CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 18 December 2012
(6.00 - 7.45 pm)

Present: Councillor G Letchford (Chair), Councillor L Butt, Councillor R Douglas, Councillor A S Jamu, Councillor E Kangethe, Councillor A Salam and Councillor J R White;

Also Present: ; Meena Kishinani, Maureen Lowes and Tony Sargeant

Apologies: Councillor T Perry, Councillor P Burgon, Councillor B Poulton, Reverend Roger Gayler, Mrs Ghadeer Al-Salem Youssef, Mr Ishmael Ncube, Paul Cox, Helen Jenner and Sally Allen-Clark

24. Declaration of Members' Interests

None.

25. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2012.

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2012 were AGREED as an accurate record.

26. Feedback from Site Visit Held on 24 October 2012 at Dagenham Park CoE School

It was noted that Councillors Letchford, Douglas, Poulton, Burgon and the Scrutiny Officer undertook a site visit to Dagenham Park Church of England School on 24 October 2012 in relation to the Children’s Services Select Committee’s (CSSC, “the Committee”) review of school lunches.

The site visit was undertaken as the Catering Service was launching its new “Recipe for Success – Secondary Brands Concept”. The Secondary Brands Concept is the service’s response to consultation with children and young people which demonstrated that there was a desire for more choice and a “retail experience” from their canteen. At Dagenham Park school this has seen the service transformed to closely resemble the food courts seen in shopping centres. Multiple windows serving different cuisines, meal deals, and recognisable national brands on offer. The councillors present learned that this had all been achieved on a minimal budget and with strict adherence to prescribed nutritional standards.

It was reported during the site visit that these measures have been successful and have seen a 7% jump in users since its introduction, this is equal to a further 94 pupils per day using the service. Meal deals are priced at a competitive rate (£2.20) which is roughly on par or cheaper than the popular sandwich deals offered by retailers such as Tesco, Sainsbury’s, and Boots, and similarly priced to the lunchtime deals offered by local independent take-away shops.

Councillor Letchford was very impressed by the scheme and felt that the Catering
Service had met the pupils’ request to create a retail “food hall” experience with multiple choice, serving healthy food, and be competitively priced. Members were in agreement that the variety of food on offer was impressive; with Italian, pan-Asian, and American available alongside the traditional canteen offer. The members backed the initiative to roll-out the service to all the borough’s secondary schools as soon as possible.

The Divisional Director Strategic Commissioning and Safeguarding (DDSCS) was keen to stress that the costs of this initiative have been met by the Catering Services’s suppliers. The central Catering Service is working with Head Teachers with a view to expand this pioneering service to other schools.

It was noted that the Council’s Catering Service currently does not run the catering contract at Barking Abbey school.

The information gleaned from the site visit will help inform the Committee’s scrutiny review, which it hopes to complete before the end of the 2012/13 municipal year.

27. **In-depth Review of School Lunches - Terms of Reference**

The Scrutiny Officer (SO) introduced the report.

The report contained the proposed Terms of Reference for the In-depth Review of School Lunches which is being undertaken by the Committee. It outlined the aim of the review, the terms of reference, indicators of success, and important notes to consider.

The Committee **AGREED** the Terms of Reference.

28. **Catering Services Report & Presentation**

The Group Manager Policy Performance and Programmes, Children’s Services (GMPPP) and the Catering Services Manager (CSM) introduced the report.

The GMPPP thanked the Committee for the kind comments expressed under agenda item 4.

The officers save an overview of the Catering Service. Of note:

- It is an annually renewable service. Schools choose whether to procure the service from the Council or an alternative service provider.
- 54 of the 56 schools in the borough buy into the Council’s Catering Service. Currently Barking Abbey and St Margaret’s School do not procure the service.
- The service employs 326 people, the majority of whom are from the local area.
- Over 2,850,000 meals are served per annum, all managed by 12 people at the Town Hall.
- The Service receives zero subsidy from the General Fund. It receives a £100,000 subsidy from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), but this is due to end in April 2013 when the service will be entirely self-funded. Officers have worked hard to ensure the April 2013 deadline will be met. When compared to other comparable services elsewhere, the London Borough of
Barking and Dagenham’s (LBBD, “the Council”) service is in a very strong position.

- When a student receives Free School Meals (FSM), the service receives 87% of the funding received from Her Majesty’s Government (HMG). This equates to roughly £3,300,000 a year in extra revenue. A FSM campaign last year saw 2,998 new FSM claimants. This bought an additional £1,800,000 in pupil premium, and £1,200,000 in grant money into the borough.

- All sales are cashless, with the payments being processed through the Youth Access Card / Access and Connect. Parents top-up their child’s card online and can monitor their purchases. This has added benefits of saving money from cash handling, more accurate transactions, and reduced potential for bullying as students carry less/no money into schools. 17,000 people pay via the internet, telephone, or via machines in one stop shops. Free School meals are credited automatically and there is no way to differentiate a FSM pupil to a paying pupil, again reducing the potential for bullying.

- Primary School provision is for a two-course hot meal, secondary schools receive the same but with the addition of a café service.

- The Service works closely with the Asset Team to ensure refurbishments and new builds are of the best quality and are fit for purpose.

- A plethora of data can be gleaned from the cashless catering system and be used to ensure accurate stock control, for example.

- The service ensures it always has a dialogue with students, school staff, cooks, suppliers, and other local authorities to listed to feedback and generate new ideas.

- All nutritional standards requirements are adhered to.

- The Catering Service has recognised that its “traditional offer” (the typical school canteen) as a concept was becoming dated and tired. The Catering Service approached every Student Council how they would like to see the service look now and in the future. This, alongside visits to the food court at Lakeside, as resulted in the Secondary Brands Launch at Dagenham Park Church of England School on 24 October 2012, which several Committee members attended.

- There are a variety of healthy eating and nutritional standards guidelines, and the Service has been successful in achieving a Food For Life Bronze award. Officers are hopeful of being awarded the Silver award in the near future.

- Seven schools have committed to a “whole school approach”.

- Benchmarking is very difficult to undertake due to the high number of variables. However, some local authorities subsidise their catering services between 15 pence and 99 pence per meal. 70% of local authorities charge £2.00 or more per meal.

- School kitchens must adhere to the same hygiene standards as commercial kitchens. 95% of school kitchens have a four star or five star rating.

- The service will soon move from pooled, to school-by-school budgeting. Proposals to offer the service to other boroughs commercially are being investigated.

Members were extremely impressed with the evidence presented to them by the officers and noted that the service is in a very positive position with a promising future. It was noted that, when the £100,000 DSG subsidy ends in April 2013, there will be no price increase on meals. Rather the difference will be met through
a new management fee to be charged to schools.

Members were mindful of the increasing child population and the changing demographics the borough is experiencing and asked if the catering service was ready for this. Officers reassured the Committee that they work closely with the Asset Team on new builds and providing extra provision in existing schools. The service is able to offer tailored menus which take account of requirements including vegetarianism, halal, kosher, gluten free, lactose free, and nut free. The service also went on to note that they do not deep fry foods and meat is good quality and British, for example. It was noted that Academy schools do not/will not have to adhere to the same nutritional standards as their traditional counterparts.

Regarding the use of biometrics, officers felt the technology offered some key advantages. For example card replacements have proved costly with different policies applied by different schools. There can sometimes be unavoidable delays to replacing cards too. Officers were keen to stress that the database does not store an image of a person’s fingerprint; rather it remembers key points in the fingerprint pattern. It is impossible to “backwards engineer” someone’s fingerprint from this stored data.

The DDSCS rounded off the discussion by noting that the service has improved significantly since 2006. For example, the number of sick days taken by staff has dropped from an average of 22 down to 8. However, officers in the Council are aware that there is still room for improvement and that, as the service moves to a business-like model, these improvements will be realised. It was noted that Investors in People inspectors deliberately speak to catering staff and on their last inspection were impressed that the catering staff were aware of priorities and applicable guidelines etc. Officers look forward to working with the Committee to deliver the review.

The Committee thanked officers for all their work so far.

The Committee noted the report and directed the SO to ensure the evidence packs are published for public inspection.

29. Feedback from Site Visit Held on 7 December 2012 at All Saints Catholic School

It was noted that Councillor Letchford and the Scrutiny Officer undertook a site visit to All Saints Catholic School on 7 December 2012. During the site visit Councillor Letchford and the SO observed the Student Council Summit, organised and run by the Sixth-Form students themselves.

It was noted that this was the first such workshop of its kind and that it was hoped it would become an annual event. The following schools took part:

- All Saints Catholic School
- Barking Abbey School
- Dagenham Park Church of England School
- Eastbrook Comprehensive School
- Eastbury Comprehensive School
- Robert Clack School
- Sydney Russell Comprehensive School
- Warren Comprehensive School
The event guest speakers (The Corporate Director of Children's Services and Mr Sim Simpkins from Student Voice UK) and four workshops:

1. The Role of Student Council
2. Effective Decision Making Process
3. Talk vs Discussion
4. Effective Meeting and Planning Strategies.

Councillor Letchford congratulated Mr Paul Cox and is All Saints Student Council colleagues for organising and hosting such a successful summit and proposed that they should be held more frequently.

A member of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum highlighted the importance of the Forum and urged the Committee to ask officers to organise joint meetings between primary and secondary age groups. It was noted that the borough has a 5-12 Children's Forum. The Engagement Team will be asked to explore the idea of inviting Primary representatives to the Youth Forum.

30. **In-depth review of Student Voice - Terms of Reference**

The Scrutiny Officer (SO) introduced the report.

The report contained the proposed Terms of Reference for the In-depth Review of Student Voice which is being undertaken by the Committee. It outlined the aim of the review, the terms of reference, and indicators of success.

The Committee **AGREED** the Terms of Reference.

31. **Date of Next Meeting**

Noted.

32. **Any other public items which the Chair decides are urgent**

The Chair would like Local Democracy Education for Young People to be added to the February agenda.

The meeting closed at 19.45.