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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN & LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE
Town Hall
30 September 2021 (7.00 - 8.45 pm)**

Present: Councillors Judith Holt (Chairman), Robby Misir (Vice-Chair), Carol Smith, Gillian Ford and Reg Whitney

Co-opted Members:

Church Representatives:
Lynne Bennett - Attended Virtually

Non-voting Member:
Ian Rusha

Apologies for absence were received from,
Councillor Sally Miller BCAC, Jack How and Julie Lamb.

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

62 **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There was no disclosures of interest at the meeting.

63 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

64 **PERFORMANCE INFORMATION - QUARTER ONE**

The Sub-Committee received a report and presentation that updated on the Quarter One 2021/22 (April to June 2021) performance information.

The report provided an overview of the services performance against the 13 performance indicators that have been selected for monitoring by the Sub-Committee.

It was noted that 7 of the indicators have been given a Red Amber Green status; RAG status. Five (72%) have a status of Green, One (14%) had a status of Amber and one (14%) had a status of Red.

The presentation highlighted the following areas of strong performance.

The report indicated that in the academic year 2019/20, 9 school inspections were undertaken of Havering schools between September 2019 and March 2020, pre the COVID-19. It was stated that the seven primary schools that were inspected retained their 'Good' outcomes and the two secondary academies inspected improved from 'Requires improvement' to 'Good'. This also resulted in an overall percentage of providers judged to be Good or Outstanding by OFSTED increasing by 2 percentage points, which was 5.2 percentage points above the national figure.

The Sub-Committee noted that the rate of both fixed term and permanent exclusions in Havering have remained below the rates for England as a whole in both primary and secondary based on the latest available published data.

It was explained that as a result of the Inclusions Service working very closely with Havering head teachers, and the new roll out of the Inclusions policy, there have been no permanent exclusions. The Sub-committee was informed that the Inclusions policy has been designed with an extra measures put in place to support schools to find alternatives to fixed term and permanent exclusions.

The percentage of looked after children with 2 or more changes of social worker in the last 12 months was noted as within target as at the end of the quarter. The Sub-Committee was informed that since the start of the pandemic, Havering has seen an increased turnover of social work staff, which particularly impacted on social worker changes for looked after children during the fourth quarter of 2020/21.

It was stated that there are still a number of vacant posts in the long term teams and staff recruitment and retention remains a high priority for the service in 2021/22. It Actions that have been taken to date include a review of pay rates to ensure Havering remains competitive; faster turnaround times for interviews when locum CVs come in (due to the increasingly competitive market); further expansion of the 'grown your own' ASYE programme; and working with colleagues in Communications to explore how 'Choose Havering' could be used as an external branding for recruitment purposes.

The service has also launched a robust permanent recruitment campaign and over the longer term, there are plans to look more broadly at pay, terms and conditions and career progression for the social work workforce to ensure that Havering is presented as an employer of choice for the profession.

The following areas that required improvement was outlined:

It was explained that the percentage of looked after children aged under 16 who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years and living in the same placement for at least 2 years remained relatively stable throughout 2020/21 but was lower than in previous years and remains below the London average (currently 67%).

It was stated that an improvement during the first quarter of 2021/22 was currently within the accepted tolerance level. A number of initiatives have been implemented over the last year with the aim of improving placement stability for looked after children.

A weekly high concern discussion also takes place within ISS, with similar aims but discussing the most complex cases and how to best support these children and their carers.

The percentage of looked after children who ceased to be looked after as a result of permanency (Adoption and Special Guardianship Order) was noted as below target at the end of the first quarter.

It was explained that the primary cause of delay in adoption orders throughout the Covid-19 pandemic has been delays in court processes and Adopt London East (ALE) continues to work with courts to progress and chase Adoption Order hearings. The number of children with a placement order for adoption has traditionally been small in Havering but increased from two in 2019/20, to seven in 2020/21.

It was noted that timescales for conversion from placement order to adoption vary according to complexity, so the impact of this upturn in adoption orders may not be felt until later in 2021/22 or into 2022/23.

It was stated that the number of cases within the court service reduced during Covid pandemic however the Special Guardianship Order team continued to work with private and public law cases to support permanency within the family.

Officers were asked to provide future performance update that had been benchmarked with the statistical neighbours and also with the Borough of Barking and Dagenham. It was also felt that the report required to elaborate further on financial pressures that the service was facing.

In response to the school performance and improvement, the Sub-Committee was informed that all trajectory indicated that Havering schools were all performing above the national average.

The Sub-Committee asked for the Inclusion Policy that was recently reviewed to be presented at a future meeting.

A Member sought numbers of cases going through the court and suggested that the Cabinet Member for Children Services be urged to pressure the courts to extend seating and resolve the back log of adoption cases.

It was suggested to officers that the service lobby government for additional funding to cover the current financial pressures.

The Sub-Committee noted the contents of the report and presentation

65 **SCHOOL QUALITY ASSURANCE UPDATE**

At the request of the Sub-Committee, officer provided Members with a report that detailed an overview of the statutory responsibilities of the Local Authority (LA) with regard to ensuring education excellence.

The report explained that the service recognised and respects the diverse educational landscape and models of governance that now exist within the borough, which currently included:

- a range of early years settings;
- infant, junior, primary, secondary, tertiary and special provisions;
- LA-maintained, academies, free-schools, stand-alone/local/national MATs, federations and faith schools.

It was explained to Members that additional quality assurance processes are likely to be taking place right across the sector (eg Ofsted, the Regional Schools' Commissioner, MATs) and the service was keen to ensure that its quality assurance processes are proportionate, work in synergy with other regulators, and minimise any burden of duplication.

The report detailed that the Education Act 2011 outlined that the role of Local Authority in relation to all children and young people under the following 3 headings:

- champions of vulnerable children and young people;
- ensuring fair access to services; and
- ensuring educational excellence.

In keeping with these principles, the service improve the well-being of young children and 'reduce inequalities between young children in the borough. It was stated that this also included young children's physical and mental health and emotional well-being; protection from harm and neglect; education, training and recreation.

Officers informed that the duties and related powers of the service with regard to settings, schools and colleges in the area are set out in the London Borough of Havering Quality Assurance Framework: Education Providers.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the service provides, challenge and support through direct provision or brokerage where needed to all providers in order to improve educational performance.

Officers explained that all the quality assurance processes are compatible with the service statutory responsibilities and are aligned with the latest DfE Schools Causing Concern guidance.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the service operates a flexible programme of quality assurance, proportionate to the quality of provision within any given institution. The service reserves the right to exercise its powers flexibly and with discretion, depending on changing circumstances and the picture emerging from a wide range of evidence.

The following quality assurance processes are administered by the service:

Desktop Risk Assessment

A desktop risk assessment is applied to all provisions to determine the extent of quality assurance scrutiny, based on a range of factors including:

- Outcomes (standards and progress) in statutory tests or examinations, including trajectory / direction of travel
- Other data (eg attendance; persistent absence; exclusions; financial management, etc)
- Previous Ofsted and likely proximity to next inspection
- Trajectory / direction of travel in relation to outcomes
- Local Intelligence (e.g. quality of leadership and governance; complaints; safeguarding concerns, admissions and popularity; financial management, record with vulnerable children, etc)

Quality Assurance Visit(s)

All schools, irrespective of governance, are entitled to receive an on-site QA visit with an experienced and qualified Quality Assurance Inspector from the LA, once each year (academic cycle). The LA is, however, mindful of the extent of scrutiny and accountability currently within the system (e.g. Ofsted, HMI, RSC, MAT quality assurance, etc). With this in mind, the following alternatives may be adopted via consultation between the LA and school(s):

- The LA will not undertake a full QA visit within 6 months of an Ofsted inspection, to any school receiving a Good or Outstanding judgement.
- The LA is willing to consider a request from a MAT or a Federation to 'quality assure' the MAT/Federation's own quality assurance processes (this is likely to include joint on-site visits and discussions about each school in the MAT/Federation).

- If the desktop risk assessment identifies minimal risk, the LA will be happy to accept any credible and comprehensive QA report undertaken by another source (e.g. DfE; independent audit, etc).

It was explained that following the process, the service will assign its own categorisation to the school or academy and determine whether the school should receive additional quality assurance visits over the course of the year.

Officers explained that where there are concerns around an academy, free school or MAT, the service has a duty to relay its concerns to the Regional School Commissioner (RSC) who has regulatory responsibility for provision outside of the maintained sector. It was clarified that the service has no intervention powers over academies except for safeguarding or equalities reasons or if statutory processes are being breached.

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

Chairman