



London Borough of Hackney  
Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission  
Municipal Year 2018/19  
Date of Meeting Monday, 25th March, 2019

Minutes of the proceedings of the  
Children and Young People  
Scrutiny Commission held at  
Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street,  
London E8 1EA

---

<b>Chair</b>	<b>Councillor Sophie Conway</b>
<b>Councillors in Attendance</b>	<b>Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice-Chair), Cllr Katie Hanson, Cllr Ajay Chauhan, Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cllr Humaira Garasia, Cllr James Peters and Cllr Clare Potter</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Cllr Soraya Adejare, Cllr Clare Joseph, Shuja Shaik Graham Hunter, Michael Lobenstein &amp; Ernell Watson</b>
<b>Co-optees</b>	<b>Jo Macleod, Jane Heffernan, Maariyah Patel and Aleigha Reeves</b>
<b>Officers In Attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People</b></li><li>• <b>Cllr Christopher Kennedy, Cabinet Member for Early Years and Play</b></li><li>• <b>Anne Canning, Group Director, Children Families and Community Health</b></li><li>• <b>Sarah Wright, Director of Children &amp; Families Service</b></li><li>• <b>Lisa Aldridge, Head of Service, Safeguarding and Learning</b></li><li>• <b>Deborah Ennis, Service Manager, Safeguarding &amp; Learning</b></li><li>• <b>Annie Gammon, Head of Hackney Learning Trust &amp; Director of Education</b></li><li>• <b>Sarah Morgan, Principal Primary Adviser, Hackney Learning Trust</b></li><li>• <b>Anton Francic, Senior Secondary Adviser, Hackney Learning Trust</b></li><li>• <b>Tim Wooldridge, Early Years Strategy Manager, Hackney Learning Trust</b></li></ul>
<b>Members of the Public</b>	<b>Two members of the public were in attendance.</b>
<b>Officer Contact:</b>	<b>Martin Bradford</b>  020 8356 3315  martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk

**Councillor Sophie Conway in the Chair**

**1 Apologies for Absence**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from:

- Cllr Clare Joseph
- Cllr Soraya Adejare
- Shuja Shaik
- Graham Hunter
- Michael Lobenstein
- Ernell Watson

1.2 Apologies for lateness were received from:

- - Cllr Clare Potter

**1 Urgent Items / Order of Business**

2.1 At item 6, Children Social Care B-Annual Report, an update would also be provided to the Commission on the outcome of the recent focused visit of children's social care by Ofsted.

**3 Declarations of Interest**

3.1 The following declarations were received by members:

- Cllr Chauhan was a teacher at secondary school in another London borough and a member of the NEU.
- Cllr Peters was a governor at the Garden School.
- Cllr Gordon was an Advisory Lawyer for DWP
- Jo Macleod was a governor of a local primary school.

3.2 Cllr Gordon indicated that given her role as an Advisory Lawyer for DWP, she would have a conflict of interest in the discussion of Free School Meals at item 4 and would therefore leave the room.

**4 Annual Update on School Achievement**

4.1 The Chair welcomed Annie Gammon, Sarah Morgan, Anton Francic, and Tim Wooldridge to this meeting.

4.2 Each year the Commission receives an update on pupil achievement at schools across Hackney which records achievement at Early Years Foundation, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. This report will allow the Commission to have year-on-year oversight of pupil performance in Hackney. The following is a summary of key points from this discussion.

Early Years Foundation Stage

4.3 Early Years Foundation stage assessment is at age 5 which is carried out at all maintained schools, free schools, academies and independent schools. In this context this assessment is different to others (KS1, KS2 etc.) as this includes children from the independent sector. The main measure in this assessment is known as the 'good level of development' (GLD). A child has achieved a GLD if it reached the expected standard in:

- Communication and language;
- Literacy and Maths;
- Physical development;
- Personal, social and emotional development.

4.4 In 2018, 70.1% of children in Hackney at age 5 had reached a GLD which was 1.4% lower than the national average, which ranked the borough 101<sup>st</sup> out of all local authorities and 29<sup>th</sup> in London.

4.5 It was highlighted to the Commission, that when children that attend PVI settings are excluded, the percentage of children which achieve a GLD in Hackney is 77% which is substantially higher than the national average. At Table 4 in the submitted report, the Commission noted that the proportion of children that achieved a GLD from the PVI sector in 2018 was significantly lower (27%) than those in maintained settings (77%). Therefore this figure depressed the overall result for children that had achieved a GLD in Hackney.

#### Questions

4.6 The Commission sought to understand why the PVI sector was underperforming in comparison to maintained sector for children that had achieved a GLD. It was noted that many of the independent schools were in the Charedi community where many children had English as a second language. This would inevitably present language and communication issues for children at these schools as the tests were undertaken in English and assessed English language skills. It was also suggested that, unlike the maintained sector, there was no requirement for Qualified Teachers to be present in the independent sector. Thirdly, the curriculum in Charedi independent schools was substantially different to that offered in mainstream settings, in that the curriculum focused on just two areas the Khol (secular) and the Kodesh religious) which meant that there was less time devoted to English language and literacy.

4.7 In light of the issues outlined above, the Commission questioned officers on what development work had taken place to help improve performance of children within the independent sector, particularly those from the Charedi community. It was reported that Early Years' service had worked with all schools and practitioners within the independent sector to develop the teaching of phonics and English. It was acknowledged however, that these barriers remained significant and work would be ongoing to support this sector.

4.8 Compared to other boroughs, Hackney had large number of independent schools in early year's sector. In this context, whilst officers did meet with other boroughs, there was little comparative learning to be gleaned from other boroughs. It was noted that whilst there was a large Charedi community in Haringey, much of the community chose to access education and health services in Hackney.

4.9 The Commission noted that there was a gender gap between the proportion of girls and boys that had achieved a GLD in Hackney, though this gap was much smaller than national figures. Other key demographic variances in achievement at Early Years Foundation Stage were highlighted to the Commission which included:

- The Orthodox Jewish community in general, though in particular boys within this community;
- Turkish, Kurdish and Cypriot community and again, particularly the boys within this community;
- Children with a SEND;
- Children who were entitled to free school meals.

### Key Stage 2

4.10 This measure of attainment is for children age 11 who were leaving primary school to attend secondary school. In 2018, 71% of children reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, which ranked Hackney 15<sup>th</sup> out of 152 local authorities. It was noted that in terms of performance overall at KS2, Hackney was in the 'outstanding' or 'good' quartile for all performance measures.

4.11 Boys achievement was lower than girls for most measures and this impacted on the overall achievement figure at KS2. Black Caribbean boys and boys from Turkish, Kurdish and Cypriot Community were also underachieving and these groups remained a priority with all local schools.

4.12 The achievement level in maths at KS2 in Hackney was lower than for reading and writing, and in general, scores for this assessment were lower than in previous years. The Commission noted that schools use a range of schemes to teach maths and therefore the focus of the HLT was to ensure that these were being taught effectively. One particular area of local weakness was in maths reasoning where children were required to explain their answer which would suggest that language issues were also at play in this assessment.

### Questions

4.13 There were only two local schools which could be considered as coasting, one in the maintained sector and one in the academy sector. It was noted that this measure would no longer be relevant after this year, as this been removed from the new accountability measures.

4.14 Black Caribbean boys were a priority for local development and improvement work as this group continued to underachieve at KS2. HLT was particularly focusing on improving the reading ability and scores of Black Caribbean boys as this may help across all assessments and help to narrow the gap between this group and other cohorts of local children. An officer from HLT was dedicated to working with schools to identify and support work with young Black Caribbean boys. It was also noted that additional resources had been allocated to work on the education component of the Young Black Men's Project: an ex-primary head will be working two days a week to develop this body of work from September to ensure that young black boys were being engaged in both learning and in the culture of the school.

4.15 As the underperformance of black Caribbean boys was a long established trend, the Commission were keen to explore what factors might be behind this. There were many factors at play including cultural competence of schools and practitioner, racial identities of young people and unconscious bias. It was clear

that this was not only a problem between schools but also within individual schools, with black Caribbean boys still underperforming in high achieving schools.

4.16 There were a number of projects which had demonstrated some measure of success, such as the black father's project which had contributed to a small fall in exclusion and upturn in pupil confidence. Hackney was not alone, as other authorities such as Lambeth, Barnet, Harrow and Haringey also experience similar discrepancies in performance of black Caribbean boys. It was suggested that this was a very complex issue but the authority continued to reflect and learn on its own practice and would continue to focus work to help narrow the gap in attainment between black Caribbean boys and other pupils.

#### Key Stage 4

4.17 Hackney continued to perform above the national average at both attainment 8 and progress 8 level (progress over the secondary school period) at KS4 for the past 3 years. Two-thirds of local children now receive a grade 4 and above for English and maths. Whilst it was acknowledged that the performance at KS4 varied between schools, the authority was on the whole satisfied with KS4 results which showed that Hackney was in the top quartile for 5 out of the 7 key measures:

- Progress 8 score overall;
- Progress 8 Score English;
- Progress 8 score maths;
- Attainment 8 score;
- English Baccalaureate average points score.

#### Questions

4.18 The Commission sought to understand whether off-rolling, where underperforming children were encouraged to be home- schooled or educated in another setting, was a growing problem in Hackney. This was in response to a report by the Children's Commissioner which had indicated that the number of children being moved in to home-education had increased by 238% in the two year period 2016-2018 in Hackney.

4.19 HLT had noted the report and was looking into these. It was noted that off-rolling should always be in the interest of the child and not the school. HLT had undertaken some analysis of the 2018 year 11 cohort to understand how many children had moved from end of year 10 to beginning of year 11. This analysis suggested that approximately 3-4% of children moved across schools in this period, some to go to alternative provision, some had gone overseas and a really small group were electively home educated. HLT had visited two schools with the highest rate of moves where reasons behind each child's move were assessed to be both legal and valid and not constitute illegal off-rolling. HLT would continue to scrutinise these moves and to raise awareness amongst school governors.

4.20 In its work with school exclusions, the Commission found that in many instances parents and children had little understanding of the school processes and often were not able to offer any effective challenge. In this context, the Commission sought to understand if any work had been undertaken with parents and children to confirm whether the moves facilitated by the school were understood and acceptable to them. HLT noted that two young people had

**Monday, 25th March, 2019**

attended the Exclusions Board recently and described how confusing the process had been to them and their families, which would appear to confirm this view. There would be a need to ensure that Head teachers are made aware of this issue and ensure that they positively engage with over represented groups.

**Agreed:** The Commission requested that a formal item on off-rolling to be taken at a future meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

#### SEND and EHC

4.21 When the Commission looked at this item in 2018, it requested additional commentary around the performance of pupils with SEND or with an EHC plan. Officers from HLT summarised the submitted report and the key points from this discussion were highlighted below.

4.22 A Special Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice was established in 2015 which stated that schools must:

- Address the needs of pupils with SEN
- Ensure that SEN pupils engage in activities alongside other pupils;
- Designate a QT as a SENCO;
- Inform parents when they are making SEN provision;
- Publish an SEN information report.

4.23 Table 1 in the submitted report provides information on the number of children with SEN and with an EHC plan across individual schools in Hackney. A number of schools were noted to have higher rates of children attending with SEN or EHC (e.g. Millfields and Tysen) as these schools had special provisions to cater for children with additional needs and were placed there by the admissions team. About 3% of children attending these schools will be on an EHC plan and about 15-17% with an assessed SEND need.

#### Questions

4.24 There was a SENCO forum to enable the dissemination of good practice in supporting children with SEND or with an EHC plan. These forums addressed frequently by those schools with specialist knowledge in this area, such as the three designated special schools (The Garden, Ickburgh, Stormont House). A local SENCO conference had been held in 2018 and additional resources had been allocated to further SENCO training in the year ahead.

4.25 It was reported that attendance at the SENCO Conference totalled 60 local SENCO, which represented about 75% of the SENCO cohort. Attendance at SENCO forums did however vary. These forums were held after school which meant that an additional time commitment was required by SENCO to attend. Efforts were being made to ensure that these forums had appeal to both Primary and Secondary SENCO's.

4.26 The report demonstrated that educational achievement of those children with a SEND or EHC plan was higher in Hackney than the national average, which would suggest that there is good practice locally. It was therefore important to understand that this learning was shared locally to help raise performance further. An exchange visit had recently taken place between a number of local schools, special schools and alternative providers which had been very informative in terms of developing awareness of the restorative approach.

Cllr Gordon left the room

Free School Meals

4.27 As part of its work programme for 2018/19, the Commission indicated that it would like assess free school meal (FSM) entitlement, and the impact that the roll-out of Universal Credit had on FSM entitlement. In addition the Commission indicated that it would like to assess the impact of the transition to an on-line application system for FSMs.

4.28 A number eligibility criteria were described for the Commission for children to receive FSM entitlement. These included if the parent was in receipt of certain benefits (e.g. Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance). If a child has been entitled to FSM or has been in the last 6 years, the school will receive a Pupil Premium Grant. Eligible parents are therefore encouraged to sign up for FSM given the additional funding this attracts to support their child.

4.29 The proportion of children that were eligible for FSM in Hackney in 2018 was 26%, but the number of children who were disadvantaged is higher at about 32%, given the application of the 6 year rule.

4.30 There had been some additional restrictions placed on the eligibility criteria for FSM in recent years which had led to a reduction in the proportion of children who were entitled to this service. In Hackney, the proportion of children on the school roll who were entitled to FSM's fell from 34% in 2013 to 26% in 2018. Similar reductions were recorded at both national and regional levels.

4.31 The Chair thanked officers from the HLT for attending and responding to questions from the Commission.

Cllr Gordon returned

## **5 Recruitment & Retention of Foster Carers**

5.1 The Chair welcomed Sarah Wright and Korinna Steele to the meeting.

5.2 It was reported to the Commission that for a number of years the Council has been reliant on the independent foster carers to care for looked after children in Hackney. It was estimated that some 2/3 of placements were made with an independent foster carer rather than a foster carer working for the Council. Because of cost and quality issues, the Council had been trying to redress this imbalance and increase in-house provision. With the exception of about 19 or 20 children in residential care, the majority of children in the care of the authority are looked after by a foster carer.

5.3 The Director noted that the service had recruited just 15 new foster carers this year which was below the target of 23 set and agreed by the Commissions review in 2018. As there had been no resignations from the internal pool of foster carers however, this would show a net increase of 15 which was better than expected. The Commission also noted that the service was also recruiting higher numbers of foster carers than neighbouring boroughs. Significant challenges in recruiting foster carers remain, however most significant is the current housing pressures, where few people have spare bedrooms to enable them to foster.

**Monday, 25th March, 2019**

5.4 The Director reported that progress had been made on all of the recommendations made by the Commission and highlighted a number of key developments:

- The sufficiency strategy was being updated and would be finalised by the summer;
- The service is still working to increase the number of Level 2 and level 3 foster carers in the internal pool - this year 4 have moved to level 2 and 2 have moved to level 3;
- The service has undertaken some targeted recruitment within the LGBTQi community and among single people and have received more applications from single male foster carers this year;
- The service has adopted the policy of making larger council rented properties available to foster carers who want to foster more children and one family has moved into a larger property this year;
- The housing service had not however been able to provide additional housing to enable older children in fostering households to move out and allow the foster parent to take on more foster children;
- A dedicated officer has been employed to specifically match looked after children with the Council's in-house team of foster carers which has resulted in a 12.5% rise in the number of children looked after by an in-house foster carer;
- A Mockingbird Model trial was being developed and the hub-carer had been recruited and the model had been well received by foster carers and this model would officially launch in spring 2019;
- The service was now part of a consortium with other east London boroughs to improve commissioning arrangements (quality and costing) for high need care placements;
- The service continued to work in partnership with its north London partners in terms of specialised training and recruitment for foster carers.

#### Questions

5.5 Having the spare housing capacity was clearly critical in the foster carer application process, therefore the Commission wanted to know what targeted recruitment had taken place amongst this demographic? It was acknowledged that there was a new demographic resident in the borough and the service would work out ways to incorporate these groups into marketing programmes.

5.6 The Commission wanted to know if anything further could be done to increase housing capacity for those potential foster carers with the right skill-set to enable them to offer foster care placements? It was reported that it was not practical to assess potential recruits without the spare room capacity as currently there would be limited potential for any foster care placements.

5.7 As there had not been any resignations from the in-house foster carer cohort, no exit interviews had been undertaken thus far in 2018/19. Systems were in place however to record departing foster carer's views if resignations did take place.

5.8 Given that the majority of looked after children were placed with foster carers outside of Hackney, the Commission wished to clarify if the Mocking Bird model would be viable in this context? It was reported that there was potential to develop hubs in other places outside of London, particularly where there was a grouping of in-house Hackney foster carers (e.g. in Kent).

5.9 It was reported that the service had benchmarked the financial package of grants and allowances that foster carers receive against other neighbouring authorities. This demonstrated that the level of financial support to foster carers was broadly similar to other authorities. New figures had also recently been issued by the Fostering Network and the service would ensure that local financial packages would reflect these recommendations.



5.10 Members of the Commission wished to note a number of positive aspects of the fostering service through their work as Councillors:

- There had been an increase in the number of advertisements encouraging fostering from non-traditional foster carers;
- The fostering team was present and actively recruiting at local events.

**Agreed:** The Commission would like a further update on the recommendations from the review of the Recruitment and Retention of Foster carers to be taken in the 2019/20 work programme.

5.11 The Chair thanked officers for attending and for responding to questions from the Commission.

## **6 Children's Social Care - Biannual Report**

### Ofsted focused visit to children's social care

6.1 The Chair welcomed the Group Director for Children, Families and Community Health to the meeting and Director of Children and Families who would update the Commission on the outcome of the recent focused visit to the Children and Families Service.

6.2 The Commission understood that the current HMI Ofsted inspection regime for children's social care operated on a three year cycle. An Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) would take place at some point within the three year cycles. The last Ofsted inspection undertaken in Hackney was in 2016. In the intervening years it is expected that a 'focused visit' or a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) would take place.

6.3 HMI Ofsted undertook a focused visit in February 2019. The focus of this visit was on 'children on child protection and child in need' plans. This was welcomed by the service as this was a very complicated and challenging area of service provision for which external assessment would be beneficial. The visit took place over 2 days and the visit focused on an analysis of casework in this service, where inspectors mostly talked to social workers, as well as social work managers and senior managers.

6.4 As a result of the focused visit a number of priority actions were identified by inspectors which required the authority take 'swift and decisive' action to address weaknesses in child protection. These were:

- The timeliness and effectiveness of social work practice and interventions to safeguard children from harm;
- The quality and effectiveness of managerial oversight and supervision to ensure that children's circumstances improve within their timeframe.

6.5 Whilst the inspectors identified a number of strengths in the service including good social work practice, good social work assessments and social work support, the review of more complex cases suggested that improvements could be made to the way these families were supported. It was noted however, that none of the cases reviewed identified children at risk or which required immediate remedial action.

6.6 As a result of the focused visit, Ofsted identified a number of areas which required improvement;

- Children's daily lived experiences to be central to all work;
- The application of thresholds to protect children on child in need plans when risks escalate or children's circumstances do not improve within children's timeframes;
- Performance data regarding the timeliness and impact of social work practice to improve children's circumstances;
- Plans to be more specific and detailed about what needs to change and by when;

- The greater consideration of men, including abusive partners, in risk assessments.

6.7 It was acknowledged that the outcome of this focused visit had come as a surprise to the service, as the internal audit and evaluations procedures employed within the service gave no indication that this was an area of weakness. In light of this, the service would be checking and validating internal audit processes to ensure that these remained robust.

6.8 The service recognised that the stability and continuity of the workforce in this situation was of critical importance, and the Group Director and Director had moved quickly to reassure the workforce that there would be additional support to the service over the coming months. Additional capacity would be provided where needed and some external work had been postponed to allow the service to focus on internal development issues. This would help the service respond to the priority actions set out by Ofsted.

6.9 A key criticism of the service was that too much emphasis was placed on working with adults to stabilise the family, rather than on the ongoing lived experience of the child in that family. In response, some immediate service changes had been made to case assessments to ensure that young people's experience was fully recorded and assessed. New check points had been added within case management processes so that there was additional management oversight to determine whether sufficient family progress has been made.

6.10 A draft action plan was being developed by the service in response to the priorities and actions set out in the Ofsted inspection letter. This draft action plan was required to be submitted to Ofsted within 20 working days with a full finalised action plan to be published within 70 working days. It was expected that once the action plan has been agreed and improvement work in train, a further full ILACS (see 6.1) inspection would take place in the period from September 2019 onwards. This would be a wider inspection of the service. The audit and review systems put in place to respond to the focused visit would be used to prepare for this wider inspection.

6.11 It was reported in the focused visit that social workers felt that their caseloads were manageable. It was acknowledged by officers present that whilst case-loads were slightly higher than neighbouring boroughs, social workers operate on a unit model in Hackney where administrative support is provided and therefore allowed them to focus more on social work practice.

6.12 It was acknowledged that the next 6 months would be difficult for the service and staff as they respond to the shortfalls identified within the focused visit. Given the importance of this service area, both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor planned to visit children and families staff to reassure them that there would be full organisational commitment and support to help the service respond positively and effectively to the outcomes of the focused visit.

6.13 It was noted that the focused visit report had been shared and discussed at the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Board (CHSCB). This reiterated the importance of a multi-agency approach to safeguarding children and underlined the commitment of local agencies to work in partnership to safeguard local children.

6.14 One of the challenges of safeguarding children was around the application of social care thresholds. It was important to note that considerable work had been undertaken through the CHSCB with community partners to help build confidence in the social care system and to emphasise that this was an opportunity for social care support rather than punitive action. This approach has been instrumental in bringing communities into the ambit of social care and the service would therefore need to be mindful as to the implications of the application of any new thresholds in these communities.

Questions

6.15 In light of the assessment made by the inspectors '*... a significant number of children continue to experience harm. Thresholds are too high and decisions are too slow for too many children living in circumstances of pervasive neglect and domestic abuse, and they wait too long for adequate help and protection*', what action was taken in respect of the cases assessed by inspectors?

- The Group Director responded that not all cases that the inspectors looked at were identified to the service by inspectors, but for those cases which had been identified and assessed, it was acknowledged that a number of children had been in the system for too long without sufficient progress and improvement being made within those families. The Group Director reassured the Commission that in these cases there was no instance where inspectors had identified a child was at risk of significant harm or when the service should have taken immediate action. These cases would be assessed on a more regular basis to ensure that the experience of the child was fully recognised and that there was sufficient improvement within the family.

- The Director also reported that the service had systematically reviewed all Child In Need cases which had been open 18 months or longer and reviewed all decisions taken in these cases. This process would be repeated for cases that had been open for 15 months or longer and again for 12 months or longer.

- The Group Director indicated that practitioners needed a more structured way to help them decide when 'enough was enough' and that the introduction of check points would help facilitate this. It was acknowledged however, that this was a very complex assessment.

6.16 The Commission sought to understand how this focused visit outcome might compare to other inspections at other authorities?

- The Group Director reported that focused visits were part of the new inspection framework we, but all visits and inspections were reported openly and publicly. This focused visit was the first one on this topic (children on Child Protection Plans and Child in Need Plans) undertaken in London, so there was little to compare it with. It was acknowledged however, that the focused visit had identified priority actions which was a serious judgement on the service.

6.17 The Commission noted that a number of previously highlighted areas for service improvement for children's social care were central to the shortcomings identified by inspectors in their assessment of children in need. Did the service need to look again at these issues?

- The Group Director noted that the new performance management system planned go-live date was in the week of the inspection. Performance data would be part of the action plan in response to the priority actions, and would ensure that data is used in a more timely way. It was noted that in terms of performance indicators, Hackney was not an outlier amongst the other 141 unitary boroughs providing children's social care. It was acknowledged however that whilst the service had the data, this needed to be used in a more proactive way.

- The Director indicated that the use of 'disguised compliance' in the focused visit report was a problematic term as it suggested that families deliberately mislead professionals, whereas in fact, many families may misinterpret what might be needed and how they need to change. This had been picked up before and training days had been provided, though in retrospect, this could have been sharper and more could have been done to embed this learning.

- The Group Director noted that additional checkpoints within the case work assessment and monitoring process would allow for greater management oversight and judgement into these very difficult issues, which should at least alert the service to any problems in non-compliance.

6.18 The Commission sought to understand if the identified shortcomings were on the self-evaluation which the service was required to complete ahead of inspection?

**Monday, 25th March, 2019**

- The Group Director indicated that this self-assessment did not require the service to indicate the level of service provided (e.g. good or satisfactory), but to highlight the areas of audit and systems appraisal and reflection on the learning from those processes. Whilst the data and audits did not suggest it, Children in Need was felt as an area which would benefit from external scrutiny which was why it was suggested as an area for review to Ofsted. As said earlier, the service would need to re-evaluate the internal assessments and audits to identify and failings in these.

6.19 What steps does the service plan to take to ensure that the lived experience of children is given greater emphasis in social work assessments?

- The Group Director reported that whilst the front end assessment of the child will remain much the same, the introduced check-points in the case management will provide an additional juncture at which to assess family progress and the impact the family situation is having on that child. This will be done in a much more overt way than has been done up until now. There will of course be ongoing legal challenge to this process through the courts, which is there to ensure that the service has done everything it can to support that child and the family.

6.20 The Commission sought to understand that if as a result of this focused visit more children would end up in care? And if so, will there be the necessary resources to meet this need and other priority actions set out in the focused visit outcomes?

- The Group Director reported that all children's services have experienced cuts over time and like many other authorities, Hackney had sought to protect front-line services by reducing management capacity within the service. This approach has been supported by the Council. A financial plan was already in development which would see the refocusing of resources to meet the identified priorities in the action plan. The service was confident that these resource needs would be met by the Council.

- The Group Director reported that it was not possible to tell at this stage whether more children would end up in care as a result of this focused visit. It was sometimes difficult to predict what the consequences would be of an action taken in one part of the social care system would have elsewhere, but the service was alert to such impacts and would monitor the situation carefully. If a threshold change was required, this would be of interest more widely outside the borough as the implications could be far reaching.

- The Director reported that the rate of children in care in Hackney was not dissimilar to other authorities which would suggest that assessment, thresholds and decision making processes are in line with other authorities.

6.21 The Commission sought to clarify if there was any connection between the decision of the service to de-layer management as a cost saving measure and the outcomes of this focused visit which highlighted the lack of management oversight of children in need cases?

- The Group Director reported that was a much more complex situation with many factors at play, including changes in case work handing and assessment, the volume of caseloads as well as managerial oversight and input.

**Agreed:** The Children and Families Service would be invited to the June 24<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Commission to present the finalised action plan and progress.

#### Children's Social Care Bi- Annual Report

6.22 This was the mid-year report of the Children's Social Care Report up to September 2018. The Director highlighted a number of key aspects of the service performance over the past 6 months which included:

- The Contextual Safeguarding Project continued to progress and had received in excess of 50 enquiries from other authorities who wanted to learn more. This information was now available on the Council website for other authorities to access;

- As part of the Contextual Safeguarding Project, a multi-agency family risk panel met every two weeks to consider risks about gangs, criminal exploitation or other risks

**Monday, 25th March, 2019**

outside the family (it was important to make connections between cases to identify common risks which could be addressed);

- The referral rate to the Children and Families Service had decreased in the first 6 months of the year and this trend would be monitored;
- 21% of children became the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time between April and September 2018 which was a concern to the service, though more recent data (February 2019) would suggest that this figure has reduced to 15%;
- The number of looked after children rose slightly to 381 in the 6 months to September 2018, this trend would appear to be upward where the most recent figures for February 2019 showed that 396 children were looked after by Hackney;
- Most children that entered care were aged between 14-17 years old, this trend had continued for a number of years;
- Placement stability of children in care had also improved in the 6 month period to September 2018.

6.23 The Director noted that workforce stability was a key issue for the service as this was central to the continuity of care for looked after children or children in need. Here it was noted that Hackney had a lower turnover rate lower vacancy rate and lower staff absence rate compared to both England and Inner London averages. The Commission noted that Hackney did have a higher rate of agency staff usage than other authorities.

#### Questions

6.24 The Commission sought to understand those service areas which were facing budgetary pressures for the year end 2018/19. Will the service be in budget at year end?

- The Group Director reported that an overspend of approximately £400k was projected for the Children and Families Service. It was noted that there were a number of service pressures which contributed to this including, the use of agency staff.

6.25 The Commission noted that there had been speculation about the future of the Troubled Families programme and sought to clarify future plans for the service.

- No further information had been provided from central government on the future of the Troubled Families programme. The Council was however, on target to reach the number of claims under the payment by results scheme, but would look to accelerate claims over the coming months. The Council was in the second tranche of authorities which entered in to this programme so it would be a challenge to ensure that claims were submitted in the required time period. Long term planning for the Troubled Families Programme had been difficult given the lack of national guidance for this policy area.

#### Temporary Accommodation

6.26 The Commission requested an update on the outcomes and tracking of the social and emotional development of children in temporary accommodation. Children and Families Service had submitted a report which detailed the findings from a piece of work undertaken through the Troubled Families Programme.

#### Questions

6.27 A summary of the key findings were presented to the Commission which included:

- There were 738 children living in temporary accommodation in Hackney of which 510 did not meet any of the Troubled Families qualifying criteria;,228 met 1 criteria, 50 met the education criteria and 15 met the education criteria plus one other criteria;
- From the data it was inferred that living in temporary accommodation had a significant impact on families, but this may not be the only factor which may be generating needs;

6.28 The Commission sought to ascertain what impact temporary accommodation had upon achievement of children?

**Monday, 25th March, 2019**

- The Group Director indicated that this would be interesting to ascertain what impact residential status had on a child's attainment, but noted that a significant problem with this work is that over half of the children in temporary accommodation had been placed out of borough which made tracking difficult.

**At 9.57 The Commission agreed to extend the meeting until 10.10pm**

6.29 Members of the Commission noted that a substantial part of a Councillor caseload involved supporting families living in temporary accommodation and dealing with issues that arose from this (e.g. cramped conditions). It was evident that in some cases this had a severe physical, mental and emotional impact on children. Members suggested that such health and social care issues should be tracked and monitored, particularly as some families may be in temporary accommodation for 6 years or more.

- The Director indicated that this issue was very much on the agenda of the Children and Families Service and it would work proactively to help identify families at risk and limit the impact.

**7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

7.1 Matters arising from the minutes:

- The new guidance on sex and relationship education had been circulated to the Commission.

- A letter on the outcomes and recommendations of the support to LGBT young people at school in Hackney to the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children's Services was still being drafted, but would be circulated to the Commission once agreed.

7.2 The minutes were agreed.

**8 Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission - 2018/19 Work Programme**

8.1 The Commission noted that the final report of the Exclusions review would be presented at June meeting as evidence was still being collected for this work.

8.2 The work programme to the end of the municipal year was agreed.

**9 Any Other Business**

9.1 There was no other business.

9.2 The date of the next meeting was the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

The meeting closed at 10.05pm.

Duration of the meeting: Times Not Specified