MINUTES OF
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Monday, 2 October 2017
(7:00 - 8:35 pm)

Present: Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe (Chair), Cllr Simon Bremner, Cllr Irma Freeborn, Cllr Syed Ghani and Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole; Mrs I Robinson and Dr Jo Finch

Also Present: Camran Ditta, Georgia Harley and Tedy Sam

Apologies: Cllr Syed Ahammad, Cllr Josephine Channer and Cllr Danielle Smith
Mrs Glenda Spencer

6. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

7. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2017 were confirmed as correct.

8. Social Care Performance Report

The Council’s Head of Performance and Intelligence (HPI) introduced a report which provided an overview of the latest performance trends in children’s social care services. For the purposes of scrutiny, the report focussed on the key performance indicators that had been flagged as areas of concern, which were indicators that had been rated Amber or Red using the red, amber or green (RAG) rating.

The HPI provided a summary of performance in relation to the following indicators, which had been RAG rated ‘amber’:

- Percentage of contacts going on to referral;
- Repeat social care referrals;
- Children subject to a child protection plan per 10,000;
- Percentage of ceased child protection plans lasting two years or more;
- Percentage of school-aged looked after children with an up-to-date personal education plan (last six months);
- Percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training (aged 17-21 from 2015); and
- Percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation.

The HPI also provided a summary of performance in relation to the following indicators, which had been RAG rated ‘red’:

- Percentage of core groups within timescale (a core group is responsible for the implementation of the child protection plan to keep the child safe);
- Percentage of children looked after in the same placement for at least two
years during the year;
• Looked after children with up-to-date health checks; and
• Adoption scorecard performance.

In response to questions from members, the HPI stated that:

• A ‘contact’ in social care was when a person reported an initial concern to social care services about a child. The contact would only be classified as a ‘referral’ if, after an assessment, it met the risk threshold which would make a further assessment necessary. After further assessment a referral could be progressed to a ‘social care single assessment’ or a ‘strategy discussion’. The current performance data showed that although the number of contacts made to social care was not increasing, the percentage of contacts which were progressing to a referral was increasing. This meant that the contacts being made were more serious in nature. 37% of contacts were progressing to referral, 10% higher than the 2016/17 April - July figure. The proportion of referrals progressing to a social care single assessment or strategy discussion was not increasing;

• The data on the percentage of children looked after in the same placement for at least two years potentially included positive placement changes, such as children who had been moved from residential care to foster care, or an adoptive family. She could include a break-down of the data to show both positive and negatives moves in a future performance report to the Committee;

• Currently, there was a sufficient number of social workers to meet demand and the average caseload was approximately 20 per worker; however, still too many social workers in the assessment service were agency social workers. The care management and looked after children services were much more stable in that regard; and

• Performance in relation to the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation indicator had decreased to 81.8% (63/77) compared to 83.7% in June and was below the Council’s target of 83%, although it was in line with the national and statistical neighbour averages. Of the 14 care leavers that were not classed as being in suitable accommodation, three were in prison and 11 were not in contact with the Council.

In response to a question, the Commissioning Director for Education (CDE) stated that the Council did not currently exempt care leavers from paying council tax; however, there were ongoing discussions about potentially introducing some level of support.

In response to a question, the Council’s Group Manager for Integrated Youth Services, 16 – 19 Participation (GMIYS), stated that the Council was committed to supporting care leavers with getting into employment, education or training. For example, all care leavers were now guaranteed an interview for apprenticeship positions and care leavers who had graduated from university and were successful at obtaining an internship with the Council would be paid for the first three months.

The Chair thanked the HPI for the report.
9. Scoping Report

The Committee agreed the scope of its scrutiny review on ‘Supporting Young People who are Not in Education, Employment or Training’ (NEETs) as proposed in the report, including the following terms of reference for the Review:

i. What do young people and parents expect and want from an offer of work experience and work-related learning, and how do they see this best contributing to young people’s employability skills?

ii. How can the Council better engage with businesses to enable them to support the development of employability skills in our young people?

iii. What are the views of parents and young people around apprenticeships? How might we improve the perception and take up of apprenticeships by borough residents?

10. Presentation on the Council's Offer and Engagement

The GMIYS delivered a presentation on Council's current work experience and work-related learning offer and the Council’s current engagement with businesses around supporting young people’s employability, which covered the following:

- Who delivers this work?
- What is the current offer?
- Examples of career insight events
- Examples of employer visits
- How many are reached?
- How are opportunities sourced?
- Which schools participate?

In response to questions the GMIYS stated that:

- The possible reasons why some schools did not buy into the Council’s offer were budgetary pressures, as the service came at a cost, and because providing a work experience service to pupils was no longer a statutory requirement (although careers advice still was);
- Work experience had a poor image nationally but recently efforts had been made to improve work experience for young people so that it provided a real insight and learning experience. Recent reports showed that it was the most positive work-related activity young people could partake in, as they would learn a variety of workplace skills.
- All the borough’s schools had some level of work-related learning on offer;
- Businesses participated in work-related learning events for free and any requests by the Council that a business contribute monetarily towards work-related learning activities or grants may jeopardise the relationship;
- The Council’s offer provided excellent value for money due to the way the offer was packaged, and its offer was consistently well publicised to encourage other schools to buy in;
- The Council wished to maintain a balance in terms of the types of businesses it worked with in order to create work-related learning opportunities of a diverse nature. For example, the Council was working with the Barking Enterprise Centre to establish a partnership pledge, whereby local businesses would all pledge to do something to contribute to
the work-related learning agenda, be it attending a school assembly, or offering work experience. On the other hand, examples of large, out of borough, businesses supporting local young people with career insight were Morgan Stanley, Lloyds of London and Gerald Eve;

- Work experience opportunities within the Council had dropped in the last few years. There was a now big push to improve this including a challenge to Council departments to make work experience dynamic and interesting. Placements have more than doubled in six months; and
- Academies were not exempt from providing work-related learning. It was difficult to say exactly what the offer was in schools which did not buy into the Council’s service; however, they would need to provide the minimum level of service required by statute (careers advice).

In response to a question, the Deputy Chair of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum described the process he underwent for his work experience. Members commented that they felt all businesses should cover lunch expenses for pupils on work experience. The GMIYS stated that this practice varied from business to business.

The Council’s Group Manager for Employment and Skills (GMES) delivered a presentation on Apprenticeships, which covered the following:

- Overview
- National commitments and Apprenticeship Levy
- Apprenticeship levels and new standards
- Public sector apprenticeship target
- Apprenticeship starts and completion by borough residents
- Apprenticeship starts: percentage of working age population 2014/15
- The Council workforce
- Construction opportunities.

In response to questions, the GMES stated that:

- The move from apprenticeship frameworks to standards by 2020 was intended to ensure that apprenticeships would be much more occupationally focused, would provide an overview of expected competencies and behaviours, and would include an end-point assessment;
- The number of apprenticeships across London councils over the past three years had gone down overall and this could possibly be attributed to councils undergoing transformation due to budgetary pressures. It was expected that the figure would steadily start to rise now. A part of the growth will be use of higher level apprenticeships to train the existing workforce;
- It was recognised that people who wish to apply for an apprenticeship may lack confidence in writing personal statements and so there was support available at the borough’s Job Shop with this, as well as an online tool which provided a basic skills assessment accepted by local colleges; and
- The assessment at the end of the apprenticeship did not have to take a prescribed form, it will vary by each standard.

The Chair thanked the GMIYS and GMES for their presentation.
11. Cabinet Forward Plan

The Committee agreed that, at this stage, there were no items on the Cabinet Forward Plan which needed pre-decision scrutiny.

12. Work Programme

The Work Programme was agreed.