Minutes

EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Wednesday 7 September 2011

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

	Committee Members Present: Councillors Catherine Dann (Chairman) Judith Cooper (Vice-Chairman) David Benson Lindsay Bliss Peter Curling John Hensley Susan O'Brien John Riley **Representative** Tony Little - Roman Catholic Diocese **Witnesses Present**: Deborah Bell – Service Manager, Special Educational Needs, Behaviour & Attendance & Pupil Support Teachers Paul Hewitt – Service Manager, Safeguarding Children & Quality Assurance Councillor Carol Melvin **LBH Officers Present**: Linda Sanders – Corporate Director Social Care, Health & Housing, Anna Crispin - Chief Education Officer, Merlin Joseph – Deputy Director, Children & Families, Gill Brice – Democratic Services Officer	
22.	**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** *(Agenda Item 1)* There were no apologies for absence received.	
23.	**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING.** *(Agenda Item 2)*	**Action by**
	Councillor Catherine Dann declared a general Personal Interest as she was a Governor of Newham Junior School and Bishop Ramsay C of E School. She remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussion. Councillor Judith Cooper declared a general Personal Interest as she was a Governor of Charville & St Andrews Schools. She remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussion. Councillor Susan O'Brien declared a general Personal Interest as she was a Governor at Sacred Heart Roman Catholic School. She remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussion.	*Gill Brice*

	Councillor David Benson declared general Personal Interest as he was a Governor of Uxbridge High School. He remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussion. Councillor John Riley declared a general Personal Interest as he was a Governor of Field End Infant School. He remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussion. Councillor Peter Curling declared a general Personal Interest as he was a Governor of Mellow Lane School and Harefield Academy. He remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussion. Councillor Lindsay Bliss declared a general Personal Interest as she was a Governor of Brookside Primary School. She remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussion. Tony Little declared a general Personal Interest as he was a Governor at Pinkwell & Harlington School. He remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussion.	
24.	**TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND ALL PART 2 ITEMS WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE** *(Agenda Item 3)* It was confirmed that all items would be considered in public.	
25.	**MATTERS THAT HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED IN ADVANCE OR URGENT** *(Agenda Item 4)* There had been no matters notified in advance or urgent.	
26.	**TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.** *(Agenda Item 5)* The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman following amendments to the declarations of interest being made as follows:- Under Councillor Lindsay Bliss delete 'Harefield Academy and change 'He' to 'She'	**Action by** *Gill Brice*
27.	**INTEGRATED YOUTH SUPPORT UPDATE** *(Agenda Item 6)*	**Action by**
	Officers introduced the report on the update of the review recommendations on the Integrated Youth Support informing the committee of the main points. The committee was also advised that the Integrated Youth Support Team (IYST) had been developed since the review had been undertaken. The key outcome from the review was for the joining up of services to deliver integrated working to support vulnerable young people and their families. Partnership working had been embedded into the Hillingdon Children & Families Trust Plan, would be submitted to Council Meeting on 8 September 2011.	*Tom Murphy* *Gill Brice*

	There was evidence that since the introduction of the (IYST) there had been an increase in use of the support service, and families valued its input. A member suggested that it would have been useful to have further information on the age range covered by the Trust and the partners forming the trust. The report does not quantify the outcomes and targets. As this Integrated service had been in operation for sometime there must be a measure of success. Members asked for information to be provided to them on the numbers of people using the integrated support services and the outcomes of the intervention. Officers agreed to provide the information requested to members. **Resolved – That the report be noted.**	
28.	**SHORT BREAKS UPDATE** *(Agenda Item 7)* Officers introduced the report stating that this was good news in terms of the update on the previous review recommendations. Although the Aiming High grant had been reduced, there were plans to expand the short breaks provision. This was being done through the expansion of the family link respite workers to 8 or 9 families. This would reduce the number of out of borough placements and the long term residential provision. A review was currently being undertaken on the Direct Payment scheme. This was to ensure that the payments covered the total package and families were not being provided with the service twice. A member asked how the transition from Howletts Lane Respite Care Home to Merryfields had gone and whether the outcome of the recent Ofsted visit was known. Officers advised that the transition had gone smoothly. This was very much a work in progress on how the service could be commissioned differently with the resources available. There would be robust safeguards in place and rigorous procedures to check that any respite placements were meeting the required standards. Inspection reports would also be carried out with the same rigour. In regard to the Ofsted inspection, officers advised that the final letter had not yet been received but the outcomes were good and all other areas were satisfactory. The committee thanked officers for the update and noted the report. **Resolved – That the report be noted.**	

29.	**FIRST MAJOR REVIEW - WITNESS SESSION 1** *(Agenda Item 8)*	**Action by**
	Members were provided with a report which gave background information to the Elective Home Education policy. Debbie Bell – Service Manager, Special Educational Needs, Behaviour & Attendance & Pupil Support Teachers, Paul Hewitt and Councillor Carol Melvin attended the meeting and provided the review with the following information: • There was a conflict between the Children Act and the Education Act 1996, and a more balanced approach to reflect both safeguarding issues and the rights of parents needed to form part of the policy. • Parents had rights to home educate and children had rights in relation to safeguarding. There needed to be a consensus on the wording that was to be included in the policy. • The policy had not changed and had been in use since 2009. • Hillingdon currently had 93 children being home educated. • There was no obligation on parents to inform the Local Authority that they were home educating their child/children. • Parents were not obliged to submit an annual report. • The Local Authority (LA) sought to see a child annually. This was not necessarily by the LA but by a recognised professional body advising that a child was safe. • The same letters had been sent out annually for many years, requesting annual reports and informing parents about visits. • There were a minority of home educating parents in Hillingdon that had concerns about the unannounced visits. • In Hillingdon 5% of home educating parents were illiterate and just under 5% were home educating due to religious and cultural reasons. There were concerns whether this was good in preparing these children for adult life. • A majority of home educating parents were to be commended for the work they undertook on home educating their child. • The Elective Home Education (EHE) policy had been through due process and had taken into consideration and struck a balance between both the Education Act and the Children Act. • The policy was legally compliant and there was an overriding duty around safeguarding. • There was a right for officers to see a child that had not been seen by another professional for a year or more. • Over the last 20 years there had been a number of case reviews, where it had been highlighted that no proper safeguarding measures had been put in place for a child not seen by professionals. • It was felt that the tension with the policy related to unannounced visits for those children that had not been seen by any professional for a year or more. There would always be a minority of home educated children that needed to be safeguarded and there was a duty on LA officers to protect each child.	*Gill Brice*

	• There needed to be a balance between these two absolute rights for a child to be educated at home and to be safeguarded in the EHE policy. • A review was commissioned by the previous Government that highlighted a number of loopholes in relation to safeguarding. • The policy was introduced to ensure best practice was followed. Councillor Melvin gave the following information on her meeting with parents that were home educating their children:- • Advised the committee that she had been approached in February by parents that were home educating. They were upset and confused regarding letters from the LA in relation to Safeguarding and EHE. • At the meeting there were 9 parents and an officer from the Home Education Advisory Service (HEAS) an independent support group. • Prior to these letters being sent to these parents they reported to Councillor Melvin that there had been a good relationship with the Local Authority. • Announced visits were being carried out, educational provision was discussed and reports had been provided. • The issue the parents had raised was in relation to the unannounced ad-hoc visits. • All the 9 parents present at the meeting had been surprised about the content of the letter and questioned whether it was lawful. • A letter had been sent to the Chief executive from HEAS advising that the Hillingdon Policy was an incorrect interpretation of the law. • The information, which had been provided by the parents at the meeting, was different to the information provided by officers. • The three main issues that the parents had raised, were as follows:- ▪ The lack of consultation and openness and transparency on the policy change. ▪ The suggestion that a panel of parents that home educated should be set up as first point of contact when changes were being proposed. ▪ Asked that schools, exam centres and 6 form colleges be more sympathetic in allowing home educated children to take exams free of charge or at a minimal charge. Officers answered some of the issues that had been raised by Cllr Melvin as follows:- • Hillingdon had a multi agency panel that looked at cases where there had been no contact with families for a year. If other agencies had seen a child and it was known they were safe this satisfied any concerns that the LA had. • There was no obligation on Local Authorities within the Education Act to co-ordinate access to exams. This was down to the individual family to contact schools direct.	

	• It was suggested that an initial recommendation of this review could be giving consideration for the Multi Agency Panel (MAP) to include a parent that was home educating. This would enable them to see the process that was followed by the Authority. The committee thanked officers and Councillor Melvin for providing the background information for the review. Members felt that from the information they had been given, the problems had arisen as a result of the changes made to the policy and the letters that were sent to parents. Although, the committee were able to see both sides of the situation and safeguarding was paramount. They felt that there needed to be a way to involve home educating parents in the consultation processes. This would then allow this information to be disseminated to other parents in the borough. Data had been provided about the number of EHE families who are not part of the EHE network, the majority. Information was also provided on the age breakdown of EHE children that the LA was aware of. It was suggested that consideration could be given to the setting up of a conference/seminar on EHE to bring together parents that home educated. If a conference/seminar was to be set up it was suggested that this should be towards the end of the current review. The committee felt that this may be a good way of involving parents and improving the communication and their perception of the EHE draft policy. A member stated that the issue raised in relation to allowing access to schools/colleges for exams may be a problem as this may reflect on their statistics. Although, there may be some schools that would be happy to accommodate this. A member stated that having had a look at other Local Authority websites, there were some good examples of the information provided to EHE parents. Members asked that a copy of the leaflet be circulated to members so that they can comment on ways this could be improved. The committee further suggested that if a panel/group for home educating parents had not already been set up, that this would be a good starting point to better informing home educating parents or those considering EHE about any changes. Officers could also investigate the possibility of setting up a school buddy system, where parents could receive help and support from local schools. These suggestions may help with the issues raised by parents and highlighted by Councillor Melvin. In answer to questions asked in relation to number of children that there were concerns about, officers advised that there were 5 children that had not been seen for a year by any professional. Councillor Melvin was asked to seek clarification of when the letters the parents had received from the Local Authority had been sent and report this information back to Democratic Services.	

	The committee felt that it was essential to hear from the parents that had contacted Councillor Melvin. It was suggested that one or two of the parents be asked if they would be willing to attend the next meeting as witnesses for the review. The committee had concerns about the unannounced visits being on hold. They recognised that in the main, visits were by appointment and that unannounced visits were done in exceptional circumstances when warranted. The committee suggested that unannounced visits should be recommenced and asked that the agreement of the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services be sought for these to be re-instated. The committee asked for copies of the letters that were currently sent out to home educating parents to see whether they needed amending, to make sure that the information could not be misinterpreted. The committee also asked for a copy of the draft policy to be circulated. **Resolved –** **1. That the information provided by the witnesses form part of the evidence for the review.** **2. That two home educating parents and a representative of the Home Education Advisory Services be asked to attend the next meeting.**	
30.	**FORWARD PLAN 2011/2012** *(Agenda Item 9)* The committee received a report setting out the Education items on the Forward Plan for September 2011 to December 2012. **Resolved - That the information in the report was noted.**	
31.	**WORK PROGRAMME 2010/2011** *(Agenda Item 10)* That the work programme be amended to make any necessary changes, as required. **Resolved – That the report be noted and that the Work Programme be updated as necessary.**	**Action by** *Gill Brice*
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.55 pm.	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Gill Brice on 01895 250693. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.