Present: Councillor G Letchford (Chair), Councillor L Rice (Deputy Chair), Councillor L Butt, Councillor A S Jamu, Councillor E Kangethe, Councillor J E McDermott and Councillor B Poulton; Mr Ishmael Ncube and Ms Ingrid Robinson

Apologies: Councillor A Salam, Mrs Glenda Spencer, Paul Cox and Helen Jenner

21. **Paul Cox’s resignation from the Committee**

The Chair stated that Paul Cox had resigned from his co-opted position on the Committee as Youth Representative in order to focus on his academic pursuits. The Committee agreed to send him a letter of thanks for his valuable contributions and insights and wish him well in his studies.

22. **Declaration of Members’ Interests**

There were no declarations.

23. **Minutes - 18 September 2013**

Agreed.

The Chair raised some matters arising which were discussed as follows:

The Committee requested at the last meeting that the Group Manager, Looked after Children Placements, look into the evidence for people’s motivations for fostering and adopting in the Borough. The Interim Divisional Director, Complex Needs and Social Care (IDDCNSC), stated that this information could be provided in six months’ time, which the Committee accepted.

The Committee was informed at the last meeting that there may be opportunities for members to observe sessions held by the Arc Theatre to get an insight of how they worked with young people. Furthermore, it asked that its suggestion that the Arc Theatre work with Year Six pupils together with their parents, be passed on. The Scrutiny Officer stated that she had been unable to obtain an update on these points and would pursue the relevant officer again for a response.

Finally, the Committee had agreed that a survey be done of schools to obtain a general picture of the incidence of cyber-bullying. The Divisional Director, Education (DDE) stated that officers would report back on this in January 2014, which the Committee agreed to.

24. **Action Plan for recommendations relevant to the Authority made by the Committee’s Scrutiny Report on school councils**

The Group Manager, Integrated Youth Services (GMIYS), provided an update on
the actions the Committee recommended the Council take as part of its scrutiny review on School Councils, which was noted by the Committee.

Members expressed regret that the visits by schools to the Town Hall as part of pupils’ Citizenship curriculum could not be continued. The GMIYS stated he had written to schools in January 2013 to advise that should they be keen for the visits to continue in some fashion, they express their interest in writing. He stated that if there was sufficient interest from schools in continuing the visits, Democratic Services may be in a position to arrange and lead them. No schools had responded to date; however, Democratic Services would write again to schools to remind them of the offer.

25. **Members’ Corporate Parenting Group**

The IDDCNSC outlined her Report as follows:

- The concept of 'corporate parenting' arose about 15 years ago in an effort to help improve life outcomes for looked after children.
- Since then various guidance has been issued to refresh the notion and improve practices, including the 'Care Matters' agenda in 2007.
- Evidence showed that corporate parenting worked best when it was lead by elected members who held officers to account.
- In 2012, the safeguarding and looked after children services were inspected by Ofsted who found that the corporate parenting function had shown improvement but was not an embedded as it should be.
- Councillor Letchford currently chaired the Members’ Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG) and the portfolio holder for Children's Services, Councillor White, was also a member.
- Crucially, young people who were in care, or care leavers, also attended the MCPG and had good input into the discussions.
- The MCPG was preoccupied with improving outcomes for looked after children with a particular focus on educational and health outcomes, as these areas were where most looked after children were behind.
- The situation for 'virtual heads', who were school staff who acted like a head teacher for looked after children attending different schools, was challenging as some children went to schools outside of the Borough.
- Personal education plans have been updated to ensure that they record how effectively the 'pupil premium' has been allocated to support the young person in school.
- Performance at Key Stage 4 for looked after children was low. Only 7.4 percent achieved five A* - C grades with English and maths, both taught in borough schools, indicating that there was a lot of work to do to improve outcomes.
- The support provided to young people in care moving on to higher education included a leaving care accommodation bursary of £500, help with graduation ceremony costs, the Higher Education Bursary (a government incentive to assist all care leavers to go onto higher education totalling £2000, paid over the duration of their course) and student loan and bursaries which normally totals £9000.
- Work has been undertaken with Public Health to ensure grants that supported leisure activities and also arrange for looked after children to have access to Splash cards and Streetbase cards which had a number of
benefits including cashless catering for school meals.

- The issue of the disproportionately negative impact on the level of benefits young care leavers could rely upon when taking up apprenticeships was raised by Learn to Live, the Leaving Care Service, and has been taken up in writing by the Corporate Director of Children’s Services with the Department of Work and Pensions.

- A number of ways looked after children living outside of the Borough or not a part of the Children and Care Council could have their voices heard have been established, including ‘Out of Borough’ days, ‘Takeover Day’, the ‘Who Cares?’ Trust survey, annual residential trips, Careweb.tv, youth4Us microsites, and the development of electronic review consultation forms for looked after children through Careweb.

Councillor Letchford commented that over the past year he had met with MCPGs at other boroughs and had come to the view that this Borough was ahead of others in terms of the impact its MCPG was able to have by working alongside children in care.

The Committee enquired as to whether foster carers were represented on the MCPG. The IDDCNSC stated they were not and agreed to consider whether this could be arranged adding that there was a Foster Carers’ Association from which representatives could be selected.

Members were concerned that only 56.4 percent of looked after children were in education, training or employment and further, that out of the 27 students who were looked after in 2013, only two (7.4 percent) achieved five A* - C grades (English and Maths were both taught in borough schools). The IDDCNSC stated that the children were very damaged by their experiences and agreed that a lot of work needed to be done to improve outcomes. She added that one of the things that could be done to improve outcomes was to help boost their confidence to move on to higher education as the financial support provided was very good.

26. **Children and Families Bill- Special Educational Needs: plans for implementation**

The Divisional Director, Education (DDE) introduced the report. This Bill was introduced to improve support for children with special educational needs (SEN) by requiring different agencies to work better together to provide more integrated support. The Bill stipulates that local authorities must publish their proposed ‘local offer’ and consult on it.

The DDE introduced the SEN Consultant (SENC) who delivered a presentation which covered the following:

- There were key changes being made to SEN provision including the requirement that provision should be centred around the child or young person and their family.

- The Bill identified duties that should be placed upon the local authority to improve SEN provision including publishing their ‘local offer’, a statement of the provision available for children and young people with SEN. The local authority must publish their local offer using language that is accessible to ordinary lay people.
There was much emphasis on services doing joint planning and commissioning, particularly health and education services.

Instead of a 'Statement of SEN', children and young people would have an 'Education, Health and Care Plan' (EHCP) which was a single assessment with different agencies feeding in to help shape the child's development.

Agencies sharing data on individuals would be key to delivering services to them in the best way.

Practices have been very process based when delivery services to children with SEN. The Bill attempts to shift this to an outcomes based culture.

The aim was not to be patronising to children and their families; it was about enabling the child to achieve their best by working with them and their families and different agencies working in an integrated way.

The definition of SEN remains the same. It was important that the cause for the child's performance or behaviour be established to first to ensure that they and their families were receiving the right type of support. For example, if a child’s educational performance was suffering due to poor attendance, that child and his or family would need different type of support than those offered by SEN services.

It would be important for agencies providing services to manage expectations.

The local authority must arrange for disagreement resolution services to be available to parents and young people. The Service must be independent of the local authority.

Transitions- no one reaching the age of 18 and who is already receiving support of some kind under the legislation will suddenly find themselves without the care and support they need at the point of becoming an adult. Post 18 Care Bill proposals apply.

Information around transport services would need to be included in the local offer. The Council’s Transport Policy for children with SEN will be reviewed and there will be a consultation on this.

Local Authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups were expected to jointly commission services and it was expected that individuals with an EHCP would be given the option of a personal budget.

Members were concerned that there may be children who are not identified early enough as having SEN and asked whether teachers had a role to play. The SENC stated that teachers should be given training on SEN but that the local offer should include information for families on the services they could turn to identify whether their child has SEN.

Members commented that there were disparities in schools' attitudes and practices around supporting children with SEN and that there should be more consistency in their approaches. The SENC stated that schools must be challenged if they were falling short of good standards at other schools and all relevant agencies must work with them for there to be improvement. The Bill proposed that schools have a legal obligation to publish how they would support children with SEN. Furthermore, there were examples of mainstream schools who had worked closely with special schools to learn best practice.

Members cited their own experience of children with SEN including the use of unqualified teachers in schools who were not always comfortable working with children with SEN and the use of teaching assistants who taught big groups of
children with SEN. Members felt that children with SEN should be taught by specialist qualified teachers in small groups.

Members asked the SENC whether the EHCP stipulated in the Bill for children with SEN was different from the current SEN statement. The SENC stated that ECHPs will have a wider age remit than statements, and could include very young children and young people up to the age of 25 provided they were in further education or training.

The Committee thanked the SENC for her presentation.

27. Education Strategy Review and Attainment Update

The DDE stated that the Committee received a report on the 2013 attainment data at its September meeting and therefore this Report was to update members on the national data, all of which was not available then.

She delivered a presentation which updated the Committee as follows:

- Early Years Foundation Stage - attainment figures have dropped against the national figure - the reason was not clear but analysis was under way. New assessment procedures were introduced in 2013 which may have been a factor.
- Key Stage 1 Headlines - attainment levels across reading, writing and maths improved but nationally, figures rose more.
- Key Stage: On the new combined measure of L4+ in reading, writing and mathematics, the LA consolidated last year's rise to 73 percent, this is three percentage points below the 2013 national figure of 76 percent. The local authority can 'disapply' children who started school late. It is expected that the final figure will be 75 percent after 'disapplications' have been made.
- Attainment amongst looked after children had improved from 45 percent in 2012 to 54.5% in 2013 in Level 4+ in reading, writing and maths.
- GCSE: A*-C grades including English and Maths were up one percent to 59.3 percent, which was above the national average for the first time and improving for the fifth successive year, which was a tremendous achievement for all schools.
- For Maths, this dropped to one percent below the national figure
- Looked after children; Seven percent (only two of 27) achieved five A* - C GCSE grades, including English and Maths. This had increased since the 2012 position but was still very low.
- Priority areas for improvement were:
  - Early Years Foundation Stage literacy and maths;
  - Reading across primary phase
  - Attainment at the highest levels (all phases)
  - Eliminating performance below the floor standard; 60 percent for primary schools (currently one school) and 45 percent for secondary (currently no schools).
  - Accelerating progress in KS1-KS2;
  - Securing national, then London levels of attainment where not already achieved.

The DDE tabled a document which listed the 'ten standards and seven priority areas' under the Education Strategy Review then continued her presentation which
provided members with an outline of issues around the Strategy as follows:

- The two overarching objectives of every school being judged a good or outstanding school and reaching national standards and beyond
- The review carried out this year identified the areas of strength and areas were improvement needed to be made, including A and A* attainment at GCSE and A Level; Level 3/A performance, the proportion of young people who remain in education and training post 16 and 17, performance at 11, quality of teaching and governance.
- An update on pupil places
  - According to forecasts 3993 primary reception places would be needed by 2016 and 4205 by 2020.
  - 3073 Year 7 Places would be need by September 2016 and 3690 by 2020.
- The impacts on secondary school provision included many new classes within schools and large new schools.
- Expansion in other places included pre-school, sixth form and special needs provision.

Members talked about the new expectations for teachers and the development of teachers; the government expects that increasingly, school improvement will come from schools themselves. They asked how the local authority was going to support teachers. The DDE stated that every time there was a new Ofsted Inspection Framework, the bar was raised. Schools that were performing strongly were deemed to have the capacity to support staff. Schools performing less well were identified via a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating system, and support was discussed with those schools as appropriate, for example, bringing in additional capacity to work with teachers in those schools to get to a 'good' Ofsted rating.

Members commented that more support was needed for parents to become good governors, or to be better informed about their child's schools' progress. The attendance and understanding of governors at school governing body meetings, in general, needs to improve. The DDE stated that this was a very important point and that the government was focussing on the role of governors in holding schools to account for performance. She added that the key thing that governors should be interested in was what could be done to ensure children were doing well, but meetings often got sidetracked by other issues.

In response to a question, the DDE stated that free schools and academies were directly accountable to the Secretary of State but also had their own board of trustees to hold them to account. She added that although the Corporate Director of Children's Services did not have legal responsibility for free schools and academies, she was accountable for the Borough's children's outcomes. So she could send letters to them too but free schools and academies would need to accept the local authority’s challenge for there be progress and partnership working.

28. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place in committee room 2, Town Hall, Barking on 15 January 2013 at 6.00pm.
29. **Any Other Business**

The Scrutiny Officer informed members that they were welcome to attend the second School Council Summit which would be taking place on 25 November 2013 at 9.00 am at Castle Green and asked members to contact her to confirm whether they wished to attend.

Councillor Letchford stated that there would be a pre-Assembly briefing on Corporate Parenting on 4 December 2013 which Members were encouraged to attend.