

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

10 October 2023

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 – Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillor Heena Makwana (Chairman), Councillor Ekta Gohil, Councillor Kishan Bhatt, Councillor Peter Smallwood, Councillor Tony Gill, Councillor Jagjit Singh, and Councillor Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p>
32.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Becky Haggar OBE with Councillor Ekta Gohil substituting.</p> <p>Apologies were also received from Councillor Rita Judge with Councillor Jagjit Singh substituting.</p>
33.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
34.	<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>
35.	<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>
36.	<p>TOPIC DISCUSSION (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p>

The Chairman recapped that at the previous meeting, a number of possible review topics were raised. These now required narrowing down. Further discussion on each proceeded as below:

Possible review ideas:

1) Absenteeism in schools and related problems since COVID and its recovery

Officers had been invited to the next meeting to establish whether this would be a suitable review topic.

2) Statutory pathways/ court system/ social work. How social workers work with the legal system

Officers had been invited to the next meeting to establish whether this would be a suitable review topic.

3) Improving communication with schools

It was noted that this item may require some more narrowing down. It was also suggested that this may have been looked into recently, but officers would check on this.

Members further noted that this was linked to the Stronger Families Hub review and the recent agenda item on safeguarding. It was acknowledged that schools were very busy.

Through the move away from Local Authorities being responsible for schooling, and the move towards academies and trusts, connections with schools may have been lost. Looking at the impact of this was worth considering.

Members were minded to seek officer advice on the appropriateness of communication with schools as a review topic, with a focus on how communication may have changed with the move towards academies/ trusts.

4) Impact on mainstream schools of additional SEND places

Members clarified that this should have read "Impact on mainstream schools of additional SEND *children*". This was in relation to a strategy for mainstream schools to accommodate more children with SEND. It was noted that this had been a challenge for some schools. It would be useful to receive information from schools on this, but possibly not in a major review.

It was further noted that it may be worthwhile to wait until the Council's SEND Strategy was in place, and when new school places for children with SEND has been established.

Possible information items:

5) Youth Justice System/ secondary school children involved in County Lines

Members noted that topics within Youth Justice could be categorised into three areas:

- a) Prevention and early intervention – what programmes were in place for at-risk young people; how young people and their families were connected to these programmes; and what evidence-based approaches were used in these interventions.
- b) Diversion from the Justice System – how often were diversionary options (such as cautions or community resolutions) used instead of formal prosecution; what criteria determined eligibility for diversionary options; how were these outcomes evaluated; how could the Council collaborate with other stakeholders such as police, schools and social services; and were there any formal agreements or partnerships in place with other organisations.
- c) Restorative justice – how could this be utilised and in what context(s).

Members noted that the above categories could be narrowed down to a County Lines/ drug use area. Links from drug use to other crimes such as theft or sexual exploitation were noted.

Members further noted that the above categories could be applied to vaping.

This could be explored with officers to see whether there was a potential review topic here.

Members noted that County Lines/ drug use was related to the first suggested review topic of absenteeism, especially with regards to being on the border with Buckinghamshire County.

6) Children not in education/ permanent exclusions

Members noted that Hillingdon had a large number of children arriving in the country who were staying in hotels, particularly in the south of the Borough. A more specific definition of ‘children not in education’ may be useful in narrowing down an area of focus.

Hillingdon was possibly not dissimilar to other Local Authorities on permanent exclusions. However, Hillingdon may be unique in the number of children arriving with their parents, for whom the Council had a duty to educate. It was noted that hotels were not homes, and that living in hotels would likely affect education access.

A potential review topic on this could relate to how schools were coping with this or how the response differed across the Borough. It was noted that there tended to be a dispersion issue in that children were concentrated in certain schools. This could be an information item.

On permanent exclusions, a focus could be around what method of education was being provided to children who had been permanently excluded. This could be an information item.

It was noted that 'children not in education' could relate to absenteeism.

It was suggested that children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) be taken into consideration, and whether their needs were being met. 'Not in education' may include those who were suspended or not actively participating in school. Members further noted that this suggestion linked to the possible review topic of the impact on mainstream schools of additional children with SEND.

Ideas to further narrow down:

7) Mental health

It was noted that the Health and Social Care Select Committee had been undertaking a review related to mental health and that this linked to absenteeism in schools. It was suggested that there may be an avenue whereby the Health and Social Care Select Committee and the Children, Families and Education Select Committee could establish joint recommendations, should their next review topics align.

Within the remit of the Children, Families and Education Select Committee, a review topic in this area could look at the accessibility of mental health services to young people, and what the barriers were to accessibility. Another area could be service effectiveness: how effective current mental health programmes and interventions were; and what the outcomes were. This could also look at the effectiveness of school-based interventions, including the role and training of school counsellors and teachers around mental health.

8) School standards

Members noted that there had previously been a report to the Select Committee on this, and there was also a future report scheduled. There was a suggestion of an information item on how the Council supports schools with a view to improving standards, however, the Chairman noted that with a number of reports both previous and scheduled, Members needed to be mindful of officer time.

	<p>9) Cyber-bullying/ mental health links This could be monitored with a view to having a future information item on an area relating to cyber-bullying, or possibly a future review topic.</p> <p>10) Social media/ mental health links</p> <p>In summary, it was noted that a number of the above issues could be further investigated, following the discussion.</p> <p>Members highlighted that absenteeism was within the eyeline of Central Government currently, and that it would be good to get ahead of the curve on this topic. The Department for Education and Local Government Association were also concerned with absenteeism.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the policy review topics raised at the last meeting set out in the report and suggested any changes; 2. Agreed the topics to receive further information on, in order to determine whether a review would be possible, noting that on topics 1&2 listed in Table 1 of the report, officers had been provisionally invited to the next meeting; and 3. Delegated to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chairman (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead) any further agreement on review topic selection as required.
37.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>Members considered the Cabinet Forward Plan.</p> <p>Members noted the upcoming Cabinet agenda item on 'Proposed Changes to Admissions Criteria for Community Schools'. It was highlighted that in a number of schools, classrooms that were no longer needed as class spaces had been used for additional SEND capacity. It was raised whether the Council had thought about this issue across schools, particularly primary schools. It was suggested that there could be a partnership between the Council and schools to use available school spaces for community activities.</p> <p>Members also asked about the SEND Strategy. This had previously come to the Select Committee in November 2022 as part of its consultation. Members asked if the report would come back to the Select Committee and noted a relatively small response to the consultation. Officers noted that this was scheduled as a Cabinet Member Decision expected in October, and so would not go back to Cabinet or the Select Committee.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee noted the Forward Plan</p>

38.

WORK PROGRAMME (*Agenda Item 7*)

Officers noted that the Committee planned to invite the Youth Council to a future meeting, to align with a future report on the one-year review of the Youth Offer. This would take place around October 2024.

There was an item scheduled for November Cabinet entitled 'DPS for Alternative Provision – Education and SEND'. Officers confirmed that this would be added to the Select Committee's Work Programme for November.

Officers highlighted two small amendments to the recommendations of the Stronger Families Hub review:

- i) Recommendation 1 and Recommendation 5 had been swapped;
- ii) Recommendation 5 had been updated to read: "To continue to raise awareness of..."

On the Stronger Families Hub review, Members suggested rewording: "*The Committee concluded that, overall, the ...*" to remove the word 'overall'. This would now read "*The Committee concluded that the ...*". Members agreed to this amendment.

Officers asked Members if they had any suggestions for potential site visits. On this, Members noted a previous visit to the Youth Parliament/ Youth Council. It was suggested that this could be done again.

Members noted there were only few information items on the Work Programme, and some still to be confirmed.

Members suggested an item on move-ins to the Borough and ease of their accommodation in secondary schools.

RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee:

- 1) Considered the report and agreed any amendments;**
- 2) Confirmed that the item entitled 'DPS for Alternative Provision – Education and SEND' would be added to the Work Programme; and**
- 3) Amended the wording of the final Stronger Families Hub review report.**

The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 7.35 pm.

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.