



Education, Children's Services and Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education, Children's Services and Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Wednesday 15 January 2014 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor David Hubber (Chair)
Councillor The Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole
Councillor Chris Brown
Councillor Lisa Rajan
Councillor Rosie Shimell
Councillor Althea Smith
Councillor Cleo Soanes
Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer
Lynn Charlton

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Rory Patterson, Director, Children's Social Care
Alasdair Smith , Service Manager , Children's Social Care.
Merril Haeusler, Director of Children's Services , Education
Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny project manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 There were no apologies.

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

2.1 There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2013 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. REGULAR UPDATE ON SOUTHWARK FREE SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL PLACES IN THE BOROUGH

5.1 The Director of Education, Merril Haeusler, went through the report circulated, and commented that the University Engineering Academy Southbank is an academy rather than a free school.

5.2 She reported that she had recently met with the board of trustees of Compass School. The former head teachers is no longer there and they are advertising nationally for a new head.

5.3 The Director reported that Southwark Free School has also appointed a new executive head - teacher, and this usually means that the executive is running more than one school, and added that she was unsure what happened to the former head-teacher. Members asked about the progress with the school and site and the Director said that she is a little concerned with the number of children in a small and constrained site and that the school is not attracting many children , however , she reported that the school is confident that once on a permanent sites it will be viable . Members asked are if there is a need for the places provided by the school, The Director responded that at the time when the application came through there was not, but the education department is now factoring in the additional places and by the time the school gets to the permanent site there will be sufficient demand.

5.4 The Director was then asked about the Judith Kerr Free School and numbers applying. The Director reported that there are around 40. She said that initially the Education Department had concerns about barriers to entry, but these do not seem to be born out and the school is operating well as a community school.

5.5 Members asked about the process for starting a free school and the Director explained that anybody can put in an application to the Department of Education for various reasons, for example there is a need for places or a community need, such as learning German. She explained that that most times free school applicants are granted permission and they then come to the council for help with sites. She explained in the case of Harris Academy they unusually named the Dulwich Hospital. The NHS will presumably give to the highest bidder; or not. She explained that it is the Department for Education who put up the funding. A member asked if the Director had further information about Harris Academy's plans for Peckham, but she explained she didn't and the member suggested inviting Harris Academy to a meeting.

- 5.6 The chair reported that earlier this afternoon a meeting was held with Education and Children's Service exploring working with schools and improving working relationships. He reported that the Director of Education attends the head teacher's forum and is going to explain what scrutiny is and scrutiny had offered to do anything possible to improve relationships with schools. The Director reported that she had suggested moving to providing reports on major updates to scrutiny. She emphasized that the council have signed up to ensuring that every child has a good education. She added that relationships with schools are good and progressing well. She reported that, with the exception of Harris Academy schools, the council has school improvement teams in local schools. Harris Academy does things differently - for example they have their own education welfare officers. The council responded that this was fine but that it is essential that these link into the services the council has. The Director commented that the council do need to bring to the table respect for the difficult job that head-teachers do. She added that every secondary school head - teacher has invited her to a meeting.
- 5.7 A member asked why there were such a high turnover of head –teachers, and raised concerns about exclusion levels, particularly at Harris Academy schools. The chair commented that a report will be forthcoming on exclusions, managed moves and with revised statistics on exclusions, and those schools will be asked for their policies. The Director responded that the turnover of head-teachers is mostly down to people leaving to retire, with the exception of one. She advised asking schools for their behaviour or wellbeing policies. The chair commented that ARK/ Globe were very helpful and the committee can continue to request that Harris Academy attend.

RESOLVED

Invite Harris Academy to attend a future meeting.

6. USE OF RESIDENTIAL CARE

- 6.1 Rory Patterson, Director of Children's Social Care talked through the PowerPoint (attached to the minutes) on 'The use of Residential care in Southwark'. Alasdair Smith, Service Manager, Children's Social Care contributed to the discussion.
- 6.2 The Director began by explaining that Children's Services now know that the longer children are exposed to abuse, the more significant to the adverse affects and harm. Southwark Council has the highest number of care proceedings. There is a legacy of children who were in neglectful situations where Southwark took action to remove the children later.
- 6.3 The Director referred to the press attention that the council received about the 12 children who were placed in care homes out of the borough. The chair commented that good practice indicates that children should be less than 20 miles away from their family. He asked about the farthest home that children are placed outside of

Southwark. The Director said that a number of children with high support needs are placed in a residential home in Cumbria. He mentioned a film made there by the new children's rights officer where the children spoke about their experiences - they will say it is a good place; but they wished it was closer to home. He commented that many children are at risk of child sexual exploitation or may have been involved in criminal activity. Children and young people have access to therapeutic care in Cumbria, with education provided on site. They have a larger house; and a smaller terrace.

- 6.4 A member asked how Southwark compared with other local authorities and the Director said that Southwark Council's placement rates outside the borough are more or less the same as similar councils. He said it is worth bearing in mind that somewhere like Kent is a big place. A child from Southwark could be still be close in a neighbouring borough; however the council is seeking more local foster care.
- 6.5 A member asked why the home in Cumbria was used rather than local provision. The Director explained that this is usually because multiple placements more locally that have not worked. In Cumbria all the children have stayed. He explained that there is also a factor about real estate costs – these are much higher in the city, and this could add £2000 a week in costs.
- 6.6 A member asked about the children's return to Southwark. The Director said that a cohort is starting to return, with one young women coming back where the council is providing support in to help her independence. The Service Manager said the council is now considering what to do about placements in Cumbria; the education and support is very good, however the council is looking at more local provision and also increasing our foster care support. The Director added that the council are looking at commissioning together with Lambeth and other providers, but there are difficulties with property prices going up so this is not easy.
- 6.7 The Director said that there are sometimes issues with around sexuality, so a placement with a family might not be appropriate and the risk of child sexual exploitation and, or, gangs. Some children may abscond - which makes fosters carers anxious and is disruptive. There can also be criminal activity – which can work in foster placements, but is challenging as this could involve difficulties such as drug dealing and the subsequent consequences and dangers.
- 6.8 The Director said that some people think out of sight out of mind - but this could not be further from the truth. He explained that the Southwark children have an independent reviewing officer, as well as social workers. There is also a children's rights officer and young people are offered an advocate. In addition to this there are children's relationships with care home staff.
- 6.9 A member asked about placements in Southwark made by other local authorities and if Children's Services are involved. The Director said that the council is informed and the children placed locally to access services.
- 6.10 A member asked if the independent officers are local to the children in Cumbria. The Director said that they were sometimes, and often the advocates are. He

agreed that this was a good point, and that there is an advantage for the local support to understand the local area. The Service Manager added that care homes do commission advocates. In Cumbria the children rights officer made a point of going there and will return within a year, and she is also in text contact. He also agreed that it is critical to have local advocates.

- 6.11 The Director commented that there are challenges around Transition we recognize. He explained that young people can now stay in foster care up to the age of 21 and the council is running a campaign for more foster carers. The local authority is looking at moving people from residential care to foster care - so a family can keep hold of young people for longer and while they complete higher education.
- 6.12 A member asked about reviews for children not in care homes. The Director explained that there are regular 6 month reviews, and when there are transitions or major events. She asked who would be there and he explained that Children's Services aim to limit the number so the child does not feel overwhelmed – often the parents, teacher, therapists and the young person or child.

7. WORK-PLAN

- 7.1 The committee discussed the work-plan.

RESOLVED

The committee will receive the cabinet response to the scrutiny report on: Bullying - school and council policy in supporting vulnerable children and reducing abusive and poor peer relations

The 11 March meeting will invite the Independent Safeguarding chair to present the annual safeguarding report.

The Youth Council will be invited to attend the 24 February meeting and suggest topics for discussion.

The Challenge Network will also be invited to present on their Dragoon's Den project.

Harris Academy chain will be invited to attend either of the next two meetings.

Exclusions will be an item on the February meeting, with a paper requested from officers and requests made to schools to provide their behaviour / well-being policies.

