

Minutes

Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee

Wednesday 27 January 2010

Meeting held at High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW



Members Present:

Councillors Catherine Dann (Chairman), Brian Crowe (Vice-Chairman), Lindsay Bliss Judith Cooper, Anita MacDonald, and John Hensley.

Officers Present: Natasha Dogra, Debbie Haith, Sarah Harty, Georgina Ayling and Richard Nash.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter Curling – Cllr Lindsay Bliss substituted.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTER COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING

Councillors Catherine Dann, Judith Cooper, Anita MacDonald, and John Hensley declared personal interests in all items on the agenda due to their roles as school governors.

3. TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND ALL THOSE MARKED IN PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

All items were Part 1 and were considered in public.

4. TO RECEIVE AND AGREE THE MINUTES OF 11 JANUARY 2009

The minutes were agreed by the Committee.

5. Review 2: CHILD TRAFFICKING – witness session 1.

The Chairman welcomed external witnesses Amanda Read (UK Border Agency) and Detective Inspector Gordon Valentine (MET Police), and Richard Nash (Children and Families, Service Manager).

Mr Nash began his presentation by stating:

- in 2006/7 a significant number of young people went missing, a large proportion of who were from a Chinese background. This was largely due to an uncoordinated approach from the multi-agencies involved in the process of safeguarding at the port of entry; UKBA, Met Police and LBH.
- Majority of children and young people who arrive at Heathrow without their parents produce either no papers or papers that were found to be false at passport control.
- Adult facilitators and traffickers organise this illegal entry. Children and young people have little control or knowledge over their fate. UKBA

Action By:

estimate it costs £7-10k per person.

- Those most at risk were 'hidden' within those arriving to genuinely claim asylum or be re-united with family.
- The challenge in safeguarding at a Port of Entry is the lack of concrete information.
- From October 2008 24 hour dedicated service for assessing children and young people arriving at Heathrow.
- Joint assessments with UKBA staff. Improved information sharing.
- Protection plan for each child including limiting communication and close supervision.
- Development of a trafficking leaflet in 10 languages.
- Multi-agency operational protocol with partners.
- Fortnightly operational meetings that discuss each and every new arrival.
- **CASE EXAMPLE:** During the latter part of 2008 a major break through occurred when a Chinese female who had previously absconded from our care returned. She had been held against her will and prostituted. She assisted in delivering key messages to new arrivals about what may happen to them should they abscond. This together with arrests made outside of the UK by UKBA significantly disrupted the trafficking of Chinese nationals through Heathrow.
- 2006/07 251 arrivals of which 28% (70) went missing
- 2007/08 221 arrivals of which 24% (54) went missing
- 2008/09 160 arrivals of which 13% (20) went missing
- 2009 to date 184 arrivals of which 4% (7) have gone missing.
- Timely, 24 hour response and joint assessment with other agencies.
- Protection Plans that reflect the potential risk highlighted in the Time Line.
- Engaging with the subject immediately
- Delivering 2 key messages to children and young people; you were very likely to be at risk if you follow the instructions you have been given before arrival and you were safe in our care.
- The increased skills and awareness of all staff.
- The majority of the 24 hour response relies on volunteers from the day-time staff.
- Safeguarding at Heathrow attracts national attention and can threaten the council's reputation. Currently there is no dedicated lead officer as no such post exists.
- Those cases that were not resolved within 2 weeks and were not USAC (currently just less than 50% of arrivals were USAC) have to be absorbed by social work teams and no extra resources were provided.

DI Valentine informed the Committee that the Paladin team at Heathrow was a joint unit of Metropolitan Police Officers and UK Border Agency staff with immigration backgrounds and their remit is to deal with all cases involving vulnerable children. These ranged from referrals from the front line, where there were child protection concerns to major criminal investigations involving child trafficking across borders.

The Paladin Team was the largest Child Abuse Investigatory Group in the

world. The team worked closely with the Social Services teams in London Boroughs. Along with tackling child trafficking, the Paladin Team investigated child murders and child abuse. The biggest strength of the Paladin team was the number of police officers and UKBA officers involved in the team. The Paladin team also engaged outside bodies such as NSPCC, London Borough of Hillingdon and ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers). ACPO investigated child trafficking with the help of other crime agencies.

In 2003, the Paladin Team provided the Home Office with 26 recommendations that, if adopted, would help tackle the problem of child trafficking. Every recommendation was agreed and put into practice.

DI Valentine said the most effective way to tackle child trafficking would be by using a multi-agency response. The excellent communication links that had been created in the last few years had led to a significant reduction in the number of children going missing from the Heathrow Port of Entry.

Amanda Read acted as the Head of Operations at Heathrow's Terminal 5. Ms Read said most of her work involved raising staff awareness of the problem of child trafficking and ensuring staff were confident enough to cope in a situation where suspected traffickers were confronted. The work of her staff involved stopping any unaccompanied child under the age of 18, making enquiries to determine the reason of visit of the child and interviewing the child in a comfortable and suitable environment.

A visit by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair to T5 allowed Ms Read's team to highlight the problem of child trafficking with the PM. Following his visit, an "unaccompanied by" visa was launched to be used by all children under the age of 18 and must state who the child was travelling with. Following this introduction, the number of children travelling alone reduced significantly.

Ms Read informed Members that the UKBA worked closely with airlines and airports that referred any suspicious behaviour to the UKBA.

The Chairman thanked all witnesses and opened the floor to questions from Members.

Members enquired whether the aim of the Children and Families team was to tackle child trafficking or to safeguard the trafficked children. Mr Nash informed the Committee that both were top priorities for his team. After a child was referred by the UKBA to LBH it was Mr Nash's team's priority to ensure the safety of that child. The team also assisted agencies in preventing child trafficking by attending regular meetings and sub-groups.

Witnesses informed the Committee that the Port of Origin was not important when protecting a trafficked child. A child coming in from the far east was treated in the same way as a child coming in from the EU would be treated.

Members aired their concerns over tackling the problem of child trafficking in LBH only to displace the problem to another area. Witnesses informed the

Committee that they regularly met with officers from other boroughs and regularly held meetings with multi-agencies not only located in LBH. This ensured that the problem was tackled laterally.

Witnesses commended the communications links that had been established between multi-agencies, councils and the police. Without these links, witnesses said they would not be able to tackle the problem of child trafficking. Witnesses also commended the work of social workers involved with safeguarding children.

6: BUDGET AND GROUP PLANS 2010/11

The Chairman of the Committee invited Officers to present this item. Officers informed the Committee that this was the second opportunity within the planning cycle for the Policy Overview Committee to consider issues relating to budget planning for 2010/11. The budget report to Council for Council Tax setting for 2009/10 contained savings of £7.5 million rising to a cumulative total savings of £20.1 million required for 2010/11. Cabinet had since provided a budget strategy to address this saving requirement by breaking down the overall target into thematic groupings consisting of specific saving targets. Progress towards the achievement of these targets had been monitored monthly by CMT and reported to the Leader of the Council. In addition, all Groups have been involved in a three stage budget planning and challenge process, and it is the output of this process that forms the basis of the budget proposals set out in this report.

There were a number of key issues to consider; there were a number of cost pressures for the group, particularly around recruitment issues within Children's Services, where the cost of agency cover is a continuing issue. Officers were working with Corporate Human Resources to endeavour to address this issue.

The group is also working towards delivering the savings identified as part of the Service Review, with the focus on furthering the work on preventative services. However, it will be particularly challenging to find additional savings over and above these targets.

The funding of Asylum remains a significant issue. Officers were continuing to work with Home Office officials and ministers to seek additional funding to ensure that the full costs the Council incurs were reimbursed through the grant regime. Officers have amended a UKBA template to enable all Asylum costs to be clearly identified. This had been circulated to authorities by UKBA. The findings should help further our discussions on full funding and around specialist status. The savings included in the draft budget for Education and Children's Services total £3.069 million and were included in.

The savings package for E&CS broadly reflects the continued delivery of the savings identified in the service review and actions to make the most effective use of grant funding towards the department's budget.

<p>Key achievements were detailed as below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in GCSE results: The percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*-Cs (including Maths & English) increased from 45.9% in 2008 to 51.5% in 2009. • The percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*-Cs increased from 63.1% in 2008 to 68.5% in 2009. • Second Youth Mobile Bus launched • Summer FIESTA 2009 had been a great success, with around 4,000 places for young people on around 135 different courses, ranging from fashion to motor mechanics programmes, sailing to cooking competitions. • The full inspection in relation to safeguarding and looked after children took place in November and Hillingdon received a 'Good' rating i.e. 'A service that exceeds minimum requirements' • Hillingdon received one green flag in the CAA for 'Partnership working to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children'. • Social Work Practice Pilot launched. <p>To Note: The Committee noted the Budget and Group Plan 2010/11.</p> <p>Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the following comments to 18 February 2010 Cabinet:</p> <p>1. The Education and Children's Services Policy Overview Committee would like Cabinet to note that the Committee welcome the 0% increase of specific fees and charges in some schools in the Borough.</p> <p>2. The Committee would like to highlight their concerns over the significant issue of the availability of additional funding of Asylum through the government's grant regime and hope that Cabinet note the Committee's concern.</p>	<p>Natasha Dogra Democratic Services</p>
<p>7. FORWARD PLAN</p> <p>The Committee agreed the Forward Plan</p>	
<p>8. WORK PROGRAMME</p> <p>The Committee agreed that the overview of safeguarding responsibilities and scrutiny paper would be presented at 23 March 2010.</p> <p>The Committee agreed the Work Programme.</p>	<p>Debbie Haith, EYL</p>
<p>The meeting closed at 21.30</p>	