



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Young People, Learning and Employment Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Young People, Learning and Employment Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday 5th March, 2024**, 18th Floor Meeting Rooms. Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Angela Piddock (Chair), Lorraine Dean, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Karen Scarborough, James Small-Edwards, Max Sullivan (online) and Jessica Toale

**Co-opted Member Present:** Alix Ascough

**Also Present:** Councillors Aicha Less (Cabinet Member for Communities, Children and Public Protection), Sarah Newman (Bi Borough Executive Director of Children's Services), Heather Clarke (Director of Housing Needs) (online), Emma Biskupski (Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Manager), Aileen Buckton (Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Independent Chair and Scrutineer), Aaron Hardy (Principal Policy Officer, Policy and Projects), and Linda Hunting (Policy and Scrutiny Advisor).

#### **1 MEMBERSHIP**

- 1.1 The Committee noted that Councillor Jessica Toale was substituting for Councillor Sara Hassan.
- 1.2 The Committee noted that Councillor Max Sullivan was substituting for Councillor Ellie Ormsby and was attending online.

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 2.1 The Committee noted Councillor Hitchcock declared that in respect of Item 5, the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report, she is a trustee of St Andrew's Youth Club.
- 2.2 The Committee noted Councillor Scarborough declared that in respect of Item 5, the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report, she is a Co-opted Member of the Governing Body and Vice Chair at St Vincent's School, a trustee of the Young Westminster Foundation, and Governor Vice Chair of St Mary of the Angels school.

2.3 The Committee noted that there were no other declarations of interest.

### **3 MINUTES**

3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023.

#### **RESOLVED:**

3.2 That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December be signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

### **4 WORK PROGRAMME**

4.1 The Committee noted this was the last meeting for the 2023/24 municipal year.

4.2 The Committee noted that a Work Programme meeting will be held on 14 May to plan the next municipal year programme. This follows from the Policy and Scrutiny Cabinet Member Annual Updates to be held in April 2024.

### **5 LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP (LSCP) ANNUAL REPORT**

5.1 The Committee welcomed Emma Biskupski (Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Manager), to introduce the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) Annual Report. The Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Manager, Sarah Newman (Bi Borough Executive Director of Children's Services) and Aileen Buckton (Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Independent Chair and Scrutineer), responded to questions on the following topics:

- Children who have been exposed to violence such as domestic violence and the support that is in place for them, including, the work that is carried out by social workers and early help practitioners, assessment of the child and the parents to meet their needs, understanding relationships that cause the conflict, support that can be provided by the schools, and how the success of these is evaluated and at what point this takes place.
- The correlations between children affected by violence and attendance at school, special educational needs, vulnerability to poor outcomes and engagement in crime.
- Relationships with schools around safeguarding, including, more regular contact with police in primary schools to assist with issues such as introduction to gangs, mobile phones and criminal activity, the safer policing initiative, the Safer Schools Programme in secondary schools being introduced in primary schools, and the Youth Crime Prevention Partnership.
- Evaluating success with the victim and feedback from different interventions, including the importance of the relationship between the victim and the person providing the support.

- The presence of mental health issues with young children, post Covid-19 affecting schools, the challenges with the Council's Early Help Offer to families being optional, and the initiatives that are being developed by the Council to improve this issue.
- A Childhood Recovery Plan and the significant investment that is needed to improve outcomes for children that were disproportionately affected due to Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis, and world events.
- How the Council intends to support schools with the increase in problems such as challenging behaviour, post Covid-19, what support is available in the system, and the introduction of a new school-based post.
- The high figures of obesity and tooth decay in Westminster and how families can be supported to improve outcomes, outside of an onus on schools.
- The outcomes included in the report and the difficulties in assessing overall performance trends given the report is across several partnerships.
- How the cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating many other safeguarding issues such as domestic violence, attendance at school, substance misuse, and neglect and the increase in the complexity of cases.
- What is being done about the safeguarding of children in residential settings and how the nine recommendations of the national review are being followed by the Council, including, the dialogue the Council is having with health partners and the ICB (Integrated Care Board) aimed at making improvements and reducing impact on children.
- The influence of social media on young children and how this affects wellbeing and many other aspects of safeguarding and topics addressed in the report, including, who the Council is working with to provide training and resources such as schools, families, carers, and the police.
- Potential staffing cuts that may occur by the ICB for designated safeguarding, how safeguarding will still be made a priority for vulnerable children if these changes are implemented, and whether the Council may be able to assist in funding any of the shortfalls that may occur.
- The NRM (National Referral Mechanism: Home Office Pilot Project) and whether this includes familial exploitation including county lines and how this may be affecting children in Westminster.
- Safeguarding issues that have been highlighted within schools around misogyny, the way in which Ofsted are dealing with this and updating their inspection framework, and where there have been issues highlighted via the Everyone's Invited website.
- The percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals in relation in comparison to the London average and why the percentage of children living in poverty is lower than the percentage of children in receipt of Free School Meals.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

5.2 To take forward to partners that safeguarding issues around social media and its impact on children and relevant data should be included in future LSCP reports.

5.3 That the newly created role 'school navigator' is implemented within all schools and the possibility of social workers being placed in schools continues to be explored.

5.4 To take forward to the police that the Safer Programme be moved into primary schools and that more regular contact between schools and police be encouraged as part of the Children's Strategy.

5.5 To continue to consider school attendance and the reasons for repeated absence as part of safeguarding priorities with children.

5.6 To take forward and monitor the effects of misogyny in schools, the issues that are highlighted, and what interventions are being deployed to address these.

#### **REQUESTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

5.7 To provide the Committee with the Westminster Children's Services quarterly social care performance data.

5.8 To provide the Committee with information data from the NRM pilot, whether it includes familial exploitation, and the types of exploitation that are being found by the pilot.

5.9 To provide information to the Committee about why the percentage of children living in poverty is lower than the percentage of children in receipt of Free School Meals in Westminster, and an explanation of the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals.

5.10 To provide information to the Committee about how school attendance is monitored as part of safeguarding and provide the report by the Department for Education the Council on this topic.

## **6 PROVISIONS FOR MIGRANT FAMILIES**

6.1 The Committee welcomed Sarah Newman (Bi Borough Executive Director of Children's Services), to introduce the report on the provisions for migrant families in Westminster. The Bi Borough Executive Director of Children's Services, Aaron Hardy (Principal Policy Officer, Policy, and Projects), and Councillor Aicha Less (Cabinet Member for Communities, Children and Public Protection) responded to questions on the following topics:

- The length of time that asylum seeking families stay in contingency hotel accommodation.
- The length of time it is currently taking the Home Office to sign off on asylum seeker leave to remain applications and how distressing this is and the effects on families.
- How asylum seekers can be empowered to raise issues they encounter in the contingency hotels without fear of being penalised.
- The disparities of accommodation and quality and quantity of food between different contingency hotel sites across London, the commissioning of different providers to supply the food across the sites.
- The details of the contracts the Home Office has with the providers of food and the lack of culturally specific and nutritional food in many sites.

- The facilities in the contingency hotels and the inability for families to prepare and cook their own meals.
- The charities that work with asylum seeker families, such as Unfold, and what types of support they provide.
- The power the Council has in making complaints to the Home Office about the standards of accommodation, quality and quantity of food, sanitary products, and hygiene and safety conditions in the hotels and how often these issues are being raised.
- Families that have been moved out of hotels due to safety issues, where these families have been rehoused, and the disruption on children and their education when they have been reassigned to alternative schools.
- Who ultimately has the responsibility to ensure that asylum seeker family's needs are being met.
- The importance of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to all ages of asylum seekers, the Council's role in promoting and facilitating these classes and maintaining a good standard of teaching, and where the classes are available.
- The role of the Family Navigators that work in the contingency hotels to support families and the types of areas where they provide support.
- The types of traumas that are experienced by asylum seekers and the effects this has on engaging with the services that are offered.
- The amount of funding an asylum seeker receives per week to live on, £8.83, and what they are expected to fund from that amount.
- The Council's responsibilities when a family receives a positive application and then enters the private housing rented sector.
- The Government's plans to close contingency hotels and move families to alternative accommodation, and how this may occur before a family receives a positive application and can declare themselves homeless.
- The re-provisioning of contingency hotels and the Council's relationship and communication with the Home Office to enable better forward planning.
- The internal safeguarding processes to escalate concerns that Clearsprings have put in place, how the Council have been kept out of that process, and the concerns the Council has, as well as other London boroughs, in understanding safeguarding concerns.
- The number of asylum-seeking young people in Westminster secondary schools and whether any have been transferred out of borough.
- The number of younger male asylum seekers that arrive in the UK on their own, where they stay, and concerns around the effects of trauma, mental health, and wellbeing.
- Provisions of support specifically for male asylum seekers in contingency hotels to come together and improve mental health and wellbeing.
- Appropriate volunteering opportunities for asylum seekers to gain positive local engagement and improve wellbeing such as environmental activities in parks and gardens and how these can be promoted.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

6.2 That the Council continue to make robust representations to the Home Office regarding the poor conditions and practices within the contingency hotels, quality and quantity of food, and overall safety and follow through.

6.3 That the Council continue to make representations to the Home Office to pursue alternative providers that can provide a higher standard of accommodation for asylum seekers.

6.4 That the Council continues to actively encourage ESOL learning for all ages of asylum seekers, particularly with older and support the facilitation and quality of these classes.

6.5 That the Council investigate a specific provision for asylum seeking men in contingency hotels that provides meaningful activities, engagement, and a supportive space in an environment where they can meet with others.

6.6 That the Council explore opportunities for asylum seekers to volunteer such as within parks, outdoor spaces, and recreational activity with charities such as Unfold as part of the wellbeing and mental health offer.

6.7 That the Council endorse the recommendations made in the Hounslow report 'On Hold', to improve conditions for asylum seekers and that the Council continue to contribute to progress this agenda.

6.8 That the Council continue to work hard to accommodate children locally in schools when they are decanted from contingency hotels with their families and ensure they have as little disruption to their lives as possible.

**REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

6.9 That the Committee receive information about the length of stay that migrant families spend in contingency hotels, including, those that are moved from a hotel before they receive a positive application.

**7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

7.1 The Committee noted that the Care Leavers report on the agenda would not be received at this Committee meeting as it was still to be agreed by all members of the Task Group. The Committee was advised that this item would come to the Committee at a future date.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm.

**CHAIR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_