

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

21 September 2022



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Heena Makwana (Chairman), Roy Chamdal (Vice-Chairman), Kishan Bhatt, Tony Gill, Rita Judge, Peter Smallwood and Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Co-opted Member: Tony Little</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Alex Coman (Chairman of the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board), Gemma McNamara (Director - Service Finance & Transformation), Julie Kelly (Executive Director of Children's Services), Vikram Hansrani (Executive Director, Education and SEND), Lynda Poole (Head of School Place Planning and Improvement) and Anisha Teji (Democratic Services Officer)</p>
19.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>
20.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>Councillor Peter Smallwood declared a non-pecuniary in agenda item 7: Twice Yearly Schools Place Planning Report as he had recently been appointed a Governor at Whiteheath Infant School. He remained for the discussion of the item.</p> <p>Tony Little declared a non-pecuniary in agenda item 7: Twice Yearly Schools Place Planning Report as he was a Governor at Harlington School. He remained for the discussion of the item.</p>
21.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes from the meeting on 20 July 2022 be agreed subject to including apologies from Tony Little and noting the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. there was no further update on the deferral of the Families Hub report on the Cabinet Forward Plan.2. the Committee's agreed comments on the Council's Strategy 2022 – 26 would be circulated to Members.

22.	<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> <p>It was confirmed that all items would be heard in Part I.</p>
23.	<p>HILLINGDON SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022 (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The Chairman of the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board and the Executive Director of Children’s Services introduced the report on the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2021 – 22 and provided a detailed update on the work undertaken to support adults with support and care needs and vulnerable children and their families.</p> <p>The Committee heard about the actions in place to prevent abuse and neglect, the joint approach to safeguarding, the challenges and learning from the Covid - 19 Pandemic, partnership working and the focus on learning and development work. It was reported that the priorities for the Safeguarding Children Partnership for 2022 – 23 were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger Families • Child Sexual Abuse • Contextual Safeguarding <p>Shared Priorities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice Development Forum • Joint Strategic Safeguarding and Trafficking • Domestic Abuse • Self - neglect and capacity <p>Members welcomed the Safeguarding Partnership Communication and Engagement Strategy that involved children and young people rewriting sections of the website. Members were pleased to see the involvement of children and young people in shaping services.</p> <p>Questions were asked around children and young people acting as carers, work being done to tackle gang grooming and safeguarding concerns in education settings. It was explained that there were provisions specifically designed to support young carers including support groups and assessments were undertaken through the Stronger Families Hub where the appropriate support was identified and implemented. The Local Authority had provisions such as the AXIS Team and the partners work closely with the police and outreach teams focussing on prevention and early intervention for children being impacted by gang grooming and other forms of criminal exploitation. It was highlighted that there had been a decrease in the number of first-time entrants into the youth justice system which demonstrated the early intervention and identification mechanisms in place. Any concerns regarding education settings were raised by Ofsted and addressed directly with the education setting.</p> <p>In terms of contextual safeguarding and aspects of concentration such as peer on peer abuse, it was reported that raising awareness of contextual safeguarding in communities was a priority. There was an emphasis on early intervention and prevention prior to escalating.</p>

It was recognised that the Covid – 19 Pandemic had led to challenges and an increase in residents requiring support. Further information was requested on how the pressure on services had been accommodated and the increase in safeguarding activity on hidden harm had impacted a demand in services. It was confirmed that a family tree structure detailing all the different subgroups would be made available to Members. Nationally, there had been a change in services following the Pandemic and an increase in needs and hidden harm. This requirement was being addressed through shared learning from the Pandemic and adapting services and engaging with residents in different ways. Many of these ways worked better such as meetings with professionals and residents virtually. Creating community teams and hubs was also a good way to provide early intervention and support to residents and a multi-agency approach was being applied. It was also noted that there had been challenges in recruitment and staff retention and this was being explored.

During Member discussions, it was reported that the Stronger Families Portal was an interactive tool children services signposting anyone who needed support, information or advice. Once a resident or professional had completed an eform, the eform was uploaded automatically into the electronic recording system and this, in turn, which triggers notifications to relevant teams who assessed the information and made decisions on the next steps. There was also the option to call the Stronger Families Hub that offered a 24/7 triage and advice service.

In terms of coordinated approaches and interventions to meet resident needs, the steps being taken to mitigate challenges in the different services and the increase in domestic violence, it was explained that a coordinated response worked well and the Children Act placed a duty on professionals working in safeguarding to escalate concerns in the appropriate manner.

There was a clear pathway in the Stronger Families Hub portal that triggered relevant assessments. The Children Partnership Board was attended by statutory partners and other organisations such as GP representatives and NHS Primary care providers. All providers worked together to share information and identify needs early, address concerns and coordinate intervention.

The Committee commended the Partnership for its work on the Joint Strategic Safeguarding and Trafficking and Operation Warm Welcome.

It was confirmed that the number of cases reported for Child Protection and safeguarding pre-Pandemic and to date would be provided.

The Committee thanked officers and all the teams that had contributed to the comprehensive, complex and detailed report. It was noted that comparative numbers rather than percentages would be useful when comparing data and statements from the voice of children and young people were welcomed.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1. Noted the report and was assured that the partnership continues to provide leadership and scrutiny of the safeguarding arrangements for Hillingdon residents.**

2. Was updated regarding the way in which the partnership has responded to the challenges posed by changing local, national and international contexts.
3. Was informed of the strategic priorities for safeguarding for 2022-23.
4. Delegated to the Chairman, in conjunction with the DSO (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead) to agree comments to submit to Cabinet.

24.

2023/24 BUDGET PLANNING REPORT FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE (*Agenda Item 6*)

The Director - Service Finance & Transformation introduced the 2023/24 Budget Planning Report for services within the remit of the Committee.

Officers highlighted the challenges that the Council was working to address, including the reduction in government funding, the continuing impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and the significant inflationary pressures facing the nation. Examples of how the Pandemic continued to affect Council revenues.

Inflation was recognised as a larger challenge that officers were seeking to address through the identification of opportunities for more effective use of resources. It was reported that there had been an overspend of £85k in the Children, Families & Education portfolio. Moving forward, the Council would be looking to Central Government for additional funding to help further address such pressures.

In terms of services being transformed and how this was impacting the quality of services delivered, it was explained that through the Covid – 19 Pandemic there was learning which had now adapted the way services were delivered. This was an issue faced by all local authorities however the London Borough of Hillingdon had a strong record of being able to change and innovate services to be delivered in a cost-effective way. There was robust monthly monitoring of demand led budgets and an ongoing transformation programme in place. In Children’s Services early intervention was important and programmes such as the Stronger Families work was a cost effective way of delivering those services.

In relation to designated schools and ring-fenced budgets, it was confirmed that the DSG was a ring-fenced budget and there were a number of targets and savings that needed to be made to maintain the agreement with the Department for Education.

Having sufficiency was a key part of the safety valve agreement and there were plans in place to increase this in the Borough. It was acknowledged that children and young people would need acute provision and the safety valve agreement was around developing additional places in the Borough to meet the need. Whilst there was a strong offer for SEND transport, there was also active promotion of independent transport to support children and young people.

During Member questions it was noted that the Council was pressing Central Government for further funding and consistently did this. For example, with the increase in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, there had been regular communications with the Home Office and the Prime Minister’s office to ascertain the additional support available. There were also groups that lobbied Government to highlight the pressures facing local authorities.

In terms of the safety valve agreements and current pressures, it was acknowledged that savings targets needed to be met and the transformation project underway had an impact on the savings program. The Department for Education had developed a program called the better delivering better value scheme and there were a number of local authorities that had engaged in the process. There were two areas in the DSG work around capital work and the independent non maintained sector.

The Chairman confirmed that at the full Council meeting on 22 September 2022 there were motions and questions from the public on the matter of early years centres and these would be addressed then. It was also noted that any points raised on the fees and charges points fell outside of the Committee's remit and would be addressed at full Council.

Officers were thanked for putting the report together particularly considering the Covid-19 Pandemic, inflation and other pressures.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the financial context in which the 2023/24 budget setting process will take place in advance of detailed savings proposals being developed and approved at Cabinet in December 2022.

25. **TWICE YEARLY SCHOOL PLACES PLANNING REPORT** (*Agenda Item 7*)

The Executive Director, Education and SEND and Head of School Place Planning and Improvement introduced the update on School Place Planning.

An overview of the School Place Planning report was provided to the Committee. It was reported that primary rolls had continued the slight decline seen each termly census since May 2019, a total 3.1% decline in three years. Due to this decline in primary rolls, the local authority was liaising with three schools to confirm if Published Admissions Number (PAN) reductions should be proposed in Autumn 2022.

The Committee heard that in secondary schools, the number of children on roll had increased in line with projections. Further work was underway on the future planning to meet the forecast need for additional secondary school places and to ensure there would be sufficient secondary Year 7 places. The Committee also heard about special schools, Department for Education(DfE) and Priority School Building Programme 2 Projects, the dedicated schools grant (DSG) deficit recovery safety valve agreement, DSG projects and the Infant and Junior Amalgamation Policy.

During Member discussions, it was confirmed that further clarification on Lady Banks school capacity would be provided to Members.

In response to questions around the infant and junior amalgamation, it was noted that headteachers usually left due to retirement or pursuing other careers routes. It was confirmed that although there was a decrease in primary school intakes, the forecast for future planning always considered any potential spikes such as Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and schools were welcome to new arrivals in the Borough. The number of programmes taking place with school buildings and expansions was also noted. The Bishop Arden free school development was currently on pause pending review on how to proceed and whether there would still be a need for additional secondary schools places.

The DfE had a recommendation that Councils should hold at least 5% of unfilled

	<p>spaces and it was noted that in Hillingdon this had been well below the threshold. This year there was a 'wriggle room' of 3.4% of unfilled places at year seven and it was noted that there was now a use of bulge classes to fulfil the statutory duty.</p> <p>Clarification was sought on whether the location of the possible new school in the North of the Borough was going to solve the issue of getting good quality school places in the South of the Borough. It was explained that the reason for the 3.4% 'wriggle room' may have been due to schools wanting more children in their schools as this impacted school budgets. Whilst the 5% 'wriggle room' was not a statutory requirement and only a recommendation, some Members considered that this matter did not involve budgets and to have a reasonable amount of choice there needed to be a five percent 'wriggle room' of unfilled places.</p> <p>It was noted that the development in Harlington School would improve the offer in the South of the Borough. Further updates would be provided on the Bishop Arden project as it progressed.</p> <p>RESOVLED: That the Committee noted the update and action underway to support parents and schools and questioned officers about the update.</p>
26.	<p>CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL MINUTES (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>The minutes from the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 20 July 2022 were noted. The Committee was keen to involve young people with the Select Committee and hear their views.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee noted the Corporate Parenting Panel minutes.</p>
27.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>The following updates were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the SEND Strategy report would be presented to the Committee in November 2022 prior to Cabinet consideration. 2. Councillors Jan Sweeting, Tony Gill, Kishan Bhatt and Peter Smallwood would be attending the Youth Council meeting on 26 September 2022 on behalf of the Committee. 3. The Part II Ofsted report on Pride Academy would be considered at the November 2022 meeting. <p>RESOLVED: That the updates and work programme be noted</p>
28.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.43 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Anisha Teji on 01895 277655. Circulation of these minutes

is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.

The public part of this meeting was filmed live on the Council's YouTube Channel to increase transparency in decision-making, however these minutes remain the official and definitive record of proceedings.