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

Apologies: Councillor T Perry, Mrs Ghadeer Al-Salem Youssef and Ms Ingrid Robinson

30. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

31. Resignation of Councillor G Letchford from the Committee

It was noted that Councillor G Letchford had resigned from the Children's Services Select Committee with immediate effect prior to the start of this meeting.

32. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2013 were confirmed as correct.

The Deputy Lead Member raised matters arising from the last meeting and the Scrutiny Officer confirmed that:

- a thank you letter had been sent to Paul Cox, who had resigned from his position as Youth Representative on the Committee, and
- a foster carer representative had been appointed to the Members' Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG). The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that the representative had attended the January meeting of the MCPG and had made valuable contributions.

33. Cyber-bullying Survey Report

The Advisory Teacher (AT) for Primary ICT presented her Report to the Committee. She stated that the Committee had commissioned a survey on cyber-bullying to be carried out in order to obtain a picture of prevalence of it in the Borough at its meeting in September 2013.

She stated that the survey was sent to the head teachers of all schools in the Borough. 694 responses were received and the majority of respondents were primary school pupils.

The AT then outlined the findings of the survey as detailed in her Report. She emphasised that:

- 81% of the respondents had never experienced cyber-bullying, with 3% being cyber-bullied at present, and 16% having been cyber-bullied in the
past.

- When asked whether they know how to keep themselves safe online, 93% replied yes.
- 11% of those who have been cyber-bullied have not told anyone.
- 9% of respondents would not know how to help someone if they were being cyber-bullied.

She stated that these results showed the importance of continued education around cyber-bullying and keeping safe online.

Members asked whether the results could be compared to national figures. The CDCS stated that although this Report did not make direct comparisons with national statistics, a search on 'Google' showed that 'Ditch the Label', an anti-bullying charity, had carried out a survey of 10,000 young people last year. Some of its main findings were that:

- 7 in 10 young people were victims of cyber-bullying
- 37% of young people experienced cyber-bullying on a highly frequent basis
- 20% of young people were experiencing extreme cyber-bullying on a daily basis.

In response to questions on her survey, the AT stated that she was not sure whether schools sent the survey to all their students. The CDCS stated a return of 694 could be relied upon for research purposes. Members commented that should the survey be repeated in future, more emphasis be placed on getting as many pupils as possible to complete it and that separate surveys be designed for primary and secondary schools.

The AT stated that primary schools were more likely to set aside time for pupils to complete the surveys which was likely to yield a higher return. The Barking and Dagenham (BAD) Youth Forum sent the survey out via text.

The Committee thanked the AT for carrying out the survey and presenting the Report.

34. Impact of Welfare Reform

The Group Manager, Housing Advice and the Director of Customer Services introduced the Report on the Impact of Welfare Reform. A discussion on the report followed, which covered the following matters:

- Over 1600 hundred council tenants are affected by the spare room subsidy, approximately 1300 of whom are losing £14 per week as they under occupy their home by one bedroom. Over 300 households are losing £25 per week as they under-occupy two bedrooms. Most of the affected tenants have been visited, and approximately 130 wish to downsize to smaller accommodation. The majority advised they wished to remain in their accommodation and would meet the shortfall; however, the latest data shows approximately 400 tenants are accruing arrears.
- There is concern about residents who live in private sector accommodation as the Council has less control over the impacts of welfare reform on them.
- Approximately 55 of the families affected by the benefits cap fall within the


' troubled families' agenda.

• The Council used to have a generous 'Allocations Policy' which allowed a bedroom each for children of opposite gender. For the purpose of housing benefit assessments, children of opposite sex under 10 years of age are expected to share, which has repercussions for residents due to the spare room subsidy. The 'Allocations Policy' has been amended by Cabinet as a result.

• The Council had done an exercise which involved matching over-occupying families with under-occupying ones. However, as only four families accepted moves as a result of this, the exercise was now being done through the Localities Team. It is likely that this will have more of an effect as it is no longer 'early days' and those in arrears will be under more pressure think about their finances.

• A key tool in preventing homelessness in this financial year has been the Council's ability to pay Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). The DHP fund is one that is intended to alleviate hardship. It allows customers who face a variety of challenges time to find alternative solutions to shortfall in income, helping with housing costs on a short and temporary basis.

• The concern is that there is no guarantee that the same amount of DHP fund will be available to the Council in 2014/15 and therefore, help through DHP is unsustainable as it is not designed to be used in the longer term. Thus it is likely that the increase in homeless approaches received in 2013 will continue throughout 2014 and beyond, and will represent a significant pressure to general fund budgets.

• The Council and Elevate are taking a proactive approach to helping people; they are trying to reach out to people who are potentially going to be in trouble before they get there.

• The Tenancy Sustainment Team has secured some funds from Public Health to support people sustain their tenancies.

• Other initiatives to support people are 'The Good Society' and a summit between Housing and Children's Services focussing on how officers could work better together to help families facing difficult times. The work being done by the Group Manager, Employment and Skills and his Team, who are helping people with their budgeting skills for shopping and supporting people to get into work, is commendable.

• A lot of work in supporting people is about educating them, for example, by helping them to understand APR rates and signposting them to affordable credit.

The CDCS and the Committee commended officers for their hard work in supporting families through difficult times and particularly praised the way officers across teams were working together to achieve this.

35. Child Poverty

The Strategic Data Manager (SDM) introduced his Report and highlighted that:

• Poverty affects many different areas including work, education, health and opportunities.

• The Child Poverty Strategy states that the Council will gather data on poverty rates, however; data is scarce which presents a challenge.

• The official measure for poverty is the proportion of children living in
households receiving less than 60% below national average income.

- In this Borough poverty exists in a number of different areas as opposed to being concentrated in one, which is unusual.
- The London Poverty Profile is compiled by Trust for London, a charitable institute in London which uses the latest official data to reveal patterns of poverty across the capital.
- The Media gives the impression that poverty is mostly confined to the unemployed; however, this has now changed. The majority of households of working age in poverty have at least one adult in work.
- There were two concerning patterns of poverty in the Borough; one was that it had the highest unemployment figures and secondly, it has a growing population of the working poor.
- In the past poverty was concentrated in inner London; however, geographical patterns of poverty had now changed and there was now a high rate of poverty in outer London areas too.
- People living in the private rented sector are more difficult to contact. The corporate and third sector's initiative 'BanD' together is trying to support people going through difficult times via projects such as 'Warmer Homes', "The Big Switch", food banks and Community Connect. Furthermore, the Council's departments are encouraged to try and 'poverty-proof' their strategies.

Members commented that defining child poverty could be a challenge, as there may be households whose income was above 60% below of the national average income, who did not spend a proportionate amount of it on their children. The SDM agreed and added that further issues with defining poverty in this way was that it would not include households who earned just enough not to be classed as 'in poverty', but did not have much knowledge on saving money such as shopping online, looking for bargains and avoiding use of cash machines that charge for withdrawing cash. Council staff were trying to educate people who did not have these skills through Money Matters courses at children's centres.

The CDCS stated that it was of concern that the Borough has one of the biggest populations of children and young people in London and was also facing increasing rates of poverty (fourth worst in London). She added that unlike some other boroughs, this Borough did not have a wide range of incomes. She added that social care and education outcomes were improving in the Borough but more resources were needed to tackle poverty and unemployment.

Members commented that television programmes and other forms of media which stereotyped people who were unemployed, and therefore reliant upon welfare benefits, were not helpful; these people needed support as opposed to being stigmatised.

The Committee thanked the SDM for his Report and attendance.

36. **Raising of the Participation Age**

The Lead Commissioner 14 -19 (LC) introduced her report and explained that from Summer 2013 all young people up until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 have been required to participate in education or training and that from 2015, this requirement will apply until their 18th birthday. This policy was known as
Raising the Participation Age (RPA). RPA placed a number of responsibilities on local authorities including supporting young people aged 13-19 and those aged 20-24 with a Learning Difficulty Assessment to participate in education or training.

The LC stated that an RPA Strategy had been developed which included an Action Plan, both of which set out the steps the local authority and its partners have agreed to, and are delivering to, to support young people not participating in education or training. There are a number of key issues in the Borough which are of concern:

- the 16 -19 resident cohort continues to rise, contrary to national and local trends
- the level of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) is rising
- the number of young people who are classified as unknown has increased
- the proportion of young people classified in learning has fallen.

She stated that a combination of these patterns meant that there were big challenges ahead for the Council in meeting its RPA duties. She presented the latest statistics to the Committee on the number of NEETs and unknowns and stated that officers are mindful of these challenges and are working hard to address them. For example, the number of young people classified as ‘unknown’ was 51.8% in October 2012 and the latest data available showed that it was now at 20.83%.

The CDCS stated that the Borough had the worst youth unemployment rate in London and the danger with having ‘unknowns’ was that, without intervention, these young people could fall into long term unemployment. It was crucial that the Council keeps its eye on this issue and the Committee could play a role in this by monitoring performance.

The Committee welcomed the planned action officers would take to reduce the number of ‘unknown’ young people. Members commented that more needed to be done not only to encourage businesses to set up in the borough, but to employ local people once they had done so.

The Committee thanked the LC for her Report.

37. **School Councils Scrutiny Review- Action Plan relevant to the Council**

The CDCS stated that actions relating to recommendations 16, 17 and 19 could now be closed and that the Committee was due to receive the final updates on actions relating to recommendations 20 and 21 at its next meeting.

38. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be on Wednesday 5 March 2014 at 6.00pm in committee room 2, Town Hall, Barking.