

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

18 April 2023



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

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Heena Makwana (Chairman), Roy Chamdal (Vice-Chairman), Kishan Bhatt, Tony Gill, Raju Sansarpuri, Peter Smallwood, and Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Mr Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Debbie Scarborough (Adult & Community Learning - Service Manager), and Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p>
79.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillor Rita Judge with Councillor Raju Sansarpuri substituting.</p>
80.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
81.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed.</p>
82.	<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> <p>It was confirmed that all items would be heard in Part I.</p>
83.	<p>ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING REVIEW 2021/22 (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>During 2020-2021 the Adult and Community Learning Service was reviewed by the former Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy and Overview Committee, and the final report was submitted to Cabinet in November 2021. The current item provided the Committee with an update following this review. The final report made five recommendations to Cabinet. These were:</p>

1. That Cabinet recognises the good work and improvisation of the HACL service during the recent COVID pandemic and notes the new ways of working identified and underway.
2. That the service be rebranded to 'Hillingdon ACE' (Adult & Community Education), supported by a communications campaign to support a 'soft relaunch' of the service to stimulate demand and uptake of courses.
3. That the service continues with the new ways of working identified as a result of the pandemic, including increased use of technology, support for blended learning, instigation of new courses, and increased interdepartmental and partnership working via new processes.
4. That officers continue lobbying the GLA to increase their grant funding allocation, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Families, Education and Wellbeing, and also investigate other funding or lobbying options.
5. That Council continues to review and develop oversight and scrutiny, and includes an annual report to the Families, Education and Wellbeing Select Committee and Cabinet Member (inclusive of feedback from learners and tutors).

On recommendation four, Members asked what the Multiply project was. Officers clarified that this was a project that had gone out through the Further Education route, designed to aid adults with numeracy skills. There had been an opportunity for top providers to offer an expression of interest in delivering the project, which was picked up quickly by the service. Funding of almost £300,000 over three years from August 2022 to July 2025 was received, which would help upskilling with numeracy skills, including every day, functional maths. Members further asked if Hillingdon had sought this grant, or if it had been given to all Councils. Officers clarified that this was a rare opportunity to apply for increased grant finding, so the service had applied quickly for it. It was noted that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and Greater London Authority (GLA) were funded by the Department for Education (DfE).

In terms of potential upcoming bids, officers noted the holiday activities and food programme. Officers were running the food element and this was linked to Marcus Rashford's campaign for increasing the provision of free school meals. Following the move from the Brookfield site to the Civic Centre, a new kitchen facility was available for use. Over Easter, eight families came in to learn skills around cooking. The families were provided with resources covering, for example, growing a vegetable patch. Officers noted help from the Youth Service in this. Furthermore, a potential capital bid was noted.

Members further noted that they knew the service was functioning well (and the December 2019 Ofsted report validated this). Members asked if the transition to a more digital service had been well received, noting the now online-only brochure. Due to the pandemic, the move to digital-only had to be made, and there had been no alternative choice. The service had put support in place to help learners with the transition. However, this choice may not have been made otherwise as it was noted that the service primarily worked with adults with lower skills, who may not ordinarily have chosen online learning. A method of blended learning was noted, and courses at higher levels included an increasing amount of online learning. Prior to level one, learning was

mostly in the classroom, although this classroom-based learning did make use of online methods. Courses at levels one and two offered more online learning. Officers highlighted here that there was some subject specificity. For example, counselling and triage courses worked better face to face. Level three childcare and health and social care courses had more online elements.

The online-only brochure had also received a mixed reaction. It was noted that generally older learners preferred to have a paper copy. There was some subject specificity here too as, for example, learners on art-related courses preferred a paper copy. ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) booklets were not printed. A positive of the printed booklets was that potential learners may look for one course and find another that they had not considered. It was noted that paper brochures brought some sustainability issues, and also quickly became out-of-date as new courses were offered. Tutors now went through options for the next academic year with learners before the end of the current year.

Members asked if the Youth Offer was involved in the current service and officers clarified that there was some collaboration in the background. For example, some premises were shared with Youth Services.

Members asked about recommendation two, regarding the soft re-launch. Officers noted that the communication campaign had taken place over the summer, along with the move from the Brookfield site, and to online. The website was also updated. Some A5 booklets had been developed, along with full brochures for adults with learning difficulties. This included one for English, maths, ESOL and digital skills; one for personal development (informal skills with no qualifications attached), aimed at reducing isolation and improving mental health and which also boosted confidence; and one for learning for work and life (vocational courses). Officers noted that the corporate communications team had been very helpful, there were now e-newsletters and the service was always highlighted in Hillingdon People. Social media was very also useful for the service. It was noted that of 1,800 people on the newsletter distribution list, around 70% were actually reading it. A previous interview on Uxbridge Radio was highlighted, and officers noted that they had more ideas such as videos and podcasts with learners, such as a 'day in the life of'. Word of mouth was the most effective way of raising awareness of the service. Members noted that they were pleased with the continuation of some printed booklets. Officers noted the elected Learner Council, who had provided good feedback on the A5 booklets.

Members further asked about outreach and engagement with the public and private sectors in terms of links to employment. Officers noted that the service was more conspicuous if it was not working well. This meant that it was difficult to get data on people who had been through the service moving into employment, though it was noted that learners were often not sent directly into employment. The target audience of the service was those who were further away from the transition into work. The service enabled people to find education and employment opportunities if they were ready to. The service had tried for a long time to work directly with employers but what employers wanted and what was provided were often different things. Research into the London Local Skills Improvement Plan had identified that, for example, employers would request 45 minutes slots for their learners to learn, while this was too short for both learners and tutors. There was a focus on enablement. Some learners were encouraged to volunteer, and some now work for the service. Links to HRUC (Harrow, Richmond & Uxbridge Colleges), West London College, the National Careers Service and the Council's Early Years service and childminders were noted.

Members asked about harder-to-reach community groups – whether there was targeted support for them and whether this was a priority for the service. Officers confirmed yes on both areas. The service was working directly with Heathrow hotels to support asylum seekers, and there was an officer within the service who spoke Russian, which aided with this. Work with Care4Calais* was noted, although there were barriers to this. Hotel staff were not trained as support staff; sometimes there was limited space to conduct skills assessments; and asylum seekers often could not afford bus fares to travel to these assessments if they could not take place at the hotels. Asylum seekers often re-located quickly and attendance could be erratic for numerous reasons, though most attended regularly. One of the funding flexibilities from the GLA was to prioritise asylum seekers. ‘Chattercake’ was a way for, in particular Ukrainian arrivals, to come and meet people. Links to the School Improvement Service with finding school places and English language help was noted. In terms of possible future funding opportunities, there was a proposal through the West London Alliance, linked to volunteering with ESOL learners, this would allow volunteers in schools to aid Ukrainian children. It was noted here that the service was not directly working with other charities other than Care4Calais, though they were indirectly via the School Improvement Service. It was noted that there were some difficulties with third party involvement.

**(Care4Calais is a volunteer run charity delivering essential aid and support to refugees living in the UK, Northern France and Belgium.)*

Members asked how new courses were chosen. This often came from officers’ local knowledge. Data from the London Local Skills Improvement Plan influenced the direction of travel. Essential skills courses changed alongside any qualification changes. Vocational skills courses adapted often as and when necessary. For example, there had been a recent increase in health and social care course uptake, and a decrease in childcare course uptake. The service deliberately over-planned for its courses. There were also funding considerations.

Members noted their thanks to officers and their wider team.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report and questioned officers on the report

84. **STRONGER FAMILIES HUB REVIEW: EARLY FINDINGS** (*Agenda Item 6*)

The Chairman outlined the progress of the review to date including the five witness sessions held so far. The first witness session outlined the work of the Stronger Families Hub. The second and third heard testimonies from young people and their parents who had used the service. The fourth heard from staff at the Hub and the fifth heard from health partners. It was noted that a sixth witness session with education representatives was still to be arranged. The current meeting was aimed at considering findings, conclusions and early draft recommendations.

Members asked how the Stronger Families Hub was supporting women from ethnic minority backgrounds, specifically non-English speakers. It was clarified that this could be looked into outside of the meeting.

Members also asked about the suggestion, from witness session four (the voice of providers), of a larger out of hours MASH Team, and whether this was a want or a

need. Members further clarified that this appeared to be a necessity, as this would, for example, aid in covering staff absence through illness. This was also a necessity due to the service becoming 24 hours. A team of 12-15 staff members would be beneficial. Members further suggested that there was an apparent fragility to the out of hours team, and that they were vulnerable to a staff shortage.

Members noted that the review will, in itself, promote the service of the Stronger Families Hub, and this would likely lead to an increase in its usage. As the team was understaffed currently an increase in demand would add further to staffing pressures. It was noted here that some internal covering of staff was already necessary, and that the Hub could function better with more capacity. Members noted here that the review's recommendations to Cabinet had to be mindful of finance. However, the professionals had been clear in informing the Committee of what they needed.

Members noted that there was currently not enough awareness of the Stronger Families Hub, especially within schools and out-of-Borough schools. Also, further information was needed on how the process worked. One of the primary functions of the Hub was early identification, which could lead to an avoidance of the increase in the severity of issues experienced by families.

Members highlighted work with harder-to-reach community groups. Using community leaders to promote the Hub was suggested. Members also highlighted the importance of mental health provision and its links to schools. Members noted that there was good signposting for, for example, Looked After Children, but that the signposting for one-off cases, such as young parents, was less effective.

Members noted that the CAMHS referral pathway was the topic of a major review by the Health and Social Care Select Committee and suggested liaising with that Select Committee in relation to CAMHS.

Members noted the enthusiasm from the staff and health partners to make the Stronger Families Hub service work, and that this should be noted in the final report. Members questioned if there should be a clarification around the expectations from the service, as it appeared to focus mainly on children and not parents. Members clarified, noting witness sessions two and three, that there was a holistic approach and while there was a focus on early identification the service did support the whole family and not just children. It was noted that the Hub could also refer to other departments as necessary.

The Chairman highlighted the many strengths of the service, which had been demonstrated through the witness sessions, and that the health partners had noted that the 24-hour nature of the service was impressive.

Members noted that the final report should re-iterate the purpose of the Stronger Families Hub, as well as focusing on the potential for it widening its remit. Regarding promotion, this needed to be increased, potentially through charities and voluntary sector organisations.

Members noted that third party voluntary, charity and community groups were often low-cost and high-reward organisations. It was highlighted here that these groups could enhance support outside of statutory services.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered possible conclusions, findings and early draft recommendations in relation to the review.

85.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Members asked about how the Committee can know if/ when it can make comments on specific Cabinet reports before the item is considered at Cabinet. Officers noted that they would look into this and come back to Members.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan</p>
86.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>Members raised the that the minutes of the previous meeting noted the possibility of the Committee receiving an audit of SEND children by school and an audit of asylum-seeking children by school. Members questioned if these could be received as future agenda items. Member asked about having an agenda item on the school's capital programme.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Work Programme</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.20 pm.</p>

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