ROYAL BOROUGH OF GREENWICH

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2018 AT 7.00 PM

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Members:
Councillor Ivis Williams (Chair), Councillors Linda Bird, Angela Cornforth, Gary Dillon, Ann-Marie Cousins, Mariam Lolavar, Anthony Okereke and Patricia Greenwell

External Education Appointees
Monsignor Rothon (Roman Catholic Representative)
Pauline Sheath (Church of England Representative)

Under Standing Orders
Councillor David Gardner (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools)

Officers
Director of Children’s Services, Assistant Director Commissioning and Resources (Children’s Services), Permanence Group Leader C, Early Help Strategic Lead, Senior Public Health Manager and Corporate Governance Officer

Item
No.

1 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Apologies for lateness were received for Councillor Angela Cornforth
2 **Urgent Business**

The Chair advised that the running order for considering the items would be amended and the Panel would consider Agenda Items in the following order 8, 5, 6, 7.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

*Resolved –*

That the list of Councillors’ memberships as Council appointed representatives on outside bodies, joint committees and school governing bodies be noted.

4 **Minutes**

*Resolved -*

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Panel held on 6 September 2018 be agreed and signed as a true and accurate record.

5 **School Place Planning Report**

The Assistant Director of Commissioning and Resources introduced the report informing the Panel of the Royal Borough of Greenwich’s statutory responsibilities for ensuring there are sufficient education places to meet the level and pattern of demand from residents. This included provision for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND), whilst also ensuring fair access to schools and protecting the interests of the most vulnerable pupils.

The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools advised the Panel that the Local Authority was in a position of duty to fulfil its statutory responsibilities, however held limited to no power and lacked the required level of funding. That going forward the Education and Skills Funding Agency would be accountable for funding education and skills for children, young people and adults. He advised that as part of next year’s work programme that the School Place Planning Report be presented to the Panel for pre-decision scrutiny.

With regards to the educational outcomes for Key stage 4 and 5, the Assistant Director of Commissioning and Resources stated that this was an area of particular focus and she was currently working closely with schools
and the Assistant Director, Inclusion Learning and Achievement to implement strategies for improvement. That those groups within the cohort that consistently underperformed would be subject to continued monitoring to ensure they had the required support around key issues such as exclusions, attendance and family.

In response to questions raised, the Director of Children’s Services informed the Panel that there was a dialogue between the authority and some of the academies but not all, expressing the importance to continue to invite them all to attend scrutiny to facilitate discussions on educational outcomes as it was vital to maintain a good working relationship. That there had been meetings with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools to discuss key stage 4 results and to identify what the short and long term strategies were, which would subsequently be shared with head teachers. She added that the Assistant Director of Commissioning and Resources was leading on an intensive piece of work on disadvantaged children. In 2017, Key Stage 4 results were above the national average however fell short of the London average and the authority were determined to change that.

In respect of the expansion of Boxgrove School, the Assistant Director of Commissioning and Resources advised that projections are tested and re-run throughout the year to keep checks on proposed demand. That the area Boxgrove School was in had previously indicated it to be one of increasing demand however updated reports showed this demand did not materialize. Therefore, the works did not result in an expansion and instead a proposed consultation would be made to Cabinet to utilise the space to establish a designated provision for children with autistic spectrum disorder.

The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools advised that in respect of school place provision that over-providing school spaces significantly added to the cost base of the school therefore getting the balance right was key, as not to have a debilitating effect on a schools finances.

In response to questions raised, the Assistant Director of Commissioning and Resources confirmed that there were sufficient secondary school places available for children in the borough for 2019.

At 8.29pm Councillor Cornforth joined the meeting.

In response to questions raised, the Director of Children’s Services advised that they were implementing strategies to bring down costs in relation to pressure on the General Fund for associated transport support; this included robust decision-making and reviewing transport routes that would be subject
to budget review board meetings. She added that the Schools Forum had made the decision to transfer funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block as head teachers and governors recognize it as an area that is consistently challenging, in need of more investment and a pressure felt across the country. That high needs spend required continued monitored.

Resolved –

That the Panel noted the demand for places at Royal Greenwich schools and post 16 provision, and the action being taken by the Council.

6 Corporate Parenting Board Progress Report

The Senior Assistant Director Children’s Safeguarding and Social Care introduced the report.

In response to questions raised, the SAD Children’s Safeguarding and Social Care clarified that the Promise sets out the Council's commitment to:

Provide young people with a safe and happy home
Respect them and their identity
Offer them support and guidance throughout their time in care
Make sure they get a good education and help them achieve their aspirations
Involve them in decisions about their life
Support them to be active and stay healthy
Ensure they feel fully prepared for their transition into adulthood.

She stated that the Corporate Parenting Board had a lot of work to do in ensuring that the whole of the Council and wider council partners recognized their corporate parenting responsibilities. She added that immediate outcomes such as health, education and placement stability were monitored, stating there were measures in place, which could be matched against the Promise made to Looked After Children in Greenwich.

The Director of Children’s Services stated that the decision was made to develop a stand-alone Corporate Parenting Board as it was felt that the change from a scrutiny function to an active board would ensure a more focused work plan and greater engagement of elected members and directors. That this change had already led to increased opportunities for apprenticeships and Housing were providing training and skills that could be utilized in the workplace.

The Panel thanked officers for the report.
The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools addressed the Panel informing them of a recent attendance at an awards event for Looked After Children were he spent time meeting and talking to foster parents and found them to be passionate and committed. He stated that the Virtual School played a significant role in promoting educational outcomes and raising attainment of all children looked after by Royal Greenwich.

Resolved –

That the Panel noted the progress of arrangements for the Corporate Parenting Board since its establishment in May 2017.

7 Fostering and Adoption Annual Reports

The Service Leader of Permanence and Care Leaving Services introduced the reports. He stated that Greenwich had an innovative fostering service, which had a good reputation across London and the sector that despite challenging circumstances continued to grow. That it was one of the first local authorities in the country to pilot the mockingbird model and few chosen by the national fostering stocktake team to be visited to look at how it supported its foster carers. Greenwich had a leading adoption service across London in terms of the number of children adopted and one that continues to actively seek and recruit adopters.

The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools advised that Greenwich’s record for rated adoptions of 9% and the productivity of its adoption service, in terms of the number of adoptions managed per member of staff was far superior to most other London Boroughs. He stated that collaboration made sense however, there were concerns that the regional adoption arrangements may have unintended negative impact on the practice in Greenwich. He added that alternative arrangements were being explored and a report on the available options would be presented to the Panel at a future meeting.

In response to questions raised, the Service Leader of Permanence advised that as a fostering service, they took an innovative approach towards supporting carers and did not differentiate between support groups for family and friends foster carers or career carers, both of whom have access to the full training program. That where appropriate family and friends foster carers are encouraged to foster a non-related child however have found that a number who had indicated interest did not have spare rooms to facilitate this.

In response to questions raised, the Service Leader of Permanence advised that having a criminal record was not an automatic bar to becoming a foster carer and would expect prospective fosterers to be truthful about their
history. He added that all would be subject to a thorough assessment process, which included statutory checks, references, local authority checks, Disclosure and Barring Services on all household occupants and health assessments.

With regards to fostering applications which were withdrawn by the applicants, the Service Leader of Permanence stated there were a variety of reasons stemming from apprehensive landlords, home security in relation to tenancy, troubled relationships and impact on the prospective fosterers own children.

In response to questions raised, the Service Leader of Permanence advised that the adoption service were committed to finding adoptive families for harder to place children and recognized that although it took longer to identify the right family and placements for them that the service did not give up. He added that Royal Greenwich worked together with consortium partners, Bromley and Lewisham with the aim of recruiting prospective adopters and achieved the second highest number of approved families within the consortium in 2017/18.

The Service Leader of Permanence stated that there had been no adoption disruptions for the past 4 years, which reflected the quality of work within the adoption team.

Resolved –

That the Panel noted the work and performance of the Fostering and Adoption Services in 2017-18 as outlined in the reports.

8 Update on Healthy Weight in Greenwich

The Senior Public Health Manager introduced the report.

The Panel expressed concerns on the 2016-17 overweight and obesity levels for children in reception and Year 6 in a number of wards that indicated higher percentages. They requested further information on the relationship and link between obesity, diabetes and deprivation.

Action: Public Health/DCS

The Senior Public Health Manager informed Members that if ward specific information on health initiatives was required this could be provided upon request.

The Senior Public Health Manager advised that a borough wide response would be required to address the issue of childhood obesity, which had been
recognized as a priority for the borough. She stated that Cookery Clubs, Food and Veg stalls were available in RBG children’s centres providing support to families to adopt healthy practices. She added that 14 schools had signed up to the food for life awards which aimed to put food at the heart of the curriculum bringing schools and their surrounding communities together around the core ethos of healthy, tasty and sustainable food.

The Director of Children’s Services stated that tackling obesity was a complex area of work and schools in the borough were undertaking numerous initiatives to address the issue and commended them for being very creative and imaginative. That the Greenwich Sugar Smart programme and Daily Mile initiative which most of the schools visited had engaged in had encouraged their communities to reduce sugar intake in food and drinks and made a significant difference to the activity levels of young people.

In response to questions raised, The Senior Public Health Manager stated that GS+ the main contractor providing school meals was providing quality and gold standard Food for Life accredited school meals.

The Panel expressed the need to work in partnership with schools to encourage them to monitor policies in practice like reviewing the amount of salad wastage.

The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools stated that the Public Health team in Greenwich were outstanding in London. He added that the Healthy Weight Taskforce chaired by the Cabinet Member for Adult’s Social Care, Health and Anti-Poverty were overseeing and monitoring the healthy weight action plan, ensuring all relevant council departments and strategic partners are held to account for progress.

The Senior Public Health Manager added the taskforce were piloting ‘Super Zones’ which would implement a health zone of 400m around schools trialling a number of interventions.

The Panel expressed that they would send a recommendation on concerns of obesity and its impact on Children and Young People in Greenwich to Planning.

Action: Chair/CGO

Resolved –

That the Panel noted the most recent obesity data (October 2017) and considered the local response, including the focus of the new RBG Member-level Healthy Weight Taskforce.
9 Commissioning of Future Reports

The Chair advised Panel members of the work programme for the upcoming meetings.

Resolved –

That the Panel noted the work items that are scheduled to be presented to the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel taking place on 17 January 2019.

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm

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Chair