

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

15 November 2023



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Heena Makwana (Chair), Becky Haggart OBE (Vice-Chair), Peter Smallwood, Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead), June Nelson, and Kamal Kaur</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Mr Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Julie Kelly (Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services), Tehseen Kauser (Head of Service for Looked After Children and Leaving Care), Kathryn Angelini (Head of Education for Vulnerable Children), Abi Preston (Head of Education Improvement & Partnerships) Poppy Reddy (Head of Service - Court and Children with Disabilities), and Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p>
39.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillor Rita Judge with Councillor Kamal Kaur substituting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Gill with Councillor June Nelson substituting.</p> <p>Apologies were also received from Councillor Kishan Bhatt.</p>
40.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
41.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Members commended the minutes.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed.</p>
42.	<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>

43. **REVIEW TOPICS** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Members heard from a number of senior officers on the topics of:

- Court system/ social work: The Children's Court and Legal System
- County Lines and Youth Justice
- Communication with schools
- The number of children arriving in the country and staying in hotels and how their access to education is impacted
- Absenteeism in schools: statutory school age children in Hillingdon

The Chair thanked officers for attending the Committee to help Members to gain a further insight into each of the topic areas. Members were asked to note that some of the briefing notes were marked as confidential.

Children's court system

The Assistant Director for Permanence and Specialist Services noted that the court system falls within this remit.

As a Local Authority, Hillingdon had a statutory obligation in terms of safeguarding children, assessing risk, and putting support in place. The process started with early intervention, and then progressed as the risk escalated. If services were not working in the intended manner, legal proceedings were the last resort option where all other possibilities had been exhausted.

The process would start with early intervention, move to a Child Protection (CP) plan if necessary, and then through the legal route via the Public Law Outline (PLO) if the risk could not be managed.

There were pre-proceedings and care proceedings. Pre-proceedings were where families were given the opportunity to work with officers to try to avoid final escalation into the court arena/ legal proceedings. This also allowed parents to get legal representation in order to try to reduce the risk that had been identified. Pre-proceedings also involved detailed assessments and work expectations from both the social services department as well as parents/ family members. Involving all family members helped to explore other possibilities, not just alternate care, but also in terms of support. Assessments may include specialist assessments such as psychological assessments, parenting assessments. Parent Assess was a new assessment which helped families where there was an element of learning needs or disabilities.

Generally, a Public Law Outline (PLO) would last around three months, pre-proceedings would be around three months. There was a possibility for 'purposeful delay', but this needed to be planned and focused.

Before moving into the court arena/ legal proceedings, a meeting was held with parents and their representatives to inform them what the Local Authority's intentions were, what their rights were and what the remit of the proceedings were. This involved the Local Authority pulling together all the information and assessments and presenting this in a statement to the court. This needed to evidence the risk, the harm, what support had been put in place, and where the gaps were. The Local Authority had to consider what was the best option to safeguard children and will look at the Nolan Principles in terms of the Childcare Act.

The Local Authority could ask for a supervision order where children remained within the family home if the risk was not imminent. The Local Authority could ask for an interim care order which would look at children being cared for away from the family home. Wider family and friends would be looked at in the first instance.

The guidance says that care proceedings should last 26 weeks from the date of issue to the time care proceedings are concluded. Given difficulties such as COVID-19 this timescale was not currently being met and was currently sitting at 48-50 weeks in Hillingdon. This was below the national average.

During proceedings there would be the opportunity for other assessments such as independent assessments, drug and alcohol testing, depending on the risk.

In Hillingdon there were two court teams due to the extent and intense nature of the work – two Team Managers, Advanced Practitioners, 11 social workers and one permanence worker. The permanence worker provided support as a direct service to parents around boundary setting, school attendance, and practical skill assistance. This has been highly commended by both the courts and guardians. The primary focus of the courts is where the Child Protection Plan had not worked and the case requires escalation. Social workers were experts in their field. Training had been provided on, for example, Parent Assess. This minimised the need to use independent social workers and helped to continue the relationship between families and social workers. Officers worked with young people from the time that the matter was first notified, through assessments and up until the point of order. This helped to maintain consistency. If the care plan was adoption, officers kept the case open until the adoption order was granted. It was noted that care proceedings could last 50 weeks; it could take three-six months to identify an adoptive family; and then a minimum of 10-13 weeks before an application order could be made. This was a significant length of time in a child's life.

Members thanked officers for the report. Members further noted that as the service was performing well, there may be limited use in a major review on this topic at this stage. Officers concurred but noted that one possible area of future focus could be 'repeat care proceedings', which could work as a means of prevention.

Members noted the previous major review into the Stronger Families Hub and noted the likely tie in with the court system/ social work service area.

Members asked about the numbers of cases dealt with in a year. In the last financial year there had been approximately 158 legal planning meetings, which was where consideration was given to whether the legal threshold had been met, or what other support could be put in place. There were 101 young people who went through the care proceedings route in the last financial year.

Members referenced the challenges noted in the briefing note such as court delays and costings to the Council. It was noted that there was an extensive project on placement sufficiency. Members asked how the service area was looking to the future. Officers noted that cases were taken to court at the right time which meant that pre-proceedings work was really strong. It was thought

that Hillingdon had fewer court proceedings than other Local Authorities.

Members noted that this topic area was very broad. It was further noted that if it was narrowed down around the challenges, the Committee may end up attempting to review something on which it had little to no control.

Members noted the possibility of receiving future updates on this topic.

Members asked officers to inform them if there was anything that the Council could do to improve the service. Members further suggested that it may be possible to invite specific external stakeholders to a future meeting. It was noted that a lot of the challenges were not specific to Hillingdon but were national issues.

County Lines/ Youth Justice

The Committee congratulated the Youth Justice Service who had recently been recognised for providing a quality service to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Hillingdon was one of four Local Authorities nationally to be awarded the Youth Justice SEND Quality Lead Status with a Child First Commendation.

The Assistant Director Prevention and Youth Justice presented a briefing note on three areas within the Youth Justice remit.

Prevention and early intervention

The first area was around prevention and early intervention, and what programmes were in place for at-risk young people, with specific reference to County Lines.

It was important to recognise that County Lines was a thread of Child Criminal Exploitation.

Hillingdon's AXIS Service started in 2018 on the back of local and national recognition of the increasing number of children coming to the attention of statutory services nationally for serious offences and significant safeguarding concerns around exploitation. This was with a view to identifying children at risk much earlier.

AXIS started as an excel spreadsheet in terms of information received through police partners, schools, Hillingdon's Youth Justice service and very quickly evolved and escalated.

Subsequently a comprehensive analytical software system had been set up to triangulate the information received and support identification of Children at Risk as early as possible. The system was also able to identify areas and locations and postcodes and was able to link to schools. This meant that in addition to identifying children as risk, it was possible to identify locations and areas which helped in deployment of resources, not just within the Local Authority but across a partnership with police.

AXIS had four key strands: serious youth violence; possession with intent to supply (linked to County Lines); sexual exploitation; and children going

missing. All these threads were interlinked.

AXIS evolved into a service roughly 18 months ago and was funded through both the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and public health funding so it was well supported. It had four full-time access workers and two Network Crime practitioners which managed the information and carried a case load of between 15 and 20 children. In 2020 a short OFSTED inspection described AXIS as 'everything that everything else isn't'.

There had been lots of contact from other Local Authorities about how AXIS was delivered. AXIS did not work in isolation, and worked closely with other services across early intervention, and pre-prevention such as Stronger Families, Brilliant Parents and the voluntary sector. The 'Your Life You Choose' programme was delivered across secondary schools and was about educating and raising awareness. It was noted that many staff within the Youth Justice service had lived experience which was invaluable.

Diversion from the Youth Justice System

The second area was around diversion from the justice system and how often diversionary options were used instead of formal prosecution.

There was a strong focus both locally and nationally around diverting young people from the Youth Justice system. In Hillingdon this was predicated on collaboration and partnership working. Recently, the service had received funding for the Turnaround Programme which was funded through the Ministry of Justice. This programme was about recognizing children who may be receiving bail or might be released under investigation by the police or might have received an NFA (no further action). This was an opportunity to identify these young people early and to offer a voluntary intervention. Hillingdon had a multi-agency panel which met on a monthly basis and could review 30-70 young people.

The Engage Programme was a new programme funded by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime. This had been rolled out across London and Hillingdon was the lead authority covering Hillingdon, Hounslow and Ealing. Project Engage was about bridging the gap between police custody and the community and continuing working with young people for example when they are released on bail. Hillingdon had just recruited an Engage Coordinator and were in the process of recruiting Engage workers.

Out of court disposals were a framework whereby if a child came into contact with a criminal justice system for a relatively low-level offense the police, in conjunction with the Youth Justice service, could consider whether or not to divert them and consider an out of court disposal. When a young person was diverted for an out of court disposal, a comprehensive assessment would be undertaken in order to make an informed decision about what was the right outcome for that child and what was the right intervention. There would then be a multi-agency decision-making panel with partners from the police, youth support

services, and Stronger Families, to discuss the case and what would be the most appropriate outcome. There were three options for what could be considered:

- Triage – a voluntary intervention for between four to six weeks. This was about recognising that an offense had been committed but supporting the young person to access support services.
- Youth Caution – this usually started at around three months and was administered by a uniformed police officer. There would have to be a set of agreed interventions that the young person would be expected to engage with. Should the child not engage, there was no substantial recourse so they could not be taken back and charged.
- Youth Conditional Caution – similar to a caution, but if the child did not engage with conditions the matter could be referred back to the police and the young person could be subsequently charged and taken to court for the offense.

Everything that the service did was about understanding the harm that had been caused and how young people could repair that harm. It was noted that no offense was victimless. For every child that came into contact with the criminal justice system, there was a dedicated restorative justice team who will work to reach out to the victims to gather their views.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is work that was undertaken with all children who come into the youth justice system. It was the vision of the Youth Justice service that there be a Justice for All approach. This was about ensuring that there was justice for the victims and for communities. A number of victim conferences had been held with the young people. Restorative justice extended beyond youth justice. Officers noted work around reducing criminalisation of children who were looked after. There had recently been work undertaken with residential care homes regarding upskilling restorative justice skills. Similarly, training had been delivered to foster carers.

The Youth Justice team had worked with and delivered training to schools around the use of restorative justice techniques.

Members thanked officers for the briefing note and noted the fantastic service. Members also noted that as the service was working well, there may be little value in a major review. It was acknowledged that there was a strong partnership network.

Members asked about how Hillingdon compared to its neighbours. In terms of the response to children at risk of criminal exploitation, Hillingdon was awarded the national Municipal Journal award. Other local authorities also sought input from Hillingdon in developing their response to child criminal exploitation. With regards to diversion from the youth justice system, the Youth Justice service had three key national performance indicators. One of those was around first-time entrants coming into contact with the Youth Justice system. Historically and continually Hillingdon had one of the lowest in London and one of the lowest national rates of children coming into contact with the justice system in terms of

diverting children at the earliest opportunity to stop them coming into contact with the criminal justice system. In terms of restorative justice, colleagues from the Youth Justice Board attended the Youth Justice Strategic Management Board and commended how well Hillingdon was delivering restorative justice.

Members further commended officers on Hillingdon being a lead authority. Members asked about the response from school children when officers presented to them. Officers noted that the 'Your Life, You Choose' program was delivered alongside colleagues in the police and was about trying to start the conversation about child criminal exploitation because and providing a safe space to have those conversations. There was follow up through PSHE lessons and schools had followed up with officers around referrals to AXIS. This was all about conveying accurate information and holding important conversations.

Members noted the possibility of inviting stakeholders to a future meeting.

Communication with schools

The Director of Education and SEND introduced a briefing note on communication with schools, particularly in light of the academisation agenda. There were 99 schools within Hillingdon and roughly half were academies. This created opportunities for working with schools but also presented some challenges with this. It was noted that the picture had been relatively stable recently.

In Hillingdon there were 12 multi-academy trusts (MATs), most academies were in the secondary sector. Two secondary schools were maintained and the rest were academies.

There were various areas where the Council looked to engage with head teachers such as the annual Head Teacher Conference for key areas of strategic development. The Council had linked meetings with the primary and the secondary sectors which included both maintained schools and academies. There were termly head teacher meetings and a weekly briefing that was sent to all schools and governors.

Working with schools had been aided by the recent development of the Hillingdon Learning Partnership. This was a vehicle for professional development and support for schools and was shaped around the needs across the Borough to further develop strong practice across Hillingdon schools. This partnership was in its second year and was growing.

There were challenges in the system regarding children with SEND and this was about working with schools, listening to where there were challenges and seeing how the support could be shaped, whilst also making sure there was a level of challenge for those schools. The School Improvement support was for maintained schools but there was an element where some of this support was offered to academies. Overall, communication with schools was an ongoing development area.

Members noted that this was a potentially very interesting topic for a major review. There had been a mixture of engagement from schools. It would be interesting to look at the difference between academies and maintained schools in the level of engagement on various topics. Another area to look at could be if/

how other local authorities had found ways of engaging, whilst noting individual differences.

Members noted that this was an area of concern and suggested that the history of this issue may have dated back to the time of grant-maintained schools. Members noted that this topic may be better suited to a future part two agenda item whereby the Committee could invite head teachers. It may be useful as a major review in the future. It was noted that the Committee had difficulty in engaging with schools as part of the previous Stronger Families Hub review.

Members asked whether there was more of an issue with Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) than with Single Academy Trusts. Members also asked, given the demand on head teachers' time, whether the Council's offer to them was advantageous enough. Officers noted that there was a range of Multi-Academy Trusts and some Single Academy Trusts, which created different dynamics. There were different levels of independence with schools in terms of working with the Local Authority and also working with each other. There were lots of positives, for example working with the CEOs of academies. There was good engagement with Multi-Academy Trust CEOs across the Borough. It was noted that there was now more of a one-Council approach under one directorate. Part of the challenge historically may have been that the services within education were more segregated. It was acknowledged that there were lots of challenges with being a head teacher and lots of pressures on their time. This may have meant that head teachers had to be selective over what/ how they engaged with the Local Authority.

Members asked what the Committee could bring to help with engagement, and also what Ward Councillors could bring. Members referenced the different level of services offered by Hillingdon to other authorities and asked what this could look like. Officers noted that some of these services had not been offered for a long time and so schools/ academies made their own arrangements. Officers were open to changing this as it was important to have a flexible offer. As a Committee it could be interesting to find out more about schools' perspectives and if there were clear differences between types of schools whether it be maintained/ Academy, primary/secondary, North/ South and understanding how the Council can shape its offer further to support schools.

Members noted that officers were in the middle of seeking improvements and that there was a lot of work upcoming. Members further noted that this would not warrant a major review at this time.

Members noted the challenge of provision for children with SEND and asked whether this was a particular problem in the context of communication with schools. Officers referenced the different set up of services within Hillingdon compared to other authorities and so it was difficult to compare like for like. The individual levels of contact between teams and schools and the support and networks were generally positive. It was noted that when communication needed to improve, this was more on the high level, strategic aspect. This was more to do with the collective approach rather than individual schools, although there were always going to be challenges particular in relation to SEND.

Children arriving in the country, staying in hotels and accessing education

The Director of Education and SEND introduced a briefing note on children

arriving in the country, staying in hotels, and accessing education.

The numbers had changed throughout the last couple of years. There were currently 17 primary aged children and 11 secondary aged children residing in hotels (since September 2023). This was significant below the number of children out of school in Hillingdon (primary: 80; secondary: 93; total: 173).

The asylum seeker project commenced in March 2020 and the Admissions Team have been aware of around 1,500 families with children seeking education across seven different hotels, predominately in the south of the borough. Many of those families transitioned to temporary housing, although this scheme had now ended.

Officers were working hard to ensure that educational placements were available, although this could be challenging because of, for example, access to transport, uniforms and resources. There were also challenges if those children moved as they were unable to be removed from roll until a new setting had been found. There was interim provision available to support children who were awaiting a school place. There was also an educational pathway that included ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) support. This was funded and eligible for children that were in year 11.

Overall, there had been a reduction in the numbers and lots of families were residing in temporary accommodation, either within Hillingdon or outside. In the most part, these children have had an educational placement found for them.

Members noted that some young people may be in placements with peers with a common language whereas some may not, and so their experiences would likely differ.

It was further noted that this issue may be unique to Hillingdon as an authority. While it was noted that some port authorities in the south of England may face similar issues, Hillingdon may have a larger challenge than some other authorities. With this in mind, this may make a unique and valuable major review topic. Officers concurred that while not totally unique, there were particular pressures in Hillingdon and in the London context with, for example, the nearby airport. Officers further noted that this was a broad topic that encompassed not just school places but also quality of life and living, learning and thriving in that environment. There was ongoing work that spanned across a number of services as there were also adults without children in similar circumstances. It was also noted that there were related issues pertaining to children missing education, nutritious lunches, and differences between DfE requirements and Home Office expectations. With this in mind, it may be difficult to narrow down a specific focus to review. Members noted that it could be possible, with officer assistance, to narrow down to, for example, 'the experience of the young people once they are placed in schools'. Members noted that there needed to be consistency in the approach to considering which potential topics were too broad.

Members noted that the figures presented in the briefing note brought up another issue of particularly secondary aged children who were not in school and the difficulties in finding secondary places for children from abroad. This could possibly be looked into as a future part two item. It was further noted that

children from abroad not in school was part of the bigger issue of absenteeism. It was noted that there had been a national focus on this. Members further suggested that children missing education could be accommodated with the topic of absenteeism and suggested a focus at looking at schools' experiences and teachers' experiences, as opposed to the experience of young people themselves, which may be difficult due them moving in and out of the borough.

Members asked officers for an update regarding hotels, and on the Council's ability to track the young people concerned. Officers noted that there were only a small number of families still in hotels. There were challenges in tracking children when they were moved on and understanding if they were still within the borough. This had been a developing piece of work over the last couple of years and officers had developed links with the Home Office and Border Force. Often children were moved in very swift circumstances and schools were not always made aware. These strengthened links would help to know if children had been moved. There was an expectation that schools would spend 10 days trying to locate the child through the contact details that they held. Once they had exhausted all reasonable measures, they would make a referral to the children missing education team through the Stronger Families Hub. This would start a tracking system that would include a standard Home Office check if it was thought that the child had been moved by the Home Office, and then a further check with Border Force if it was thought that the child may have left the country.

Absenteeism

The Assistant Director for Education and Vulnerable Children outlined the issue of absenteeism and attendance in statutory school age children in Hillingdon.

It was acknowledged that absenteeism across the country was a huge issue and had been since the COVID-19 pandemic. In nearly every category of absenteeism and attendance there had been a doubling in the figures, which was a concern and had been recognised by the Department for Education (DfE).

It was noted that it was presently too early to compare Hillingdon to statistical neighbours. Broadly speaking, in the previous academic year (2022-2023), Hillingdon had performed similarly to national statistics. For the current academic year, albeit it very early, Hillingdon was again in line with national statistics, roughly 93-94% attendance, which was an improvement on the previous year.

Persistent absenteeism (referring to children with 90% or less attendance – equivalent to children missing one school day per fortnight) was starting to come down.

As of September 2023, the UK Government had released new guidance entitled 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance'. This was on the national agenda and officers had been undertaking lots of work to align with this programme. Although this had only been in place since September, officers had spent the whole of the previous academic year preparing themselves and Hillingdon schools for the changes.

Hillingdon had re-branded the former 'Participation Team' to become 'Attendance Support' to bring this in line with the DfE's expectations. Attendance

support was now offered to every setting including independent settings, which was a first for Hillingdon. Previously there was a traded offer whereby schools to choose whether or not to be brought into the service. Now, Hillingdon had to provide a core programme as a standard offer. This included termly meetings with Hillingdon's attendance officer, the school's attendance officer and a senior school staff member. These meetings would also look into persistent absenteeism (attendance at or below 90%) as well as severe absenteeism (attendance at or below 50%). As this progressed, officers would be able to identify if there were any particular cohorts (for example, children with SEND, children on free school meals, etc.)

Officers were looking to, by January, have a three-year strategy for attendance and absenteeism across the Borough and involving all stakeholders.

There were a number of upcoming plans, particularly from January onwards, taking into consideration how the new guidance was working.

Members asked what 'severely absent' meant. Officers noted that this referred to under 50% attendance. Members also asked about children who were residents of Hillingdon but attended school outside of the borough. Officers noted that these figures would be recorded by the borough in which the school was located.

Members asked what the Committee could add, should this topic be chosen as its major review. Officers further noted that they were still in the early stages, and so it would be difficult to identify where specific challenges lie at the moment and until it became apparent how successful schools had been in implementing the new guidance.

Members suggested that this should be the major review topic – this was a sizeable project but there needed to be a starting point. Members noted their surprise at the high persistent absentee figures, and this could be a reason for the major review. The persistent absentee figures for 2022-23 were above the national average, and for the current academic year, the figure was 17.3% persistent absence.

Members further asked how many children had been taken off roll. Officers noted that this was tracked as part of the attendance support team. Schools were required to inform the Council about a deletion from their roll on the day that they do it. This was done via an online form which included a set list of reasons including the child moving to another Borough, or to another school within Hillingdon. As of the week commencing 06 November 2023, the number was in the region of 600-700 since the start of the academic year. It was important to note that each of these had a known destination and so was different to those 'children missing education'.

Members asked about other Boroughs and whether they had strategies in place, and what methods they were using to tackle this issue. Officers noted that all boroughs were in a similar position because there was new guidance. Every Local Authority had been offered an attendance advisor from the DfE. Officers were due to meet with this advisor next week. The advisor would be able bring intelligence from other Local Authorities which may help to shape the three-year strategy.

Other Members noted their preference for this review topic, and further noted that it had been picked up by central Government. Members referred to another Select Committee's review into mental health. It was suggested that it may be possible to invite young people, families and officers from other authorities as witnesses to any major review.

Members asked if attendance officers at schools were engaging with attendance officers at the Local Authority. Officers noted that they were working well together. Under the previous traded offer, a significant number of schools were already engaging because they valued the service, so there was a strong relationship with attendance support officers in schools. Senior leads in schools had also been very supportive. Officers had offered schools a self-evaluation framework to drill down into attendance, their attendance policy, attitudes towards trauma responsive practices. There had already been good take-up of this.

Members noted the importance of consistency in decision-making around which major review topic to pick. Members follow this up by noting that the briefing note referred to termly support meetings and this could also help to aid communication with schools.

Members noted that the communication between attendance support officers could be a starting point for a major review in this area.

Members highlighted the possible diverse range of reasons for persistent absence, and this could be one avenue of a major review.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Discussed the above noted topic ideas with officers, with a view to deciding on a review topic; and**
- 2. Delegated to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chair (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead) any further agreement on review topic selection as required.**

44. **SEND STRATEGY** (*Agenda Item 6*)

The Chair noted their appreciation for the document's comprehensive nature, emphasising the "how to achieve each ambition" section's effectiveness.

The Director of Education and SEND presented the report, detailing its significance and importance, particularly regarding the review of feedback since the previous version was brought to the Select Committee in November 2022. The approach involved considering residents' and schools' input, indicating an attempt to address feedback constructively rather than in a tokenistic manner. It was highlighted that this was a local area approach, not a Council strategy.

Officers highlighted a shift in the strategy's approach, aiming to be more ambitious and having listened closely to the voices of children, families, and professionals involved in SEND. Emphasising the importance of children's perspectives, efforts had been made to capture their experiences and opinions on early interventions and the flexibility of

support within school settings.

This strategy had been scrutinised and positively received by the SEND Executive Partnership Board, reflecting collaboration among various stakeholders (including Health and Social care, education, parents/ careers, and voluntary organisations). However, challenges arose from schools, citing concerns about increasing levels of inclusion and the pressures to adapt to varying needs, leading to a discussion about finding a balance between inclusive practices and acknowledging the challenges faced by schools.

In summary, the five ambitions were:

- 1. The right support, at the right time, in the right place:** this was about early intervention and meeting need earlier. For example, young people fed back that they felt they should not need an EHCP in order to get support. Also, not all children wanted a Teaching Assistant supporting them.
- 2. Fully inclusive education for all**
- 3. Provision meets the needs of Hillingdon's children and young people:** this involved looking at the spectrum of provision – not just special school places, but also in mainstream schools, SRPs and designated units. It was noted that young people were positive about SRPs.
- 4. Children and young people live happy and fulfilled lives where they are included in the community:** this referred to outcomes outside of education. It was typically quite difficult for families with children with particularly complex SEND to access clubs, and so this ambition aimed to assist with this.
- 5. There is a flexible offer and range of interventions available for children to access Alternative Provision:** this was important because there was pressure on schools which could lead to disruption and exclusions, so this ambition aimed to avoid exclusions where possible. This would provide outreach and inreach as well as alternative provision places.

The discussion revolved around the SEND strategy's ambitious goals and the importance of translating these ambitions into tangible outcomes. Members highlighted the importance of monitoring the strategy's outcomes. Concerns were voiced about funding, suitability of placements, and varying percentages of EHCPs (Education, Health, and Care Plans) across schools. There was a shared consensus on the necessity to closely monitor the strategy's progress and outcomes.

Officers acknowledged these concerns, assuring a monitoring system through priority groups around each ambition within the strategy. Regarding EHCP distributions across schools, efforts were underway to consult with schools that had lower EHCP levels, intending to foster more inclusive practices among all schools. The emphasis remained on the strategy's aim to support children's diverse needs while addressing challenges faced by schools and parents in selecting schools.

Members commended the report's comprehensiveness, in particular around the data representation and the holistic approach towards children's needs and emphasised the importance of not labelling children negatively.

Furthermore, attention was drawn to a notable trend concerning higher percentages of children with primary needs in autism and language categories within the borough. Officers noted the rising national trend of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and

attributed it partly to better access to diagnosis and the increasing complexity of ASD cases diagnosed at earlier ages, emphasising the necessity for early interventions. Efforts were ongoing to understand these trends further and ensure a more equal provision across different types of needs.

The discussion highlighted the importance of a comprehensive strategy that addressed diverse needs while balancing the challenges faced by educational institutions, striving for equitable provision and support for children with special educational needs.

Officers noted ongoing initiatives and projects aimed at various aspects of SEND support. Some projects, such as updating the banding model and matrix of funding for SEND, were expected to show progress sooner, while others, like developing increased inclusion, were perceived as longer-term goals requiring continuous collaboration with schools.

Additionally, the discussion touched upon preparing children with special needs for adulthood, highlighting the challenges in providing experiences similar to those of children without SEND, such as managing budgets or using public transport. There was a recognition of crosswork among social care, SEND, education, and adult social care services, aiming to support the transition to adulthood, ranging from independent travel programs to employment opportunities. This collaborative effort aimed to strengthen the support network for children in fostering a seamless transition into adulthood.

Members asked about benchmarking SEND outcomes against statistical neighbours and London boroughs rather than solely against national standards. Officer noted that this was possible, and that OFSTED tended to look at national figures as well.

The conversation touched upon the SEND Inclusion Plan pilot of 31 local authorities, which did not include Hillingdon. Why certain local authorities were selected for the pilot and others not was uncertain.

The conversation shifted to concerns about capacity and specialist staff to meet SEND needs. Efforts were discussed to enhance training and provide support to ensure staff confidence in catering to diverse SEND requirements. In addition, there would be support for the Council's different teams to act in a One Council approach.

Another topic discussed was the ongoing need for feedback mechanisms to drive continuous improvement in SEND provision. There were plans to encourage feedback through various forums such as the Child Voice Panel, Children in Care Council and Parent Carer Forum, to engage children with SEND, and efforts to share good practices and effective training methods across settings. It was important to share the child's voice with partners. It was also important that schools and teams could learn from each other.

The conversation also addressed the quality of data tracking and funding issues within the SEND system. Challenges in managing data accurately were acknowledged. The potential for new systems to be used was being investigated. There was a continuous struggle to manage funding amid growing demands and pressures on resources with a fixed budget. There had been some inconsistency in the funding approach, and this was one reason for the banding review. This was also linked to ambition one and why early intervention was so important.

Members highlighted past challenges in SEND provision regarding EHCP delivery and the shortage of local specialist provision, with a higher number of children placed in independent settings. Officers noted this was something that a lot of local authorities had struggled with and that Hillingdon had come a long way with EHCP compliance outcomes. On special school places, officers clarified that on one level it appeared that there were not enough places but actually the number of children in a specialist placement was above national levels in Hillingdon. The reason for that was because Hillingdon was placing more than double the national rate in independent settings that were high cost rather than in local provision. So as far as having a shortage, it was more around local specialist provision rather than not having enough places for children.

Members raised concerns about delays in funding reaching schools for SEND support. Officers clarified that a number of schools experienced issues at the end of the previous financial year and beginning of the current financial year. Assurance was provided that efforts were underway to rectify configuration issues and only a small proportion of reconciliation was outstanding. New systems were noted to streamline the process for timely funding allocation.

It was clarified that the Hillingdon PCF was the Parent Carer Forum.

Lastly, the meeting concluded with gratitude for the dedication of officers in navigating the complexities of SEND provision and ongoing efforts to improve support and address various challenges faced within the system.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Noted the contents of the draft Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2023-2028 which outlines the strategic vision and priorities for the delivery of SEND Services across the borough; and**
- 2. Delegated to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chair (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead) comments for inclusion in the upcoming Cabinet Member report.**

45. **DRAFT MINUTES FROM THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** (*Agenda Item 7*)

Officers informed Members that prior to the meeting, the Chair had agreed to defer this item to the next meeting, due to the short timeframe in between the Corporate Parenting Panel and Select Committee meetings. This would enable officers to receive feedback/ amendments to the minutes before they were presented to the Select Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee deferred this item to the next meeting.

46. **FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 8*)

Consideration was given to the Forward Plan.

The Chair noted that the previous major review report on the Stronger Families Hub had been presented to, and recommendations agreed at, November Cabinet.

	RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.
47.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>Members considered the Work Programme.</p> <p>Members noted that the possible review topic of engagement with schools could be a future Part II item.</p> <p>Members further noted that 'in-year admissions to secondary schools' and associated difficulties could be a future agenda item.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee considered the report and agreed any amendments.</p>
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.25 pm.

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