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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN & LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall
5 February 2013 (7.30 - 9.00 pm)**

Present: Councillors Sandra Binion (Chairman), Gillian Ford (Vice-Chair), Robby Misir, Pat Murray, Frederick Thompson, Melvin Wallace, Keith Wells and Garry Pain (In place of Peter Gardner)

Co-opted Members: Phillip Grundy, Jack How, Julie Lamb and Anne Ling

The Chairman advised those present of action to be taken in the event of an emergency evacuation of the building becoming necessary

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nic Dodin, co-opted member Margaret Cameron, Keith Passingham and Garry Dennis and Bev Whitehead

17 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Julie Lamb and Pat Murray declared a personal interest in Items 5 and 6.

18 **MINUTES**

The Committee approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2012.

19 **SCHOOL TRANSPORT UPDATE - VERBAL REPORT**

The Committee considered a presentation from Assistant Group Director (Commissioning) from Social Care and Learning regarding progress made with changes to the SEN Transport provision.

The Committee noted that there had been significant changes since September 2011 and since the Committee considered the proposals in September 2012.

There was said to be a changed provision for Hall Mead School which was cheaper and which had received positive feedback. One of the assembly points, Beacon Hill, was out of borough and this had been replaced via a taxi service.

There were two escorts accompanying children to Corbets Tey School instead of just one, which had been the case previously. The risk assessment around this had been fine. The route to Ravensbourne School had been replaced and the overall changes meant that no route was

significantly longer than any other. However, punctuality had been an issue at Corbets Tey.

The Committee was informed that 29 children had completed their travel training with a ceremony performed at the Town Hall, in which awards were given to the children. A further 15 children from Dycorts School had also completed their travel training. The Committee was reassured, arising from member concerns that travel training remained optional for children and there were no plans to change that policy in the foreseeable future.

The Committee noted the update.

20 **SCHOOL TRANSPORT - TRAVEL PLANS - PRESENTATION**

Further to a request by the Committee in 2012, members considered a presentation from Havering's Smarter Travel Officer regarding school travel plans in the borough.

The Committee noted that a School Travel Plan (STP) was a document written by a school in consultation with its pupils, parents, staff, and local residents, which sought to address travel and transport issues in and around the school

The STP looked at how pupils and staff currently travelled to school, how they would prefer to travel and how the school could encourage more sustainable travel habits. An effective STP would be kept up to date, reviewed annually, and re-written every three years. School Travel Plans were usually voluntary and relied on the schools willingness to participate.

An STP was said to help schools by:

- Reducing traffic congestion and air pollution in and around the school site
- Improving personal and road safety skills
- Improving the health and fitness of pupils and staff - linked to improved academic results
- Establishing safer walking and cycling routes to school
- Enhancing relations with the local community

School Travel Plans were first introduced in Havering in 2005 and all 90 schools in Havering had an approved travel plan by 2009. Schools were now implementing their travel plans to address specific issues. The majority of Havering schools were very active with their travel plan and accredited schools deliver greater modal shift.

Results were described as very positive. Schools in the Borough had achieved a high modal shift, with the percentage of car trips for school journeys being down from around 39% three years ago to approximately 23% now. Increased levels of walking and cycling had been seen in many

schools. In the future, expanding schools, particularly primary schools, would present a significant challenge to existing plans.

The Committee noted the presentation.

21 **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

The Committee considered a report from the Manager, Additional Educational Needs regarding attendance data for schools/academies for the school years 2009-10 to 2011-12 and the work being undertaken by the Local Authority to support attendance in maintained schools and academies in the London Borough of Havering.

The Committee noted that the Government was placing high importance currently to improving school attendance and reducing the number of children with high levels of absences from schools/academies. The Committee also had regard to information concerning the overall rates of attendance and the rates of “persistent absence” for schools/ academies in the borough for the three school years from 2009-10 to 2011-12, providing comparisons with figures both national and for outer London boroughs.

The report detailed the strategies currently employed by the Local Authority to improve levels of school attendance and reduce the level of absences at schools within the borough. It further explained the loss of funding to the Local Authority as a result of schools converting to academy status and the changing relationship between the Local Authority and academies in terms of the services provided. Despite the changing nature of this relationship the report highlighted the need for the Local Authority to continue to monitor overall levels of school attendance and the rates of persistent absence for both maintained schools and academies in the borough.

The Committee noted the Government had adopted all of the recommendations made by Charlie Taylor, the Government’s expert adviser on behaviour, in his report “Improving School Attendance” published in April 2012. The focus was on improving attendance results from the evidence which showed that children with poor attendance were unlikely to succeed academically and they were more likely than not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) when they leave school.

There was also an established link between poor school attendance at school and lower academic achievement. Of pupils who missed more than 50% of school only 3% managed to achieve 5 or more GCSE’s at grades A*-C including Maths and English. 73% of pupils who had over 95% attendance achieve 5 or more GCSE’s at grades A*-C.

The Government was particularly concerned about the relatively small number of pupils who were persistently absent from school. As a consequence it lowered the threshold for pupils to be considered to be “persistently absent” from school from 20% to 15% in September 2011. This

change was intended to ensure that pupils with attendance issues were identified earlier.

As children move up through the school system the number of children who are persistently absent grows. By the time children have reached their mid-teens it would often become more difficult for schools to get these children to attend. Evidence suggested that children with low attendance in the early years of education were more likely to come from the poorest backgrounds. As a consequence the government was seeking to increase the emphasis on improving the attendance of vulnerable pupils in primary schools. Non-attendance at school, for whatever reason, was an important issue that parents, schools and the Local needed to take seriously and address effectively.

The Committee noted that School staff, both teaching and non-teaching, were in the front line of the drive to improve attendance. While Local Authority staff could make a valuable contribution, teachers and others who worked in schools were in daily contact with pupils and could forge effective links with parents at a local level. It was essential that the promotion of good attendance was recognised at every school.

Schools/ academies had been supported to improve their attendance levels by:

- Having in place a whole school approach to ensuring good attendance, and where necessary to improve it through data analysis and prioritisation.
- Identifying a designated member of the Senior Leadership Team to have responsibility for all attendance matters and to initiate the review of attendance targets. Schools/ academies have also been advised that it is good practice to have a designated member of the governing body responsible for monitoring attendance matters.
- Developing a written attendance policy which sets out the school's expectations and priorities, strategies for improvement, advice for parents on procedures and the role played by the Education Welfare Service.
- Paying particular attention, within their absence management strategies, to persistently absent pupils, intervening early to nip emerging patterns of absence in the bud, and making full use of the support available from the Local Authority and other agencies to address problems which are beyond the capacity of the school to deal with.
- Developing efficient systems of registration which encourage children and parents to account promptly for any absences, which are in accordance with legal requirements and which show a consistent

approach to the classification of absences as either authorised or unauthorised.

- Implementing First Day Contact schemes, attendance incentive schemes, individual and group awards etc. in accordance with the needs of the school.
- Developing suitable monitoring and referral procedures to ensure that children whose attendance is a cause for concern are identified, supported through the school's/ academies own pastoral systems, including appropriate contact with parents, and, if required, brought to the attention of the Local Authority.
- Accessing regular training for staff with responsibilities for the registration of pupils.
- Ensuring absences are authorised only when the school is satisfied that they are genuine.
- Ensure that Parenting Contracts are completed in line with Havering's Policy Parenting Contract.
- Adopting the borough's 'Holidays in Term Time Guidance

The Committee noted the report.

22 **SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

The Committee considered a report from the Principle Inspector, Havering School Improvement Services (HSIS) regarding the performance of all schools in the borough over the previous academic year.

The report summarised the 2012 performance of Havering primary and secondary schools/academies in key stage assessments, tests and examinations.

The Committee noted that 2012 was another successful year for Havering schools. Although early years results were mixed, Havering enjoyed its best ever results at Key Stages 1 and 2. There was a fall for the first time at GCSE, due to the outcomes of the English results, which were a national phenomenon. For the second year running, Havering had no schools or academies below the government floor standard (60% L4 joint En/Ma at Key Stage 2, and 40% A*-C (inc En/Ma) at GCSE).

Overall attainment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 remained above the national average for each of the main attainment measures and was higher than the performance of Havering's statistical neighbours. During 2011-12, primary and secondary schools/academies receiving targeted support improved more significantly than those schools not in receipt of support.

Foundation Stage

Havering results for 2012 were mixed. Overall, they were marginally lower than our best ever outcomes in 2010, but we did not match the national improvements and attainment for 2012 was broadly average.

Key Stage One

These outcomes were said to be the best ever results for Havering at Key Stage 1. Overall performance at the Levels 2+, 2B+ and 3+ benchmarks at Key Stage 1 improved. Performance improved in every subject (Reading, Writing, Maths), with more pupils achieving the expected level (2B+) than ever before. There was also an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the highest levels (L3).

Key Stage Two

Level 4+ attainment in both English and Maths combined rose to 82% - Havering's highest ever performance and higher than this year's national average figure of 79%. Level 5+ performance rose to 28% - well above previous years. These results place Havering, once again, above the national average. In particular, the Committee was asked to note that 2012 saw a significant increase in the performance of the most able learners – with the proportions reaching the higher Level 5+ increasing by 7% in both English and Mathematics. Raising the achievement of the most able learners had been a major focus in Havering over the last few years.

Key Stage Four

The 2012 Havering average for 5A*-C grades (inc En/Ma) decreased for the first time in many years, by approximately 2.4%, to a provisional 61.1%.

This was more than accounted for by the drop in English results, which was a national phenomenon that was currently being challenged by secondary headteacher associations. However, the drop in Havering exceeded the national fall and comprised significant variation between the English results of different schools.

The fall in Havering's results was disappointing after many years of incremental increase. However, scores in Havering remained above the national average at this measure.

The Committee also considered Key Stage Five results, those for additional needs and the performance of those schools supported by HSIS.

Chairman

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