

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

18 June 2025



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

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillor Heena Makwana (Chair), Councillor Ekta Gohil (Vice-Chair), Councillor Peter Smallwood OBE, Councillor Kishan Bhatt, Councillor Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead), Councillor Tony Gill, and Councillor Narinder Garg</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Mr Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Poppy Reddy (Assistant Director, Care, Support and Transition), Donna Hugh (Assistant Director, Care Provision Services), Tehseen Kauser (Director of Children's Social Care), Julie Kelly (Corporate Director of Children's Services), Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer),</p>
4.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
5.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
6.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Referring to the previous agenda item on the Youth Offer, Members asked if there was any update on securing new transporter buses. This could be looked into outside of the meeting.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed</p>
7.	<p>MINUTES OF THE AGM (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the AGM be agreed</p>
8.	<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 5</i>)</p>

9.	<p>OVERVIEW OF CORPORATE PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>Members noted the recent changes introduced under the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill and asked how this would affect the Council’s role as Corporate Parent. Officers noted that the Bill would extend corporate parenting responsibilities beyond the Council to include other statutory partners such as health and police services. Whilst the practical implications were ongoing, the change was expected to positively impact young people by placing a statutory duty on partner agencies to act as corporate parents.</p> <p>Members asked if the DfE was leading on this. Officers noted that the Bill was still progressing through Parliament and that current engagement with the DfE was limited due to its focus on the Family First reforms. It was anticipated that the implementation of these changes would unfold over the next couple of years.</p> <p>Members asked how the Council benchmarked its performance in corporate parenting. Officers advised that while internal quality assurance audits were conducted, benchmarking was primarily achieved through external regulation. Ofsted and other bodies conducted inspections, including the ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services) every three years, which evaluated care for looked after children and care experienced young people. The Council was previously rated in the top 15% nationally, with an overall outcome of “Outstanding” for looked after children and “Good” for care experienced young people. Efforts were ongoing to improve further ahead of the next inspection.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the developments and achievements outlined in the report; 2. Endorsed the continued embedding of corporate parenting principles across all services; and 3. Supported ongoing efforts to prepare for the expanded statutory duties from 2025
10.	<p>CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL MEMBERSHIP 2025-2026 (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families & Education Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appointed Councillors Nick Denys, Heena Makwana and Jan Sweeting to be the permanent Elected Members on the Panel on the basis of political balance (2 Con: 1 Lab); 2. Appointed Councillors Becky Haggart OBE, Peter Smallwood OBE and Tony Gill to be named substitutes on the basis of political balance (2 Con: 1 Lab); and 3. Upon the recommendation of the Chair of this Committee, confirmed Councillor Nick Denys as the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel and Councillor Heena Makwana as the Vice-Chair.
11.	<p>PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM REVIEW (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>The Chair introduced the item and invited Members to note and agree on the amendments to the recommendations and on the final report to be taken to the</p>

	<p>Cabinet.</p> <p>Members asked if schools had had an early view of the recommendations, given their involvement in the witness sessions. The Chair noted that they had not; that the recommendations were formed based on all of the witness sessions; and it was appropriate for the Committee to make its recommendations based on this evidence.</p> <p>Members noted that persistent absenteeism reflected a wider issue beyond what was reflected in the recommendations, and that a broader effort was required to promote the value of education, particularly among those parents who may not prioritise it as highly as other activities. It was suggested that the value of school was taken for granted.</p> <p>Members asked about including more up to date statistics in the final report. The Chair suggested that any concerns over this could have been raised at an earlier opportunity and noted the need to finalise the recommendations. It was further noted that improving attendance was an ongoing effort, and the Committee would have the opportunity to review progress over time.</p> <p>The amendments to the recommendations were agreed.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families & Education Select Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the final review report; 2. Agreed to the suggested amendments; and 3. Agreed the final report, subject to the amendments, for submission to Cabinet
12.	<p>POLICY REVIEW DISCUSSION & GUIDANCE (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>The Chair opened the discussion on potential topics for the next review. It was noted that there was limited time available before the upcoming local elections and consideration should be given to this when choosing a topic to review. The current review had taken approximately 20 months, and there were only seven Committee meetings remaining before the local elections.</p> <p>Members made a number of suggestions, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Inclusivity It was noted that this was a broad topic area and may be better suited to a later review when more time was available. b) Narrowing the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged young people in education standards This had formed part of the Committee's comments to the Cabinet Member in the recent Annual Education Standards 2023-24 report. c) Falling school rolls and changes in admission numbers This could include looking at ways of supporting schools with falling rolls, particularly in the primary sector. d) NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)

To look at current strategies in place for young people not in education, employment or training, and to learn from other places.

e) **Utilising spare capacity in schools**

Linked to the decrease in school rolls, to examine how spare classrooms and spaces can be used to benefit schools and the wider community.

f) **Third party/ voluntary groups and opportunities in Hillingdon**

To highlight the range of community-led groups (including scouts, guides, local football clubs, youth centres, churches, mosques, gurdwaras) and potential gaps in their offerings; to highlight areas of the borough where there were limited opportunities or issues of accessibility; to note the importance of promoting good practice and collaboration between organisations; to identify what role the Council plays in supporting such groups, including venues, safeguarding and insurance; to promote/ commend the volunteers who run these groups.

Members further suggested looking into the distribution of volunteers across the borough.

Members referred to the agenda item on the Youth Offer at the previous meeting which had acknowledged gaps in venues.

Members suggested a dictionary of groups with contact details. Officers responded that the care and support directory had gone live and was available on the intranet. This was for all services for children and young people aged 0-19 and up to 25 for those with specific needs or disabilities.

Members noted that a review of this topic would need to be narrowed down to ensure it could be completed in the preferred timeframe.

g) **Addressing the post-COVID mental health gap in schools**

CAMHS waiting lists remained long and early intervention in schools was inconsistent. The scope of a review on this topic could be access to mental health mentors; school counselling capacity linked to CAMHS; resilience programmes; trauma support; and the impact of DfE funded activity. It was noted that some of this may fall under the remit of the Health & Social Care Select Committee.

h) **Digital Exclusion and Educational Disadvantage**

Lots of young people lacked reliable access to technology or broadband, affecting homework, online safety and hybrid learning. To look at device distribution, safe digital spaces, parental digital literacy, and other external educational providers and how they can support young people. Members suggested that this may be more suitable as an information item, potentially over two meetings if split in two.

i) **Social care**

Officers noted that, looking at previous review topics, there was a significant gap in social care topics outside of corporate parenting. There had been a lot of focus on youth & community and education. There were a range of social care services such as help & protection, the front door (some of which was covered under the previous review of the Stronger Families Hub), court services, and fostering services.

Members noted the importance of balancing officer capacity with the need to scrutinise services when considering a review topic.

	<p>The above topics would need to be investigated with relevant officers.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the guidance on undertaking policy reviews in Appendix 1; 2. Sought to make use of the scorecard attached in Appendix 1 (Annex A) to assess any policy review topic ideas; 3. Developed a single or shortlist of potential topic ideas over the coming months or year for officers to scope further and report back to the Committee on feasibility; and 4. Delegated to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chair (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead) any further agreement on review topic selection as required.
13.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>)</p> <p>Members considered the Forward Plan.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan</p>
14.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 11</i>)</p> <p>Members considered the Work Programme.</p> <p>Members noted that the work programme within the agenda only showed up until November 2025 and asked if there were any allocated agenda items for meetings thereafter. Officers noted that this was merely for presentation and to ensure that the information in the agenda was legible.</p> <p>Members highlighted upcoming items on the budget and noted the need for a specific update on the DSG. Officers noted that they could provide a separate update on the DSG and Members asked for this at the next meeting.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families & Education Select Committee</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Considered the report and agreed any amendments; and 2. Added an update on the DSG to the July meeting
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7:00 pm, closed at 7.30 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Ryan Dell, Democratic Services Officer on democratic@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, officers, the press and members of the public.