House was a care home for younger children who were between families. It provided seven spaces, including an emergency bed, and played a vital role for foster carers and caring within families. The Cabinet Member visited the care home six months prior and deemed it in need of an upgrade. The Council was able to invest in creating a high-quality space that was welcoming to children. It was confirmed that the provider changed through re-procurement and the new provider was familiar to Camden and had a proven positive model of working. The new care home had been thoughtfully redesigned, with each room being slightly different, and it included a vegetable patch and a water feature. In response to a question, it was confirmed that there were plans to refurbish or commission other care homes; however, they were in the early planning stages. One area being considered was introducing more supported accommodation for young people aged 16+ and those experiencing mental health issues.

The Committee noted the update.

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

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

The Cabinet Member updated the Committee on the following areas relating to their portfolio: data and performance linked to the Youth Justice Plan key performance indicators; key achievements including disproportionality work, education, and training and employment programmes, Peer Advocates and the new Youth Justice Service reception space opened co-designed with children; events including the Youth Justice Event, Camden Youth Mission events, and the Youth Safety event; children, young people's and families voice; and key successes. In addition, the Cabinet Member stated that their updates would be providing more statistics and information throughout the year, to give opportunity for the Committee to see the data more frequently than the annual Cabinet Member report.

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

- A Member stated that it was currently a tough environment for the creative subjects and that those excelling in the field were disproportionately privately educated. The Member suggested that Camden should design its own strategy to ensure young people from low-income communities could access arts education. In response, it was confirmed that work had started on drafting a new Cultural Strategy because the climate had changed greatly. Examples of this change include the impacts of the pandemic, the loss of Arts Council funding, and reductions in government funding due to national 'levelling up' policies, from which Camden suffered a loss. Officers were speaking with schools and the Cultural Camden Committee to form ideas. Additionally, it was noted that

Camden's culture and community funding made £100,000 available per year for organizations to bid for funding.

- In relation to section 2, a Co-opted Member asked what the service knew about the children who reoffended and their pathways to reoffending. In response, it was confirmed that there were many programs and a lot of family centre work taking place. However, the portion of children who reoffended tended to have very complex cases. Each year the Youth Justice Board received a report which outlined a deeper dive on those children and their complexities, which included: being known to social care, having SEND, having experienced a number of transitions between schools, and parental mental health issues. These children may thrill-seek through peer groups and if they were from a more deprived area they were vulnerable to exploitation and grooming from older influential people which was a difficult trajectory to leave. Young people who were being exploited often did not see themselves as being taken advantage of but saw themselves as earning money; alternatively, those young people needed therapeutic support and help to gain legitimate experience and confidence. The learning for the Council when support to young people had not been successful informed other work at earlier stages of the process. Examples of this included improving teaching schools about adverse childhood experiences, trauma informed training, early help and preventative work to help children at risk, and targeted help for parents about children's behaviour. Additionally, there was system learning and research taking place in this area. The Co-opted Member stated that it would be beneficial for settings to communicate better about children at risk, such as primary schools speaking to secondary schools. Transitional communication would also be helpful for SEND children. It was confirmed that there was a lot of work taking place in schools and setting transitions.
- A Co-opted Member stated that workshops educating young people should also cater for younger year groups to be more effective in the life course. In response, it was confirmed that current work included a detached youth team working in schools, peer advocate work, workshops given by previous offenders in youth clubs, and heavy investment in youth hubs using multi-team working to provide wrap-around help. The Cabinet Member asked if the Camden Youth Council representatives had any ideas on how to improve presentation work and workshops, requesting their feedback.
- A Member requested more detailed data to be included in the annual report. This data should cover outcomes, types of offending, ages when young people started offending, the status of previous offenders 1-2 years after offending, and information on how previous offenders were monitored by officers to stay in touch. The Member asked if the Council kept in touch with previous offenders. Officers replied that they tried to maintain communication and relationships with young people they previously worked with until at least age 25.

The Committee noted the update.

10. ANNUAL HEALTH UPDATE ON CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES - 2023/24

Consideration was given to the report of Director of Health and Wellbeing.

Manuj Sharma (Consultant in Public Health for Children and Young People), accompanied by Kirsten Watters (Director of Health and Wellbeing), introduced the report. The report summarised health outcomes for children, young people and families in Camden and focussed on population health metrics, inequalities and intersectionality data. The report also provided updates on work undertaken to improve health and address inequalities across 2023/24, plans for work in 2024/25, incorporated case studies, evidence of impact, and children and parental voice.

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

- A Member stated that much of the report provided snapshots of data rather than evidence of an ongoing picture that could assess progress. The Member noted that while Camden was reported to this Committee as performing well on breastfeeding metrics a decade ago, this report only provides a comparison to the previous year's performance, lacking broader historical data. The Member requested more comparative data in a future report. In response, it was confirmed that some previous data was not available due to new processes and measures which were not compatible with previous years. Camden was performing well in the breastfeeding space, however there were inequalities, for example outreach in the Bangladeshi community where health partners wanted to increase peer support initiatives and volunteer outreach programmes. It was confirmed that for most public health childhood outcomes there were benchmarks and Members could request detailed reports on particular interest areas
- A Member expressed concern over the stark variation in life expectancy outcomes across the borough, which they stated was up to 13 years between a boy born in Gospel Oak compared to Hampstead Heath. The Member went on to speak about child health challenges such as smoking, the unknown consequences of vaping, obesity due to inactivity, and oral hygiene due to poor access to treatment. In response, it was confirmed that some of the deep inequalities were hard to digest and ambition was still high in the child health equity agenda. Children may experience poor housing conditions, live in households with drug misuse, live in poverty and therefore wrap around care was required to reduce the health gap, whilst operating in the tide of national issues such as impacts from the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. It was confirmed there was a lot of work including with schools was taking place relating to youth vaping. There was a national crisis in child health; children were shorter, had poorer mental health and there was an increase in severity of health conditions. Improving services in general was not enough but targeting the services most in need and whole system working would be key.
- In relation to section 11.3, a Member expressed their concern over contraception being less accessible now than prior to the pandemic and asked what the plan

was to address the problem. In response, it was confirmed that following a Sexual Needs Assessment it was found there was a demographic not accessing contraception and Healthwatch did a deep dive into sexual health which informed the work of the Health and Wellbeing department in their outreach work. There needed to be an improved online offer developed which had to be easily accessible across the whole borough. The rate of STIs (sexually transmitted infections) was increasing across London due to changing behaviours and the lack of access to services during the pandemic. Camden was developing a sexual reproductive health approach across the life course, including access to health relationship advice and sexual health services.

- A Co-opted Member stated that the report was well structured, however gave feedback that the report sometimes obscured the severity and urgency of the issues, the focus of equity did not flow throughout the paper to match the issues identified, and that not all actions focussed on closing the equity gap. In response, officers thanked members for the feedback on the structure of the report and noted that in places data seemed lighter would be down to availability at times. A key piece of work the service wanted to carry out this year was around working with commissioned services to get minimum data sets that were of sufficient quality. The report highlighted selections of activities officers felt were relevant and pertinent to the Committee or an activity of transformational nature, however, they took the point there was room to marry up the sections and focus more to understand the inequalities.
- In relation to section 16.12, access to speech and language therapy, a Co-opted Member stated that information gathered during the SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel showed that children with autism were specifically excluded from speech and language therapy in schools. Officers confirmed they would take up the issue raised with commissioning leads and find out more about the situation and the related challenges and provide a written response to the Committee.

Action By – Director of Health and Wellbeing

- In relation to section 18, mental health, a Member stated that there was stigma in certain demographics to openly discuss mental health and asked what help there was available for young people in those groups who had been diagnosed to help them access support. In response, it was confirmed it was known that some communities engaged less with mental health services. A website had been developed to help young people access advice and support and continued learning was needed in how to reach into communities. Officers said that current work included the Hive (a free mental health and wellbeing service that supports all young people aged 16 to 24 in Camden) employing a member of staff to reach out to young black men about mental health services; a campaign was being launched in September 2024 working with a group of young people from diverse backgrounds to improve access to health services with the young person voice embedded in the movement; and a youth champions programme was being launched with UCLH (University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust) to raise awareness of mental health services.
- The Member commented that the report's structure made it difficult to draw informed conclusions and suggested that clearer year-on-year and London

comparative data would be helpful. The Member also noted that using the data they would like to judge if there was a proportional allocation of resources to challenges faced. In response, it was confirmed that data was available however the report was meant to summarise areas of children's health that was of interest to the Committee. Camden was one of the most unequal London boroughs, which affected all of the population negatively, and also did not perform well compared to its statistical neighbours. Benchmarking this type of health data was difficult and trend data was important. Camden wanted to be ambitious because child deprivation impacted whole life courses – children in London were more deprived, more densely populated and more diverse therefore Camden needed services to be able to respond to those factors. The Member responded that it would be good to be able to view data where Camden was doing disproportionately worse and the Chair stated it may be good to introduce an appendix on more detailed trends and benchmarking, so that the data did not crowd out the main report like officers suggested.

- In relation to vaping, the Camden Youth Council representatives stated that to reduce access to vapes there needed to be acknowledgment of how easy it was for young people to access vapes and they suggested that more secret shopper initiatives to curb sales to young people. Vaping products needed to be less attractive to young people, for example limiting the flavours and colours available on the market. In addition, they noted that in their view there were many young people who knew but did not care about the long-term health impacts of vaping because the habit was so deeply rooted in society. In response, it was confirmed that the levers on vaping policies were limited on a local government level, however Camden had responded to a national consultation alongside the national conversation. Locally, Trading Standards were able to look at the practice of retailers selling vapes to young people and the Council was able to work with schools and young people to raise awareness of the issues. There were multiple layers of the work where preventatively there was a need for education and reduced accessibility and then also support people to stop the habit.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

11. INSIGHT, LEARNING AND IMPACT REPORT - QUARTER 4/END OF YEAR 2023-24

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

Tim Aldridge summarised sections in the report which related to the Children and Learning directorate. This end of year report focussed on the year 2023-24 using a broad range of measures from each division and Camden Directors were asked to provide narratives covering key areas of challenge, opportunity, and learning.

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

- A Member asked why there had been an increase in secondary school suspensions and how this issue was being addressed. In response, it was confirmed that the increasing number of suspensions in the autumn term was a trend which required a deeper dive. There was an item on the work programme concerning permanent exclusions scheduled for November 2024, which has remained static; however, suspensions required more attention.
- A Member asked why primary school attendance was decreasing and how it could be improved. In response, it was confirmed that emerging out of the pandemic period was a worrying national trend in decreasing attendance. Even before the pandemic, Camden started from a low baseline and did not perform as well as statistical neighbours, therefore long-term work was taking place to address the issue using more granular cohort analysis to understand the factors of why some children were more vulnerable to missing school. Although an increase in attendance was observed in the autumn term, more data was awaited for further review.
- A Co-opted Member commented that in their view the challenges and opportunities in section 2 did not match up. They stated that focusing more on responding to the questions set out in section 1.3 would have improved the report's reflection of what was happening in services. They asked if the paper truly reflected the story of the services. In response, it was noted that this was the first iteration of the end-of-year Insight, Learning, and Impact Report and that learning was ongoing regarding the approach and format of the report. Directors had been asked to speak about their services individually and currently there was less of a focus on matching the whole directorate story together across the piece. Feedback and suggestions from the Committee on how to improve the paper would be highlighted to report authors.

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 Executive Director, Children and Learning.

Tim Aldridge summarised the work programme.

The Chair invited questions and comments from the Committee.

Dr Rachel Wrangham requested that the School Place Planning report scheduled for November 2024 should include details on special schools and SEND provision, commenting there was no clear plan for the larger cohort of high-needs children entering secondary school and data was available to address this impending challenge. Secondly, Dr Rachel Wrangham stated that the Persistent Absence,

Inclusion, and Alternative Provision Report scheduled for November needed to include strong family perspectives of why children were not attending school and the barriers they faced. The Chair stated that family perspectives could also be addressed in the Stocktaking report on the approach to participation and co-production with children, schools and families listed for October 2024. Tim Aldridge stated there was specific work was taking place with schools on SEND school place planning and attendance which could be shared as part of the relevant reports.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

The next meeting would be on 8 October 2024. The remaining meeting dates for the 2024/25 municipal were noted.

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

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END