

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN & LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE
VIRTUAL MEETING
17 September 2020 (7.00 - 8.45 pm)**

Present: Councillors Judith Holt (Chairman), Robby Misir (Vice-Chair), Gillian Ford, Sally Miller, Dilip Patel and Carol Smith

Co-opted Members:
Parent Governors
Julie Lamb and Kathy Freeman

Church Representatives:
Jack How

Non-voting Member - Union:
Ian Rusha

Apologies for absence were received from
Councillor Reg Whitney and Lynne Bennett.

Councillors Tony Durdin and Tele Lawal were absent.

**34 PROTOCOL ON THE OPERATION OF CHILDREN & LEARNING
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB- COMMITTEE MEETINGS DURING
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS**

The Committee considered the protocol and **NOTED** its contents.

35 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

36 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

37 **PERFORMANCE REPORT UPDATE - QUARTER ONE**

The Sub-Committee received the quarter one performance indicators (PIs) update. The PIs were the standards by which performance of services are measured within the Council. The update provided an overview of performance against the eight performance indicators selected for monitoring by the Sub-Committee in 2019/20 as the final meeting of the 2019/20 financial year was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.

The Sub-Committee had not had the opportunity to consider which indicators it wanted to receive during 2020/21.

The report outlined that seven of the indicators have been given a Red Amber Green - RAG status; five have a status of Green and two indicators have a Red.

The report provided the following highlights and potential areas for improvement:

The percentage of 16-18 year olds who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), or not known was recorded at 3.1%, which was lower than this time last year (3.3%). It was stated that Havering's annual performance of 2.9% for last year was also lower than the national figure of 5.5% and the regional performance of 4.2%.

The report detailed that the number of apprentices aged 16-18 recruited in the borough had dropped as at quarter 1 (the academic year up to April 2020) but for the 19+ cohort, performance remained on track to achieve the target of 850 starts. It was clarified that the apprenticeship targets for the year had been reduced in line with national performance for the previous academic year, in light of the challenges presented by Covid-19.

The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days had increased when compared to both the previous quarter and the same point last year. The report explained that the main contributing factor has been the close working between Safeguarding Support Unit and the social work teams to ensure early notification of a conference needing to be convened and reminding social workers and team managers of the purpose of initial and review strategy meetings in line with London Child Protection procedures. It was stated that remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic and the use of virtual conferences had also had the benefit of increasing the availability of Child Protection Conference Chairs, which also contributed to the improved performance.

The report informed the Sub-Committee that the number of new in-house foster carers successfully approved amounted to four between April and June 2020 and a further 3 to 4 approvals were expected within the next quarter. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic there was a higher

volume of enquiries from people who were at home but many of these were discounted by the service or discounted themselves.

It was noted that there had been a lack of marketing options and visibility in the community due to Covid-19 however there have been an on-going presence on Facebook and Instagram and a local radio campaign in August 2020.

The percentage of care leavers (aged 19-21) in education, employment or training at the end of Quarter 1 was above target at 55.7%. The Leaving Care Team had continued to support experienced young people into education, employment and training, with specific actions including:

- liaising with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Havering Works for courses to upskill, and for funding;
- continuing to work with foster carers and placement providers in supporting young people to access apprenticeship opportunities;
- continuing to provide on Future Mentors programme - a group of local volunteers who provide one-to-one coaching a care leaver to assist with job/college course searches, applications, and preparing for interviews (training for mentors would begin in August / September 2020);
- encouraging young adults to attend a Zoom event (Uni Connect) hosted by 6 universities to discuss a care leaver's journey into higher education - covering UCAS applications, lecture tasters, Q&As with undergraduate care leavers and more.

The report outlined the following areas of potential areas for improvement:

- The average number of children missing from education in quarter 1 was higher than both the previous quarter and the same point last year. The performance in this area had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown with more Children identified as Missing from Education (CME) due to the situation. Admissions generally closed in all local authorities following the lockdown and therefore children who had moved were not being admitted to new schools, and were therefore counted as CME.
- The team continues to advise and liaise with schools and parents and was actively working to ensure both the safeguarding of children and the best outcomes for pupils.
- The report indicated that the number of apprentices aged 16 to 18 recruited in the borough was behind target. The service continue to work with local employers and training providers to promote apprenticeship opportunities, and with Prospects (the commissioned targeted Information, Advice and Guidance services provider), to maintain high levels of participation. In

light of Covid-19, the team was looking to secure external grant funding opportunities and develop a programme which targets 16-24 year olds in Havering seeking education, employment and apprenticeship opportunities.

The Sub-Committee was informed that Prospects had secured GLA funding to deliver a mentoring programme in Havering and would be working with local Alternative Providers and Pupil Referral Unit settings to support Year 11 learners at risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment, or Training.

The percentage of looked-after children who ceased to be looked after as a result of permanency (Adoption and Special Guardianship Order) represented one child who was adopted in Quarter 1, with no children made subject of an Special Guardianship Order. This reflected a downturn in children placed for adoption in 2019/20.

It was stated that adoption orders were delayed as a result of court responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of children with placement orders and matched with adopters had increased in recent months and over time this would be reflected in the percentage of children adopted.

It was agreed that the comprehensive list of indicators relevant to the Sub-Committee would be circulated following the meeting.

The Sub-Committee noted the content of the report.

38 ADOPT LONDON EAST - ANNUAL REPORT

The Sub-Committee received the annual report for Adopt London East. The report provided a summary of the development and functions of the agency including performance information for 2019/20. Appended to the report was the Havering specific performance information.

The report outlined that all adoption agencies are required to provide an annual report to their governing bodies and to elected Members in all partnership Local Authorities.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the service went live in October 2019 and the report therefore focussed on performance in quarter 3 and 4 of 2019/20 and on adoption performance in Havering throughout 2019/20 based on the Adoption and Special Guardian Leadership Board (ASGLB) data returns.

The report informed the Sub-Committee that statistical returns measured long-term trends but Adopt London East in-house statistical records

provided clear evidence of early improvements in performance and activity since go-live.

It was stated that the transition from four Local Authority teams to one integrated service had its complexity and challenges had been encountered in respect of pre-transition performance, service staffing, casefile information transition and demand for adoption support services. It was noted that there had been substantial progress made in all areas.

The Sub-Committee was informed that only one team manager had joined Adopt London East and the service had been able to recruit three further team managers from within the service. The service currently had 15 permanent staff in place and 3 interim social workers.

The quarterly Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board report for all Local Authorities have been analysed to provide a service baseline. It indicated that performance had declined in all Local Authorities in the 6 months prior to the Adopt London East go-live. The decline in performance was linked to a number of factors including adoption service staff leaving, higher levels of sickness absence, caseload transitions and a delay in operational go-live.

The sub-committee noted that adoption performance was measured over one and three year cycles and improvements therefore took time to be fully captured in the data returns. Early indicators were however monitored closely within the service.

It was stated that performance in respect of child matches had improved considerably. Adopter approvals were predicted to decline further in Q3 and Q4 due to the decline in numbers of adopters in early stages of approval. Early stage applications had though increased from month to month and improvements were predicted for 2020/21.

The Sub-Committee noted that demand for adoption support services had increased considerably as had the number of children requiring a placement. In the last reporting year, a total of 57 children were placed. It was likely that less children would be placed this year due to the slowdown in quarters one and two but a total of 167 children were currently receiving a family finding service.

The demand for adoption support had shown an increase along with improved support for families which would improve outcomes for adopted children and families.

The report outlined that any savings made from an increase in the number of adopters available to accept a placement would be re-invested into service improvement to ensure the service was able to meet identified increased demands.

In response to the time delays experienced in the adoption process, the Head of Regional Area Adoption explained that it was a service and also a national challenge. There were two sets of delays, one that was national in terms of court work being over pressured before adding Covid as a further pressure. The other challenge being that care proceedings had not been as effective because they were clearly past the process of ensuring that the children were safeguarded and their future made secure.

The Sub-Committee was informed the delay in adoption of children from BME backgrounds and in particular black backgrounds was a national issue. This was attributed to systemic and socioeconomic factors that meant black families were less likely to have the income and the wealth to be able to afford houses with spare bedrooms and often some families did not feel that they would be considered for adoption, which was also a perceptual issue. It was mentioned that Havering performed considerably better than the national average in this regard

In response to a Member of the sub-committee, the Head of Regional Area Adoption informed the Sub-Committee that the service had been inundated with requests for post-adoption support it. It was stated that it was a pattern that adoption agencies have seen with the growth of regional adoption agencies and expectations of adopters have increased.

The Sub-Committee noted the content of the report.

Chairman