

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Wednesday 19 October 2011 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01C - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor David Hubber (Chair)
Councillor the Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Sunil Chopra
Councillor Althea Smith
Councillor Cleo Soanes
Colin Elliott
Leticia Ojeda

**OTHER MEMBERS
PRESENT:** Colin Elliott
Leticia Ojeda
Nick Tilderley

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Gill Davis: Director of Environment and Leisure
Rory Patterson: Deputy Director specialist children's services
Rosie Dalton-Lucas: Health and Wellbeing Manager
Jin Lim: Public Health consultant
Julie Timbrell : Scrutiny project manager
Colin Gale: Free Healthy School Meals project lead
Sam Fowler: Schools for the Future project director

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Adele Morris and Rosie Shimell. Councillor Nick Stanton attended as a reserve.

1.2 Nick Tilderley was welcomed as the new headteacher representative.

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

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

4.1 The minutes of 28 June 2011 were agreed as an accurate record.

4.2 The chair reported that the cabinet has received the scrutiny report on School admissions reports positively and there will be a report by the lead member, Cllr McDonald in response. This report will also cover the scrutiny request to improve school admission information given to parents/carers with a child with special needs / a statement of special needs.

5. REVIEW OF PARENTING SUPPORT - PART 2 A : SUPPORT FOR PARENTS - PARENTS & CARERS OF DISABLED CHILDREN

5.1 The chair introduced the item by welcoming the parents, carers and organisational representatives who had come to give evidence for the review.

5.2 Naomi Gilbert, Manager of Contact a Family Southwark was invited to give evidence to the committee first. She referred to the written evidence circulated with the papers and asked members if they had any questions.

5.3 A member asked about the impact of funding cuts and how a fully funded service differed from the service now on offer. The manager explained that Contact a Family had experienced financial cuts of 25 %, and that they are waiting to hear what will happen after April 2012. She explained that it may be that funding will fall further. The work of Contact a Family is focused on working with families; often at a time of crisis. This is often before a diagnosis has been received; this is an often a time of uncertainty and stress for parents. Families often also need particular support around times of transition, for example moving into school or college.

5.4 The manager went on to explain that Contact a Family provide a listening ear, which is very important. They also help with income maximisation. There is a focus on helping families live the kind of lives they want to live, and this often means helping families access universal services, often in a group, as this helps with access and finance. Contact a Family also provides timely, accurate information so that families do not get overwhelmed with information, or isolated.

- 5.5 A member asked how many families the service worked with and the response was that there are 580 families on the database; some receive intensive support, others just the newsletter.
- 5.6 A member asked how she sees the future in times of reduction in resources. The manager recalled an uncomfortable meeting she had with Southwark Council commissioners. She reported that one good agreement was that all contracts would now be rolled into one. However there was an emphasis from officers on the under 5's, but in her experience there are just as many problems when a child enters puberty and becomes physically and sexually mature. Often services drop off during this challenging time. In her organisational view limiting services to under 5's is not a good idea.
- 5.7 A member asked the manager to comment on the reduction in funding that Contact a Family are receiving; particularly given that many families prefer accessing non statutory services such as Contact a Family. The manager commented on the importance of finding those families before they go into crisis to prevent further difficulties. The manager reported that officers are saying that unless there is a Common Assessment Framework in place we are being asked not to provide services. This creates difficulties as some people have had a bad experience of statutory services .She emphasised that it is very important that they can self refer so we can meet the needs of these families.
- 5.8 The manager was asked how she is coping with the cuts and she responded that they are employing fewer workers and work with less people. She explained they have moved to Cambridge House so the service is now co-located with other services. In addition to this she reported that they are being mean about who they provide a newsletter too and generally tightening their belts.
- 5.9 The chair welcomed Catriona Moore, a parent of a disabled child. She said she hoped everybody had had a chance to read the paper she produced [circulated with the papers]. She stated this reflects her own experience and she is not trying to speak for other parents. She went on to explain that the policy seems to be to say no the first time, then parents have to go back and make the case, then eventually you get what you need. This advantages more articulate and pushy parents. Services should be given to those who need them, not those who shout the loudest.
- 5.10 She spoke about her experience; explaining that her child was referred to social workers by a medical professional, but the social workers were not particularly uninterested in the medical diagnosis and this meant that, despite the referral, she did not receive the assessment she needed. There is a tension between the medial and social work teams, and they have no access to the records.

- 5.11 Catriona stated that she thought it was really important that the disability register was kept updated, even if families do not receive services. Early help is much better. She explained that telling services the same thing again and again is frustrating and dehumanising. She asked the committee to think about how we can do data sharing better and more sensitively. For example Sunshine House has different professional from different services using different computer systems
- 5.12 Harry Opoku introduced himself and explained that his boy is now 12, and when he was diagnosed 2 years ago when his family was under terrible strain. He explained that Contact a Family supported him through the referral process and helped him negotiate the system. He explained how important that is as most parents do not understand what services are available or the laws surrounding access. He went on to explain that if parents are not forceful statements will not be issued.
- 5.13 Harry said that he knows many parents who have broken down, been through hell; they are bouncing off the walls. He explained that the initial shock is very profound and this is the time when you need support, which is often morale support to come to terms with the diagnosis. Family support at that time is very important.
- 5.14 He went on to talk about the importance of communication and the difficulties his child has had at mainstream school. Often his child would be distressed because the support worker was not available, but the school had not informed him.
- 5.15 A family with a young child next came to give evidence. The father explained that his daughter needs help and he has been to both the school and the hospital but has been unable to access support. The chair of the committee asked the Contact a Family to help the family and they swapped contact details.
- 5.16 Alison Miles, from Southwark Parent Carer Council (SPCC), introduced herself by explaining she is a parent of a disabled child and used to work for the SPCC until recently. The organisation recently has given lots of evidence to a consultant working on the Short Breaks [reports were circulated with the papers].
- 5.17 Alison explained that she wanted to draw the committee's attention to a number of areas. Firstly there is a massive prevalence of autism. This is very misunderstood and families experience lots of intolerance when accessing universal services. She went on to explain that families understand that specialised services are under pressure so the recommendation was to improve universal services. Alison explained only a small proportion; around 180 out of 2500 children with disabilities, receive a service. Fair access to universal services is crucial; too often families are met with an

attitude that it not helpful. Isolation is a big issue.

- 5.18 She recommended that this wider groups needs are addressed; for example when considering the short breaks, is it the 180 or the 2500?
- 5.19 Alison said that parents and carers need clear accessible information. This cannot just be on the website. She went on to explain that there needs to be more transparency, particularly on how decisions are made so that parents can be clear on the process. When it comes to assessment the needs of the entire family need to be taken in to account; particularly the needs of the siblings.
- 5.20 She explained that parents and carers want to work in partnership with professionals; we are a resource and feel underused. A member asked how representative the group is and Alison explained they have good representation, but they have identified gaps and these are Asian families and travellers.
- 5.21 A member asked Alison about health and emergencies and she explained they have looked into a health passport which describes the child's needs and what they like and don't like.
- 5.22 There was a question about siblings from a member. Alison responded that siblings do often take on a caring role and the needs of siblings are real issue.
- 5.23 A mother next gave evidence and explained that she has 15 year old son with complex needs. The younger brother shares a room and sometimes he has difficulty sleeping. It can be a difficult relationship. She went on to say that one issue that particularly needs highlighting is that we cannot name an Academy school for our children, if a statement is received.
- 5.24 The chair invited Rory Patterson, Deputy Director, and specialist children's services, to comment on the evidence received. He began by saying that some very powerful evidence had been received here and in the recent Short Breaks consultation. He hoped parents and carers valued the in-depth consultation that had been done.
- 5.25 The Deputy Director went on to explain that Common Assessment is supposed to be a tool to build up information, and is based on the concept of the team around the child. The green paper has lots of recommendations.
- 5.26 He went to note that families value good resources. The council is facing challenging times, however we do think we can reach out to more families, by simplifying services such as transport.

ACTION

Draft recommendations will be drawn up based on all the evidence received, and this will then go to officers for comment.

The final report will go to cabinet.

Everybody who has given evidence will be kept informed.

6. REVIEW OF PARENTING SUPPORT - PART 2 B : SUPPORT FOR PARENTS - VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

- 6.1 Sarah Armstrong and a colleague from CSV referred to the paper circulated and the new initiative they have started in partnership with Southwark Council; supporting parents and families. They explained that CSV is UK's leading volunteering and learning organisation providing a range of opportunities for almost fifty years. They work closely with partners, including local authority partners, to help deliver services and provide support for people who need it most. They support children in care, young people leaving care, and families with parenting issues
- 6.2 CSV explained that they initiated two pilots recently in Bromley and Sunderland. Bromley continued, but Sunderland faced difficulties because of social work staff sickness. They reported that they had received lots of evidence of good outcomes; including many cases of children coming off the Child Protection register.
- 6.3 She reported that CSV provide parent mentoring, particularly with parents facing difficulties, such as single parents. This is the model they will be implementing in Southwark.
- 6.4 A member asked if CSV thought they could expand and they responded that they could; they are inundated with volunteers. There was a follow on question about training costs, and CSV agreed that there is a cost in training volunteers. In Southwark they are contracted to work with 25 families. CSV explained that they offer a rigorous programme of training which is highly valued by the volunteers. This is an investment but if it works it will save money.
- 6.5 CSV explained that volunteers are there to support, as an outside service, and give reassurance and guidance. They are independent. CSV explained that safeguarding and confidentiality still applies and that means that if there is a discovery that could lead to harm then volunteers would need to be open about that and inform professionals. They are very clear about that and all the volunteers are trained in safeguarding and confidentiality, and this

is applied.

- 6.6 A member asked how long the programme works for and what it consists of. CSV explained that they do not want to create a dependency culture, this is about enabling parents. Support focuses on two themes in particular: practical and emotional support. The practical support includes things such as going to meetings and building links, with schools for example. Emotional support is just as important and consists of empathetic listening and building parents morale.
- 6.7 A member asked about the management structure and the role of more experienced volunteers. CSV explained that they have a coordinator and management structure to offer support to volunteers. More experienced volunteers mentoring new volunteers will be our next step.
- 6.8 There was a question about building links with schools and ensuring consistency of advice to parents. The Deputy Director mentioned the Common Assessment programme. CSV explained the programme is complimentary and the volunteers will often support parents to send children to school regularly and attend meetings. They will help parents access and attend parent programmes run by school.
- 6.9 A member asked if they had sufficient volunteers and CSV assured members they did. The chair remarked that following the riots many people had blamed parents and his response had been that we should ask what we can do to help parents rather than apportioning blame. The chair said he has been championing this initiative over the past year as this programme gives society an opportunity to support parents in challenging situations; he is very pleased to see it being established in Southwark. The chair thanked CSV for attending and asked them to return in 6 months time to report back on the programme.

ACTION

CVS will come back in 6 months time to report on progress.

7. CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND SPORTS - DRAFT INTERIM REPORT

- 7.1 The chair asked colleagues from Public Health to comment on the draft Childhood obesity and sports report. Rosie Dalton-Lucas, Health and Wellbeing Manager and Jin Lim, Public Health consultant, said the report was very good and they would welcome the recommendations. They commented

that there is quite a lot about the environment and this is a way of going upstream to be more preventative.

- 7.2 A member noted the links to the Food Strategy in the report, and then the officer update report that this is not being progressed. The member asked what happened to this. Officers undertook to get more information.
- 7.3 A member asked about supermarket offers; such as buy one get one free. Public Health officers reported that they have done work with supermarkets such as Tesco's and said that they we can raise this issue when they meet again, however often they are driven by economic needs.
- 7.4 Clarification was sought by members on the fast food outlet planning policy and commented that they would have liked these powers to have been available for recent planning applications. Public Health officers said there are some strategic plans, and local initiatives, but not a general policy. They would welcome a borough policy.
- 7.5 A member commented that the report was very wide ranging and had expanded beyond its original scope. In addition there was a lot of recommendations that could benefit from more focus.
- 7.6 A member commented on the evidence that exercise is very important for health, whatever your weight. There are cultural issues around healthy weight. There was comment on the importance at looking at other studies showing indicators of health.
- 7.7 Members noted the strong evidence that mothers who are overweight or obese are 10 times more likely to have overweight or obese children. There was a comment that the under 5's are also an important group to target. Public Health officers responded that they have recently been focusing on childminders and nutrition, as well as maternal obesity.
- 7.8 Public Health officers were asked what happens when a child is identified as overweight or obese through the child weighing programme. Public Health officers explained that there are a number of interventions including vouchers, referral to the MEND programme and doctors. Members asked if medical conditions are detected and an officer commented that it takes time for conditions to manifest , most of the work at this stage is about prevention of later disease.

ACTION

Clarification will be sought on Southwark's Food Strategy and fast food planning policy.

The report will be refined and slimmed down. It will then be circulated to the committee.

8. UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL HEALTHY MEALS PROGRAMME

8.1 Colin Gale, Free Healthy School Meals Project Lead, was invited by the chair to present the paper circulated with the minutes. He reported that the initial pilot was done order in to gather learning. The council has produced a nutrition tool kit on the website and this contains nutritional standards.

8.2 Clarification was sought from a member on the need for forms. The project lead explained that the pilot helped streamlined the paperwork and this has led to an increase in pupils claiming free school meals; which is good for increasing income and the pupil premium. The project lead explained that the forms capture evidence and are needed to ensure a good audit trail. The need for good statistical data was endorsed by a member. There was a question about children with no recourse to public funds and concern that many may be unwilling to fill out forms. The project lead explained that the forms are very simple and can be filled out with only name and date, and there is no obligation to fill out the remainder if there are eligibility concerns.

8.3 The project lead explained that the Council is working with Public Health to develop an evaluation framework. This is a whole school approach. While the initiative will not be able to singularly tackle childhood obesity it is a step.

8.4 A member commented that he is cannot see how free school meals will help tackle obesity, moreover there seems to be a lack of clear outcomes for a large financial investment of several million pounds. The project lead commented that this was a decision taken by cabinet. He went on to mention the Hull report on universal school meals, which he said makes interesting reading. A member asked if this demonstrates a positive impact on childhood obesity and the project lead said that it did show this impact, however we cannot be sure that it was a direct result of the universal free school meal programme.

- 8.5 A member commented that while we do not seem to know for sure if it will impact on obesity he hopes that the initiative will improve nutritional standards in schools. The project lead said the council has been encouraging schools to get the Food for Life Bronze award.

ACTION

A report on progress will be received in 6 months time.

9. ADULT EDUCATION UPDATE

- 9.1 Gill Davies, Director of Environment and Leisure , introduce the report on Adult Education. The Director explained that they are planning a review of the Adult Learning Service. There are a number of key questions they have been set in order to evaluate the service including what the Council brings to this service; is this a service that the Council should provide or would other providers be better placed. There will be a consultation with stakeholders and an analysis of the data. Scrutiny is invited to contribute. A report will go to cabinet in February in 2012.
- 9.2 The director commented that the service was pleased with the recent OFSTED evaluation, which showed improvement. The service now rated as 'satisfactory' with several 'good' features.
- 9.3 There was discussion about how scrutiny could be involved and a comment was made that what started as an argument over fees in developing into a visioning process. A member commented that there is a need for the service to develop clear outcomes. The member went on the say that it might be right for the service to wind up. The director commented that ESOL teaching has clear outcomes and this is the stronger part of the service. There was agreement that the committee should consider the results of the consultation and contribute to the process.

ACTION

Officers undertook to provide the results of the consultation with stakeholders; including services users and adult education providers. Officers will provide data before analysis.

10. ROTHERHITHE FREE SCHOOL UPDATE

- 10.1 Sam Fowler, Schools for the Future project director, went through the report. He explained that two schools have now reached the next stage; Compass and University Technical College (UTC). He

reported that on 10 October 2011 the DfE advised that a 700 place UTC for 14-19 year olds based at Southwark College's Bermondsey site will proceed to the next stage.

- 10.2 A member asked about how much the council knew and the officer explained they were aware of the proposal, but not the detail. A member asked what are the councils duties in respect of free schools and the officer said the council needed to engage with a proposed free school; put our views through and consider its impact on people and place.
- 10.3 Members are asked if we will supply free school meals and what our obligations are. The officer responded that clarification on these issues is being sought.
- 10.4 A member commented that schools need information as soon as possible to enable them to plan ahead, and asked about information timescales. The officer responded that Southwark had made an application to provide a school, but the funding situation remained unclear. The council had continued to make representations and seek clarification but this was not forthcoming. He went on to say that the council's first notification received was that these two free schools would be developed. The officer explained that while the funding has now become available, it is not accessible to the council. Prior to this announcement local discussions had considered the possibility of popular local schools expanding to provide more places. There was a comment about the site in Bermondsey and if that might be problem.

ACTION

The officer will update members on development at the next meeting on 28 November

11. WORK PROGRAMME