



EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Monday 23 April 2012 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor David Hubber (Chair)
Councillor the Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole
Councillor Sunil Chopra
Councillor Adele Morris
Councillor Rosie Shimell
Councillor Althea Smith
Councillor Cleo Soanes
Reverend Nicholas Elder
Colin Elliott
Leticia Ojeda
Nick Tildesley

**OTHER MEMBERS
PRESENT:**

**OFFICER
& PARTNER
SUPPORT:** Colin Gale: Free Healthy School Meals project lead
Chris Davies, independent chair of Southwark
Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB)
Ann Flynn, SSCB development manager
Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny project manager
Ihona Hirving, CVS
Fern Edwards, CVS
Duton Alade Odomoso, Adult Education service user

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Sunil Chopra and education representative Colin Elliott.

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

2.1 There was none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

4.1 The chair reported that Councillor Catherine McDonald, cabinet lead for children's services, had contacted him to request corrections to the minutes, but had not specified the changes she would like. The chair reported that he had invited the cabinet lead to submit details for consideration.

4.2 The minutes were agreed as an accurate record, subject to any amendment.

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

5.1 The chair drew members' attention to a written comment made by a parent on the draft report. The parent said that she was very impressed with the report and suggested that an additional recommendation be added; that Southwark make provision for parents of disabled children to find meaningful employment, whilst fulfilling their caring responsibilities. The chair recommended this was included. The report was agreed with this amendment.

RESOLVED

The report was agreed with the additional recommendation that support be given to parents and carers to get back into employment:

Promote provision for parents of disabled children to find meaningful employment, whilst also fulfilling their caring responsibilities. Parents recommended a pilot developed by the London Borough of Wandsworth.

6. SAFEGUARDING - ANNUAL REPORT PRESENTED BY INDEPENDENT CHAIR

6.1 Chris Davies, Independent Chair of Southwark Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) and Ann Flynn, SSCB development manager, introduced the report. The safeguarding chair reported that the council had demonstrated its commitment to safeguarding when it lost the children's safeguarding manager and filled that position in a timely and appropriate way.

6.2 He explained that one of the board's functions is to identify high-level risks in the system. Last year the board identified the NHS as a risk because of a high level of turnover of staff and systems change because of the introduction of the NHS

and Community Care Bill, particularly the local move to clinical commissioning. He reported that early on the board identified this change programme as a significant risk to our safeguarding work, but because of the strong commitment and effective leadership of our health colleagues locally, the board has been reassured that the effectiveness of the council and health colleagues working together on safeguarding is being sustained.

- 6.3 The Independent Chair went on to detail that locally safeguarding in health services are moving to Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, as managers of community services, and to the Business Support Unit and Southwark Clinical Commissioning Committee (SCCC), as GPs assume their new role as clinical leads. He went on to explain that the board has been building relationships with the SCCC and local GPs and had seen a growing commitment and understanding of the importance of safeguarding.
- 6.4 The Independent Chair explained that the board does not carry out direct safeguarding work, but has a significant role in supporting frontline practitioners who work to support and safeguard children and their families. He reported that he was particularly pleased with progress in training and that this was now quality assured.
- 6.5 The last time the Independent Chair had visited the scrutiny committee he spoke about the high volume of safeguarding referrals. He referred to this and explained that the board had focused on this area over the last year to ensure that social workers were not flooded and this has led to improved referrals. He reported that fewer cases which turn out not to need a response are now being referred, and more appropriate alternative help is being put in place for many of these, but the service is not overwhelmed.
- 6.6 A member asked how referrals had been reduced and improved and it was explained that the Common Assessment Framework had been used to encourage service users and practitioners to come together and provide more local support where possible. There had been an emphasis on early support, even before a formal assessment had been made.
- 6.7 The Independent Chair said that the board is now asking all partners to come and account for their work on safeguarding and other partners are asked to participate in challenging and asking questions.
- 6.8 The safeguarding team explained that they have resolved to work more closely with adult safeguarding as this is a time of huge stress and increased safeguarding risk.
- 6.9 He reported that private fostering is reasonably common in Southwark and the board think there is major underreporting of this, as the legislation is not very well understood. The Independent Chair said that there is also the issue of child trafficking, which is hard to quantify, but he said that given the nature of Southwark's population, and the degree of flux, it is likely to be present to some degree.
- 6.10 Child neglect is one of the areas that the board is considering exploring thresholds

for intervention, the Independent Chair explained. Child sexual exploitation and particularly the grooming of young vulnerable girl is an area of particular concern.

- 6.11 The Independent Chair reported that safeguarding training is now on a more secure, planned and assured basis, with the new partnership between the Board and the Council's Organisational Development Service
- 6.12 The safeguarding team explained that there had been a big investment in domestic violence prevention and the team have decided to audit this work and would like to send an early draft to the committee to consider.
- 6.13 The chair of committee thanked the safeguarding team for their presentation and remarked that CVS are reporting on their work supporting families shortly. He asked how integrated CVS is with the safeguarding work. The safeguarding manager responded that she had assisted with CVS training.
- 6.14 A lay member commented that the training programme had been of very high quality and commended the recent training on domestic abuse. He also went on to comment that often practitioners in Early Years are often not highly trained so this is particularly valuable.
- 6.15 A member raised concerns about girl gangs grooming other girls into prostitution. The safeguarding team said that the grooming of girls by other girls had not been identified as a specific risk; however, they have been identifying concerns around the use of rape and sexual abuse to initiate girls into gangs. The team is working to identify particularly vulnerable girls, for example siblings. The approach has been to build resilience so that girls are more able to be assertive, know their rights and so reduce the risk of exploitation. The member responded that she is in contact with a voluntary provider in Peckham doing good work with girls at risk and that she would like the safeguarding team to follow up this contact outside of the meeting.
- 6.16 Members raised concerns about witchcraft and child abuse, in both church and the wider community, commenting that this is a national issue and there was a recent child death. Members pointed out that many churches have good safeguarding procedures, such as CRB checks and training; but there is also a need for officers and ministers to improve practices in faith communities. Officers said that they try to work with families on cultural beliefs and are clear that some things are acceptable in this country and some things are not. Members expressed particular concern for children who may be at risk because they belong to a faith group that believes in spirit possession, and the Independent Chair agreed that these concerns would be pursued and that this would be reflected in the next annual report.
- 6.17 A member asked how acceptable parenting is defined and representation for parents during any hearings. The Independent Chair commented that parenting standards are often not clearly defined and are a matter of judgement; for example there is no set age when a child can babysit but there is a need for a competent carer. He went on to explain that judgements about acceptable behaviour are not left to one person and that the team try to ensure that there is a network of support. For any court hearing there would need to be full representation.

RESOLVED

Officers will contact the community group based in Peckham, to follow up concerns raised about girl gangs grooming other girls into prostitution.

It was recommended that officers do more to address the risk of harm from witchcraft and spirit possession in their child protection and safeguarding work. Members advised that there is a particular need for engagement work with faith group communities and leaders, and that more is done to ensure that those in authority meet certain training standards and have the appropriate checks; e.g. CRB checks.

7. CSV (COMMUNITY SERVICE VOLUNTEERS)

- 7.1 Ihona Hirving and Fern Edwards from CVS introduced their work on the Parent Mentoring Project. They explained that when they presented to the committee six months ago the project was in its infancy. CVS has now received funding for 8 regions to work with families. These are families in need, but not the highest level of need. Ihona explained that they have now trained 141 volunteers nationally. In Southwark 25 volunteers have participated in training and 12 are ready to volunteer.
- 7.2 CVS staff explained that the needs of families are varied and support could be to help families get their children up on time and to school, for example. Sometimes families on the higher end of need could present safeguarding issues. CVS trains volunteers initially and does top up training. Families are monitored for progress, and this is motivating for both families and professionals.
- 7.3 There have been three families matched in Southwark, staff reported. It was explained that sometimes families do disengage if the time is not right, or sometimes the match between volunteer and families does not work. On the whole, CVS reported, the matches have been very positive, for example one family has redecorated their flat that was in disarray.
- 7.4 The chair invited members to ask questions and members asked if volunteers get discouraged if families drop out and what happens to families that disengage. CVS staff responded that this has not been their experience as it is explained to volunteers that often it might not be the right time to work with a particular family. They went on to explain that families that disengage are referred back to social services. Families are kept in constant contact and offered other forms of support; such as parenting support. CVS explained that this is a voluntary, rather than compulsory, initiative.
- 7.5 A member asked if families can self refer and CVS explained that this is not possible at the moment as someone needs to have overall responsibility and the referrals come through the parent partnership. The chair thanked CVS for their presentation and invited them to keep the committee updated.

RESOLVED

CVS were invited to return in a few months time.

8. REVIEW OF UNIVERSAL FREE HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS : FINALISE REPORT

- 8.1 The chair opened the item by referring to the recent visits to Surrey Square, Albion and John Donne primary schools and the reports circulated. Cllr Althea Smith requested her name be added to the visit to John Donne School. Members commented that the presentation by Surrey Squares on their service had been very impressive.
- 8.2 Members discussed resources and the chair commented that the head of Albion had said that she did not consider resources to be of big concern. Colin Gale, Free Healthy School Meals project lead, commented that Albion has a high level of free school meal take up and promoted 100 % take up of school meals.
- 8.3 A member commented that his school had taken meals in-house and while fresh food is not more expensive there is high staff costs associated with preparation.
- 8.4 Members commented that there are quite a few children with no recourse to public funding and schools have had to do separate fund raising so children do not go hungry; the universal free school healthy meal programme had provided some assistance.
- 8.5 Members praised the questionnaire used at John Donne School.
- 8.6 A member commented that she was still unconvinced about free school meals, and queried whether this programme had led to healthier school meals. The Free Healthy School Meals project lead commented that he is working with governors and school staff to ensure that they are meeting nutritional standards. He explained that all schools needed to meet these, apart from Academies. He went on to explain that he can't visit all 70 schools and colleges to ensure standards are met, but he is promoting this. He reported that three catering providers have met the Food for Life standards, which means they have the appropriate software.
- 8.7 The Free Healthy School Meals project lead went on to explain that the programme is seeking to ensure that kitchens have the physical capacity to provide the increased level of school meals and this often gives the schools more resources; for example one school was provided with a dishwasher which helped with staff costs. He explained that his role is there to ensure standards are good.
- 8.8 A member commented that that the programme needs to go a step further and said that a whole school approach is really important; for example a parent bringing the chef recipes for jollof rice can help with involving parents in the school community. Members agreed that the social education of eating together and using a knife and fork is also very important. A member commented that in their school parents and children have two choices; at home or a school meal.

- 8.9 The Free Healthy School Meals project lead commented that they are seeking to promote the Food for Life awards as these take schools above the most basics standards. He reported that he will be conducting focus groups with parents and children after Easter and will then be able to provide the committee with these findings.
- 8.10 Members expressed concern about takeaway chicken shops near to schools and the chair reminded members of the recommendations to restrict fast food in the recent review report completed by the committee on childhood obesity and sports provision for secondary and primary age children. Members also noted that the Peckham and Nunhead Area Action Plan is piloting restrictions.

RESOLVED

Invite the Food for Life Partnership to present at the next meeting of the new administrative year.

Visit one more school that uses an outside caterer.

9. ROTHERHITHE SCHOOL AND SOUTHWARK FREE SCHOOLS

- 9.1 The chair noted that there had been no significant developments.

RESOLVED

This item should be kept as an item for regular updates.

10. ADULT EDUCATION

- 10.1 The chair reported that the strategic director for environment, Gill Davies, had reported to him that officers were seeking to find a date to set up an additional consultation meeting with services users on Adult Education. A visioning report will be completed in the next couple of months and officers would like to share this with the committee.
- 10.2 The project manager reported that Save Southwark Adult Learning had circulated a papers to members and this had been tabled (attached to the minutes) .
- 10.3 Service user, Duton Alade Odomoso, commented that the service had just received a good ofsted report. He commented that it is important to note when a good job is being done. He went on to say that local people are accessing training and this is valuable. The chair thanked him for his contribution.

RESOLVED

The additional meeting/workshop to consult with current and former users of the Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) courses should happen as soon as practically possible.

The wider visioning for the service should come to scrutiny once this has been completed by officers.