

## Minutes

### CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

15 July 2015

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



	<p><b>Committee Members Present:</b> Councillors Jane Palmer (Chairman), Teji Barnes, Jem Duducu, Tony Eginton, Duncan Flynn, Becky Haggard, Judy Kelly, Peter Money, Jan Sweeting (Labour Lead) and Mr Tony Little.</p> <p><b>LBH Officers Present:</b> Vince Clark (Assistant Director, Children's Social Care), Nikki Cruickshank (Interim Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance), Sarah Hydrie (Assistant Internal Audit Manager), Peter Malewicz (Finance Manager, Children and Young People Services), Tony Zaman (Director Adult Social Services / Director Children &amp; Young People Services (Interim)) and Jon Pitt (Democratic Services Officer)</p>
14.	<p><b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. Nick Denys (Vice-Chairman), with Cllr. Judy Kelly substituting.</p>
15.	<p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THE MEETING</b> (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>No Declarations of Interest were made.</p>
16.	<p><b>MATTERS NOTIFIED IN ADVANCE OR URGENT</b> (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>No matters had been notified in advance or as urgent.</p>
17.	<p><b>TO CONFIRM THAT ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE</b> (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all agenda items were Part I and would be discussed in public.</p>
18.	<p><b>TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE 2015</b> (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>Members requested that the minutes for the work programme item be updated to reflect that officers had provided a figure for the number of permanent management posts within children's social care that had been filled. This has stood at ten on the date of the June Committee meeting.</p>

**Resolved: That:**

**1. Subject to the above addition, the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2015 be agreed as a correct record.**

19. **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Officers introduced a report to provide the Committee with details of the Children and Young People's Social Care Service Improvement Plan (SIP). The Plan provided an overview of the key areas of activity and details of planned improvements.

At the March 2015 meeting, the Committee had been informed that the Ofsted Plan to address recommendations from the previous inspection had been concluded and that ongoing work would be transferred to a new Service Improvement Plan. The development of the Plan had taken into account national policy and legislation and the report of the Ofsted Chief Inspector.

The Report of the Chief Inspector, published in March 2015, had outlined a number of key characteristics that had been judged to be good. These included 'strong leaders and managers have a relentless focus on outcomes for children' and 'managers have a discernible grip on cases at all times.' These had formed a basis for the development of the Plan, which aimed to ensure improved service delivery using an iterative and sustainable approach.

It was noted that the SIP was based upon six key principles. All open cases were required to be supported by a plan and, where required, permanency arrangements also needed to be made in a timely manner. There were also challenges in relation to legislation regarding permanency and the Public Law Outline as legal requirements in relation to these areas had been tightened.

The SIP provided a framework of seven workstreams that would address the range of challenges and improvement activity within the service. Four of the workstreams set out the structure of the services provided. There was now dedicated project management support available to assist with development and delivery of the SIP. An officer had been seconded from Finance and would be working full time on the Plan.

Officers advised that there were now greater expectations of how well Children's Services identify, manage and support children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), gang violence and radicalisation. The 'Staying Put' legislation also had an impact on service delivery. This increased the age that Looked After Children were entitled to remain in their foster placements from 18 to 21. Unaccompanied Asylum seeker children arriving at Heathrow also presented a challenge as Hillingdon had responsibility for providing services to unaccompanied and asylum seeking children and young people. These factors had been considered during development of the Plan.

Staff stability and the management structure were considered to be essential to the Plan. To ensure good management oversight, a flatter management structure had been developed. This involved increasing the number of Team Managers, with a maximum number of seven social workers reporting to each. A layer of management below Team Manager level had also been removed.

The SIP was considered to be a 'live' document and the Committee would be provided with an update on progress once a quarter. Officers reflected that the Service was much more stable than it had been a year ago and had improved significantly. It was

anticipated that it would be a 'good' service by the end of the next financial year.

Members reiterated concerns, previously expressed at the April 2015 meeting, that some of the targets and deadlines within the SIP had changed and requested that a traffic light system be adopted to demonstrate progress, as was commonly used in other Council reports. Within the Action Plan, it was asked that, where available, the latest data should be provided e.g. the number of reviews of audits. There was also concern that the titles of some of the work areas had changed and that changes made to the SIP had not been clearly articulated, as had been requested at the April meeting.

The Members considered that the format of the SIP made it difficult for the Committee to monitor progress. Members stated that it had been acknowledged that the report presented to the Committee in April 2015 was not user friendly. They raised further concerns about the changes that had subsequently been made and requested that any changes made should be highlighted. One example of such a change was that the timescales had changed for a defined response where Domestic Violence was a risk factor. A further example was that the report on the effective parenting assessment service had been previously listed under workstream 3 and was no longer included. It was also requested that the future quarterly updates provided to the Committee focus on actions that were due to be undertaken in the next six months. Officers were commended for the work made to improve the service, but this did not detract from the fact that clearer information was required in order for the Committee to effectively monitor the progress made.

Officers advised that the separate Ofsted Improvement Plan was designed to address the previous Ofsted report. The SIP had been developed subsequently in order to identify areas for improvement. It was agreed that targets should normally be set and kept, but that some had been unrealistic and had therefore needed to be changed. Measurable outcomes were in the process of being finalised and it was confirmed that a traffic light system would be adopted and used alongside pie charts in order to provide a clear overview of progress made. Changes would be made to the SIP to reflect the evolving nature of service delivery, for example, due to changing national issues or legislation. The version of the SIP presented to the Committee in April had been a draft, although it was noted that there had been incorrect labelling of the report as 'final'. In relation to the changed titles of some workstreams, this had been done to provide greater clarity. Officers advised that the Social Care Improvement Action Plan was not intended to be a performance report and that including too much data in this document could be confusing. If required, a separate performance report could be developed.

Officers informed the Committee that further progress had been made in the recruitment of permanent staff that had led to reduced reliance on agency staff. The initial focus had been on ensuring stability within the service, that training needs were met and that Hillingdon was able to make a good offer to potential recruits in terms of caseloads, staff morale and career progression. Following recruitment advertising work with Penna, further recruitment would be undertaken in the autumn. Although there remained a significant number of interim staff working within Children's Services, this was not considered to be significant concern. This was because staff sometimes chose to retain interim status even though they remained with the Council in the longer term. The majority of such staff had been employed for over a year.

A Member asked whether Hillingdon was one of 22 London Boroughs that had just signed up to a scheme in relation to the pay and retention of social work staff. Officers advised that the Council had not signed up to the scheme as the Council leadership was of the opinion that the Council should not agree to limits in terms of the offer it

could make to potential employees as this could impact on the ability to deliver statutory services.

The Committee questioned whether there were opportunities for social workers and foster carers to provide feedback on their experiences. Officers advised that there were a number of opportunities available. For social workers, this included regular one-to-one meetings and group learning sessions. Foster carers each had a dedicated social worker and also had the opportunity to provide feedback through the Foster Carer's Forum and as part of the Annual Fostering Review.

In response to a Member question that asked whether the service would be considered good by March 2016 and how this would be maintained, officers considered that it was likely that the service would be good if everything set out in the action plan had been implemented. They reflected that significant progress had been made in the previous twelve months. Once the service was considered to be good it would then look to develop towards a position where it could be considered to be outstanding.

Members asked whether officers were confident that all vacancies would be filled during the forthcoming recruitment campaign and also questioned how the new management structure was flatter than the previous structure. It was confirmed that the structure was flatter as the level of management below team manager had been removed. This and the recruitment of additional team managers had enabled social workers to report directly to team managers. There were also now more opportunities for social workers to move through practice grades as they gained experience, without the need to become a manager. In relation to recruitment, it was difficult to predict the percentage of posts that would be filled by permanent staff, but it was anticipated that a figure of 70 - 75% would be achievable and that 80% would be excellent.

The Chairman commended officers for the improvement work undertaken to date and thanked Cllr. Sweeting for her attention to detail in her work to compare the reports presented at the April and June meetings of the Committee.

**Resolved: That:**

- 1. Officers to consider how to improve the clarity of information provided in future update reports on the Social Care Improvement Plan, including the use of a 'traffic light' system to monitor progress.**
- 2. An update report on the Service Improvement Plan would be presented at the October 2015 meeting of the Committee.**
- 3. The report be noted.**

20. **BUDGET PLANNING REPORT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2016/17** (*Agenda Item 7*)

Officers presented the 2016/17 Budget Planning Report for Children, Young People and Learning Services. This was the first of two opportunities within the budgetary planning cycle for the Policy Overview Committee to consider issues relating to budget planning for 2016/17. The report set out the main financial issues facing the service, the work being undertaken to overcome them and the response to legislative changes. The second report, due to be considered by the Committee in January 2016 would set out detailed budget proposals, which would first be presented to Cabinet.

It was noted that the current forecast for 2016/17 was for a Council savings requirement of £20.3 million. Officers were working to identify potential savings and it was anticipated that there could be some frontloading in cuts of funding from the

Government. However, until the Government announced the final amount of funding that the Council would receive in December 2015, the final funding position would not be fully known. It was noted that the Government's recent Summer Budget had added defence spending to the list of protected budgets and that cuts would therefore have to come from other areas, with local government being one possible area.

The Council remained in a strong position to deal with future budgetary challenges, due to having an accumulated balance of £40.4 million at the end of 2014/15 and the robust budget challenge process that was utilised. An initial budget challenge session had been held and a second session was due to take place in the autumn. The embedding of the Council's Transformation programme was helping services to meet budgetary challenges and all services had had their delivery models reviewed.

The Education Service had identified budget savings for 2015/16 totalling £240,000. The service was confident that these would be delivered and the capital programme was dealing with pupil growth through school expansions. The rate at which schools were converting to Academy status was slowing down, although the current Education and Adoption Bill could lead to an increase in conversions. It was also noted that there was a national shortage of teachers and especially of headteachers.

The Department for Education had indicated that they would be investigating the National Funding Formula. Funding of schools was currently not standardised across the country, although since 2014, the Government had ensured that each local authority received a minimum of the average level of funding per pupil compared to the national average. This had resulted in receipt of an additional £155,000 of funding.

Within Children's Social Care, 2014/15 had seen a high level of staff turnover from director level down. A significant programme of recruitment was underway and opportunities would also be taken to convert agency staff to permanent employment, where the staff wished to make this move. New ways of working were being implemented. The 'Staying Put' legislation, which increased the age that young people in foster care were entitled to stay with their foster carers from 18 to 21 also was having an impact on budgets. Additional New Burden funding of £56,000 for each of the next three years would be provided to Hillingdon. However, the costs to the Council were higher than the grant provided and the change reduced the number of foster carers available to care for other children and young people. Other challenges that could have a budgetary impact included issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation and child trafficking. It was also noted that there was evidence to suggest that the needs of Looked After Children were becoming more complex, which could result in higher placement costs.

Another factor that could impact on budgets included a provision in the Education and Adoption Bill for grants to be introduced to fund adoption between funding areas. Asylum also had an impact with the number of asylum seeking children (up to age 17) decreasing and the number aged over 18 increasing. This increase was attributed to the fact that there had previously been higher numbers of under 18 asylum seekers and this group had now become adults. Grant funding provided by the government had decreased.

Officers cautioned that there were lots of challenges facing the Children's Services budget and that there were a number of factors that were beyond the control of the Council, such as the 'Staying Put' legislation.

Committee Members expressed concern that it would be difficult to make budgetary plans as it was not known what the extent of the reduction in Government funding

would be. Officers agreed that this was correct but said that historically, the Council had been good at accurately predicting how much funding would be received and that the £40 million that the Council had in reserve would allow it to deal with the unexpected. A Government Spending Review was due to be undertaken in the autumn, after which there would be a clearer picture of where cuts were likely to be made. The Review was due for publication on 10/11 December 2015, ahead of the Council's draft 2016/17 being considered by Cabinet on 17 December.

A Committee Member questioned whether it would be realistic for Children's Services to make the identified budget savings of nearly £1 million and how these could be realised given that a number of factors were outside the Council's control. It was asked what would happen if the savings could not be achieved. Officers advised that alternative methods of providing services and how to improve value for money were being investigated and that this would help to achieve the savings required.

The Chairman thanked officers for the comprehensive overview of the budgetary situation that had been provided to the Committee.

**Resolved: That:**

- 1. The report be noted.**

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

A Member raised a concern that a report on the School Improvement Plan due to be considered by Cabinet on 23 July 2015 did not contain information about secondary schools that were under consideration for expansion. This was of concern as the Member had understood that some of these places were required for September.

It was noted that an item in relation to Education Travel Plans was due to be considered by Cabinet in September 2015. This had been added to a version of the Forward Plan that had been published after dispatch of the papers for the Children, Young People and Learning POC meeting.

**Resolved: That:**

- 1. Concerns raised in relation to the Cabinet School Improvement Plan report be passed to relevant officers for a response to be provided.**
- 2. The Forward Plan be noted.**

22. **WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16** (*Agenda Item 9*)

Members requested that consideration be given to inviting additional witnesses to attend one of the witness sessions for the Committee's first review of 2015/16, the title of which was "The effectiveness of early help to promote positive outcomes for families." It was proposed that a representative from Bell Farm Christian Centre be invited in addition to a representative from a Children's Centre in the north of the Borough.

**Resolved: That:**

- 1. Officers to investigate inviting additional witnesses, as requested by the Committee, as part of the first Major Review of 2015/16.**
- 2. The Work Programme be noted.**

	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.05 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Jon Pitt on 01895 277655. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.