MINUTES OF
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Monday, 18 July 2016
(7:00 - 8:45 pm)

Present: Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe (Chair), Cllr Melanie Bartlett (Deputy Chair), Cllr Edna Fergus, Cllr Irma Freeborn, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole and Cllr Danielle Smith, Mrs Glenda Spencer, Mrs I Robinson, Ellen Grant, Tracy MacDonald and Suriyaa Gnanapandithan

Also Present: Cllr Dominic Twomey

Apologies: Cllr Simon Bremner

1. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2016 were confirmed as correct.

3. The Growth Commission’s Recommendations

Councillor Twomey, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Growth and Investment, presented a report on the independent Growth Commission’s report advising the Council on how to achieve its ambition to be London’s growth opportunity. Members noted that the Growth Commission, which was commissioned by the Council, made 109 recommendations in total and that 21 of these related to issues within the remit of the Children’s Services Select Committee (CSSC).

Councillor Twomey asked the CSSC to select its top three priorities from Growth Commission recommendations 67-86 and 95, which were listed in Appendix 2 of the report. The CSSC’s top three priorities would then be presented by the Chair of the CSSC, Councillor Kangethe, to the Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee (PASSC) on 25 July 2016 to inform all the select committees’ chairs of the CSSC’s priorities before they are considered by Cabinet in September 2016. Cabinet would consider the priorities and the implications for implementing them before deciding whether they would form part of the future aims and ambitions of the Council to achieve growth.

Members discussed and put forward their views on which of the 21 recommendations should be prioritised. Members individually indicated support for the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 69: A multi-agency early intervention strategic partnership could play a critical role in developing and implementing the range of interventions needed during early years. Such a partnership should be driven by the Council, and have as its focus the need to break the cycle of poor outcomes, including health, poverty and education;
• Recommendation 72: The Commission recommends that the Borough should be more ambitious in raising aspirations and educational outcomes;

• Recommendation 76: Recognising the holistic approach required to address educational underachievement, strong partnerships between schools and other stakeholders, including the community and voluntary sectors, and business, should be established focusing on providing the social, emotional and practical support children and families require;

• Recommendation 79: In order to help make the Borough an attractive one for teachers, and other key workers, the Commission recommends that the Borough make available housing, in a mix of styles that meet the needs of people at different stages of their lives (smaller apartments through to family homes);

• Recommendation 80: The Council should persuade tutoring organisations, including those that draw on tutors from the private sector (such as The Access Project – which matches students from disadvantaged backgrounds with volunteers from the private sector to help them get into Russell Group universities) or those that utilise university students, such as the Manchester based charity Tutor Trust, to support student in the Borough;

• Recommendation 81: Working with parents is crucial to raising aspirations, but the challenge of doing so should not be underestimated and a multi-stakeholder approach is required. Schools should identify and develop strategies, drawing on successful examples from both inside and outside of the Borough, to help engage parents where low aspirations are a hindrance on children’s performance;

• Recommendation 82: Schools should adopt an experiential approach to the curriculum, which incorporates the cultural entitlement statements adopted by school governing bodies in the Borough, enabling students to have wide-ranging experiences that both inform their learning and contribute to widening their horizons. This could include activities across London, as well as a ‘Model UN’ activity, harnessing philanthropy to support the activity;

• Recommendation 83: The Council should ensure that schools in the Borough are providing careers education, as distinct from individual advice and guidance, to students from a young age; and

• 95. Schools should support the development of healthy lifestyles and active citizenship through their curricular and extra-curricular activities.

The Strategic Director for Service Development and Integration (SDSDI) suggested that as some of these recommendations were closely related, it may be possible to group them under themes. The Commissioning Director for Education (CDE) advised that recommendation 72 underpinned the main aims of the Council’s Education Service and therefore may not need to be prioritised as part of this exercise. She also stated that recommendation 79 was already a part of the work stream under Ambition 2020, the Council’s transformation plan, and again, for that reason, may not need to be prioritised. As for the remainder of the recommendations supported by members, she suggested that they could be grouped as follows:

• Supporting aspiration and ambition of young people: recommendations 81, 80 and 83;

• Develop innovative partnerships to support young people’s achievement: recommendations 69 and 76, and

• Encouraging a broad and varied curriculum which develops young people’s
talent and prepares them well for adulthood; 82 and 95.

The Chair asked officers to circulate the CSSC’s recommendations to members prior to the PASSC meeting on Monday.

4. Children’s Services Financial Update Report

The Council’s Group Manager for Finance presented a report to update the CSSC on the financial position of Children’s Services. Members noted that in July 2015 the 2015/16 Budget Monitoring report highlighted a projected overspend for Children’s Services of £7.1m. The Director of Children’s Services implemented a number of initiatives to address the overspend and proposed a formal cost saving programme, the Social Care Ambition and Financial Efficiency (SAFE) Programme. Cabinet approved the Outline Business Case approved in October 2015.

Members noted that the programme was successful in containing costs in 2015/16 reducing the original forecasted overspend of £7.1m to £4.8m by outturn; however, Children’s Services in LBBD was similar to other London boroughs in that it faced continued increases in demand both in numbers and the complexity of cases. In February 2016 the Service reviewed the underlying pressures it was facing in order to develop a base budget for 2016/17. The report provided an outline of the following pressures:

- Staffing
- Placements
- Transport
- Legal
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- Families with no recourse to public funds
- Independent Review Officers
- Project Team and Recruitment Cost.

Members noted the proposals to mitigate £5.9m in the above areas and the current budget position.

The Chair asked for further detail around what the Council was doing to address the staffing issues, as this appeared to be a persistent problem, over a number of years. The Operational Director for Care and Support (ODCS) stated that the Council had undertaken a number of recruitment initiatives to reduce staffing pressures including creating an attractive housing offer for potential new social workers, and efforts to reduce the average case load. Furthermore the Council had held ‘open days’ and provided staff ‘profile’ articles in the Guardian and on the Council’s website to promote its offer. She stated that unfortunately, whilst there are many newly qualified people, there is a shortage of experienced social workers looking for permanent roles, which the Council needs the most. Staffing pressure remains an entrenched national problem, which the Government is working on too. The Council is engaged in some of these Government measures, for example the ‘Step Up to Social Work’ initiative which allows people with degrees to undertake a condensed course that leads to a social work degree. The Council has recruited some people to permanent posts but it cannot compete with agencies’ rates. It has worked closely with the University of East London and had recruited people who
had studied there.

Members asked whether the proposal to move on some looked after children over the age of 16 in accommodation to live independently would be contrary to the Government’s ‘Staying Put’ guidance. The ODCS stated that Young people in foster care are considered for Staying Put placements in accordance with the Council’s Policy. The Council would be very careful in selecting young people for post-16 plus moves and would always work to ensure that these moves would not jeopardise their life chances. She stated that the decision would not be made by her staff solely; it would be reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officer.

In response to questions, the OPCS stated that the east London labour market for social work is different to other areas in London in that there are more agency workers; however, she was not sure of exactly the reasons why.

In response to a question the Group Manager for Finance stated that currently Children’s Services did not receive any funding from the European Union. He highlighted that Children’s Services had been successful in recruiting a number of permanent social work managers, which would create a stable environment, and hopefully help in attracting more suitable people to permanent positions.

5. **Social Care and Education Performance Report**

Members noted the Social Care and Education Performance report and noted that a further performance update report was on the Committee’s Work Programme for 2016/17.

6. **Scrutiny Review on Adoption - Scoping Report**

The ODCS explained that prior to the meeting members were asked to select one area from the following list, which the Committee would undertake an in-depth scrutiny review on:

- Care Leavers;
- Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities; or
- Adoption Scorecard Performance.

Members were provided with an options paper which provided detail on the issues that would be involved in undertaking a review into each of the above areas. The majority of the CSSC (including co-optees) opted to do an in-depth review into Adoption Services and therefore, on this basis, it was agreed that the topic for an in-depth scrutiny review in 2016/17 was Adoption Scorecard Performance.

The ODCS stated that it was important to scope the review to ensure members receive the correct range of evidence and to ensure there was a timetable for delivering the end report with recommendations.

Members asked whether it would be possible to know, as part of the review:

- The age of the youngest and oldest child adopted;
- The level of achievement and outcomes of adopted children;
- What the Council was doing to address issues faced by children in care for a long time;
• Whether the Council recruited its own adopters;
• Benchmarking data telling us how we perform compared to similar local authorities; and
• The process a person would need to go through to find out if they were adopted.

The ODCS stated that a range of sessions would be arranged as well as reading material, which were likely to provide most of the above information.

The young person representative asked whether the Council tracked the lives of adopted children. The ODCS stated that local authorities do not do this; however, the Government has recommended that adopted children are a priority for school admissions, so in this way, the Council does have information on adopted children. The emphasis on providing better support to the child and their adoptive family meant that the Council now did hold some information about adopted young people.

Members asked whether the Council held information on adoption breakdowns and the list of reasons why. The ODCS stated that the Council did not monitor families routinely; however, a Government Policy Review which led to a university study in this area indicated that this might be a requirement in future. This study could be shared with the CSSC.

In response to a question the ODCs stated that it was possible to adopt through fostering.

The SDSDI stated that as part of the scrutiny review process, the CSSC could undertake visits to other authorities, hear from an expert in the field and if it could be arranged, watch a video about, or speak to a person who had been adopted (although it was likely that this would be someone who had been adopted a few years ago). She stated that it may not be possible for every member to attend each session relating to the review, and therefore small working groups could be formed, who could report back to the CSSC.

The CDE stated that officers would now need to draft Terms of Reference for the review so the review would have focus and direction. These would be circulated to the CSSC in due course for agreement. Officers would also review the key lines of enquiry to reflect as far as possible, members’ comments and suggestions at today’s meeting.

7. Draft Work Programme 2016-17

The Chair presented the draft Work Programme for 2016/17 and asked members to note that the performance and finance updates reports currently scheduled for 19 September 2016 would move to 8 February 2017 as September 2016 was too close to this meeting, which had just received performance and finance updates. The CSSC agreed the Work Programme subject to this change.

Councillor Freeborn asked whether the agenda item on child sexual exploitation could be moved to an earlier meeting. Officers advised that this item had been scheduled for the February 2017 meeting so that the CSSC could dedicate adequate time to the Adoption Scrutiny Review in earlier meetings.