MINUTES OF
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE
Monday, 27 November 2017
(7:00 - 8:35 pm)

Present: Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe (Chair), Cllr Melanie Bartlett (Deputy Chair), Cllr Simon Bremner, Cllr Josephine Channer, Cllr Irma Freeborn, Cllr Syed Ghani and Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole; Mrs Ingrid Robinson

Also Present: Georgia Harley

Apologies: Cllr Syed Ahammad, Mrs Glenda Spencer and Dr Jo Finch

13. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Minutes - 2 October 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2017 were confirmed as correct.

15. Scrutiny Review on Improving the Employability of Young People: Discussion with Business Representatives on Work Experience and Work Related Learning

The Group Manager for Integrated Youth Services, 14-19 Participation and Engagement (GMIYS), introduced the report on the third part of the consultation element of the scrutiny review on Improving Employability Prospects of Barking and Dagenham’s Young People, which was a discussion with local business representatives on their role and experiences in this area. Similar consultations had been undertaken with young people and parents and an update on that would be given later in the agenda.

The GMIYS explained that a number of organisations that contribute to the work experience, work-related learning and apprenticeships in the Borough had been invited to give evidence to the Committee, but due to unavoidable circumstance had tendered their apologies, and only one organisation was now present. The GMIYS then introduced Ms Donna Finley - Operations Director of the Barking Enterprise Centre (BEC).

To give the Committee an overview of her organisation Ms Finley explained that the BEC provided work space rental to over 120 businesses, primarily sole traders and small businesses, as well as providing rooms for training and workshops. The BEC had worked with LBBD’s Trident, which had links with many of the Borough’s schools, and had given placements to pre and post 16 young people, Ms Finley explained how they reviewed potential work experience candidates before accepting them. The duties that the BEC could offer during a placement were varied but would mainly be reception and general office support such as facilities set-up, hospitality, and leaflet and posters design, rent invoicing etc. Ms Finley added that her experience of the young people in work experience placements was that the majority do turn up on time, are appropriately dressed, are polite and
willing to learn and many students appreciate the opportunity to work in a business or commerce environment. However, some students do not necessarily have an interest or want to be in that sector of employment and do not seem to be fully concentrating, and therefore getting the best out of their work experience placement.

The Committee and Ms Finley then discussed several issues, including:

- Matching the students’ expectations and aspiration to placements and the reality of what work involves, including the repetitive and more mundane activities. The reality of not being able to give more complex or long-term projects due to the level of their experience and the duration the placements.

- The assistance the students receive when making their application for work experience placement, bearing in mind many young people at school have not settled on an area of employment they wish to pursue after school.

- The provision of careers officers, events, speed networking and visits to aspirational companies was at the discretion of the schools. Concerns were raised that the quality or lack of advice initially could result in poor placement matching and how that could affect the young person’s view of a work experience placement. Although it was noted that the experience, especially if it had been negative, may galvanise a young person to achieve better at school or change their career choice.

- The effect of the student getting their first, second or third choice business / industry sector and how that may impact upon their engagement during the placement.

- The Borough’s schools are not obliged to buy into the Council’s traded services, such as Trident.

- Skills that business were looking for when hiring a young person and what the Council could do help support the development of those skills. Ms Finley advised that when selecting work placement candidates, the BEC looked for traits such as willingness and enthusiasm to learn, etiquette of work behaviour, and a sense of the role, for example for a public facing role wearing the appropriate apparel and the way they greet and talk to people.

- The students’ mindset that even if the placement did not match their ideal long-term career, the opportunity could be a springboard for their future ambitions.

- Mentoring and training opportunities for candidates.

- Sponsors, such as National Westminster Bank, funding workshops to encourage young people interested in being entrepreneurs and starting up their own business.

- Schools / colleges teaching speed interviewing skills and encouraging young people to put their work placement experiences on their resume / CV.

- To assist young people to have a understanding of their future education and
career choices and employment opportunities, the benefits of encouraging schools to invite a variety of professionals and employment sectors to visit their students to explain what they do and the qualifications and training ladder required for those jobs / careers

- Concern had been raised by businesses about the impact that an apprentice being at college for one full day a week caused them, particularly where they employ two or more apprentices. Some Colleges offer a distance learning option that suits businesses much better.

The Committee noted that the BEC signposts its clients to Trident if any of them enquire about work experience and apprentices and the BEC would be willing to act as a channel towards its clients if there was demand for a potential taster / network event for young people considering starting their own business. The BEC would also consider the issue of providing a certificate to the young people that complete their work placement with them.

The Committee thanked Ms Finley for attending on behalf of the BEC and her frank input.

16. Improving the Employability Prospects of Young People: Progress Update and Feedback

At its meeting held on 12 July 2016, the Committee agreed to undertake a review which had subsequently been scoped and entitled ‘Improving the Employability Prospects of Barking and Dagenham’s Young People’. The report provided an update on the progress of this scrutiny and next steps to completion, including timelines. The earlier item on this agenda had provided useful input from perspective of the business community.

The Chair drew attention to the sessions held on 10 October and 9 November 2017 and invited those that had attended the session(s) to provide a verbal feedback to the Committee.

Cllr Bremner advised that he had felt that a lot of young people were unaware of what apprenticeships were.

Ingrid Robinson commented that some students get into placements because of their parent’s contacts, but many don’t have those links. The expectations of the young people need to be managed and they need to understand that in the workplace the level of tasks and duties would be basic until an individual was experienced and that many tasks in the work place are mundane and repetitive. The mundane was not necessarily bad as it could help students work harder at school. Parents, students and teachers need to work jointly to get the parameters right.

The Chair said she had been particularly impressed with Trinity School, where the placements seemed to have been good and appropriate for the student’s needs. The enthusiasm of the students’ and motivation of all those involved in achieving a successful placement was evident. The teachers had clearly explained what was required of the students and what they should expect from their placements.
The Chair said she felt from some of the student’s comments that some other schools do not provide students with a realistic and good understanding of work experience or enough information about specific placements: some of the students had said they just get a form. The Chair said that she felt that schools should have a teacher or careers advisor to prepare students for work experience placements (what was expected of them and what the placement would involve).

Cllr Oluwole raised the issue that there were no clear guidelines on the involvement of parents in choosing the work placement for their child. He felt that school governors needed to be more proactive in rolling out the details of the opportunity of apprenticeships and work experience placements to parents.

In addition, there also seemed to be some thinking with students that apprenticeships are not for the academically brilliant, but this was not the case as they are available for a wide variety of jobs, which needed to be clearer. There needs to be much more information provided to the children, as well as parents, on apprenticeships.

The Chair then invited comments from the Committee and Members then raised and discussed several issues:

- What was the fundamental purpose behind work experience and what was its purpose? Was its purpose to inspire, give a taste of what it was like to go to work, or to work in a specific field in order to help young people decide what GCSE they want to do and any other subsequent qualifications?

- What were the different types of work experience offered. Some Councillors felt that it would help the students make choices if there was a list of the types of work experience and what they students would be doing at them. Councillors felt that it would be helpful to the review if they could see the types of work experience offered to the Borough’s students. The Commissioning Director, Education (CDE), advised that she would provide a list of work experience placement providers direct to Committee members.

- The feedback from the children indicated that some of them had had event days and placement advice at school.

- The importance of placements offering inspiration and aspiration to encourage career selection. Many of the young people did not know what they wanted to do after they left education so there also needed to be much wider industry choices to encourage students to try an area they may not otherwise had.

- The placements opportunities and choice being limited by the number of businesses that could and were prepared to take students, the number of students those businesses could accommodate and capacity to provide interesting activities. Increasing the number of businesses participating does need to be pursued.

- In response to a questions about creative and inspirational placements, and the offer from the Council, the Commissioning Director, Education (CDE), advised that local schools have taken the opportunity to link with a number of significant city firms, including holding taster days. The Council now had work experience
placements and apprentices in a number of areas including, administration, financial, legal and media.

- Regardless of the role at the individual placements, the scheme provided young people with a learning curve in regard to the behaviours required and responsibly of attending work: a taste of what it was like in the real world of work.

- Some students had indicated that they had been so bored during their placement that it had provided them with the drive do better at school.

- The feedback from the sessions indicated that not all schools have careers advisors or provide a consistent level of support to students and there appeared to be a lack of information for the young people about work experience at the beginning of the process. The Committee suggested that as a low resource opportunity to address this could be the BAD Youth Forum making a video for students of what to expect when applying and attending work experience to help young people get the most out of the opportunity.

The GMIYS explained that the challenge was that the Council provides a traded service, and whilst most schools buy into that others do not, hence the inconsistency in students’ experience.

The GMIYS also explained that the BAD Youth Forum would be re-elected in January, and he would put the video suggestion forward to the Forum to consider as part of their work programme for the year.

The Chair thanked the Committee for its feedback and comments and advised that these would be fed into the first formal draft report, which was due to be considered at the 22 January 2018 meeting.

17. Education Strategy and Annual Performance Report

The Commissioning Director, Education (CDE), presented the annual report which reviewed the educational performance in regard to the outcomes in national tests and examinations and Ofsted judgements and the overarching objectives of the Education Strategy 2014/17. It also set out the key actions to meet those objectives and maintain a strong family of schools in the context of raising outcomes for children and young people that live in the Borough and national policy and reductions of reductions in government funding. The Proposal for a School Improvement Partnership with local schools had received Cabinet approval on 20 June 2017 and that Partnership would begin formally trading in April 2018.

The Committee’s attention was drawn to the performance, set out in detail in the report and the data sets at the end of the report, and in particular to the significant improvement headlines:

- The proportion of good or outstanding schools has risen by 6% to 91%, and this equated to 2% above national level and was in line with Outer London performance.

- Primary school results in national tests and assessments were strong. Maths
and grammar, punctuation and spelling are significant strengths. Reading, the weakest area at 11 improved this year by 6% and was now in line with national performance.

- GCSE results indicated solid improvement, a far as can be judged given the changes to English and mathematics examinations and grading. Performance on the headline Progress 8 measure, which included every child from age 11 to 16, was particularly strong at twentieth best in the country out of 151 local authorities.

- Performance at A Level remains the most challenging area. Despite significant changes to content the results had remained relatively stable but the gap to national and London had not closed. Vocational performance was also strong.

- There ambition of schools and students getting into the top third universities was beginning to be seen with a marked increase of 44% of successful university applicants in the Borough going to the most competitive top third universities.

- The validated 2015/16 data for Looked After Children places our Key Stage 2 (11 year olds) performance was amongst the best in the country. The current cohort will be set in March and would be reported next year.

- The CDE drew attention to Section 2 of the report, which provided details on the results of the Ofsted Inspections undertaken between September 2016 and July 2017 for education establishments within the Borough.

- Section 3 of the report provided information on the core priorities and the difference the Council was making by marshalling its resources, levers and influences in a more coordinated way to support schools and improved outcomes for young people. This included the challenge to the Council officers to provide 60 work experience placements in a lively and exciting way and drawing upon the professional expertise within the Council, NEET programme and celebrating success of our young people, such as the Colin Pond Trust providing bursaries for the top 50 GCSE students.

- Section 4 covered the emergence of the Government’s policy and the move toward the limited company, School Improvement Partnership (BDSIP), for traded services between schools and the Council.

In response to questions from the Committee, the CDE advised:

- That it was providing difficult to make in-roads on our target of 20% (12 schools) judged as outstanding. There were a number of schools achieving level 1 in leadership, but the whole package of an individual school’s performance was not quite of a level that Ofsted felt were prepared to awarding outstanding.

- That for a number of the indictors the younger year groups had achieved London standards. The Governments headline was the Progress 8 key indicator, and the Borough was eighteenth in London. Performance in English was way above national average with maths being the poorer performing area.
The Borough was now concentrating on a programme to assist schools improve maths results.

- There was a national shortage of teachers in some disciplines, particularly maths and science. The costs of living in London and teachers leaving the profession due to work-life balance was having an effect on recruitment and retention. It was noted that the national agreements on the teachers’ pay and conditions, including London Weighting, were being followed by all schools in the Borough and that it was anticipated that the Council’s scheme for reduced market rent housing for key workers, would be rolled-out to teachers during the next school recruitment period. Many of the Borough’s schools, particularly at Primary level, were providing teacher training and upskilling of their own staff. The behaviour of students was generally good in the Borough’s schools and was not affecting retention.

- The change of the GCSE gradings and new examinations boards had impacted on schools across the country.

The Committee received the report and noted:

(i) The performance against the overarching objectives within the Education Strategy 2014-17 (as set out in section 2 of the report);

(ii) The priorities for 2017/18 (as set out in section 3 of the report);

(iii) The Council’s commitment to continuing the strong partnership with all schools in the Borough to achieve the best possible outcomes and opportunities for children and young people, and the performance of schools in national tests and examinations (as set out in Appendix 1 to the report); and,

(iv) Requested the Commissioning Director, Education to provide comparison details of the secondary level education attainment for Redbridge, Newham and our nearest demographic comparison / statistical neighbours.

18. Forward Plan

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

19. Work Programme

The Work Programme was agreed.