

Minutes

EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

9 February 2012

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



HILLINGDON
LONDON

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Catherine Dann (Chairman), Judith Cooper (Vice-Chairman), David Benson Lindsay Bliss, Peter Curling, John Hensley, Susan O'Brien, John Riley</p> <p>Witnesses Present: David Fry – Service Manager - Children's Resources, Roy Stewart – Independent Adoption Adviser</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Linda Sanders, Corporate Director – Social Care, Health & Housing, Merlin Joseph – Deputy Director, Children & Families, Anna Crispin - Chief Education Officer, Sherifa Prince – Senior Performance & Intelligence Officer, Steve Buckingham Performance and Intelligence Manager, Gill Brice – Democratic Services</p>	
63.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Tony Little.</p>	
64.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING. (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 January 2012 were agreed as a correct record following an amendment to the minute on the Funding for Universal Careers Guidance Update shown in italics below:</p> <p><i>'Officers introduced the report, which provided an updated requested by a previous meeting on funding of universal careers guidance. The committee was advised that changes in statutory duties as detailed in the Education Bill would led to a transfer of responsibility for securing impartial careers guidance. It is anticipated that from September 2012 schools will assume this responsibility and that a new 'all-age' careers service would be launched in April 2012.</i></p> <p>A member asked whether officers had been in discussion with schools to advise them of the change and that they would have to but in the services.</p> <p>Officers advised that discussions had been undertaken with schools <i>with regard to the changes</i>. Guidance had also been provided to them. It was the expectation that the <i>similar</i> guidance would be provided to Local Authority's (LA's) <i>setting out revised statutory expectations which will focus on LAs providing support to vulnerable young people and monitoring and tracking their progress.'</i></p>	<p>Action by</p> <p><i>Gill Brice</i></p>

65.	STANDARDS AND QUALITY IN EDUCATION (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)	Action by
	<p>Officers introduced the report providing the committee with an overview of the information contained in the report. This was a good news story in relation to the academic qualifications of a majority of children and young people in Hillingdon Schools.</p> <p>Officers explained that exam results had improved over the last seven consecutive years, attainment continuing to rise from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4 (KS4), in line with or above the national average. Support was continuing in schools to increase the positive outcomes for pupils in Hillingdon Schools.</p> <p>The committee was informed that for the first time the report included information on Adult Learning Services and showed that outcomes in this area were continuing to rise.</p> <p>In answer to a question raised in relation to the school that was shown to be inadequate, officers advised that a further OFSTED inspection had shown that this school was now satisfactory and the Teacher management was now good.</p> <p>A member asked whether it would be possible to provide the attainment figures for schools by constituency. Officers agreed to provide the committee with the attainment figures by constituency.</p> <p>In answer to a question in regards to the results by gender in Maths & English officers informed the committee that they were working with all schools to ensure that outcomes improved for all young people.</p> <p>A member asked whether there needed to be a priority given to children with special educational needs.</p> <p>Officers advised that schools were directly responsible for raising the attainment of all young people in Hillingdon Schools. The Local Authority had regular meetings and received feedback from schools for children with special educational needs.</p> <p>A query was raised in relation to Table 11, officers were asked to check the figure in the last row of the table and inform members of the committee if this was correct.</p> <p>In answer to an issue raised in relation to exam equivalents, members were informed that these were included in the figures. The changes to the national qualifications being bought in at the end of the year were mostly included in the range of qualifications provided at Key Stage 4. This list included alternative qualifications and a list of accredited providers that fell within these standards. In relation to Maths, schools would be expected to enter pupils at an appropriate level on how they had performed previously and young person's ability.</p> <p>A member stated that they were delighted to see the improvement of Looked After Children, but those with Special Educational Needs were below the level expected. The information does not show the hard work being put in this area was there anyway of showing this.</p>	<p><i>Gill Brice</i> <i>Sherifa Prince</i> <i>Steve Buckingham</i></p>

	<p>Officers advised the committee that children with Special Educational Needs had very individual statements and the information included those with severe disabilities. Data was available to break this down further and officers agreed to provide this information to committee members. Priorities for SEN children were identified and built in to service and team plans, this ensured future priorities were translated into future actions.</p> <p>Resolved – That the report be noted.</p>	
66.	<p>FIRST WITNESS SESSION - ADOPTION PERMANENCE (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p>	<p>Action by</p>
	<p>The Chairman welcomed the witness to the meeting to provide the committee with information about its review on adoption.</p> <p>Roy Stewart a Social Work Consultant and David Fry provided the review with the following information:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee received a presentation, which covered 3 broad headings in relation to the History, Legal Framework and Policy context in relation to Adoption. • Reference was made to the Munro and Family Justice Review (FJR), which set out a number of recommendations. • One of the recommendations suggested that it would easy to achieve a 55 week timescale for the average adoption case. • There were a number of reasons why this might not be achievable. • The performance information provided included Adoption Orders (AO), Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and Residence Orders (RO) and showed that the total number of Permanence Orders (PO) had risen. • The main focus of the Government review being undertaken was to speed up permanency for children. • The national review for permanency for children would depend on the successful recruitment of prospective adopters. • Hillingdon was heading in the right direction on achieving the statutory timescales and acting on meeting some of the objectives in light of the national debate. • The way in, which Hillingdon operated in relation to recruitment of adopters, would be paramount. • The recruitment process raised a number of issues some of these were exclusions as adopters, stability of placements, pre course work to include needs of children and criminal convictions. • Timescales for permanency was an important factor • Permanency and placements needed to be twin tracked to ensure that there was no delay for the placement of a child. • The first point of contact for prospective adopters was through the contact centre. • After the initial enquiry a permanency professional welcomed the family and provide information. 	<p><i>Gill Brice</i> <i>David Fry</i></p>

- Once information had been provided to the family if they wished to continue an Adoption Team member would make a visit to undertake an early stage screening.
- The prospective adopters would then attend preparation groups to provide in depth information, which provided information on case scenarios and the types of children that come up for adoption.
- These preparation groups needed to provide information on additional needs that a child being adopted may have.
- Adoption was not always a straightforward process as there may be sibling groups, children with complex medical needs and contested adoption.
- A home study assessment was undertaken of prospective adopters that wished continue once they had attended the preparation groups.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Were the timescale for permanency being put forward realistic.
- The timescale being put forward made no allowance for the more complex or contested adoptions.
- Prospective adopters may benefit from undertaking a fostering role initially.
- Concerns about the Courts taking on the work currently undertaken by Adoption Panels.
- If a prospective adopter's accommodation was considered unsuitable would they be looked at as a priority either in private or social housing?
- Would a family be moved if they were suitable adopters but their accommodation was not suitable.
- Were there any restrictions on the age of prospective adopters?
- What was the essential difference between an AO and a SGO?
- Was safeguarding sufficient in relation to SGO's to meet the policy to ensure a child's safety.
- Were Social Workers trained on how to conduct themselves when attending Court as they often had not dealt with a case from the beginning and the Court report had been prepared for them?

Officers responded to the points raised as follows:-

- The optimum period for a home study to be completed was 3 – 4 months.
- There may be times when this timescale was not met due to the prospective adopters taking a break from the assessment.
- Achieving the timescales for permanency would depend on the successful recruitment of prospective adopters.
- There may be a number of reasons why this was unable to be met, especially where further information or reports were required and whether an adoption was being contested.

- A meeting with local Court officers had been set up to discuss the process and how the timescales for permanency could be met.
- Time and resources needed to be provided to support adopters at the first point of placement to ensure the management of the placement the attachment of a child to the family.
- With fostering support was always available, but with adoption once an adoption order had been granted support was not provided by the Local Authority.
- There was a significant difference in moving from fostering to adoption.
- Adoption Panels focus on a child's needs, in moving this part of the process to the Courts may not necessarily speed up the process.
- There was guidance available in relation to accommodation but this would not necessarily be an obstacle. If accommodation was inadequate this would not stop someone applying to be adopters.
- Housing was one of the considerations that apply in some places. It would be difficult to deliver a need for housing but a question that could be raised as a challenge.
- Housing was an important issue that had been highlighted and would enable sibling groups to be accommodated in suitable social housing, but would be at a cost.
- A tenancy review would be undertaken in the next months and perhaps adoption could be looked at as a factor for priority in Housing when looking at the tenancy strategy.
- There was no age criterion for adopters and each family was assessed on merit.
- AN SGO would be sought where there was already a relationship with a child and there was an attachment and care was being provided in a safe and proper way.
- There was a statutory obligation to consider children remaining with birth family. The threshold for SGO's was no lower than for AO's.
- Officers informed the committee that Hillingdon has very good Social Workers and case notes were produced. Counsel was always in attendance at hearings and Managers also attend. There was a lot of debate outside of the Court hearing. Training was provided, which included role play.

The Chairman thanked officers and the Independent witness for attending the meeting and providing information for the review.

The committee agreed to the following witness for the next meeting

- Independent Adoption Chairman
- Legal Adviser to the Adoption Panel.
- Adopters
- Officer from CAFCAS

Resolved - That the information provided as part of the witness session be used to form part of the evidence of the review.

67.	<p>FORWARD PLAN 2011/2012 (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>The committee received a report setting out the items on the Forward Plan relating to Education & Children's Services.</p> <p>Resolved – That the items on the Forward Plan be noted.</p>	
68.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME 2011/2012 (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>The work programme was amended for the 20 March meeting to change the Second Review – Witness Session to '2' not '1'.</p> <p>As the next meeting was going to be the last witness session for the review on adoption it was suggested and agreed that the report on the Quarterly Child Social Care Audit Update 2010/11 be put back to the April meeting</p> <p>Resolved – That the Work Programme be updated as agreed.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p><i>Gill Brice</i></p>
<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.45 pm.</p>		

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Gill Brice on 01895 250693. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.