

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

05 February 2026

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillor Heena Makwana (Chair), Councillor Ekta Gohil (Vice-Chair), Councillor Peter Smallwood OBE, Councillor Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead), and Councillor Tony Gill</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Mr Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Alex Coman (Director of Children’s Safeguarding and Care) Debbie Scarborough (Service Manager, Learn Hillingdon Adult Community Education), Kudakwashe Kurashwa (Head of Service, Youth and Adolescent Services), Antony Madden (Assistant Director, Stronger Families & Protection), Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p>
60.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Councillor Narinder Garg and Councillor Kishan Bhatt.</p>
61.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
62.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed</p>
63.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p>
64.	<p>LEARN HILLINGDON ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The Chair introduced the item and moved straight to questions.</p> <p>Members referenced the gender imbalance, noting that 80% of learners were female, and asked why this was the case; whether it reflected local or national patterns; and whether additional actions could encourage greater male participation. The gender split was broadly consistent with national patterns, particularly for courses aimed at lower-</p>

skilled adults re-entering education. Historically, more men had attended due to evening classes, but demand fell sharply post COVID and had not recovered, resulting in reduced male participation. Many learners came from communities where there was a cultural expectation that men work during the day and women attend classes while children are at school. Male learners now tended to be older, often carers or widowers, and many attended cookery and healthy eating classes to develop life skills. There had been some improvement in the gender split over time, now approximately 76% female/ 24% male.

Members asked whether the service had explored recruitment through existing learners, such as encouraging learners' partners to attend or considering flexible timings. Word of mouth remained the primary recruitment method in adult learning. Couples did sometimes attend, often in different subjects. Despite longstanding efforts, attracting male learners had been a persistent challenge for a number of years. Officers remained open to suggestions to improve reach and engagement and further added that the imbalance was not unique to Hillingdon, but common across regions and nationally. The adult learning offer remained open and accessible to all residents.

Members commended the service and asked what would make it even better. Additional funding would enhance provision. The service had to regularly adapt to changing national and local priorities, particularly with the new government's emerging policies. A strong focus continued on supporting residents toward employment. Education journeys for adults may take up to five years before individuals reach employment or higher-level study, making impact less immediately visible. Stronger links with employers and workplaces would support clearer pathways into work, though learners' financial pressures often prevented them from progressing to higher level qualifications. Economic challenges increasingly resulted in learners taking immediate employment rather than continuing their studies. Officers further added that recent performance indicators were very strong, highlighting 95% retention, 97% pass rate, and almost 93% achievement. These outcomes reflected the commitment of staff and the strength of the service. A recent Ofsted visit had commended the service.

Members asked how funding from the GLA was progressing; how much funding the Council provided; and whether any other funding avenues were being pursued. Officers advised that the service aimed to break even, and the Council contributed approximately £50,000–£60,000 annually. The GLA had been a strong and supportive funder, with clear guidance and good understanding of London's regional needs. GLA flexibility such as free courses for those earning at or below the London Living Wage had been beneficial. The GLA had mitigated national cuts by spreading reductions over two years, enabling more manageable planning. Despite good partnership working, overall funding was decreasing nationally.

Members asked if any research existed on the gender imbalance, and whether offering manual or technical skills courses might attract more male learners. Officers were not aware of any significant research on the issue, likely due to limited national resources. Some subjects attracted more men (e.g., IT, digital skills, English, ESOL, mental health related provision). However, male participation remained low in areas such as childcare or health & social care. The service avoided duplicating provision offered by the neighbouring college, which already delivered many technical and vocational subjects, as this would not be an efficient use of resources. Planning of provision always considers the local educational landscape. Skills such as IT, English and employability were essential for supporting independence and progression.

Members asked about engagement with the Traveller community. Engagement varied considerably and can be inconsistent, with fluctuating attendance. Officers delivered learning in community settings, including past work at Bell Farm, though projects depended on current demand. A recent successful project involved flower arranging as an engagement tool, run jointly with the NHS, who used the sessions to discuss health topics such as vaccinations. The service hoped to repeat this model but has not yet been able to due to variable participation. Officers added that engagement required cultural sensitivity and persistence. Different groups needed different approaches and so adaptability is key.

Members also asked about engagement with those who lived in temporary accommodation. Services were delivered in schools and libraries. Engagement challenges were similar to those experienced with Traveller communities. Many residents in temporary accommodation faced mental health challenges, which impacted their ability to attend. Despite initial enthusiasm, sustained attendance was often low. Officers were exploring indirect engagement routes, such as mental health awareness, art therapy or other creative activities, to build confidence before progressing to English or skills-based learning. Practical constraints existed around delivering classes with very low attendance.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report

65. **YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICES STRATEGY 2024-2029 UPDATE** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Officers introduced the item, outlining the recommendations to note the progress and strategic direction in delivering the Youth Justice Service's five-year strategic plan; and to note the key priority areas guiding current and future work.

Officers outlined the five strategic priority areas, aligned to the five-year strategic plan:

1. Over-representation and disproportionality
A significant issue within the Youth Justice Service, with a co-produced disproportionality action plan now in place across the partnership.
2. Child first practice
Ensuring children are central to service design, implementation and evaluation, and emphasis on co-production and embedding the voice of the child throughout all interventions.
3. Victims and restorative justice
Offending occurred within broader community harms. Work aligned with the Council's strategic commitments to safe and strong communities, and thriving, healthy households. There was a focus on victims as well as children.
4. Prevention and early intervention
Strengthening work prior to the age of criminal responsibility (10 years old), and aligning with wider Council transformation work, including Family First and early help. Work was also ongoing to reduce stigma on families when accessing help, particularly children who come through the Youth Justice Service.
5. Reducing reoffending
This was a core mission of the service. There had been significant reductions in first-time entrants to the Youth Justice Service, and children entering custody

due to offending. There was also an increased engagement in Education, Training and Employment (ETE) for children within the Youth Justice Service.

Members highlighted that funding for Project Turnaround had ended in March 2025 and asked if there was any update with regard to future funding. Officers advised that funding would progress into the coming year and details of the funding model were awaited.

Members asked for examples of effective multi-agency practice and its impact on re-offending. Officers highlighted strong collaboration with health partners (CNWL) who support children with speech and language needs, neurodiversity, and chronic conditions. All children who come through the Youth Justice Service received a speech and language screening, enabling holistic assessment and tailored interventions. This had contributed to the reduction in numbers. Officers also highlighted the disproportionality action plan that had been co-produced with health, education, police, probation, with governance through the Youth Justice Strategic Partnership Board. This looked to address the over-representation of young people from the global majority within the Youth Justice Service. Officers further added that multi-agency activity was monitored via a High-Risk Panel and a Strategic High-Risk Group, and through reporting to the Children's Safeguarding Board. Young people directly participated in multi-agency work, including Stop and Search reviews, and through Walking in Our Shoes training. Officers added that strong leadership by the Youth Justice Strategic Board drives accountability and change. Reoffending rates had fallen from 40.5% to 37.5% (Ministry of Justice figures), with a local estimate of 32.8%, below the London average. The AXIS Service (soft intelligence early intervention model) has contributed to a reduction in first-time entrants (from 64 in 2019–20 to 46 in 2023–24).

Members commended the report and asked whether reductions in youth offending corresponded with police data, particularly amid increases in shoplifting reported by residents. Officers advised that no such correlation could be confirmed. Focus remained on early intervention, diversionary pathways and preventing entry into the Youth Justice Service. Community-facing interventions and programmes such as Project Turnaround and Project Engage broadened opportunities to support young people at teachable moments, including following arrest. It was emphasised that early intervention was central to all children's services. Work focused on reaching children before offending occurs, through engagement, diversion and understanding community needs. The aim was to balance reducing youth offending with minimising impact on communities. High levels of restorative justice participation (around 90%) supported victims effectively. Preventing offences remained the central goal. Members referenced the good practice from the Making Hayes Safer project which had been discussed at the recent Corporate Parenting Panel.

Members asked whether young people across the borough had equal access, given that children preferred interventions in familiar surroundings. Youth Justice work was referral-driven, supporting children from any part of the borough. The Youth Offer operated as a mobile service, increasingly flexible in reaching areas of identified need. Deployment was guided by local data and intelligence.

Members asked about engagement with schools. Officers noted that there was strong partnership working with schools, supported through a dedicated ETE Officer (education, training, and employment) co-located within Education and a new designated social care officer; close collaboration with the Skills Hub and Alternative Provision providers; and involvement in operational high-risk panels and strategic

groups. There were particularly strong links with SEN teams.

Members asked whether the service tracked children after leaving the Youth Justice Service to ensure sustained engagement in education, employment or training. Officers noted that this would be taken forward for consideration. Officers added that current data showed 87% engagement in full-time education at end of intervention, and improvement in engagement for non-school-aged children from 56% to 67% in education, employment and training. Work with post-18 partners aimed to maintain positive transitions into adulthood.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Noted the progress and strategic direction outlined in the Hillingdon Youth Justice Five-Year Strategy; and**
- 2. Noted the continued focus on prevention, early intervention and restorative justice as key priorities for youth justice in Hillingdon**

66. **FOSTERING REVIEW - RECOMMENDATIONS** (*Agenda Item 7*)

The Chair opened the item, noting that a set of draft recommendations had been produced and shared with officers. Officer feedback on these had then been shared with Members.

The Chair proposed a set of final recommendations, based on the officer feedback:

1. Develop an introduction pack for children that provides Cared For Children with all essential information to help them feel prepared and supported when starting a new placement and, where possible, during placement moves.
2. Include a 'Voice of the Child' section in the 'All About Me' profiles.
3. Include 'Where Are They Now' stories on the Council's website, where Cared Experienced Young People share their experiences, if they are comfortable and willing to do so.
4. Review and develop the training programme to introduce specialist Foster Carer pathways, including pathways for carers specialising in supporting young people with complex needs.
5. Review existing peer support initiatives and develop opportunities to strengthen engagement.

Members supported this summary, and noted that peer support (number 5) should extend to both foster carers and young people.

Members highlighted witness feedback regarding information on the website, that it could be clearer, more accessible and more informative.

Members supported the recommendation around enhanced training, noting repeated referenced in the witness sessions, and the need for specialist and ongoing development. Officers noted that there was an existing comprehensive training offer to foster carers. While training was regularly reviewed, officers remained open to further

improvements. The training programme was designed to remain an ongoing, evolving area, responsive to emerging needs.

Members referred to national data suggesting that large numbers of expressions of interest translated to relatively low approvals of foster carers. Members asked if national proposals to broaden eligibility criteria may affect Hillingdon, and if local assessments were 'too picky'. Officers noted that a national consultation was underway on the future of fostering, aimed at increasing recruitment of foster carers. While the Council welcomed national efforts to strengthen the foster care system, fostering involved 'parenting plus plus', supporting children with significant needs, complex needs and trauma. Safety, skills, and motivation of prospective carers remain critical. Hillingdon's assessment process was robust but inclusive, with no exclusion based on employment status, relationship status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or similar personal characteristics. The requirement was to approve safe, capable carers. Fostering was not always the first placement option – kinship care, family placements, and residential homes also featured within a broader placement strategy. Officers confirmed that no inappropriate exclusionary criteria were used.

Members highlighted the importance of social worker stability, noting that frequent changes could negatively impact both children and foster carers. A recommendation on this had been considered outside the scope of the fostering review because it related more broadly to social work workforce organisation rather than fostering service provision. Officers clarified that children's social workers were allocated through wider Children's Social Care teams, while supervising Social Workers (supporting foster carers) fell within fostering services. Supervising social worker stability was generally high.

It was clarified that the Committee were happy with the above five recommendations, while final wording could be confirmed later.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Agreed findings, conclusions and draft recommendations in relation to the review; and**
- 2. Delegated final wording of the recommendations to the Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chair and in consultation with the Opposition Lead**

67. **FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 8*)

Members considered the Forward Plan, noting that an updated version had been shared separately from the agenda.

Members referenced the Best Start in Life/ Family Hub Strategy and asked if this would be presented to the Select Committee before it was considered as a Cabinet Member Decision. Officers would follow up.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan

68. **WORK PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 9*)

Members considered the Work Programme.

	<p>Members highlighted that there were a large number of items due to be considered at the March meeting and asked if some could be moved back. Officers would follow up.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the report</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.00 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Ryan Dell on democratic@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.