

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

18 September 2024



Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillor Heena Makwana (Chair), Councillor Ekta Gohil, Councillor Peter Smallwood, Councillor Kishan Bhatt, Councillor Tony Gill, Councillor Rita Judge, and Councillor Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Laura Baldry (School Placement and Admissions Manager), Georgia Watson (Head of Access to Education), Suzi Gladish (Head of Safeguarding Arrangements), Alex Coman (Director of Safeguarding, Partnerships and Quality Assurance), Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p>
21.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillor Becky Haggar with Councillor Ekta Gohil substituting.</p>
22.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
23.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Members noted that the November meeting would consider the Youth Offer Delivery Model update, and asked if it would be possible to invite the Youth Forum to the meeting. This would be looked into.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed.</p>
24.	<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>
25.	<p>MOVE-INS TO THE BOROUGH (IN-YEAR ADMISSIONS) (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p>

Officers introduced the briefing note on in-year admissions.

Members asked if asylum-seeking children were still residing in airport hotels or if they were being accommodated elsewhere. Officers responded that there were no unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in hotels in the area. The Local Authority provided timely accommodation and ensured transfer to the appropriate local authority under the National Transfer Scheme where appropriate. There were a number of children with their families residing in local hotels which were used by the Home Office. Asylum-seeking children received educational provisions such as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

Members further asked about the use of airport hotels for asylum-seekers and for how long this may continue. Officers noted that there were a number of hotels in use around Heathrow which had been set up as they were available during the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of hotels being used had decreased, but some were still in use. Some had been stood down.

Members asked about the tightness in years 9 and 10, particularly in the north of the borough. Officers acknowledged this and noted that some schools had not shared their numbers. The Fair Access Panel was used to place hard-to-place children who had been out of education for a period of time.

Members noted the complex issue of children living in Hillingdon but attending private schools outside the borough who were struggling to find school places within the borough. There was a case of a private school finishing at Year 8 and a young person had been on the waiting list of nearby schools for three years. Officers responded that they actively looked at vacancies in surrounding schools that were local to the home address. The Fair Access Panel could be utilised for children without a school place.

Members asked about the impact of the new government's 20% VAT on private schools, which may force children into new schools mid-year if parents could no longer afford the fees. Officers noted that prior to the General Election they had received lots of enquiries regarding vacancies in the borough. Officers had also received 59 applications between June and 13 September from parents of children attending private schools. Of these, 29 were for secondary places and 30 for primary places and across all year groups. These applications were being processed, and officers continued to monitor the situation.

Members asked if the 59 applications were for children with SEND provision or from SEND schools. Officers confirmed that the 59 applications were from mainstream private schools. Applications from special independent schools would go through the SEND team.

Members cited research from the Taxpayers Alliance which suggested that the new VAT policy may cost taxpayers more money. Members asked about receiving any uplift from Government. There was no indication of this but officers were due to attend the London Council's meeting on 14 October to discuss the impact of private school applications on Local Authorities. Officers assured Members that the right processes were in place to address applications in a timely and equal manner.

Members asked about ESOL lessons for asylum-seeking children. Officers explained that ESOL lessons were provided based on individual needs for the duration that the young person was in Hillingdon until they were transferred under the National Transfer

Scheme. Alternatively, if they remained in Hillingdon and became Looked After Children, ESOL would last for three months depending on need. During this time, the Virtual School and education colleagues ensured appropriate school placement. There was a framework for ESOL to support children through entry level, level one and level two courses.

Members asked about any feedback from schools on the borough's admissions policy. Officers noted that they had a good working relationship with schools and addressed any issues raised. It was recognised that schools closer to the hotels to host asylum-seekers were more impacted and officers supported them. The continuous movement of children in and out of the borough also impacted these schools.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report

26. **CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Officers introduced the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report.

The Safeguarding Partnership was made up of three statutory partners: the Local Authority, the ICB, and the Metropolitan Police. Each partner shared equal responsibility for safeguarding adults and children in Hillingdon. New working together to safeguard children guidance issued at the end of 2023 emphasised the importance of including education as a statutory partner, although this was not yet enshrined in legislation.

Hillingdon had mirrored arrangements across children's and adult's safeguarding, reporting to the same Executive Leadership Group. This approach, known as 'think family,' ensured that child-focused practitioners considered the adults and parents, and adult-focused practitioners considered the impact on children. The aim was to avoid duplication and to be as efficient as possible, given that many agencies worked with both adults and children.

In addition to the statutory partners, there were various relevant agencies involved in the safeguarding boards and sub-groups. These agencies attended the safeguarding boards and specific sub-groups. For example, the Centre for Expertise for Child Sexual Abuse was involved with the child sexual abuse sub-group.

The partnership actively engaged with children and young people in Hillingdon through direct meetings with Children in Care Councils, child in need forums, and children subject to CP plans, actively seeking views of the young people. This engagement ensured that their views were heard and incorporated into the partnership's work. Co-production involved working with children and young people to identify their priorities and ensure their input was threaded through the partnership's activities.

The partnership had undertaken various awareness-raising activities, including briefings on mental health issues and what it is like to be a young person with mental health difficulties, cultural literacy in safeguarding practice, suicide prevention, and child exploitation. Training was provided through practice briefings, commissioned training, and free webinars accessible to representatives of any agency, including the charity and voluntary sectors.

Young people had delivered their annual report to the Safeguarding Board and the Executive Leadership Group, which comprised the most senior representatives of the

statutory partners. There had been various sessions with Board members talking about 'You Said, We Did' – what young people had said and what officers had done in response. Young people had also delivered Walking In Our Shoes training to a number of different agencies, including police officers, nurses and Designated Safeguarding Leads.

There were free webinars available which would enable them to be accessible to the charity and voluntary sector.

All sub-groups followed a simple framework of prevention, identification, and response. This framework guided their work on issues such as child sexual abuse from a multi-agency perspective. Officers noted the NSPCC's PANTS campaign, which was a preventative programme aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse. PANTS was an acronym for: Privates are private; Always remember your body belongs to you; No means no; Talk about secrets that upset you; and Speak up, someone can help.

The partnership had made progress in launching the Contextual Safeguarding Strategy, which addressed risks faced by children and young people outside their families, such as in their communities, schools, and neighbourhoods. It involved engaging with the environments where harm occurred and implementing measures like improving street lighting to enhance safety.

The partnership had a multi-agency quality assurance schedule, which involved conducting audits to identify strengths and areas for development. Recent audits had focused on allegations against people in positions of trust, leading to recommendations and improvements in processes. An independent scrutineer had conducted an annual review of the functioning of the Safeguarding Adult Board, Safeguarding Children's Board and Executive Leadership Group, with findings summarised in the annual report.

The partnership will continue to work with children and young people, with new areas of focus including transitional safeguarding, which addressed the transition of children into adulthood, particularly those with safeguarding or additional needs.

Members thanked the safeguarding teams for their report.

Members asked how the positive feedback from the Ofsted inspection can be leveraged to continue innovating in safeguarding services for children and families. Officers responded that the positive feedback reflected the multi-agency work and that the partnership will take forward the recommendations from Ofsted, as well as findings from other inspections, to inform training, practice guidance, and priority groups. It was reiterated that Children's Services and the Local Authority were one part of the Safeguarding Partnership, along with the Police and ICB. Later in the calendar year (29 April 2024 to 3 May 2024) there was a CQC and Ofsted joint Area SEND inspection of Hillingdon Local Area Partnership which was also taken into account.

Members noted concerns about capacity, communication, and consistency.

On capacity, Members noted the stretched situation due to the number of referrals and support needs, particularly in mental health and the busy MASH team. Members sought assurance that everything possible was being done despite these challenges. Officers acknowledged the capacity challenges across the sector, including police, health, and local authority children's services. There had been a 35-40% increase in demand for children's services post-pandemic, which had now stabilised at a 29-30%

increase compared to pre-pandemic levels. The focus was on early intervention and the stronger family model to manage demand and support families before issues escalated. This involved collaboration with schools, health, police, social care, and early intervention teams to address issues early and proportionately.

On communication and consistency, officers emphasised the importance of consistency in applying practice guidance and best practice models across all agencies. Officers also highlighted the multi-agency approach to ensure that guidance was understood, well-communicated, and impactful. Regular audits and measurements were conducted to ensure the effectiveness of implemented practices.

Members inquired about the outcome of the local area partnership inspection for SEND, which took place at the end of April and beginning of May. Officers explained that the outcome of the inspection had not been included in the report as it occurred after the reporting period. However, a multi-agency plan to respond to the recommendations, which needed to be submitted to the DfE, was being developed and would be available by mid-October. Officers were working closely with the ICB on this.

Members asked about the quality assurance process and what happened if safeguarding practices fell short of expectations. Officers explained that each audit generated recommendations and findings, which were reported to the safeguarding board (either the children's board or the adults' board). These were followed up and there was a plan associated with each audit. Significant concerns were escalated immediately, while other findings formed part of a related action plan.

Members asked about the priority of educational safeguarding. Officers clarified that the new priority referred to the creation of a new education safeguarding sub-group with representatives from various educational sectors (including primary, secondary, EYFS) to ensure feedback from schools and appropriate dissemination of partnership work.

Members raised two further lines of questioning. The first concerned young people who may not have a voice, such as those in criminal gangs or those with disabilities. The second focused on multi-agency safeguarding training and how to equip parents with soft skills to protect young people from issues like social media exploitation.

On young people without a voice, officers explained that a whole stream of work had been done around behaviour as a form of communication for children with disabilities. Multi-agency practice guidance had been reviewed and updated around working with children with disabilities, and resources were available on the website. The 'You Said, We Did' initiative had been translated into PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) to engage directly with children with disabilities. The views of children in residential placements had also been considered.

On engaging with parents, awareness-raising activities were published online and circulated via schools, the stronger communities teams, and faith-based sectors. Specific sessions for parents were planned as part of the PANTS campaign, coordinated with schools and children's centres.

Members asked about initiatives addressing child sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and how these were communicated to the community. Members also inquired about early intervention for at-risk children who did not meet statutory review criteria. Officers responded using the example of the PANTS campaign, which included

free training sessions for parents, schools, and professionals. This was supported by Dinosaur story books. There was an upcoming conference where parents could attend and meet with the NSPCC. Information was circulated via regular newsletters. Every child attending secondary school in Hayes had been asked to complete a survey on how safe they feel in the community, and there was an adapted version for parents.

Officers emphasised that the safeguarding partnership included the Local Authority, police, and ICB. All documents, including the report, were publicly available. A link to the website would be included in the minutes for access to materials and resources (<https://hillingdonsafeguardingpartnership.org.uk/>). Signing up for the newsletters and training was also encouraged.

Members asked about the quality assurance process and the handling of allegations against staff involved with children and volunteers. Officers explained that allegations against the Chair of Governors should go straight to the LADO. The audit findings included recommendations for structural improvements in data capturing.

Members also inquired about the handling of FGM in the borough. Officers noted a large project undertaken with the National Centre for FGM, resulting in nationally available training through the FGM centre's website. The partnership worked with Border Force to raise awareness and provide opportunities for help. International Day of the Girl Child was upcoming and would focus on identifying and recognising FGM risks.

Members inquired about the new fostering offer. The Chair noted that this was considered through the Corporate Parenting Panel which reported to the Committee through its minutes. Officers briefly mentioned that the new fostering offer had been launched this year and was detailed on the Council's website. The offer was comprehensive and aimed to attract more foster carers.

Members highlighted the increase in agency and lesser qualified staff managing complex situations without necessary skills or training in schools. Officers responded that the LADO had increased training capacity to ensure schools and agencies understood safe recruitment processes. Additionally, there was an ongoing effort to increase capacity within education safeguarding work, which would be reported on in the next year. Officers added that the new working together guidance from December 2023 specified that the education sector should be a statutory partner in safeguarding, joining the local authority, police, and ICB. This inclusion aimed to address capacity issues and improve safeguarding practices. It was noted that capacity was not always about numbers of people but about different approaches, training and procedures.

Members asked if the Council was involved in a recent case reported about a primary school. Officers explained that the annual report included themes and patterns identified throughout the year. The Council was aware of the case.

Members inquired about support for parents and carers who may have experienced safeguarding issues themselves and how they can be supported in safeguarding their own children. Officers explained that the local authority provided support and advice to young people who had experienced neglect or abuse, even after they turned 18 and until they were 25. The 'think family approach ensured that assessments consider the child's context, the parents, and the wider environment. Historical abuse disclosures were handled through established processes between the local authority and police, with support services available for parents.

Members asked about the key recommendations from the independent scrutineer's review, specifically on strengthening multi-agency collaboration and improving early intervention, and their implementation. Officers highlighted the focus on ensuring education representation within the safeguarding partnership. This included the inclusion of education leaders in the sub-groups, and improved links between the education safeguarding sub-group and various networks. Police representation at sub-groups had also been strengthened. There was more equal responsibility of chairing the sub-groups. The ICB designated nurse chaired the child sexual abuse sub-group for example. One ongoing challenge was the availability of a multi-agency data set to inform strategic work, which was being addressed. This was a challenge due to different ways that different partners collated data. Work had been done to develop the LEAP website.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Was reassured that the partnership continued to provide leadership and scrutiny of the safeguarding arrangements for Hillingdon residents;**
- 2. Was updated regarding the way in which the partnership had responded to the challenges posed by changing local, national and international contexts;**
- 3. Was assured that local learning was identified to enhance and strengthen safeguarding practice;**
- 4. Was informed of the strategic priorities for safeguarding for 2024-2025; and**
- 5. Delegated comments to the Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chair, and in consultation with the Opposition Lead.**

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

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel were noted.

It was also noted that the structure of the meetings and the presentation of the reports were currently under review.

The Chair highlighted that the health representatives had noted that Hillingdon had the best Corporate Parenting Panel that they had attended and commended the inclusion of young people in the meetings. This was acknowledged and celebrated by the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel be noted

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

Members considered the Forward Plan.

Members noted that the Youth Justice Plan which was scheduled for October Cabinet.

Members raised a query regarding the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, and whether this

	<p>would include anything on the CQC and Ofsted joint Area SEND inspection of Hillingdon Local Area Partnership, given that the response to the inspection was expected in mid-October and the SEND Sufficiency Strategy was expected to be on the Committee's agenda for November. This would be looked into.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan</p>
29.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>Members considered the Work Programme.</p> <p>It was noted that witness session 4 of the Committee's review into Persistent Absenteeism had taken place in August. Members noted that this was a very insightful and enlightening session. Minutes from this session were being finalised and would be circulated to Members.</p> <p>A possible witness session with parents and carers was highlighted and this was being explored.</p> <p>Members suggested that officers compile the minutes from each witness session and share with Members prior to the next Committee, to inform discussion on possible findings, conclusions and recommendations.</p> <p>Members asked about the SEND Strategy update and whether this would include anything on the CQC and Ofsted joint Area SEND inspection of Hillingdon Local Area Partnership.</p> <p>Members also noted the Youth Offer update, and asked if this would include an audit of activities in different areas. It was noted that any additional information could be requested following the November Committee if necessary. Members highlighted the need for information on activities in specific areas, noting that while some information was available on the Council's website, it was not comprehensive for all areas. It was proposed to ask for a snapshot of the Council's offerings to young people for a specific month, such as September, to be included to provide a clearer picture.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee considered the report and agrees any amendments</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.