

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

15 April 2025



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW

Committee Members Present:

Councillor Heena Makwana (Chair),
Councillor Becky Hagger OBE (Vice-Chair),
Councillor Peter Smallwood OBE,
Councillor Kishan Bhatt,
Councillor Tony Gill,
Councillor Rita Judge, and
Councillor Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)

Co-Opted Member Present:

Mr Tony Little

Cabinet Member Present:

Councillor Susan O'Brien, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education

Officers Present:

Alex Coman (Director of Children's Safeguarding and Care)
Dettie Quirke (Team Manager – Children's Social Care)
Julie Kelly (Corporate Director of Children's Services)
Kathryn Angelini (Assistant Director for Education)
Laura Baldry (School Placement & Admissions Manager)
Luisa Hansen (Head of Finance – Children's & SEND)
Monica Gaga (Team Manager – Children's Social Care)
Tehseen Kauser (Director of Children's Social Care)
Valentin Danciu (Assistant Director, Children in Need of Help & Protection)
Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)

77. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

None.

78. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (Agenda Item 2)

None.

79. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed

80. 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 (Agenda Item 4)

81.	<p>YOUTH OFFER UPDATE (Agenda Item 5)</p> <p>Officers provided an update on the Youth Offer, noted against the key priorities in the five-year strategy.</p> <p>Priority 1: Local Youth Offer</p> <p><u>1a: Publish and distribute a clear, accessible and informative LYO across the borough</u></p> <p>There had been a successful launch event in February held at Harlington Young People's Centre. There had been a new publicity campaign called #NextGen, created by young people for young people. The campaign included a TikTok channel, which was regularly updated to highlight services for children and young people.</p> <p>The care and support directory had been updated to be more user-friendly and went live at the beginning of March.</p> <p><u>1b: Develop plans for the continuation and evolution of the LYO beyond the current delivery period</u></p> <p>There had been an increase in sessions delivered across various localities, including new sessions for different age groups (primary and secondary) and partnerships with local organisations. Efforts were underway to secure two new transporter buses for outreach work, pending approval.</p> <p>Priority 2: Monitoring and evaluation</p> <p><u>2a: Assess and review all existing monitoring and evaluation systems and structures</u></p> <p>A quality assurance toolkit had been created and was being rolled out to standardise processes and enhance service delivery.</p> <p><u>2b: Develop a plan to establish a standardised approach to data collection throughout the Youth Offer</u></p> <p>Data collection efforts had been standardised using new templates and a Power BI dashboard for data analysis.</p> <p><u>2c: Create templates designed to capture the necessary insights to demonstrate impact effectively</u></p> <p>All teams within the Hillingdon Youth Offer had migrated onto the EHM data management system. A new document suite has been developed to standardise data collection.</p> <p>Priority 3: Youth Engagement</p> <p><u>3a: Co-create a Youth Participation Strategy for the Hillingdon Youth Offer in partnership with stakeholders</u></p> <p>A youth participation strategy had been created with the first draft approved. Children and young people were being involved in various activities and decision-making processes, ensuring the voice of the child was captured.</p> <p>Priority 4: Youth Work Curriculum</p> <p><u>4a: Align the Hillingdon Youth Work Curriculum with the National Youth Work Curriculum</u></p> <p>The youth work curriculum had been aligned with the National Youth Agency's</p>
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national curriculum.

4b: Implement the new framework, providing regular feedback opportunities to assess impact and effectiveness

This curriculum was being introduced to all new and existing staff through the Stepping into Hillingdon Youth Offer training sessions, with the third cohort scheduled for early April 2025. The implementation of the new framework had been incorporated into the induction training for all staff.

Priority 5: VCFS engagement

5a: Develop a comprehensive volunteer strategy to encompass the entire borough

A voluntary strategy has been created and changes were being implemented.

5b: Establish a new Partnership Board to propel the implementation of the new Youth Offer. The Board will enlist representatives from charity, voluntary and faith sector organisations

A partnership board had been established with local organisations. The first meeting with groups and charities across Hillingdon took place last month.

Priority 6: Workforce Development

Recruitment efforts were ongoing to fill vacancies within the universal team. Training programs, including youth mental first aid and educational visits, had been rolled out for appropriate staff.

Members acknowledged the excellent work being done within the service area and the dynamic and flexible approach being provided.

Members asked about vacancies in the universal team, and barriers to recruitment, and if these were affecting service delivery. New officers were currently being onboarded into the team. Internal recruitment can take time but these officers were onboard so there was currently no issue. The longest part of the recruitment process was obtaining the DBS.

Members commended the emotional health & wellbeing sessions, Link counselling and yoga for wellbeing, and the adaptation of the team to put on more sessions.

Members inquired about the multicultural intake and engagement of children from different cultural backgrounds. Officers noted that there was a diverse intake of young people which reflected the diversity of the borough. Officers highlighted a residential visit to a scout camp for young people whose first language was French. There was also diversity among officers within the team, which could help the young people to identify with them and feel represented.

A lot of work was being done with asylum seeking children in hotels via the young enterprise programme.

Members asked about an audit of available venues. Officers highlighted the upcoming West Drayton family hub, West Drayton young people's centre and the Skills Hub.

Members highlighted the recently launched TikTok campaign and asked if there was any feedback on this. Informal feedback had been received via the Youth Council, and a formal survey was planned. On social media platforms it was easy to monitor

interactions such as views and likes. The communications team assisted with monitoring feedback.

Officers noted that using Power BI would assist with data collection and analysis.

Members inquired about the volunteer strategy and engagement with scout groups, guide groups, and football clubs. Officers had launched a partnership board to enhance collaboration with partner agencies. This initiative built on the previous launch of family hubs. The board aimed to provide practical support by allowing partner agencies to utilise Hillingdon's space, staff, and resources. This collaboration included a session where about 140 agencies were brought together for an event which helped to raise awareness of the youth offer.

Additionally, within the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, the budget had been used to employ local businesses to deliver some of the holiday offers. The involvement of the voluntary sector, including volunteers in our link counselling, mentoring, and specialist services, added extra value.

Members noted a disparity between the number of sessions delivered by the South West locality team compared to others and asked for reasons why. One reason was around staffing, as recruitment can take time whilst waiting for DBS checks and so some sessions had started later.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the information presented within the report

82. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

Officers presented an update on school admissions including in-year admissions and an overview of primary and secondary allocations.

Members noted that Year 7 numbers had reduced compared to previous years, resulting in some unfilled places.

Members asked if there was pressure in new areas such as in the north of the borough, and if this was due to a drop in first preferences (noting that Hillingdon was 23rd out of 32 London boroughs for first preferences in secondary schools). Officers explained that parental preferences played a significant part in admissions. Parents sometimes chose schools that were not their closest, affecting the number of children receiving their first preference. Some grammar schools had tightened their admissions criteria, which also impacted the number of first preferences offered. It was important for parents to make realistic choices.

Members noted that 5.88% of the cohort (over 200 young people) had been offered none of their preferences and asked if there were any patterns. Officers noted that this was evenly spread across the borough. There were a range of vacancies across the north and south and so officers were able to offer alternative schools that were a reasonable distance from home. A number of schools allocated to children were their closest school, even if they were not one of their preferences. Many of these offers were made to families that did not put realistic preferences on their applications or only put one or two preferences. The number of young people who did not receive one of their preferences was generally higher for secondary schools than primary schools.

	<p>Members asked about the categorisation of move-in applications, noting that the report stated that only approximately 200 secondary applications out of 902 were from people moving into the borough. Officers noted that this data relied heavily on information provided by parents on their application. Not all parents specified where they had moved from. Therefore 200 out of 902 was likely not an accurate reflection. Some families moved from one school to another within the borough.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families & Education Select Committee noted the contents of the report</p>
83.	<p>FAMILIES FIRST REFORMS AND CHILDREN'S WELLBEING & SCHOOLS BILL (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Officers introduced the Families First Reforms and Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.</p> <p>The 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive' policy statement came out last year. These would lead to some significant changes to how some services were delivered.</p> <p>Officers noted that various reviews had influenced the current reforms. The focus remained on prevention, support, and improving the quality of care while implementing significant changes in service delivery.</p> <p>The Committee was reminded of the guidance from the Families First programme, emphasising key working teams and community-based work. The reforms aimed to align social work teams with stronger families teams in localities, moving towards a multidisciplinary team setting. This approach would involve children's assessments led by the most appropriate practitioner, not necessarily a social worker.</p> <p>The consultation process had begun, with a draft structure in place. Engagement with staff and partners was ongoing to ensure a smooth transition. The goal was to implement these changes by April next year, with a focus on supporting families through multidisciplinary teams.</p> <p>The programme continued to ensure families had access to good education, safety, and economic stability. The emphasis was on early intervention and prevention, with multidisciplinary teams addressing social care and housing. The integration of services on the same floor in the civic centre had positively impacted service delivery.</p> <p>The programme included targeted efforts to prevent repeat removals of babies from parents who struggled to care for their children. This involved dedicated coordinators and key workers to support vulnerable parents post-adoption, aiming to prevent future adoptions and reduce trauma.</p> <p>The family hub journey continued, ensuring integration across the family help spectrum. The focus was on planning and understanding the whole lead change, with key components of family help being implemented.</p> <p>Significant changes were planned for child protection, including the establishment of lead child protection social workers responsible for decision-making, investigation, and conferencing.</p>

The reforms would require close collaboration with key partners, including the Met Police, NHS, education and young people. The Committee acknowledged the challenges posed by restructuring and potential reductions in partner organisations. The aim was to ensure partners were engaged and supportive throughout the process.

There had been a restructure at senior level, with three directors, and there was a lot of transformation underway.

The programme was backed by £500 million, with Hillingdon receiving £1.3 million for transformation. This funding was ringfenced for early intervention and prevention projects, with approximately a third allocated to supporting partners. The Committee would monitor the use of funds and the impact on service delivery.

The Committee agreed to receive an update in nine months to review progress and address any emerging issues. The focus would be on the family health space, child protection work, and the overall impact of the reforms.

Members expressed interest in the prevention of repeat removals and the challenges of multi-agency protection and how this would pan out.

Members asked about the biggest differences families in need will notice and the potential challenges. Officers noted that there would be local delivery, less centralised and better relationship building. Families would feel more like partners and have more consistency in their contacts.

It was acknowledged that there were going to be lots of new ways of working.

Members acknowledged the challenges related to pace and capacity, managing staff anxiety, and ensuring a smooth transition, as well as whether new roles will be attractive.

It was important to ensure that all team members were adequately trained and up-to-date with legislation.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Noted the information provided, and asked question as required; and**
- 2. Agreed realistic timescales for how they wish to monitor progress**

84. BUDGET & SPENDING REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

Officers presented the budget and spending report.

Members focused on savings proposals, what they meant in practise, and the likelihood of them being achieved this financial year.

Officers clarified that making savings did not necessarily mean overspending. Last year's data indicated that Hillingdon had the second lowest-cost children's services in London, with very good regulatory outcomes. The focus on prevention had been a key factor in maintaining low costs while delivering necessary services.

Placement costs were a big pressure, particularly for looked after children. The market

for residential care was expensive, the most expensive placement offered to Hillingdon was £28,000 per week. The high costs did not always correlate with better outcomes, highlighting the need for more cost-effective solutions. When young people had to be placed away from Hillingdon, the wraparound care element could be lost.

Officers explained that the savings proposals were not new ideas but part of ongoing efforts to address identified pressures. The savings were linked to the care offer, fostering transformation, and the residential beds programme. The goal was to lower costs while improving outcomes for children.

Six new units had been completed in Charville, with plans to open them by autumn after the estate registration process. Staffing and recruitment were key risks, but experienced managers and deputy managers were being prepared to ensure smooth operations.

The focus was on using residential care as an intervention rather than a permanent solution. Trauma informed training for foster carers and residential workers was being enhanced to support children locally and prepare them for foster placements or returning to their families.

Officers discussed the joint efforts in recommissioning supported accommodation and working with housing colleagues to address homelessness pressures. The aim was to ensure proper pathways for young people transitioning to independence. It was reiterated that all Members were corporate parents to Hillingdon's young people. A recent acquisition guaranteed 19 places for young people. Officers had looked at the entrants into care at different levels over recent years to predict the numbers over the next five years and also met with practitioners in different parts of the system. Officers were working with procurement on a new tender process for new contracts for providers. When talking about children's care it was important that all parts worked together. The aim was to ensure that young people were ready for independence by the age of 18, and if not, other routes such as Staying Close were available. All strategies for housing included young people and vice versa. Staying Close can accommodate up to 45 young people. Officers were also exploring rent guarantor schemes and Council Tax exemptions.

The social care delivery model aimed to reduce repeat removals of babies and improve outcomes for families. The restructuring included efforts to manage agency costs and convert agency staff to permanent contracts.

Officers highlighted the efforts to reduce agency costs, particularly for educational psychologists, social workers, and SEND officers. The goal was to offer competitive permanent pay and conditions to retain staff. This saving had been delivered. It was noted that recruitment and retention can be difficult. There was a disparity between agency costs and permanent costs.

Savings had been achieved through the work of keeping families together and supporting special guardianship orders. This saving had been delivered.

Reducing repeat pregnancies this was likely the biggest risk but there was enough knowledge and understanding of this. Last year there were eight repeat pregnancies and this would be monitored.

Officers explained that the savings in post-16 transport were linked to promoting

independent travel and using personal budgets. This approach supported preparation for adulthood while managing costs. Members asked how the savings would be made. This involved providing young people with financial assistance rather than paying large contracts. This would enable independent travel and preparation for adulthood.

Members asked if any of the £5.2 million savings were looking vulnerable. There was currently no vulnerability, but this would be monitored. There was no cutting or stopping services, but there would be transformation. It was important not to do things at the risk of outcomes for young people.

Officers noted that they were awaiting a response from the DfE regarding the DSG. Officers were hoping for feedback shortly which would hopefully mean the release of £7.5 million funds from the DfE towards the cumulative deficit.

Members asked about tracking outcomes against financial investment and ensuring alignment with our corporate priorities. There were a range of KPIs as well as clear qualitative measures. Hillingdon had the lowest rate of care proceedings in the country. There were good gatekeeping processes in place to look at cost, benefit and expected outcomes.

The Committee agreed on the importance of regular updates and the involvement of senior team members in future meetings.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report, and agreed the proposed approach to financial monitoring at this Select Committee as set out in this report

85. **PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM REVIEW: RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda Item 9)**

The Chair introduced the item, with the aim of finalising the recommendations.

Members questioned the effectiveness of the draft recommendation on an Attendance Awards scheme, particularly for younger students. The concern was that at younger ages, attendance was often dictated by parents rather than the children themselves. For older students, there may not be any additional motivation to attend school for small rewards such as certificates. It was agreed to remove this recommendation. Schools already did significant work around attendance and punctuality, and it should not be seen as the local authority imposing additional measures.

Members noted the importance of including information in the final report on Hillingdon's current context, work already done and improvements in attendance.

The data and monitoring theme was considered light, and there was a suggestion to include more detailed recommendations based on witness sessions and feedback from schools and parents. Members highlighted the need to heal the contract between parents and schools, which has been strained post-COVID.

Members acknowledged the extensive work already done by officers. Initial drafts of the recommendations had included vast amounts of ideas which had been narrowed down as actions were taken. It was reiterated that the final set of recommendations needed to be concise and specific.

Members noted the need to address the impact of delays in mental health and

	<p>wellbeing services on absenteeism, and that this needed to be communicated to relevant agencies. It was noted that while this Committee did cover mental health, a lot of this came under the remit of the Health & Social Care Select Committee.</p> <p>Members referred to a government initiative of mental health mentors in schools. Any progress on this would be looked into.</p> <p>It was noted that officers would share a draft final report.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families & Education Select Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed the revised recommendations to be included in the final report; and 2. Agreed to delegate approval of final report and its submission to Cabinet, on behalf of the Committee, to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chair, and in consultation with the Opposition Lead.
86.	<p>CPP MINUTES (Agenda Item 10)</p> <p>Members considered the minutes of the previous Corporate Parenting Panel meeting.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes</p>
87.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (Agenda Item 11)</p> <p>Members considered the Forward Plan.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan</p>
88.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 12)</p> <p>Members considered the Work Programme.</p> <p>Members suggested adding consideration of the next review topic to the Work Programme.</p> <p>Members asked for confirmation of the dates of future meetings. These would be shared.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families & Education Select Committee considered the report and agreed any amendments</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.05 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.