

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

14 March 2023

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

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Heena Makwana (Chairman), Roy Chamdal (Vice-Chairman), Philip Corthorne, Tony Gill, Rita Judge, Peter Smallwood, and Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Anthony Madden (Head of Service, First Response, MASH and Out of Hours Social Work), Julie Kelly (Executive Director of Children's Services), Michael Hawkins (Interim Service Manager -Education Partnerships and School Improvement), Dan Kennedy (Corporate Director of Central Services), and Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p> <p>Also Present: Siobhan Appleton (Assistant Director for Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children and Children Looked After), Emma Kay (Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children (Hillingdon)/ CNWL Interim Head of Safeguarding Children), and Sian Thomas (Head of Children's Services, Hillingdon)</p>
68.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillor Kishan Bhatt with Councillor Philip Corthorne substituting.</p>
69.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>No interests were declared.</p>
70.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Members thanked officers for the minutes.</p>

	<p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed.</p>
71.	<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>
72.	<p>WITNESS SESSION 5 – PARTNERSHIP WORKING (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The Committee held its fifth witness session into its review of the Stronger Families Hub. This session focused on partnership working with health representatives. Witnesses in attendance were the Head of Service, First Response, MASH and Out of Hours Social Work; the Assistant Director for Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children and Children Looked After; the Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children (Hillingdon)/ CNWL Interim Head of Safeguarding Children), and the Head of Children’s Services for Hillingdon.</p> <p>The Head of Service, First Response, MASH and Out of Hours Social Work introduced himself and his role with the Stronger Families Hub. It was noted that this session related to partnership working with health representatives and that a future session would be held with education representatives. The partners worked with families who were under pressure, and also dealt with impacts of COVID-19 and the cost of living. Despite the challenges, the partners remained committed to providing support, and there was close collaboration between health partners and the Stronger Families Hub. The main source of referrals had come via the Police, with up to 11 officers on site within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH*) to enable the quick exchange of information. The second most referrals had come via health partners.</p> <p><i>(*MASH was the Stronger Families Hub's safeguarding element where professionals shared information quickly about police referrals of domestic abuse (Merlins) and referrals where there were concerns about a child's safety or welfare.)</i></p> <p>The Head of Children’s Services, CNWL, noted that their portfolio included children aged 0-19, health visiting, school nursing, child development centres, community paediatricians, children integrated therapy, occupational therapy, paediatric occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and language, children’s community nursing team and working with those with life-limiting conditions. Health representatives were a large partner of the Stronger Families Hub. The above noted services had been asked about their experiences with the Stronger Families Hub prior to this witness session, and the feedback was positive, despite some teething problems. Partners highlighted the benefit of the Stronger Families Hub as one forum for a range of issues, and this was linked to the early identification of needs. It was also noted that partners had a strong relationship with the Local Authority.</p>

The Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children (Hillingdon)/ CNWL Interim Head of Safeguarding Children noted that they worked with all children's services when they had safeguarding concerns and delivered training to staff. They line managed the MASH Health Practitioner within Hillingdon. There was lots of interaction with MASH and these services used the Stronger Families Hub a lot. The Named Nurse further noted the initial teething problems but that they were pleased with the work of the Stronger Families Hub.

The Assistant Director for Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Children and Children Looked After at CNWL NHS North West London worked in close collaboration with all health services including Primary Care, Primary Medical Care, Acute Trusts and Community Trusts. Part of their role was to ensure that health colleagues were discharging their safeguarding responsibilities appropriately. The Stronger Families Hub came under this remit. They noted that there had been issues for the Acute Trust with the online portal when initially launched but commended the Local Authority for its response to this. A sub-group has been established which had discussions around the initial operational issues with the online portal, which had helped to resolve some of these issues and to reduce anxieties. It was noted that there was still some work to do with Primary Medical Care via support for GPs in terms of accessing and using the portal. A positive aspect was the useful guidance document that had come out alongside the launch of the portal. This had been well received by Primary Care.

Members questioned how feedback was received from or on behalf of non-verbal children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). Witnesses noted that training was ongoing with key workers as well as social workers which included training on communication tools, such as parent-child observations for non-verbal children. Continuous improvement was reviewed on a four-weekly basis through one-to-one supervision, while there was also peer supervision and group supervision. There were also workshops taking place with partners. There was a reliance on universal services for information sharing, but once information was shared, the process was more streamlined than it was prior to the establishment of the Stronger Families Hub due to its one number, one email, one online portal that children, parents, carers and professionals can access.

Partners further noted that training was assertive in knowing that children with SEND were at higher risk of safeguarding concerns. This was linked to the Early Health notification.

Members questioned how feedback was received from young people after any case of safeguarding breach. Partners noted that there was a focus on getting better at obtaining feedback and that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) asked for evidence of this feedback. Reference was made to the Teddy Bear's picnic but it was noted that improvements were needed and so partners gave a partial assurance to the Committee on partners getting feedback from young people.

Members further highlighted other voluntary groups such as scouts and girl-guides, and sports teams as avenues for feedback or for direction to the Stronger Families Hub. Partners further noted Young Health Watch, the Children in Care Council, and the Child's Voice Panel as other avenues for feedback. Feedback was also received during the statutory SEND process. It was, however, noted that sometimes feedback was sought from the easier-to-reach groups as opposed to all groups. A possible future group for children with epilepsy was referenced as a potential new route for engagement as part of the plan for 2023.

Partners noted that for children with disabilities, when a referral was made, partners had close relationships to identify which professionals know that individual child well, for example a Speech Therapist or Occupational Therapist, who could identify their communication needs and identify which tools to use to get the child's voice heard.

Reference was made to Speech and Language therapists within the Youth Offending Service – these were key in the communication process and were often linked to undiagnosed cases of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Members asked about the challenges faced and what areas of improvement could be identified. Partners noted that quality assurance of referrals being made was one area to look at, as well as mental health services. On quality assurance, partners further noted that this was tracked, and there was practitioner-to-practitioner tracking where possible. This had led to less escalation to managers. Partners noted other partner organisations such as Border Force and noted an increase in quality in Early Help Assessments. Partners noted that the form on the online portal had been amended to be more concise, and now consisted of drop-down boxes. Further noted was the importance of ensuring that staff were supported in quality assurance.

Members referred to the next agenda item and asked if there was a capacity issue. Partners noted that some staff were on lean contracts and there were some vacancy issues around Paediatric Occupational Therapy, although this reflected a national issue. It was acknowledged that funds were tight but that an Asylum-Seeking Health Visitor would be beneficial as well as a Paediatric Occupational Therapist. It was noted that there was a struggle with the increase in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and that the number of referrals to the Child Development Centre for concerns regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were increasing. Creative and innovative ideas were often pursued as a way around capacity issues.

Members commended the more joined-up nature of the service with partners, and asked about any issues with data sharing between agencies and how these were overcome. Partners noted that GDPR should not be a barrier to keeping children safe. It was noted that the Stronger Families Hub was a consent-based service, and it was recommended through a review that parents and carers be better informed that consent meant to more than one agency. This was known as universal consent.

There was also a named nurse for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), who was trained in information-sharing. Data was provided through the Safeguarding Children Partnership for CAMHS. It was noted here that a CAMHS post within MASH would be beneficial.

Members asked the partners about their work with other Local Authorities and how this differed from its work with Hillingdon. Partners noted that most of their work was with Hillingdon and that the service being 24-hours was impressive, as not having to use emergency teams outside of core hours kept the quality of service high. Also, having the one front door was beneficial. Partners noted that there was not enough experience of other Boroughs to give an accurate comparison. Partners again referenced the earlier point about quality assurance as an area for improvement. It was noted that the voice of the child runs through all sub-groups, and this was something that Hillingdon did well.

Members asked about the percentage of children with additional needs being identified through ASQ checks, how many were missed, and where any were missed, what was done to bridge this gap, in particular between children with and without SEND. It was noted here that further information could be shared outside of the meeting.

Partners noted the importance of early identification, and that they worked with a designated officer for SEND. The multi-agency approach of the EHCP was noted, and there was good signposting to, for example, resources available in alternative languages. Partners noted that the multi-agency work around SEND was strong.

Members asked partners for their input into possible recommendations for the major review. Partners noted that there were concerns around new arrivals in hotels, and so an Asylum-Seeking Health Visitor would be beneficial in terms of early identification of needs. Partners also had concerns over the number of vacancies within their services. Investment into children's integrated therapy services was recommended, as was more focus on children with ASD. ASD navigators or pathways was suggested as a new approach to ASD. Stronger integration was needed between children's services and adult services, as well as the transition when young people move from children's services to adult services. The new Transition nurse was highlighted as a recent benefit. More focus on mental health provision and on neurodiversity support was recommended.

Members sought clarification on, and partners confirmed that, communication within the partners' services was good, but communication with other agencies was what required improvement. It was further noted here that quality assurance was a high priority for the Stronger Families Hub sub-group.

RESOLVED: That the Committee asked questions of the witnesses and noted the updated scoping report.

73.

ANNUAL EDUCATION STANDARDS (*Agenda Item 6*)

The Interim Service Manager – Education Partnerships and School Improvement introduced the item on Annual Education Standards. It was noted that outcomes had depressed nationally in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was highlighted that there was some strong performance among Early Years, however there were concerns around performance at Key Stage 5, especially in A Level results and especially when compared to other London Boroughs, although this was again in line with the national picture. There was an element of reverting back to pre-COVID performance levels, although there was also a national issue around attendance, which had knock-on effects on outcomes.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) numbers were referenced, and it was noted that there was good information sharing with schools, as well as a partnership with the London Borough of Ealing. It was noted that there were currently just over 100 NEETs, however there were lots of unknowns, for example where young people may have left the Borough but were still identified as unknown. It was noted that more capacity was needed as some staff were currently borrowed from the DWP. Mental health issues leading to young people becoming NEET was highlighted, and this was linked to the capacity issues and being able to hold conversations earlier in the academic year.

Members referenced page 7 of the report, which stated that 56 childminders had resigned from the sector since the start of the pandemic and asked about the impact this had had. Officers noted that some young people were difficult to engage with, and this was in part due to COVID-19, but schools were doing all that was expected of them to this end.

It was further noted that officers were tracking numbers of exclusions and suspensions, and reached out to schools where these numbers were high. Reference was made to the inclusion toolkit for early intervention and ensuring that the right steps were taken.

Members asked about the role of the Council in monitoring and evaluation and stepping in. Reference was made to previous questions submitted by the Committee for which answers were forthcoming.

Officers referenced the school improvement approach and the three-tier approach of universal, targeted and intensive. It was noted that this depended on the school type and for academies, the process would have instead involved the Regional Schools Commissioner. There were regular meetings with the CEOs of multi-academy trusts (MATs). Two new School Improvement Partners (known as Education Advisors in Hillingdon) had been appointed, and there was a Primary and Secondary Lead. 16 schools were listed on the Council's Schools At Risk Register at the end of 2021/22; this comprised of 8 academy schools and 8 maintained schools. It was noted here that concerns could be educational or financial.

Further to this, Members referenced section 1.6 Performance Outcomes of the report, and it was noted that there was a Regional Schools Commissioner for academies. Some schools were within Single Academy Trusts which presented challenges. There was still work to be done with schools at risk, and engagement improvements were also required. Members asked about receiving a sub-analysis of the data by age and ethnicity. Officers confirmed that this could be provided outside of the meeting.

Members referenced School Attendance Orders and asked for further information pertaining to resourcing issues. Officers confirmed that this could also be provided outside of the meeting.

Members asked about how the role of the Committee differed in relation to academies as opposed to maintained schools. Officers noted the more direct accountability over maintained schools and again referenced the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner in the accountability of academies. Officers re-iterated that the Council had a responsibility to all children, but that more engagement was needed. The focus on data had been skewed by COVID-19. Sessions had been run via the Primary Education Advisor on the topic of inspections, and sessions would be run on data.

Members asked about attainment for children with SEND and how it was ensured that targets were set appropriately. Officers noted that in interpreting SEND outcomes data, it was important to note that every child was different, and that attainment could be measured via certification, pathways or employment. Officers noted that challenge with increasing numbers of children with concerns of ASD. The need to upskill the education workforce was noted and part of this should be around higher expectations for children with SEND. It was noted that this had been impacted by COVID-19.

Members referenced the 3.5% of schools requiring improvement. It was noted that Early Years settings rated as Inadequate and Requires Improvement were encouraged to sign up for the Experts and Mentors programme. This was led by the Department for Education. Members asked officers for further information on Pen Green. Further information could be provided on this outside of the meeting.

Members referenced the Key challenges, which stated that there was a higher number of children starting Early Years provision with SEND concerns than pre-COVID. Officers noted that there were occasions of children displaying, for example, a communication delay or attention delay prior to coming into Early Years settings as opposed to as a result of COVID-19. There was also a staffing issue for Early Years settings, which was linked to training needs.

Members asked about the issue of repeat absences and the adequacy of sanctions and officers noted that this had not been raised as a concern by headteachers, and that there was a follow-through in terms of sanctions. The issue of absences in holiday seasons was raised. Officers noted that it was often the case that repeat absentees were known to headteachers, and often these cases were referred to the Stronger Families Hub to identify underlying

issues such as mental health and wellbeing, or travel costs. It was highlighted here that absence was a symptom not a cause.

Members referenced the poorer outcomes for Key Stage 5 and asked for possible reasons for this. Officers noted there may be more robustness in Key Stage 3 and 4; that there was a big gap between Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5; and the impact of COVID-19, where some students had sat A Level exams but not GCSE exams. This was being reviewed with schools through a peer review process and via the Hillingdon Learn Partnerships. It was noted that students were building resilience. Members asked about students leaving the Borough after Key Stage 4 to attend out-of-Borough settings for Key Stage 5, if there was a way to measure this, and whether this had a significant impact on the results at Key Stage 5. Officers noted that most 6th Forms in the Borough were full and students moving outside of the Borough was not seen as an issue. Officers noted that they may be able to provide further information on this.

Members asked about the reference in the report to low practitioner morale, and whether this was still the case. Officers confirmed that it was still the case and was linked to low pay and scarcity of opportunity.

Members asked about the table of Placements of Children of Gypsies, Roma Travellers, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, and asked if more details could be provided, possibly through an audit of information for primary schools, either during the next annual report or sooner. It was referenced that the Fair Access Panel worked with secondary schools. It was noted here that representations were being made frequently to the Home Office; that there was lots of turnover; and that this was a huge pressure on resources such as NEET unknowns. Officers noted that there was a strategy for Ukrainian children, and also a strategy for asylum-seeking children.

Members referenced safeguarding in inadequate settings and officers noted that this was a high priority, although a Safeguarding Officer would be beneficial to enable more work done in-house. There was collaboration between schools and via the Primary Forum, Hillingdon Association of Secondary Headteachers, and the Hillingdon Learning Partnerships through which new headteachers were offered mentoring from experienced headteachers.

In relation to Bishop Ardern, a proposed new secondary school in Ruislip, this was currently under review.

Members asked about the Five to Thrive programme which was being introduced across all providers – this was a partnership approach to working with Parents and Practitioners in recognising the importance of and supporting healthy Brain development. This was being rolled out as the result of a pilot scheme.

Members asked about the numbers of children with SEND in mainstream schools and what the proportion was. Members asked if it would be possible

	<p>in a future Committee to have an audit of numbers of SEND children by individual school and to include comparisons of standards and funding. Officers noted that some of this information could be taken from the school census.</p> <p>Members referenced the addendum, which noted an area of concern in relation to staffing insufficiencies within a NEET team. Officers noted that this was under review. Officers noted that an update on this could be brought to a future Committee.</p> <p>Members asked if there was a register of elective home educated children. There were links to the Stronger Families Hub in terms of safeguarding, and there was a robust policy that was robustly implemented including a trigger review of the appropriateness of home education. It was noted that a register of home educated children would not identify those who had never been in school unless identified elsewhere.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the key findings set out in the report; and 2. Delegated to the Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chairman (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead) to agree comments to be submitted to Cabinet
74.	<p>UKRAINIAN CHILDREN UPDATE (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Central Services introduced the report on the Ukrainian Children Update. The Corporate Director of Central Services coordinated an officer group comprising a range of services, such as Children’s Services, Adult Social Care, Counter Fraud and Housing with a view to placing guests with vetted hosts. Over the past year, officers had been working with the voluntary sector to help, for example, register with GPs, to obtain school places, and to connect with other Ukrainians. The focus had also turned to adult learning and preparation for work and other employment opportunities. It was highlighted that schools had been provided with information and access to the LEAP digital platform, and that officers had responded to needs including psychological needs, and the Virtual School had helped with the placement of refugee children and with help for non-English speakers.</p> <p>There was also the intention here of avoiding children becoming NEET and that the Council had access to grant funding based on head count. Support had also turned to achieving educational outcomes, and it was noted that Ukrainians were not saturated in specific schools. A cluster model had been employed and met the needs of both the individual and the school. Internal services were all involved in this process, to identify any red flags, and to identify any issues at an early stage. It was noted here that some websites were available in Ukrainian.</p>

	<p>Members asked about how targeted support was measured, and officers noted that it was too early to say at this point, although a further report could be brought to a future Committee.</p> <p>Members highlighted the difference between Ukrainian children placed under the Homes for Ukrainians scheme, as opposed to those that were not placed under the scheme. Officers noted that this related to the type of visa and to funding. Funding was received for those placed under the scheme only. In November 2022, Hillingdon had received notification of a grant of £712,896 for the integration of Ukrainian children into schools and the wider community on arrival into the UK under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The grant funding was to be distributed throughout 2023/24 on a needs basis.</p> <p>Members put on record their support for Ukraine. Member asked about numbers of bi-lingual officers; about how the Council was supporting those who had suffered bereavements; and about the partnership with Wealdstone FC. Officers noted that there was a shortfall of bi-lingual officers, but this was not seen as an issue as there were other avenues/ networks to deal with this; there was an educational psychology service and health services available for help with bereavement, and officers were making schools aware of this; and the partnership with Wealdstone FC offered places for children to attend training events and to watch matches.</p> <p>Members asked about preparations for longer-term arrangements and plans for more integration. Officers noted that arrangements were being made for the next financial year with a focus on integration and re-settlement. There were also arrangements for Ukrainians to network with each other. Officers and volunteers were working together on this and in some cases Ukrainian guests worked on networking with more recent arrivals.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the information presented within the report and asked questions about the support being provided to children.</p>
75.	<p>CPP MINUTES (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>Officers noted that the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 24 January 2023 had come to the Select Committee for noting.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel.</p>
76.	<p>UPDATE TO CPP TERMS OF REFERENCE (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>Officers highlighted the two updates which the Corporate Parenting Panel wished to make to their Terms of Reference. These updates were brought to the Select Committee for their approval.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee:</p>

	<p>1. Noted the contents of the report; and</p> <p>2. Approved the updates to the Corporate Parenting Panel’s Terms of Reference</p>
77.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>)</p> <p>Members asked about the Early Years item and whether the Select Committee would be consulted. It was confirmed under the Work Programme item that Cabinet may agree to consult on the ‘Hillingdon 0-19 years core offer to children, young people and their families’ and on the ‘Hillingdon’s Youth Offer and Delivery Model’. If Cabinet agreed to consult on these items, the Select Committee would be part of the consultations and so these items had been provisionally placed on the Work Programme for June 2023.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan</p>
78.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 11</i>)</p> <p>Members clarified the above. Officers noted that the SEND Strategy Update had been added for June 2023. The Twice-Yearly School Place Planning report had moved from April and September to July and November at officers’ request in order to provide better information to Committee. Members asked if the Youth Offer report would include information from, for example, any third-party groups, as opposed to a Council-only view. Officers noted that the report that may be considered for consultation by Cabinet was on Hillingdon’s Youth Offer. In terms of the wider offer, which included the Youth Directory of Services, this would not come to Committee in June, but could be scheduled at a later Committee.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the report.</p>
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.03pm

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information of 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.

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.