

## Minutes

**Education & Children's Services Policy Overview  
Committee  
11 February 2010  
Meeting held at High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW**



### **Members Present:**

Councillors Catherine Dann (Chairman), Brian Crowe (Vice-Chairman), Peter Curling, Judith Cooper, Anita MacDonald, and John Hensley.

**Officers Present:** Natasha Dogra.

### **Others Present:**

Tony Little (Roman Catholic Diocesan Representative), Jane Graver (Head of Care, Respite Unit), Paula Neil (Manager, Asylum Team LBH), and Dan Coombs (Uxbridge Gazette).

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTER COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING**

Councillors Catherine Dann, Judith Cooper, Anita MacDonald, & John Hensley and Tony Little declared personal interests in all items on the agenda due to their roles as school governors.

### **3. TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND ALL THOSE MARKED IN PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE**

All items were Part 1 and were considered in public.

### **4. TO RECEIVE AND AGREE THE MINUTES OF 11 JANUARY 2009**

The minutes were agreed by the Committee.

### **5. Review 2: CHILD TRAFFICKING – witness session 2.**

The Chairman welcomed external witnesses Jane Graver (Head of Care, Respite Unit) and Paula Reid (Manager, Asylum Team LBH).

Witnesses began their presentations to Committee by informing the Committee that the Asylum Team supported unaccompanied minors who ranged from under 16 year olds to 24 year olds. Many of these children were assessed as being victims of child trafficking and some pleaded asylum. The awareness around child trafficking had risen to a higher level and as a result the London Borough of Hillingdon was very proactive in their response to this activity. The level of understanding around child trafficking and the level of support available had developed significantly in the last few years. For example, it had been

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noted that profiles and patterns between trafficked children varied according to the differing ethnicities of the children.

Immigration was the first point of contact with the trafficked child. The Asylum Team worked very closely with Immigration at the Heathrow Port of Entry due to the need to provide intense support to the children in the first few days after arrival. The level of support available out-of-hours had also increased due to a larger capacity of staff available to respond to children arriving at Heathrow Airport.

Witnesses continued to explain the surroundings trafficked children were kept in. Staff at respite units worked very closely with the child to ensure that they were as comfortable as possible. Staff understood that the child would be frightened of their new surroundings and therefore treated the child with respect and care. The child was made to feel safe, but most children appeared withdrawn and traumatised at first.

Children were monitored at all times and accompanied in and around the centre. The profiling of the children allowed trends to be established, which led to fake stories being picked up early on. Children were usually told what to say by their traffickers and therefore it was difficult for staff to unveil the truth about their origin and purpose of their visit.

The Chairman thanked the Committee and opened the floor to questions. Members asked witnesses whether more children of a certain gender were trafficked. Witnesses said the children were mixed but a large proportion of the trafficked children were female. Witnesses said that some of these females would come into the respite unit pregnant or would become pregnant while in care.

Members asked witnesses whether the children wanted to be reunited with their families. Witnesses said that most children were afraid of returning home due to unpaid fees to traffickers. Children had been bought here on a promise of a better life and therefore did not want to return home. However, some children undergo 'voluntary removal' and are returned home accompanied by a social worker to ensure a safe reception at home.

Members asked witnesses how staff tackled children trying to escape respite units. Witnesses said that due to a combination of increased education around child trafficking and excellent communication between immigration, the police and the asylum team the information about each child was shared at fortnightly meetings. This allowed better intelligence, better sharing of information and less disruption of the assessment period when the child arrives. This in turn led to a reduction in the number of children escaping as their needs were anticipated and patterns were developed which were flagged up by staff to ensure certain children were monitored very closely.

Witnesses informed the Committee that there was a lack of support from the

<p>child's country of origin. It was possible for immigration to track down the route of the child, but the route was usually extremely long-winded and had taken months to complete. Therefore embassies of other countries were reluctant to help as it was difficult to prove that the child was there and the purpose of the child's visit.</p> <p>The Committee asked witnesses what improvements could be made. Witnesses said the London Borough of Hillingdon had done very well in developing the standard of the asylum service and the safeguarding of trafficked children. The development of the provision of resources had also helped this process. One area which needed developing was the level of training and support available for foster carers. Foster carers needed to be trained on the risks involved when a child tries to escape and how to monitor the child when they cannot be cared for by the carer. More training was needed in the early days following the fostering of a child. Witnesses informed the Committee that foster carers got an initial briefing but were not specifically trained in caring for trafficked children. Specific skills were necessary when working with this group of children which needed to be developed.</p> <p>Members asked witnesses whether there was a language problem when communicating with the child. Witnesses said that their staff were able to communicate with the children.</p> <p>Respite units had classrooms where children could be taught and a library where the children could further their knowledge. The cook in the unit was very creative and tried to involve the children as much as possible. Medical issues were dealt with very seriously and each child was screened for any medical issues relating to their country of origin. Children were assessed and only then allowed out of the centre alone, for example to travel to college. The units are funded by central government and the UKBA asylum fund.</p> <p>The Chairman thanked the witnesses and offered them the opportunity to leave. The Committee decided to include the following conclusions in their final report:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There was a need for better interagency communication. This would allow different agencies to share expertise and information.</li> <li>2. Training for foster carers needed to be developed.</li> <li>3. There was a desirability of cooperation, involvement and support from embassies of countries where children are being trafficked from.</li> </ol> <p><b>Agreed:</b>  <b>The Committee agreed to include the above conclusions in the final report of their review of Child Trafficking.</b></p>	<p><i>Natasha Dogra DCEO</i></p>
<p><b>6. FORWARD PLAN</b></p> <p>The Committee were directed to the Cabinet Report on Schools Budget to be</p>	

considered at the 18 February Cabinet meeting. The Committee agreed to send any comments for Cabinet to Natasha Dogra to relay on to Cabinet.

**The Committee agreed the Forward Plan**

**7. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee asked that the following information be supplied to Members:

1. School Entry (P 31) - Committee members requested a written report providing more information on the implications of having to find additional school entry places (cost and planning implications/ longer term impact on secondary schools). This would be an extra Agenda item at the 27th April POC Meeting Agenda.

*Chris  
Spencer,  
ECS*

2. SEN Out of Borough Placements ( P 23) - The Committee requested a written response from the Directorate clarifying why Option 1 has been turned down by the Schools Forum

*Debbie  
Haith,  
EYL*

3. Procurement Officer (P 49) - The Directorate was asked to explain why schools would not want the benefit of a Procurement Officer.

*Sarah Harty,  
F&R*

4. The Committee requested an update on the progress of Children's Centres - are they on track / are they delivering? This item was added to the 27th April POC Meeting Agenda.

*Debbie  
Haith,  
EYL*

**The Committee agreed the Work Programme.**

The meeting closed at 21.30