

Minutes

Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee

Wednesday, 23 November 2011

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



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Committee Members Present:

Councillors Catherine Dann (Chairman)
Judith Cooper (Vice-Chairman)
David Benson
Lindsay Bliss
Peter Curling
John Hensley
Susan O'Brien
John Riley

Apologies:

None.

Representative Member:

Tony Little - Roman Catholic Diocese

Witnesses Present:

Grace and James – Elective Home Educated young people

LBH Officers Present:

Deborah Bell – Service Manager, Special Educational Needs, Behaviour & Attendance & Pupil Support Teachers, Anna Crispin - Chief Education Officer, Paul Hewitt – Service Manager – Safeguarding Children and Quality Assurance, Merlin Joseph – Deputy Director, Children & Families, Gregor O'Gorman – Education & Children's Services and Khalid Ahmed – Democratic Services Manager.

42.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING None.	
43.	TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND ALL PART 2 ITEMS WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE It was confirmed that in relation to Agenda Item 6 – First Major Review – Elective Home Education – Witness Session, that the witness session for this item be considered in the private Part II of the Agenda. All other items of business would be considered in public.	

44	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING – 19 OCTOBER 2011</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.</p> <p>[Members were informed that the representative from the Home Education Advisory Service who had attended the meeting as a witness had submitted suggested amendments to the information contained in the Minutes relating to the review into Elective Home Education. These comments would be covered in the review's final report.]</p>	Action by
45.	<p>FIRST MAJOR REVIEW – ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION (EHE)– WITNESS SESSION</p> <p>The witness session part of this item was included in Part II as it contained information relating to an individual and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing it (exempt information under paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 A to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 as amended).</p> <p>Members were informed that for this meeting, four randomly selected former EHE young people who had now moved into higher education, had been invited to attend the session. One of the parents of the invited younger people had said that they would be in attendance, but they did not turn up for the meeting. Unfortunately there had been no responses to the other three requests. However two other young people who had been home educated and then went onto higher education had asked to speak to the Committee to give their experiences of EHE.</p> <p>Areas and issues covered during the session included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James referred to his eldest sister who had got into trouble at school as being one of the reasons his parents had given him the option of being home educated • James had been taught at home from the age of 10 through to 16, and then went on to Uxbridge College and then onto University. The transition had been smooth and trouble-free • The main reason why James' parents had given him the option of being home educated was because he had been an average performer at school and home education gave him and his parents the freedom to teach him what he was good at, whilst ensuring he was taught the basic educational standards (English and Maths) • James as a parent, now home educated 4 children. The Council was aware of this and a visit took place annually. • As a home educator he had taken the decision to work with the Council on elective home education whereas he understood some parents did not • The major benefit of home education for children was giving 	

	<p>them the freedom to explore what they were really interested in and giving them an opportunity to learn more about these subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This freedom had resulted in James acquiring the skills and knowledge to develop his interests into his chosen career • The freedom and lack of restriction which elective home education brought, made him “think outside the box” and be innovative, which may not have happened if he had been in a classroom, within a school • In response to a comment regarding elective home education and the lack of interaction / socialising with other children, James reported that personally this had not been an issue with him. When he was home educated there were 4 - 5 families who were jointly home educated. This meant that they shared knowledge, conversed together, socialised and exchanged views and opinions • The groups of children would have sessions with specialised teachers once a week • From his own personal experience of being home educated, James felt he had matured quicker and had not been subjected to the peer pressure which sometimes happened with children at school • Whilst being home educated, children did still come into contact with local children outside of school hours, so relationships and contact was still made with other children. The everyday issues which confronted children (i.e. bullying) did not just happen in schools and James reported that he had been equipped to deal with the issues that children who attended schools dealt with • Grace relayed her experiences to the Committee and referred to the flexibility of home education. She had been home educated until the age of 16 and was now in full time education at a sixth form. She believed that her experiences of home education had made her more motivated in her studies • Specialist teachers were brought in to teach a small group of home educated children • Physical education and sports lessons / activities were undertaken by home educated children with parents hiring sports halls and swimming pools in leisure centres. These were structured and took place sometimes 2 to 3 times a week • Reference was made to the difficulties which home educated children had in terms of finding examination centres to take their exams. There were cost implications and LEA schools were not always receptive to non-school children taking exams on their facilities • Discussion took place on the teaching skills and background of parents who home educated their children and Grace referred to her mother self-teaching herself. James was now a qualified teacher and taught his own children at home 	Action By:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grace had had violin lessons through Hillingdon Music Service and these extra curricula activities were available to home educated children Financial and personal sacrifices were made by parents who home educated their children and this commitment and dedication was appreciated by the children and was a driving force behind them doing well with their education Reference was made to the possible involvement of the local authority with home educated children and their parents and the possibility of establishing a network group. The witnesses said this could be where parents could tell the local authority what they wanted and parents could work with the local authority. This would be seen as a positive move and remove the suspicion which some parents had of the local authority Reference was also made to parents who chose to educate their children at home for negative reasons and the need for the local authority to be mindful of their responsibilities to those children under the Education Act. These parents may not want be part of a network with other families and the local authority One of the witnesses was asked for his views on if there was a legal requirement for home visits. He said that he personally chose to allow arranged visits for his children but he fully supported the rights of other home educating families who chose not to have home visits Members made reference to the health and safety and well-being of children who were home educated and the need for the authorities to safeguard these children. This could include inspections to assess the standard of education, visits from school nurses. Both witnesses did not agree with the general linking of health and safety and the safeguarding of children to just home educated children, as this also applied to children who were educated in schools. 	Action By: Gill Brice / Anna Crispin
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The Chairman and the Committee thanked the two witnesses for attending the session and for their input into the review.

Discussion took place on the evidence received and Members felt that they had enough evidence and information to bring their review to a conclusion. Officers were asked to draft a final report on the review, outlining possible recommendations and this be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That the information provided as part of the witness session be used to form part of the evidence of the review.
2. That officers be asked to submit a draft of the final report of the review, with suggested possible recommendations, to the next meeting of the Committee.

**Gill Brice /
Anna
Crispin**

46.	<p>ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION – DRAFT POLICY</p> <p>The Chief Education Officer reported that the draft policy was being looked at in considerable detail by officers. Detailed legal comments had been received and officers would be taking this advice into consideration to ensure the policy was as robust as possible.</p> <p>Every local authority had a policy on Elective Home Education and it was important that the policy targeted all appropriate people. Members were informed that the draft policy followed the format of guidelines issued by the previous government and was published on the DfE website. The guidelines stated that each local authority should have a policy on EHE and that this policy should be regularly reviewed so that it reflected current law and was compatible with the guidelines.</p> <p>Members were informed that the present draft policy had been written following the format of the 2007 guidelines. It was now appropriate to review this draft policy. The policy had to ensure that there were adequate legal powers in relation to safeguarding children who received EHE and that this tied in with the Education Act 1996 which placed a duty on parents to secure the education of children at regular school or outside of school.</p> <p>Once the legal advice had been considered the draft policy would come back to the Committee and would correlate with recommendations from the Committee's EHE review.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That consideration of the draft EHE policy be deferred until the next meeting of this Committee. 	Action By:
47.	<p>DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HILLINGDON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD</p> <p>The Service Manager – Safeguarding Children and Quality Assurance informed Members that overall there was a positive picture within Hillingdon, with children being well safeguarded. There was evidence of strong multi-agency working and commitment and a large number of tasks and actions had been progressed under the support of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.</p> <p>Members were informed that the report was to be considered at the Local Safeguarding Children Board on 25 November 2011 and presented to Cabinet in January 2012.</p> <p>Details of the seven priority areas of work were reported. Reference was made to the national action plan for tackling child sexual exploitation, which had been published and brought together for the first time actions by the Government and a range of national and local partners to protect children from this largely hidden form of</p>	

	<p>child abuse. This would give local authorities a greater responsibility for this area.</p> <p>Reference was made to the difficulty of having a sense of context with the report due to the lack of data and officers agreed to ensure that data was included in the final report to provide a sense of scale and numbers.</p> <p>Reference was made to the increase in the number of disabled children on child protection plans and Members were informed that this was evidence of increased awareness of safeguarding and most cases centred around neglect rather than physical abuse.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the information in the report be noted.
<p>48. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND AUDIT FRAMEWORK – CHILDREN'S SERVICES</p> <p>Members were provided with a summary of the some of the quality audits which had taken place across Children's Services in the last quarter.</p> <p>A quality assurance framework had been developed to co-ordinate and target activities to ensure there was robust scrutiny and to underpin the delivery of quality services which would improve outcomes.</p> <p>Discussion took place on the contents of the report and it was requested that data be included in future reports to provide some context to the audits and in addition there should be reference to training needs. Officers were asked to look at the possibility of peer reviews for the future.</p> <p>Members were informed that a Quality Assurance and Audit Framework for Adult Services would eventually be submitted to this Committee.</p> <p>Members thanked officers for the progress made in this area and asked to have regular updates.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the information in the report be noted. 	<p>Action By:</p> <p>Merlin Joseph</p>
<p>49. HILLINGDON VIRTUAL SCHOOL UPDATE: LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ATTAINMENT REPORT – ACADEMIC YEAR 2010-11</p> <p>Members were provided with an update on the education progress of Looked After Children.</p>	

	<p>Members asked that comparison graphs be produced for 2010/11 and 2009/10 to provide context to attainment levels. Reference was made to the attendance analysis and Members were informed that there were 60 young people in Year 11, with only 43 in Council care for 12 months or more.</p> <p>In relation to exclusions for the academic year 2010/11, the number of total days accumulated had reduced from 215 days to 172 days.</p> <p>Members noted that over a third of the Authority's Year 11s had a statement of Special Education Needs with 80% of these pupils placed out of the Borough.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the information in the report be noted. 	
50.	<p>EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES POC – REVIEW TOPICS</p> <p>Discussion took place on possible review topics for this Committee's next review. Reference was made to looking at Out of Borough and In Borough Placements for Children with Special Education Needs, Looking at the academic performance of young offenders and Adoption in Hillingdon.</p> <p>After deliberations Members agreed that a review on Adoption be undertaken. Officers were asked to submit a background report and a draft scoping report on Adoption, providing details of how Hillingdon performed in relation to the speed of providing placements for children. This was topical in light of the recent Department for Education publication which produced a league table on the performances of local authorities in relation to the process for adoption.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That approval be given to this Committee's second review being on Adoption and a draft scoping report and a background report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee. 	<p>Action By:</p> <p>Gill Brice / David Fry</p>
51.	<p>FORWARD PLAN 2011/12</p> <p>Noted.</p>	
52.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12</p> <p>Noted.</p>	
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.45 pm.</p>	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Khalid Ahmed on 01895 250833. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.