

CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Tuesday 19 January 2010 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Barrie Hargrove (Chair)
Councillor Nick Vineall
Councillor Eliza Mann
Councillor Jonathan Mitchell
Councillor Sandra Rhule
Councillor Veronica Ward

EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVES: Reverend Nicholas Elder
Colin Elliott
Sharon Donno

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Nick Stanton

OFFICER SUPPORT: Pauline Armour, Assistant Director of Access & Inclusion, Children's Services
Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Sarah Feasey, Legal Services
Susie Haywood, Senior Media Officer
Christine McInnes, Assistant Director Children's Services (Leadership & Learning Services)
Mike Smith, Asst Director Community Services
Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Jane Holt, Councillor Lisa Rajan, Executive Member for Children's Services and, for lateness, from Councillor Jonathan Mitchell.

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

- 2.1 The Chair asked Cllr Nick Stanton if he would like to answer the question submitted about snow and school closures. Cllr Stanton responded that relevant data was being compiled and he would circulate a response.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

- 3.1 Members made the following declarations: Sharon Donno as an employee of Kintore Way Nursery School; Cllr Ward as the grandparent of a child at a local primary School. Cllr Ward as a governor at Dulwich Wood Children's Centre; Cllr Mitchell as a governor at Harris Girls' Academy; Cllr Rhule as parent of a pupil at Kingsdale Foundation School; Reverend Elder as the chair of governors at Kinderella Pre-School; Jane Hole as an employee of Harris Academy at Peckham and governor at the City of London Academy; and Colin Elliott as a parent governor at St Saviours and St Olave's.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2009 be approved as a correct record.

5. EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS

- 5.1 Cllr Nicholas Stanton drew Members attention to the written answers emailed to Members and tabled at the meeting.
- 5.2 A Member asked Cllr Stanton a supplementary question on Q14 (How is the Council ensuring a smooth transfer of all post 16 education from the Learning and Skills Council to Southwark Education?) and asked for his view on the role of Southwark College in providing post 16 education? Cllr Stanton commented that Southwark College is on special measures and is currently reviewing its focus and purpose.
- 5.3 Concern was expressed regarding the number of NEETS in Southwark and the Local Authority's place in the worst performing 3rd of Councils. Cllr Stanton explained that given Southwark's level of deprivation it would probably be expected that Southwark would be faring worse than many other Local Authorities; however the proportion of NEETS is reducing year on year. Pauline Amour; Assistant Director (Inclusion and Access), elaborated that there have been a higher percentage coming out of Southwark College but a relatively lower number overall.
- 5.4 Cllr Stanton commented that there is a new non-governmental body, the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), who will work with Academies, Sixth Forms and other providers.

- 5.5 A Member asked a supplementary question arising from Q15 (How is the Council coordinating all the many agencies offering post 16 work experience and placements; and how are the Council ensuring good quality placements and teaching). The Member asked how young people who had left school would access appropriate information about the many opportunities that are available as these are often advertised and promoted through a variety of media.

RESOLVED Cllr Stanton said he would take this away and come back with an answer.

- 5.6 A supplementary query was raised on Q17 (What remedial measures are now in place to ensure that KS 2 English and Maths results improve in those Primary Schools where results have not been as good as the previous year). The Member queried if the Primary School results were out yet? Pauline Amour confirmed that they were.
- 5.7 A Member asked if there were any further issues in relation to Q18 (What does the Executive member see as the biggest challenges to the department over the next 24 months for Southwark primary schools?). Cllr Stanton commented that there is an ongoing problem of parents navigating the application process and turning up at School at the start of term with out making a prior application.
- 5.8 A question was asked on how well Southwark performs at accurately estimating changing demographics. The problems in the Dulwich area are well known but it is unclear if this is to do with more children in the area or caused by the recession fallout whereby more parents opt for a state school whom would have previously chosen a private school.
- 5.9 Cllr Stanton replied that Southwark uses demographic data, and while usually very reliable is has sometimes been inaccurate. There is anecdotal evidence that a number of factors have affected raising demand for primary schools in Dulwich including less parents leaving for the countryside and the increased pressure as schools improve. For example Heaver has restricted its catchment due to rising popularity. There is more pressure; however this could change. There could also be something about East Dulwich becoming a more popular area for families.
- 5.10 There are measures in place to deal with hot spots like East Dulwich. This year, three schools, including Goodrich Primary School in Dunstan's Road, East Dulwich, agreed to open extra classes temporarily to help cope with demand. There are ongoing temporary and permanent measures to increase capacity at St Anthony's Primary School and Lyndhurst Primary School.
- 5.11 A Member commented that they are receiving anecdotal stories of this still being a big issue; will these measures be enough? Cllr Stanton replied that they will look at admissions data and will then consider working with local schools to open a bulge class. Also Bessemer Grange has capacity so there is something about it marketing itself. Goose Green is in special measures, so it is understandable if there is reluctance by parents to apply, but there is now a fantastic new head and if and when it comes out of special measures the schools appeal will further increase. There is capacity; but it is a question of these schools raising their cache so that parents want to send their children there.

- 5.12 There was a query raised about the catchment areas of primary schools. Cllr Stanton explained that these are not fixed and can change as the popularity of a school fluctuates and capacity alters. There is a 2 mile rule; however Southwark aims for an offer within a mile as this is more suitable for a dense urban environment. The rules refer to the 'nearest community school' followed by the nearest school; however we are scrapping this as it is so confusing. We will be looking at plain distance.
- 5.13 There was a question raised about disappointed parents who applied to Heber or Goodrich Primary Schools. Cllr Stanton commented that they may have resided in the Peckham Rye end of East Dulwich. Although Southwark was able to offer every child a place there were some unhappy parents who did not get their school of choice. People were disappointed as perhaps in previous years might have lived close enough to Heber or Goodrich, but this year the schools were unable to accommodate these families. There were also a lot of parents who applied late and this caused problems.
- 5.14 Admissions processes are changing. Formally parents applied to three local schools; now there is a form where you put down four schools. The new national initiative means you can apply all over London. The common admission procedure will help the administration process and also with forward planning.
- 5.15 Pauline Amour explained that all Early Years providers have been contacted to check that parents have applied for school places. Cllr Stanton commented that parents still think that if they have siblings in the school that they can turn up at the gates at the start of term, but they still need to follow the admissions process.
- 5.16 A Member made a comparison between Southwark and Lewisham and the perception that they had been able to be more flexible with catchment areas and so had less of a problem
- 5.17 Cllr Stanton replied that there is a national criterion that everybody applies. They probably did a better job with communication. We have now increased our staff capacity and made it more user friendly so we will have an ongoing dialogue with parents. Pauline Amour elaborated that they have recently seconded staff to deal with the increased demand Southwark have in January to deal with applications for September places.
- 5.18 A Member commented that changes to the admissions process delay the speed that Schools can accept children; they used to be able to accept children Friday for a Monday start but now the process can take three weeks. Cllr Stanton agreed that recent changes to government policy mean the Local Authority now have to coordinate mid year admissions . The new application process does delay admissions; it is now a maximum of 3 weeks whereas before it could take a matter of days.
- 5.19 A supplementary query was raised on Q19 (this question asked what measures are being taken to reduce the negative impact on children's education in light of the continuing financial crisis and the number of homes being repossessed). The Member asked if there any figures on the number of successful interventions.

- 5.20 Cllr Stanton answered that although he looked into this issue there is no data and commented that this is not the kind of information that schools would normally collect. The Homeless Unit did not report a huge rise; but then they would not always be involved.

6. ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT

- 6.1 This was not covered as there was no officer to present.

7. SINGLE FUNDING FORMULA - UPDATE

- 7.1 Mike Smith gave an update on the Single Funding Formula and consideration given to the option to defer full implementation for a year. This has been out for consultation and the view from Schools is that there is potential for the shift from funding 'participation' rather than 'places' to negatively impact on Schools; most thought they would lose. On the other hand the PVI sector probably thought they would gain as they are already funded for 'participation'.
- 7.2 There is transitional grant funding for Schools to mitigate any adverse affects. The Schools wanted to defer implementation; the PVI sector wanted to go ahead, so the compromise has been to introduce it for the PVI sector but not the Schools. Those providers who qualify will also benefit from the deprivation funding.
- 7.3 The other issue is that if we went ahead this year and fully implemented we would have to make a special application with the legal complexities this involves. Officers do not recommend this option. Deferring it will give more time for Schools to make adjustments while still giving PVI sectors the additional deprivation funding.
- 7.4 A Member commented that this is a different recommendation from the report. Mike Smith agreed and explained that this was because they had not received the consultation responses from the head teachers. The other issue is that the Government could change and an upheaval such as this could mean that some nurseries could face part or total closure. Another change that could impact on Schools and the implementation of the SFF is the proposed single admission point – rather than the dual intakes at January and September.
- 7.5 Mike Smith explained that they are proposing to do a 'dry run' whereby the Schools get to see how it would affect their financial position. A Member queried if they were getting additional resources? Mike Smith confirmed they were and this year these additional resources would be targeted at the PVI sector.
- 7.6 Mike Smith also flagged up that Southwark has a historical framework for part-time / full time places with no policy framework. We want to develop a policy framework; to target those full time places at those most in need. This review could help with this. This is why we don't want providers to make these changes until this is completed.

- 7.7 A Member commented that her Nursery has lots of part time and full time places and this can be challenging to manage. Mike Smith commented that flexibility is an issue that has not been dealt with in depth. It is very difficult for settings to offer complete flexibility and remain economically viable. The duty to offer flexibility is placed on the Local Authority; not the individual provider.

8. EARLY YEARS REVIEW - CONTINUED

- 8.1 There was a recap on the Site Visits planned for the Early Year's review. Members plan to visit to Kintore Way and Robert Browning. Kintore Way Nursery School's provisional meeting will be rescheduled. Robert Browning visit is scheduled for 28 January 2010. Details will be circulated to Members. Members commented that it would be good to visit another couple of providers and both a private and community nursery would be ideal.

RESOLVED Mike Smith will provide details of another couple of providers; both a private and community nursery if possible.

- 8.2 Session/s will be organised at Sunshine House for Members of the committee to meet parents and childminders. The Chair also reported that Rachael had conducted two telephone interviews with parents and these will be written up and circulated

- 8.3 Sharon Donno, Member and head teacher of Kintore Way commented that that they would particularly welcome the visit to look at the impact of the SFF. There is concern that the move to 'participation' rather than 'places' will negatively impact on those children who are transitioning from a 'Toddler' place into an Early Year's place. The ethos of the centre is to ensure that children can make these smooth transitions but the present SFF proposals would mean either the parents would face extra charges they could not meet, or it would adversely affect the nurseries economic viability.

- 8.4 Members recapped on the focus of the Early years review and the ability of providers to meet demand. Waiting list information would be useful however caveats were raised as a many parents put their children on a number of waiting lists.

RESOLVED Mike Smith will supply some sampled waiting list information.

- 8.5 There was a discussion about the need to refine the focus of the review; particularly in light of the full implementation of the SFF now being delayed. Mike Smith said that addressing flexibility, a policy around the allocation of part-time / full-time places, and the effect of SFF on admissions would all be helpful in guiding its implementation. The Committee were advised that although officers are recommending that the Single Funding Formula (SFF) will not be fully implemented this year it remains valuable for the Early Year's review to inform this process.

- 8.6 Member raised concerns about children who do not access any formal Early Year's education. There is concern that those most in need may not be aware of the provision or find it difficult to access. The importance of Early Year's education

in promoting emotional, social and educational development is well-known; however some of the most disadvantaged families may not be accessing it.

RESOLVED:

The Early Year's review will focus on the following:

- i. Developing a policy framework for the allocation of part time and full time places
- ii. Admissions to Early Years ; with particular regard to hard to reach / disadvantaged groups

A draft will be done ready for the next sub-committee meeting.

9. PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS - CONTINUED

- 9.1 The meeting started with a presentation from Christine McInnes, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Leadership & Learning Services).
- 9.2 Christine McInnes first spoke about the report circulated to the sub – committee. This explained that the programme aims to raise the standard for all with a core offer for all schools while raising standards for identified vulnerable groups through targeted intervention programmes.
- 9.3 Recent data has identified widening gaps in attainment between Southwark overall and Black Caribbean pupils. BC pupils (as a group) have not made expected gains at KS 1 and 2. We are committed to narrowing the gap between this group of pupils and Southwark pupils and this is a key focus of work. Specialist support is also available for schools to improve provision for gypsy, Roma Travellers and pupils with English as an additional language.
- 9.4 There are a number of initiatives including 'The Hero Inside' project which focuses on raising achievement of groups of children in selected schools who may be underachieving or not reaching their full potential. It will fuse culture, Literacy, ICT, History, citizenship and the arts together to reflect the cultural diversity of Southwark. Using animation and drama identified key stage 2 pupils will explore how stories can provide a framework for problem solving and finding solutions.
- 9.5 White British boys on Free School Meals are another group who have been identified as a cause for concern both locally and nationally. There is a project to address this delivered in 2 parts. The first part looks at national research and the successful work in a number of Southwark schools/settings to identify strategies that appear to make a difference. The second part of the project will engage other Southwark schools that wish to narrow the gap and improve attainment of this group in their schools.
- 9.6 The importance of having positive role models for children and young people in school cannot be underestimated. Children's Services have a commitment to helping schools to recruit and retain a high quality workforce which reflects the

local community. The current data on the schools workforce is being analysed by ethnicity, particularly focusing on staff in senior management posts. This information will be used as the basis of a report which will make recommendations about how we can improve current recruitment and retention strategies to work towards a better representation of the local community in the schools workforce. Alongside this we are piloting a coaching programme for nine black and minority ethnic leaders in schools who aspire to headship.

- 9.7 Christine McInnes then spoke about the Parental Engagement work in more detail and showed a presentation (published on the website) put together by lead External Consultant: Dr Jan McKenley. This initiative is using Action Research to discover how we can best build parental engagement processes with parents in homes where an effective learning culture may not be evident. New engagement strategies will be explored through this project which will lead to parental engagement at home as well as parental involvement in school. This project will work in identified schools identifying good practice as well as development opportunities and is based on the most recent research (Professor Alma Harris: Do parents know they matter – Raising achievement through parental engagement). It offers school visits and the possibility of learning networks.
- 9.8 A member commented on the importance placed on good transitions in the Scrutiny reports circulated from Haringey and Tower Hamlets. They particularly focused on primary to secondary. Christine McInnes responded that this is a very important area, particularly for vulnerable children. They are looking to develop consistency and good practice from Early Year's settings into Primary School to impact on Key stage 1.
- 9.9 There was a comment on how the report had very much emphasised the importance of parents involvement in their child's learning; particularly fathers. Is there mentoring of parents and fathers in their own home to encourage skills and confidence? Christine McInnes commented that yes, sometimes a parental support advisor might do that; one to one will really help but it is resource intensive.
- 9.10 Kintore Way Nursery School did some excellent work with fathers and male carers. This started with breakfast play set up indoors and outside supported by members of staff. The children sent invitations to fathers and male carers. This has reached over 100 different parents and carers with around 30 attending 6 sessions over a year. This has helped parents gain confidence and understanding of the value of play; helped parents appreciate and value their children's learning and provided opportunities for male networks of friendship and support to develop. Sometimes parents have a poor experience of school themselves and it is important to get over that. The sessions aim to empower parents to carry on playing and encouraging their children to learn in the home.
- 9.11 A query was raised about how to get males involved where the mother is a single parent. Kintore Way had encouraged children to invite any significant male in their lives; uncle; grandparent; step-father etc.
- 9.12 A Member commented that sometimes there are no males in the children's lives and that membership of men on the PTA of Schools can really help. Christine McInnes commented that there is a growing focus on workforce development to get more males employed.

- 9.13 There followed a discussion on how to reach those families who were least involved in engaging with their children's learning. The importance of not patronising people or making assumptions about parental engagement because of false assumptions or stereotypes was emphasised. Members thought that blanket and regular communication was a good approach. This should emphasise the role of parents in play, games and reading to improve numeracy and literacy.
- 9.14 It was noted that the fathers' role was particularly important but it is vital that the approach does not undermine fathers but rather promotes the importance of their roles and empowers fathers through developing skills and confidence.

RESOLVED:

A one page report will be drafted noting the importance of family learning and the key role that parent's play as informal educators.

The report will briefly draw out particular issues discussed by the committee including the importance of male carer's / father's participation in children's learning and recommend that further resources be devoted to developing this area.

10. MATTERS ARISING

- 10.1 Members considered the answer to the request for a brief written update on the general wellbeing of the children affected by the Lakanal fire several months on; and to confirm whether any of the children have been referred for adolescent psychological counseling.
- 10.2 Members noted that an executive question on counseling to children affected by the Sumner Road fire has been put to Cllr Lisa Rajan.
- 10.3 A Member asked if there were numbers on children receiving counselling. Pauline Amour; Assistant Director (Inclusion and Access) responded that this was not possible as children can access counselling in various ways including through their GP and local mental health services and therefore a school would not necessarily know. Welfare officers have contacted the school. It is understood that more people requested counselling following the fire at Sumner Road as over 20 people lost their homes.
- 10.4 There was a discussion on when families would request counselling and it was noted that the schools offered emotional support.
- 10.5 Members considered the response from an officer at the Department of children, schools and families regarding the query on sports provision. There was concern that the response has not clarified if provision of '5 hours of high quality PE and sport per week ; in and out of schools ' is aspirational or prescriptive. Moreover what our Schools actually do is also a pertinent point.

RESOLVED:

- i) The Chair indicated that the sub-committee would give full support if Cllr Nick Vineall was minded to write a further letter.
- ii) There may be an opportunity for further written questions to be submitted to Cllr Lisa Rajan to clarify the provision of sport in Southwark.

11. UPDATE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

1. Hold Executive Questions with Cllr Lisa Rajan
2. Consider the combined report and brief Q & A session (no longer than 20 minutes) on both the 'Review of integrated youth support services' and 'Overview of the project for 14 – 19 year olds coordinated by the Learning Skills Council'
3. Early Years review – sub-committee to consider draft report
4. Parental engagement review - sub-committee to consider draft report
5. Consider the Children's and Young People's Plan - the Chair recommended that members consider the report already circulated via email

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.