CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 6 February 2013
(6.03 - 8.13 pm)

Present: Councillor G Letchford (Chair), Councillor P Burgon, Councillor L Butt, Councillor R Douglas, Councillor A S Jamu, Councillor B Poulton and Councillor A Salam; Mrs Ghadeer Al-Salem Youssef

Also Present: Helen Jenner and Christopher Martin

Apologies: Councillor T Perry, Councillor E Kangethe, Reverend Roger Gayler, Mr Ishmael Ncube and Paul Cox

36. Declaration of Members' Interests

None.

37. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2012 and 22 January 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2012 were AGREED as an accurate record.

It was noted that Pupil Premium payments are paid directly to schools. This enables schools to purchase additional services with those funds to support those students.

The Corporate Director Children's Services (CDCS) raised the issue of the Barking and Dagenham (BAD) Youth Forum representative on the Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC, “the Committee”) being unable to vote. As this is a constitutional issue guided by legislation, it was noted that the Chief Executive Officer and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services are investigating the issue. The Committee AGREED that they would support the BAD Youth Forum representative being a full member of the Committee with voting rights if legislation allows.

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2012 were AGREED as an accurate record.

38. Corporate Parenting

The Divisional Director Children's Complex Needs and Social Care (DDCCNSC) introduced the item.

The Divisional Director offered the Committee some historical context: The Corporate Parenting Group meets regularly but is very “Town Hall” focused with a feeling that Young People did not wholly shape the agenda. There is also a lack of direct scrutiny and performance challenge. Partner organisations' participation could also be improved. It was felt that there was a lack of direction and clarity of purpose.
However, in April 2012 a half day workshop was undertaken to review the Members’ Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG). Some of the work undertaken at this session and the outcomes include:

- Reviewed national and local context for Looked After Children (LAC)
- Refresher of the legislative requirements
- Focused upon the corporate parenting role and in particular the responsibilities of officers and elected members.
- Considered who is providing corporate parenting currently and who this should involve in the future.
- Discussed: ‘our children’, improving outcomes and life chances, value for money, council-wide responsibility, LAC voices shaping their services.
- Reviewed the Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2014 and refreshed it as appropriate to include measurables and responsibilities
- Emphasis on evidence within the action plan
- Provided evidence of key achievements for 2011/12.
- The MCPG terms of reference were revised along with the membership (including an elected councillor as chair, a health representative, corporate management team (CMT) representative, and children in care council members (Skittlz)).
- Reviewed pragmatics, frequency and standing agenda items.
- Re-emphasised the role of the group re challenge and accountability.

The Corporate Parenting Group sits below the Children’s Trust, which is a part of the Barking and Dagenham Partnership. It is governed by the:

- Children in Care Outcomes Group
- Children in Care Council (Skittlz)
- Participations Champions Group

Its work is delivered by:

- Complex Needs and Social Care (Allocated Social Workers, Fostering and Adoption Services, and Leaving Care).
- Health and Education Specialists (Nurses, Emotional Wellbeing Coordinator, Virtual Head teacher, and Advisory Teachers).
- Participation and Rights Service (Children’s Rights Officer & Participation Officer).

The Divisional Director AGREED to circulate the latest Key Performance Indicator information to the Committee.

The Safeguarding and Looked After Children (SLAC) Inspection in June 2012 highlighted an area for improvement: “Corporate Parenting arrangements and strategic planning are strengthened to ensure that they properly reflect the Council’s responsibilities to children looked after.” Since the inspection the Lead Member and Director of Children’s Services now attend the Corporate Parenting Board and Children’s Trust. Furthermore, the Corporate Parenting Board members are held to account for performance through the Children in Care Outcomes Group, Corporate Parenting Board, and Children’s Trust. An annual report has been drafted and is due to be shared with Cabinet in March 2013. There are frequent meetings between the Lead Member and the Divisional Director regarding Children in Care. And the SLAC action plan (and progress) is regularly shared.

The Divisional Director was pleased to note that the agenda is increasingly shaped by young people and the board continues to be chaired by Councillor G Letchford.
There has been a focus on leisure options for children in care within and beyond the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD). Young people have been consulted on exam support, with an outcome being the reintroduction of the “homework club”. Health performance is now a standing agenda item and one board meeting was entirely focused on Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) young people.

Future actions will involve a revision of the board membership and terms of reference. There will also be a review and refresh of the Children’s Services Corporate Parenting Strategy and progress against the current action plan.

The Lead Member (who also chairs the Members’ Corporate Parenting Group) was confident that the department is moving in the right direction and that excellent support and management is being provided by the Corporate Director and Divisional Director.

Responding to what officers hope to achieve, it was noted that the Council has a responsibility to all Looked After Children (LAC). Officers and Members hope to improve the outcomes for these young people in the areas of life experiences, leisure, health, and education. It was acknowledged that the Council has a responsibility to all children and young people regarding these outcomes, but the responsibility is particularly acute for these people.

The Council has a strong safety net to support especially vulnerable LAC, including social workers, health workers, and other specialised provision. All LAC have a review every six months which is attended by all key officials. At this meeting the individual’s care plan is assessed. Overall, there are three levels of care:

1. Child in Need
2. Child on a Child Protection Plan
3. Looked After Children

Level three includes those placed with a foster carer, for example. In all cases, the carer receives lots of training and support. They are very well protected (including by statute) and reviews are undertaken by those not providing the care.

The provision for someone leaving care is entirely tailored around that individual, and support is provided up until 25 years of age. Some people choose to walk away from all support, as is their right to do so. It was noted that the Housing Department work closely with Children’s Services to ensure adequate accommodation is available for these people. The Corporate Director AGREED to circulate information on housing options to the Committee. The Corporate Director affirmed that the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD, “the Borough”) have some exceptional foster carers who build strong life-long relationships with many of the people who have been in their care.

The Corporate Director offered Members access to the online training tools which officers use to further expand their knowledge and understanding of this area. It was AGREED that this training opportunity would be highlighted to the Member Development Officer by the Scrutiny Officer.

The Committee noted the report.
SEN Review: Update in the implementation of the recommendations

The Corporate Director of Children’s Services (CDCS) introduced the report.

In 2011/12 the Committee undertook a review of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in LBBD. Several recommendations were made and, in accordance with good practice, the responsible department has been asked to update the Committee on the progress of implementing those recommendations.

It was noted that the Committee assessed the Government green paper as a part of their review. There were delays in delivering the reports from the pilot projects, by the Children and Families Bill was finally published on 4 February 2013. The delay as had a knock on effect to the delivery of the recommendations.

The emphasis is on a personal budget being provided after an assessment of needs has taken place. Some challenges will be encountered when trying to ensure funds are appropriately spent. However, there are benefits resulting from personal budgets, including better cooperation. The Council will publish a “Local Offer” which will map all services available in a local area for each type of need. It is believed that the pilot areas are struggling with the assessment stage in the process, whereas the mapping is time consuming but fairly straightforward.

Turning to the recommendations and further to the information contained in the report it was noted that:

Recommendation One: Implementation of Robust Assessment Process with Clear Timescale:
Good progress is being made but the Government have not yet published the process for the new multi-agency assessment process. It has been postponed until Summer 2013.

Recommendation Two: Clear Details of Provision Available on the Website:
The Council is working towards having detail of its full provision available online as soon as possible. The Heathway centre is the focal point of service sign-posting. There has been lots of development. The national requirement for completion is September 2013, but this could be postponed to April 2014.

Recommendation Three: Parents Aware of all Affordable Options Early in Assessment Process:
Training has been given to the SEN team. The Council has to provide “suitable” and “affordable” provision. However, what is suitable for parents sometimes differs from what the Council deems suitable and affordable, so there is work to be done in managing expectations.

Recommendation Four: Introduction of Personalised Budgets Supported by a Framework of Advice:
Personalised Budgets are now used extensively for transport. Heathway provides advice and support. The national regulations are still awaited, once they are received work will be undertaken with the Just Say Parents Forum.

Recommendation Five: Multi-staged Appeals Process:
The Committee didn’t want cases to go to tribunal so every effort is made to avoid this including multiple officer meetings (with parents). Health colleagues need to
be linked into the appeal process.

**Recommendation Six: Linked School Improvement Plans for SEN:**
The Inclusion Team is based within the School Improvement Team. The restructure has enabled better linking and cross-referencing between schools. Annual reviews of ARP provision is now in place. A provision and quality review is currently being undertaken. This is linked to recommendation two.

**Recommendation Seven: Transition Plan:**
A new transition strategy has been agreed by Cabinet and a Transition Steering Group is in place and reviewing the impact. Revised national guidance awaited on implications of proposed extension of transition age to 25 years.

**Recommendation Eight: Progress Report to be Presented to the Children’s Trust and CSSC:**
This report meets the second part of the recommendation.

Regarding the personalisation budgets, it was noted that the department is willing to pursue the idea but some resistance has been encountered when trying to engage health organisations. If officers feel there is a risk of misuse, the personalisation option simply won’t be offered. However, if personalisation budgets become statutory officers will lose this discretion and a formal intervention would be required to stop misuse. Furthermore, officers can require the money to be held in a separate and dedicated account so, if required, scrutiny of spending can be undertaken.

The Committee noted the report.

**40. Local Democracy Education in Barking and Dagenham**

The Lead Member introduced the item.

The Lead Member explained to the Committee that he had recently been involved in some work with “Brighter Steps”. Part of this was being interviewed by young people from Robert Clack School. While the Councillor greatly enjoyed the experience and meeting the young people, he came away with a worry that the knowledge of local democracy by these young people could be improved.

The Lead Member outlined that many of the young people were unaware of a councillor (often confusing it with a counsellor), with many never having met one, and a lack of understanding of wards and local decision making. Furthermore, the young people who spoke to the Lead Member were aware of the BAD Youth Forum and their school councils, but could not cite any of the work either body had undertaken.

To overcome these communication barriers the Lead Member proposed, subject to Schools’ agreement, that each school should have a Democracy notice board. It could be split between the Council and the School Council and could contain information on the Cabinet, the Council and its services, wards, councillors and their role and sign-posting to further information such as the Council’s Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The Committee engaged in a lengthy discussion about democratic knowledge and
participation in the local area. Of note:

- LBBD should explore other ways of disseminating information, such as notice boards inside pubs, bars, cafes and coffee-shops, and places of worship and community halls.
- People rarely distinguish between local and national politics and policies.
- Councillors need to work hard to ensure they can meet as many of their constituents as possible.
- It was AGREED that the Corporate Director should circulate BAD Youth Forum voting turnout figures to the Committee.

The Scrutiny Officer outlined that it is a part of his role within the Democratic Services department to teach Children and Young People about national, London, and local democracy – along with his colleague the Democratic Services Officer who was also present at the meeting. It was explained that together they have developed extensive teaching tools for a number of age groups to explain how democracy operates at those three tiers and, importantly, how children and young people can engage with the democratic process and ensure their voice is heard. The department has also organised democracy events for the BAD Youth Forum to which the Member of Parliament for Barking, the local London Assembly Member, and the Deputy Leader of the Council answered questions. The Parliamentary Outreach Service also gave a presentation at the event. It was noted that the Lead Member met with the Scrutiny Officer to review these presentations and he was satisfied with the content. The presentations will be made available, via the engagement team, to more officers who work with children and young people in an effort to ensure they reach a wider audience.

It was AGREED that the Corporate Director would raise the issue of Democracy education and information notice boards at the next meeting of head teachers.

41. Early Outcomes Update

The Corporate Director of Children’s Services introduced the item.

The Committee was pleased to note that, following a request from BAD Youth Forum, the Schools’ Forum has set aside a sum to allow all schools to have a student voice evidence gathering visit.

The Corporate Director outlined that:

- The BAD Youth Forum asked that all school councils could be visited by a trained school improvement officer. They wanted an objective view of each school council so that each school could have an individual snapshot of its own council and a picture of how it compares with school councils across the borough.
- Whilst this has been requested by the Youth Forum itself, it will also provide helpful evidence for schools – it will contribute to the student voice strand of the schools’ own self-evaluation evidence.
- The programme of visits is being coordinated by Anne Pepper – Principal Adviser – an experienced school improvement office and Ofsted Inspector and Erik Stein – Group Manager Engagement and External Services – an expert on schools’ councils.
- The visits are planned to take place in the second half of this term – February and March – with the possibility that a few may go into April. Secondary schools will be prioritised. There are around 55 visits to make –
so it is a considerable undertaking!

- Visits will follow a standard pattern:
  - Meeting with school council representatives;
  - Meeting with SLT lead for student voice;
  - Reading of any relevant documents/minutes;
  - Brief feedback to head or nominated senior leader.
  - Key points will be captured on a proforma agreed and provided for the school.
- General points will be drawn out in a report for the CCSC and BAD Youth Forum.
- Visits will be carried out by LA staff and Janet Dyson who is the RE Subject Adviser to the local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) and has many years experience supporting and inspecting schools – with particular expertise in Religious Education, spiritual, mental, social and cultural development – which strongly includes how students’ views are captured and valued by schools.
- Head teachers have been briefed and given a copy of the Schools Council UK Top Tips documents

The Committee noted the update.

42. **Student Voice Presentation from Council Officers**

The Corporate Director Children’s Services introduced the item.

The Children’s Trust aims to ensure:

- Every child is valued, supported, and challenged so that they develop the ambition, skills, and resilience to succeed.
- Every child knows that they are part of, and have a responsibility to contribute to, building a strong, empowered, and cohesive community.

It was outlined that Student Voice describes the distinct perspectives and actions of young people throughout schools focused on education; Student voice is giving students the ability to influence learning to include policies, programs, contexts and principles. The "Ladder of Participation" was shown to Members. Written by Sherry Arnstein in 1969, the ladder outlined citizen involvement in planning processes. There are eight steps:

8. Citizen Control
7. Delegated Power
6. Partnership
5. Placation
4. Consultation
3. Informing
2. Therapy
1. Manipulation

Steps one and two are considered “non participation”, steps three thru five are “tokenism” gestures, while six thru eight are deemed “citizen power”.

In 1995 Skinner looked at how individuals and communities were actually involved in participative partnerships as a tool to categorise participation. Skinner suggests that a community will adopt five roles if fully participating:
1. As **beneficiaries** of the programme and users of services
2. As **consultees** and representatives of local opinion
3. As the **support** source for general community activity
4. As the source for the **delivery** of new community activity
5. As potential long-term planners in future development for the community.

The Corporate Director also outlined Roger Hart’s Ladder of Young People’s Participation. It also has eight rungs:

8. Young people and adults share decision-making  
7. Young people lead and initiate action  
6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people  
5. Young people consulted and informed  
4. Young people assigned and informed  
3. Young people tokenised*  
2. Young people are decoration*  
1. Young people are manipulated*

*The last three rungs are not considered participation.

Using the above ladder as a guide, the Corporate Director outlined that if the Committee had the BAD Youth Forum representative as a voting member of the Committee, this would be considered Rung 8. School Councils would be considered Rung 4.

The research conducted by Rudduck has highlighted that insufficient attention is paid to Student Voice. OFSTED has a focus on student voice and considers the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural aspects of learning. The citizenship curriculum also covers student voice.

Some examples of Student Voice in LBBD include:
- Thomas Arnold School App (Young people can add their views in a message board type format)
- Eastbury School hosted a mock United Nations
- Sydney Russell School’s student voice system
- School Councils (including infants) – almost every school.
- Lesson planning and organisation – children and young people need to “own” their education.
- Student self-evaluation and target setting

Another example highlight to the Committee was that of Eastbury:

“At Eastbury Sixth Form we take the opinions and input of our students seriously and understand that a thriving student council is essential to a well-balanced community which meets the needs of its students.”

And one of the borough’s primary schools with its message of

“I make a commitment to take a stand against bullying. I will treat others with respect and kindness. I will have the compassion to not be a bully and the courage to not be a bystander. It is my responsibility to help others being bullied and to report bullying.”
The Corporate Director highlighted a quote from a member of a student council:

“Being on the student council is “hard work” but rewarding, the pupils say. Most have been on the Council since year 7. It was consistently oversubscribed, so the democratic youngsters set up sub-committees for those who were not elected. We feel like our voice is heard. They even interview teachers, recently helping to choose the head of the English department.” Meghan says.

Moving onto the main concern of the BAD Youth Forum, the Corporate Director addressed the issue of variability across the borough. To address this, the Corporate Director proposed:

- Analyse: School Forum funding additional project on quality of school councils
- Consult: Members, BAD Youth Forum, All Saints Summit, national experts.
- Prioritise: Select Committee, Officer and Young People
- Recommend...
- Report

It was AGREED that the summary from the All Saints School event would be circulated to the Committee by the Scrutiny Officer.

It was AGREED that the BAD Youth Forum would be invited to the Select Committee to discuss their thoughts on Student Voice.

Turning their attention to the “School Councils UK Top Tips” document, the Committee affirmed that they would be keen to learn more about tips 5, 8, 9, 11, and 12. They noted that 5, 8 and 9 all relate to communication, a theme from the presentation by the BAD Youth Forum chair at a previous meeting.

The Committee noted the presentation.

43. **Date of Next Meeting**

Noted.

The meeting closed at 20.13