CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

12 June 2013

Draft Recommendations of the Student Voice Scrutiny Review 2013/14

Report of the Corporate Director, Children Services

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Summary:

On 29 May 2012 the Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC) agreed to undertake an in-depth scrutiny review on Student Voice on the recommendation of representatives of the Barking and Dagenham (BAD) Youth Forum, one of whom was Paul Cox, a co-opted member of the Committee. The reasons behind why they felt a review into this area was needed were as follows:

- Students' voices are not as fully empowered as they should be. Drawing on personal and the wider experiences of their peers, they did not feel the student voice had made a significant contribution to school life. This could be attributed to there being no real opportunities to make a difference which made students feel frustrated.
- A school council is meant to be one of the students' primary channels of communication to a school's senior management team and is also their method of voicing what they are unhappy about or, to make recommendations for the school to make school life better.
- These principles are the tenets on which student voices are meant to run by; however, their experiences did not find that this was the case. They felt this was down to students' views not properly being listened to by various levels of management in the school.
- A student voice does not exist to make a school's pupil participation records look good, it exists to improve the experience of pupils who study at the school, and both students and staff need grasp and implement this concept within schools for things to change and improve.
- They wished for the Committee to determine whether the experiences of students across the borough were similar in this regard and depending on its findings, make recommendations to strengthen the student voice in borough schools.

Since this meeting, the CSSC has commissioned reports and considered evidence to establish how school councils can be better supported to strengthen student voice. As part of this, the Committee invited a consultant from School Councils UK to a meeting to discuss the national picture and also commissioned a review of all borough schools to obtain an overview of how well school councils are supported to understand the local
The CSSC used this information to make recommendations to strengthen student voice in borough schools, which officers have collated. A draft list of recommendations is provided as Appendix 1 to this Report.

Members are asked to note that the full Student Voice Scrutiny Report (which will incorporate the recommendations once they are agreed), is currently being drafted. The CSSC will be given full opportunity to shape the report, and ensure the final version reflects the scrutiny process and its findings.

Recommendations

- That the CSSC review the list of draft recommendations arising from the Student Voice Scrutiny Review and comment on whether this reflects the evidence the Committee considered and, whether there are any gaps.
- Good practice dictates that recommendations arising from scrutiny should be specific, measurable, accurate, realistic and timely (SMART) and the CSSC is asked to comment on whether the recommendations meet these principles.

Reasons

The CSSC seeks to work with the Council and other partners to secure the continuous improvement of services for children and young people and assist in improving outcomes for the borough's young people.

This reasons behind why this review was undertaken, and the recommendations arising from it, relate to a number of priorities stated in the Council's 'Policy House':

- A borough where people get involved – and feel included – in the decisions that affect them.
- A borough with a range of positive activities for young people.
- A borough which meets the needs of disabled children, young people and adults.
- A borough with excellent schools, constantly improving and which are growing to meet the demands for pupil places.

Furthermore, evidence heard by the CSSC suggests that an empowered and more dynamic student voice may have positive impacts upon the behaviour and attainment levels of young people. This aspect of this review may relate to other priorities in the Policy House overtime, for example:

- A borough with excellent – and improving – attainment through education and training.
- A clean borough, with low levels of litter and graffiti and where residents look after their own homes and gardens.
- A borough where people’s health and fitness are improving, with fewer smokers, with more people taking exercise and where people take better care of their diet.

Appendix 1: Draft Recommendations of the Children's Services Select Committee's Student Voice Scrutiny Review 2013/14