MINUTES OF
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 12 June 2013
(6:00 - 7:05 pm)

Present: Councillor G Letchford (Chair), Councillor L Rice (Deputy Chair), Councillor R Douglas, Councillor A S Jamu, Councillor E Kangethe, Councillor B Poulton and Councillor A Salam; Mrs G Spencer and Paul Cox

Apologies: Councillor L Butt and Councillor T Perry

1. Declaration of Members' Interests

None.

1. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2013

Agreed, subject to the following caveats:

- The penultimate paragraph of minute 53 (starting "In summary, a high proportion of...") should have been placed as the last paragraph of minute 52.
- The Group Manager who presented the 'Children in Care' presentation, referred to in minute 54, should have been referred to as the 'Group Manager, Integrated Youth Services'.

In relation to the issue of low attendance of co-opted members of this Committee noted in minute 56, it was suggested that the lack of available parking spaces in the Town Hall car park may have been a factor. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to send information about the London Road Multi-storey Car Park to all co-opted members of the Committee.

3. Food For Life Gold Mark Standard

The Catering Services Manager (CSM) delivered a presentation to compliment her report on 'Gold Food for Life Catering Mark' which covered:

- Background information
- Primary School Lunch Service
- Secondary School Lunch Service
- Additional Services for Schools including breakfast
- Hospitality Services
- Benefits of the Food for Life Award
- Criteria for Bronze Mark
- Criteria for achieving the 'gold' standard
- Strategy to achieve the gold standard

The CSM introduced Katrina Kollegaeva from the Soil Association who worked in partnership with the Food for Life project and would be able to answer questions
Ms Kollegaeva stated that the Food for Life Partnership is a programme that is transforming the food culture in schools across England. It was a whole school approach that incorporates areas such as growing, cooking, farm visits and the food on the plate served by school caterers. Originally led by the Soil Association with the support of three other charities, the project was funded by the Big Lottery over five years. Phase one of the project ended in 2012 becoming one of the most successful programmes the Big Lottery has ever funded. Phase two of the programme is starting this year. Food for Life is commissioned by local authorities to deliver on local objectives around public health, whilst keeping to the project’s original principals. Food for Life Catering Mark was born out of the Partnership work above in recognition of the school caterers’ need for an accreditation that provides them with endorsement and a framework to make gradual improvements in quality and provenance of the food they serve. The scheme is run independently by the Soil Association and is available to caterers in all sectors.

Members asked, given that achieving the gold standard would require providing more organic and fresh vegetables, would this cost substantially more. Ms Kollegaeva stated that the Soil Association had been working on the Food for Life project for over five years and could confirm that London was ahead of other areas in terms of taking the project forward. Havering was seen as a ‘beacon’ authority in that regard as it had achieved the gold standard about a year ago at no extra cost. However, it was important to note that it took them a number of years to achieve this. The menu they offered was achieved in a way that did not cost more by changing their relationships with their suppliers. Furthermore, the gold standard required that only five percent of the menu comprise organic products. The CSM stated that the Service was currently operating on the bronze standard, which already included some organic products, therefore the service was in a comfortable position to introduce more, such as organic yogurts. She confirmed that it was a requirement to use local suppliers for fruit and vegetables to achieve the gold standard, which could also help ensure cost remained low. Furthermore, the Council had joined other authorities in agreeing contracts with suppliers which meant it would be in a better price negotiating position as it could guarantee volume.

Members enquired whether the two schools who were currently not participating in the Food for Life project, were closer to doing so, and whether members could do anything to encourage them to join. The CSM stated that one of the two schools had shown a lot of interest. Ms Kollegaeva added that 54 out of 56 schools had joined the scheme, which was in fact, a very good number compared to other areas. There were always going to be some schools which wished to explore other options. Members could talk to schools’ governing bodies of the two schools to encourage them to join the scheme. She confirmed that Catering Services employed local people, who were all very well trained.

In response to questions from members, the CSM stated that halal and vegetarian options were always available on the menu and all schools were aware of this. Ms Kollegaeva added that suppliers of all animal products had to prove that the products conformed to welfare standards. This usually meant that the products were British, which was good albeit it was slightly more expensive.

Members asked what was being done to promote the menus to the pupils and the
CSM stated that traditional methods such as posters were used as well as information to school councils and the 'parent pay' website. Furthermore, Ms Kollegaeva stated that it was an absolute requirement for schools which joined the For Life partnership to set up a 'SNAG' group which had to be representative of pupils, parents and teachers, and would get together every month and talk about menus.

Members asked whether any schools were planning to have open days like the one held by Dagenham Park School. The CSM stated that the Head Teacher of Sydney Russell School was likely to show off the School's new facilities, perhaps by holding an open day, when the facilities go live.

The Group Manager, Integrated Youth Services, asked how the Service would interact with schools in relation to the 'Healthy Schools' initiative. The CSM stated that there were many opportunities to work together with schools on this; for example, by involving pupils in growing schemes.

In response to questions, the CSM stated that:

- School meals were made by Catering Services staff in the schools and not transported in from elsewhere. Each school had its own production kitchen with good equipment and facilities.
- The Council had insurance to cover any claims of food poisoning, for example.
- The Service was attempting to by-pass the 'silver' standard stage to aim straight for the gold standard; this was not going to be easy but plans were in place to make this achievable. It was hoped that the Service would be able to obtain the award within the next academic year. Ms Kollegaeva added that there were three aspects of the award the Service would need to work on; environmental, locally sourced products and healthy eating, such as reduced salt.
- Catering Service staff did not have a role to play when faced with children whose parents' were behind on payments for their child's school meals. This was governed by the school's policy. It was not thought that any school had a policy of refusing to provide a child with a meal in the event that their parent was behind on payments.
- It was also not within the remit of Catering Services staff to monitor children to ensure they were eating their meals. They could encourage the children to try different options whilst the children were being served at the food counters; however, once the child went away with their plate, it was for the school's lunchtime supervises to encourage the children to eat their food. It was very important for schools to provide a good dining experience in this regard. Ms Kollegaeva stated that the Food for Life project did attempt to work with schools to create a good dining environment.

Members commented, in relation to the last point, that it was important for schools to be proactive in this regard; there were schools which made a record of children who did not eat their food and ensured this was fed-back to the children's parents. Members agreed that this was something the Committee could revisit in the course of the municipal year.

The Lead Member thanked both the CSM and Ms Kollegaeva for their attendance.
and asked them to report back to the Committee once the gold standard had been achieved next year.

4. Impact of the Saturation Point Policy on the take-up of school meals

The Lead Member stated that this report was for information only and that the Scrutiny Officer would be happy to take back any questions on it.

Members wished to highlight that whilst general observations could be made from the statistical information provided in the Report, the statistics had not been broken down to provide ward specific factors. For example, there had been a significant decline in the uptake of school meals in Whalebone ward; however, this could be related to a large increase in certain communities living in the ward in recent years.

Members asked whether retailers other than fast-food takeaways, such as supermarkets, and parents providing pack lunches had been taken into account. Anecdotal evidence suggested some children bought in take-away fast food in their packed lunches, which was a concern. The Scrutiny Officer stated that she would seek to provide this information to members.

Members noted that the overall message of the Report was that the Saturation Point Policy does not appear to have had impacted the take-up of school lunches either positively or negatively.

5. Draft Recommendations

The Lead Member asked members for their comments on the draft recommendations arising from the Student Voice Scrutiny Review 2012/13. He asked them to note that what was currently recommendation six could be disregarded as it was already covered by recommendation four.

Members asked whether a recommendation could be made asking all schools to ensure a fair and democratic system was in place to elect school councillors. Furthermore, they stated that sometimes quieter but equally able students were not elected, and this was an area which could be looked at further. The Scrutiny Officer noted the comments.

Members were pleased overall with the recommendations and noted that the Scrutiny Officer was working on providing them with a full report in due course.

6. Any other business

The Lead Member stated that Councillors Kangethe and Douglas had been tasked with acting as 'challengers' to the Corporate Parenting Group, after they received the relevant training. They were due to report back to the Committee on their work in November.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Noted.