

Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Wednesday 2 July 2014 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02C - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)
Councillor Lisa Rajan
Councillor Evelyn Akoto
Councillor Anne Kirby
Councillor Kath Whittam
Councillor Kieron Williams
George Ogbonna

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Sunny Lambe

OFFICER SUPPORT: Kerry Crichlow, Director; Strategy & Commissioning
Rory Patterson, Director; Children's Social Care
Merril Haeusler, Director; Education
Ann Flynn, Safeguarding Children Board Development Manager
Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. INTRODUCTIONS

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 There were apologies for absence from education representative Abdul Raheem Musa.

1. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1 There were no urgent items of business.

1. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 Members declared that many had children using Southwark schools and services.

1. GENERAL TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SCRUTINY COMMITTEES/SUB-COMMITTEES

5.1 The Head of Overview and Scrutiny, Shelley Burke, presented the paper briefly. She explained that the paper sets out the constitutional powers of scrutiny. The general scope of the sub-committee is defined by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC). She reported that at the last OSC it was noted children's health matters will come to this committee, along with the appropriate powers.

1. OFFICER PRESENTATIONS OUTLINING THE CURRENT SITUATION

6.1 Officers presented and tabled reports (attached to the minutes) on three different areas:

- School Update
- 16 Plus Progression & Performance
- Children in Care (Social Care)

Schools Update

6.2 Merrill Haeusler, Director of Children's Services; Education, presented the Schools Update report and the chair then invited members to ask questions.

6.3 A member commented that over the last several years local schools have improved their performance considerably and asked the Director how that came about. She responded that it was the combination of headteachers taking the initiative and the council's School Improvement Plans.

6.4 The Director was asked what she considered to be the key challenges now and she responded that these are the challenge to recruit teachers, particularly given the high living costs, and also the changes to the national curriculum and testing regime, which could impact negatively on some Southwark pupils. She commented that Southwark is an area where there is significant economic & social deprivation and therefore teaching can be challenging as pupils face significant disadvantage and the schools are therefore more difficult to teach in. The council does offer more support to newly qualified teachers, but there is a need for extra incentives to ease the recruitment difficulties.

6.5 A member asked for a definition of a Free School and an Academy. The Director explained that all new schools are now Free Schools. She commented that although the government had said that Free School were supposed to come from a groundswell of opinion from parents, it has not quite worked out like this and instead sometimes academy chains have been proactive in setting up new schools. Maintained schools are also

sometimes becoming academies because of financial incentives. Maintained schools can also become forced to into Academy status is they go into special measures, however no Southwark Schools are in this position

6.6 The Director was then asked about Camelot school and if it faced this prospect. She clarified that the school is not on special measures but it does require improvement. It was rated as a 'Satisfactory' by OFSTED. The Council is visiting regularly.

6.7 A member asked for a breakdown of results by gender and officers agreed to provide this.

6.8 A member commented that around 30% of children are not achieving 5 GCSEs and young people find it increasingly difficult to find a job The Director said she had concerns that the emphasis is moving towards a very academic curriculum. She added that vulnerable young people need family support to engage with schools and while the council has done lots of work there is still more to do.

6.9 The Director was asked about Pupil Premium and if schools use it effectively for the purpose it is given. The Director assured members that it was used on what is needed. Members asked if schools are buying back services from the council and the Director said that the council offer a variety of services including welfare services and educational psychologists and only one or two academies are not buying these in.

16 Plus Progression & Performance

6.10 Merril Haeusler, Director of Children's Services, Education presented the report and the chair then invited members to ask questions.

6.11 A member voiced concerns that schools are not providing enough for the bottom 30%. The Director responded that schools are very straight jacketed by league tables and a curriculum focused on university entrance. She assured the committee that schools do care about the bottom 30% and when she meets with secondary headteachers every 6 weeks they talk about this issue.

6.12 Members asked if there was a strong local network and the Director said that there were; schools like to come together, however there is also competition between schools.

6.13 The chair asked the Director if she would recommend any further work by the committee and she recommended a look at the curriculum changes and the new testing regime.

Children in Care (Social Care)

6.14 Rory Patterson, Director; Children's Social Care, presented the report, with assistance from Ann Flynn, Safeguarding Children Board Development Manager.

6.15 A member referred to the Director's comment that everything is dropped when an inspection of the service takes place and the Director clarified that he meant senior managers rather than the front line workers. The inspectors concentrate on front line workers and the user voice: families and children.

6.16 A member asked about the focus on working with families, the high level of children in foster care and the lower numbers placed for adoption, particularly given the recent government focus on faster adoptions and the evidence that early adoption leads to better outcomes. The Director responded that Southwark Council has one of the highest levels of care proceeding nationally and taking a child from a family is one of the most draconian steps the state can take. He explained that ultimately this is a court judgment and while sometimes it is clear that removing a child from their family is the right thing to do, other times it is a grey area. He said the movement of children in and out of foster care is a concern and the service want to see an increase in the stability of placements and have done successful work in widening the number of potential placements which enables a better match and more chance of continuity.

6.17 The Director explained that one of the reasons the council takes proceeding is that it can force the issue, for example the extended family can step up and are appropriate. A member asked if the extended families are the first to be considered and the Director explained that all have to be considered and that this work needs to be done before going to court and this includes contacting everybody, including international extended family.

6.18 A member commented that the stability of placements was an issue at the Corporate Parenting Committee. The Director agreed this is an issue. He reported that Southwark was in the upper quartile for performance, however this has fallen. He explained that some of this was to do with the challenges of teenagers and the importance of getting the match right. It is much more likely that a ten year old and upwards will be in long term foster care, rather than adopted, and more local choice enables more young people to maintain their local friendships and school links.

6.19 A member commented that one complaint from children in care is that that do not get consulted enough. The Director explained that Social Care undertakes independent care planning and consulting with the child and young person is a key part of social workers' role. He explained that the department also have a children's rights officer and she has recently been focused on younger children getting involved in Speakerbox and having a voice.

6.20 The Director spoke about a more community focused social work practice whereby social workers considered the social context; rather than just looking at the individual behaviour they also now considered the family set up, for example a child might be out on the street causing trouble and at risk because the home is overcrowded.

6.21 A member asked if new and innovative methods are being used in social care, particularly new technology. The Director responded that videos can show prospective families how appealing many of the children are. This might not come thorough on more bureaucratic forms - particularly as there is a need to be honest about children's histories and challenges.

6.22 The Director was asked about the use of residential care rather than families and the Director said that some young people are very challenging, for example violent. In these cases it's really important that a relationship is built up and this can better facilitated in a more secure environment.

6.23 A member asked the Director if there will be more care proceedings by the

council. He responded that neglect is a big issue as is domestic abuse, particularly the attitudes that men have to women, young boys have to young women and sons have to their mothers. A member asked the Director to explain more about why domestic abuse leads to care proceeding and he explained that periodic violence impacts on brain development and this can start from an early age – the children will be anxious and will be acting out. A member said that some cultures use a slap and asked about particular communities. The Director responded that Social Workers see violence against children using implements and this is very serious. A member asked how this is tackled and the Director responded that sometimes the department take a child into care for a short time while the department makes an assessment to find out if this is systematic abuse or families are using inappropriate physical chastisement that social workers will then work to overcome. The Director was asked how many children are in and out of care and he responded that it would probably be possible to drill down into the data to find turnover.

6.24 A member commented on the figure of 27% of children in care achieving 5 A-C GCSEs. The Director said that this is better than average and the member acknowledged this; however commented that it was still poor.

6.25 A member commented that the new administration is developing a Women's Charter.

6.26 The Safeguarding manager was asked about work the council has done to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation and she explained that a conference was held in 2013. A sub group of the Safeguarding Board looked at data and identified around a 100 children at risk, of these young people the sup-group then focused on those judged most at risk, however practitioners know that those with at a lower risk profile can come to harm . The group decided to do both policy and hands on work. The practical work with young people was based on the successful gang work to disrupt and prosecute. There was intelligence sharing across agencies and action, for example targeting certain betting premises. A member asked about the number of children at risk who are in care and the Safeguarding manager explained that CSE is not at all exclusive to children in care.

RESOLVED

Provide more details on exam results broken down by gender

Provide more information on placements of children in care by age and turnover.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 The chair invited the scrutiny officers to comment on the role of scrutiny and facilitate a workshop session on the committee's role, review topics and work programme.

7.2 The Head of Overview & Scrutiny, Shelley Burke advised the committee had it had an important role in holding the executive to account on its delivery of services to young people. She explained that one way this was usually exercised was to conduct an annual interview of the cabinet member for children's services. The scrutiny project manager,

Julie Timbrell, explained that the committee also usually held an annual interview of the Independent Chair of safeguarding and considered the draft annual report. She commented that children's health services are often under scrutinised as the remit of the health scrutiny committee is very large and paired with adult social care and recommended that this committee spend some time on this area..

7.1 The Head of Overview and Scrutiny read out the comments on post it notes that the chair had earlier invited members and officer to write down their aspirations and goals for scrutiny:

Confidence from scrutiny that we are working on a common agenda to support the interests and well-being of children & young people of Southwark.

Make a difference to children & young people.

Thorough investigation of topics chosen.

Continue to support our service improvement.

To hear direct from children & young people on actions that would improve their lives and to have specific examples where their ideas have been implemented (and ensure reports refer to this).

To keep tabs on the promises made in the new administration's manifesto that affect children & young people

Children & Young People Plan: challenge & support to assure Southwark residents that decisions are sound, make a difference and are in the right interests of residents.

7.2 The chair commented that she would like to see more engagement with outside bodies, and less reliance on officer advice. A member agreed, and recommended that the committee outreach to schools and observed that school governors would probably have a useful and different perspective on the priorities, shortcomings and performance of schools, and noted that data can be selectively used to focus on particular areas.

7.3 The project manager advised that it was better to look at a few areas in depth, as reviews, however other topics and concerns could be picked up through a variety of ways; including questions to the cabinet member or the safeguarding chair, invitations to the youth council to consider when they attend quarterly and through one off sessions and reports. Members were invited to suggest areas for the committee to look into and the following suggestions were made and then roughly grouped together after a short discussion:

Attainment / qualifications/ access to vocational training for school children – particularly the bottom 30%, who do not get 5 A-C GCSEs , and children in care:

Promote equality of outcome for all school leavers.

(N.B link to Corporate Parenting committee for work with children in care/ leaving care)

Look at the new curriculum; particularly the academic emphasis and the impact of the new testing regime. Examine the delivery of the manifesto commitment to 'guarantee

education, employment or training for every school leaver in Southwark’.

Delivery of the council's Free Health School meals programme:
Consider the review material gathered by the last committee.

Early Help:

Look to support development of Early Help impacting on neglect issues for children. Support services for families on the verge of care (and related manifesto commitment)

Children in care: early and stable placements.

Autistic and special needs policy: clear policy and management and that scrutiny influences the development of the new planned strategy for Southwark.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Outcomes for Girls:

Education results, self esteem, aspirations, education careers services, teenage pregnancy, relationship violence, sexual exploitation, culturally sensitive issues: FGM, Trafficking, Forced Marriage.

Retention and recruitment of staff working with children:

Schools and other services are facing issues in recruiting and retaining good quality permanent teachers/ youth workers / childcare / health & social workers. Consider actions that the council has taken in the past to help the recruitment of social workers and if the council has a role in providing borough wide support for schools to recruit staff, and other services.

Childcare commission: input from the committee

Schools places & projected demand: understand if there are enough places (N.B this might be dealt with by OSC).

The health of children: assurance that this is being adequately considered by scrutiny by inviting the CCG to present and give an overview.

7.4 The chair explained that she intended to take this material away and devise a draft work programme, review topics, in consultation with officers, which she will then send to the committee for comments. Scoping documents for the review topics will be posted on social media for residents to comment on and then finalised at the next meeting. The scrutiny project manager showed a slide with the planned timetable:

Timetable scoping documents
16 July 2014
Draft scoping documents developed and emailed to committee
23 July 2014
Comments received from committee
28 July 2014
Revised scoping documents posted on social media for comment
18 August 2014
Draft scoping documents deadline social media
22 August 2014
Draft scoping documents revised
26 August 2014
Draft scoping documents published on agenda
3 September 2014
Scoping documents agreed at committee

RESOLVED

A draft of the review topics and work programme will be circulated to members for comment.