



London Borough of Hackney  
Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission  
Municipal Year 2023/24  
Date of Meeting Monday 18 December 2023

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

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<b>Chair</b>	<b>Councillor Sophie Conway</b>
<b>Councillors in Attendance</b>	<b>Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice-Chair), Cllr Alastair Binnie-Lubbock, Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott, Cllr Midnight Ross, Cllr Anya Sizer, Cllr Sheila Suso-Runge, Cllr Lynne Troughton and Cllr Sarah Young</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Cllr Ifraax Samatar and Andy English</b>
<b>Co-optees</b>	<b>Chanelle Paul</b>
<b>In Attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care</b></li><li>▪ <b>Mayor Caroline Woodley, Cabinet lead Families, Early Years</b></li><li>▪ <b>Diane Benjamin, Director of Children's Social Care</b></li><li>▪ <b>Lisa Aldridge, Head of Service, Safeguarding, Quality Assurance &amp; Improvement</b></li><li>▪ <b>Sajeed Patni, Head of Finance Children &amp; Education</b></li><li>▪ <b>Vernon Strowbridge, Interim Director of Finance</b></li><li>▪ <b>Paul Senior, Director of Education and Inclusion</b></li></ul>
<b>Members of the Public</b>	<b>None.</b>
<b>Media Link</b>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uk5w7J-P418">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uk5w7J-P418</a>
<b>Officer Contact:</b>	<b>Martin Bradford (martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk)</b>  020 8356 3315  martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk

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## Councillor Sophie Conway in the Chair

### 1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from:
- Andy English (cooptee)
  - Cllr Ifraax Samatar.
- 1.2 Apologies for lateness were received from:

- Cllr Margaret Gordon;
- Deputy Mayor Bramble.

## 2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 There were no late items and the business of the meeting was as published.

## 3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 The following declarations were received:

- Cllr Lee Laudat Scott was a member of the Corporate Parenting Committee;
- Cllr Anya Sizer was a parent of a child with SEN.

## 4 Children's Social Care Annual Report (2022/23) (19.05)

4.1 The Children's Social Care Annual Report is a standing item on the Commission's work programme. This enables the Commission to have oversight of all activity across all children's social care services including early help, children in need, looked after children and care leavers. The attached report details activity for the Children's Social Care Service for the period April 2022 to March 2023. This report is taken alongside the budget monitoring report (at item 5) so that members can be assured that budgetary and policy commitments are aligned.

4.2 To support the scrutiny process, the Commission held a short focus group with 9 members of Hackney of Tomorrow (Care Council) to talk through some of the issues which were important to them. Representatives were present at the meeting and agreed to ask some questions on behalf of other members of Hackney of Tomorrow.

4.3 The Director of Children's Social Care introduced the report highlighting the following key achievements for 2022/23:

- The service had led a month long series of seminars on developing anti-racist practice across children and education services;
- An inspection assessed the Youth Justice Service to be good, highlighting the quality of partnership work and anti-racist practice;
- The new Mosaic primary case recording service has been embedded to help managers oversee and improve practice;
- Ongoing service alignment with Hackney Education.

4.4 From analysis of the activity data, the Director of Children's Social Care also highlighted the following:

- The number of children on a child protection plan has dropped by 15%;
- The average time taken complete care and supervision proceedings has been reduced from 58 to 52 weeks (close to the national average of 47 weeks);
- As of September 2023 there were 390 looked after children down from a peak of 470 in November 2020

4.5 Priorities for children's social care for 2024 were agreed:

- Proud to be systemic, anti-racist and trauma-informed;
- Proud to listen to children so they can help shape and inform provision;
- Proud to work in partnership to keep children safe and deliver the help and support that they and their families need;
- Proud to work with the workforce so that they can deliver the best possible outcomes for children and families in Hackney.

Questions from the Commission

4.6 The Commission requested further information on the designated safeguarding leads and how these worked with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)?

- The LADO role was well established and had good working relationships with local nurseries and schools, those settings which provide the highest number of referrals for allegations of harm to children from staff and volunteers. Safeguarding issues are raised in a number of contexts including allegations of direct harm, misconduct and other contextual issues for the school itself. A new referral system was set up over the past year as the LADO was always caught up on the phone and was therefore unable to triage or prioritise incoming enquiries. This initial written request process has had good response from users, as this now enables the LADO to prioritise referrals effectively.

4.7 A full inspection of children's social care services by Ofsted is expected early in the New Year. Can you update the Commission on service preparations ahead of this visit? What have internal audit and quality assurance systems revealed about the services strengths and weaknesses ahead of this inspection? What is morale like ahead of the visit?

- (DCSC) The service was expecting an inspection from Ofsted and this was likely in January 2024. The service was well prepared and had undertaken a 'dip sampling' of local social work practice to test out and assess local systems. The service was confident that 'it knows itself', and that perspective has been assisted by two previous focused visits by Ofsted as well as the Local Government Association visit.
- (HoS) Annex A data is all ready for submission and there are approximately 200 supporting documents which have been cleared and are ready for inspection. The last 6 months of audits have been completed and ready for Ofsted to inspect and to select cases for further investigation. Practice has also developed and improved since the last visit as there are now many consistencies within the audit programme, for example ensuring the voice of the child is heard (previously identified as a weakness by Ofsted). The most recent internal audit was on anti-racist practice, which suggested that almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of cases had good evidence of anti-racist practice and with good outcomes for children and their families. There is a strong learning programme for practitioners with regular conversations between practitioners and managers. The annual report was also ready to share with inspectors.

4.8 Can officers update the Commission on the development of a partner wide Early Help Strategy? What are the key principles and functions of the strategy? What are the timelines for its completion and implementation?

- (DCSC) The EH strategy is in its early days and at present is a small team of 3 practitioners located in the MASH. Ofsted feedback from the focused visit in 2022 noted that more use should be made of the early help strategy to expand referrals from beyond statutory services. Too many families were being referred for social care assessments where it was later determined that no statutory social service was required. This suggested that more work needed to be done to ensure that families were referred to other non-statutory support services earlier.

4.9 Given that Early Help - and preventative measures - are predominantly supported through non-discretionary funding, there are clearly challenges in developing a comprehensive and coordinated local early help offer in time on financial constraint. How is Children's Social Care working to overcome these financial challenges?

- (DCSC) Early help is jointly funded with Education as both services recognise the importance of this preventative service. There are financial challenges for this and it is important to safeguard these services given their preventative role in addressing needs early which may reduce future needs and provide longer term cost savings. Given its importance, the service was looking to increase the stability and future sustainability of the EH team.

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- (DoE) It was noted that there was a similar EH team located within the education service and that this would be combined with the CSC team to scale up the local early help response. It would be important to establish a single front door and early help response across all statutory services.

4.10 Can officers update the Commission on the effectiveness of the consultation line, where local services may contact social workers to discuss cases to assess whether a formal referral is needed? What levels of activity is this service recording? Is this resulting in fewer referrals? How will the service be evaluated - is it being used equally across all sectors?

- (HoS) Whilst activity numbers were not to hand, there had been positive feedback about this service from local partners. One particular area of success was the clarity that it provided on the need for parental consent for a referral (unless this was a safeguarding issue). The consultation line had helped local agencies and practitioners to develop strategies for asking for consent from parents and to allow for a referral to take place. The consultation line had also helped agencies to understand how they might intervene first and support children and families *before* a referral might be made. CSC was keen to promote this model as it encouraged a shared approach to supporting children and families rather than simply 'referring to another agency'.
- (DCSC) Schools and police were the biggest users of the consultation line. This service provided an opportunity for front-line practitioners to discuss cases in advance, but this did not preclude from making a formal referral. The quality of the referrals (e.g. fathers details, consent) has also gone up as a result of the introduction of the consultation line, and this also helps for screening and assessment timescales.
- (DCSC) Evaluation of the EH help service is ongoing, and the MASH manager is very clear as to who is using the service and why they are using the service. Whilst activity is currently high, more engagement needs to be undertaken with the voluntary sector to promote awareness and use of the service from community settings.

4.11 The rate of referrals for children's social care has risen over 60% in 2 years (at page 19) and is now significantly higher than comparative assessment rates for England and other 'comparator boroughs'. Why are referrals for social care increasing at a faster rate in Hackney than other areas? What analysis has been undertaken of where these referrals are coming from or for what area of need (to allow for upstream interventions)?

- Some LA areas experienced a sharp increase in referrals after Covid, but Hackney did not, but Hackney has experienced a more gradual but continuous increase. Increasing austerity has increased stresses and strains on families which was a likely factor in these increase referrals and assessments. The most recent data (not included in the annual report) would suggest that activity is plateauing to more 'expected levels'. The numbers of children on Child Protection Plans (CPP) had fluctuated, which again suggests to the service that more support needed to be directed through the early help offer to reduce the need for more statutory interventions.

4.12 The Chair made the following observation. The data shows that the number of children who are looked after, who are assessed to be Children in Need or placed on a Child Protection Plan have all decreased since 2021. Given that the number of referrals and assessments that the children's social care service has made is increasing, did this mean that there had been a change in thresholds for care and support? Is this an indicator of activity rates stabilising to pre-pandemic levels?

4.13 The performance of the service in undertaking social work assessments within the required 45 days was much lower than England and statistical neighbours in 2022/23. What was the reason for this underperformance - and what action was taken to address

it? Data for the first half of 2023/24 shows a marked improvement in performance, is this being sustained ahead of a likely Ofsted inspection?

- (DCSC) There was a period in 2022/23 when there were significant staffing issues which affected the performance in which statutory assessments were undertaken. The service was, for a period, struggling to maintain good quality staff, but this had since been resolved and performance in this area has now returned back to comparable levels with other boroughs. Furthermore, data from April 23 to September 23 indicated that assessments undertaken within the statutory timeframe has improved significantly. It was noted that social worker recruitment continues to be problematic for all local authorities, especially in London, and one of the key priorities for the service was to make sure that quality staff were recruited and retained.

4.14 Following on from the above, the Commission asked what the key strategies for recruitment and retention were, knowing that this has been an ongoing issue for a number of years. Also, what strategies have been successful in recruitment and retention? Is housing an issue in local retention and recruitment?

- (DCSC) A lot of work has been undertaken to improve recruitment and retention, especially the London Pledge, which effectively prevents authorities from competing for, and bidding up the cost of employing social care staff. This had helped to bring some staffing stability. Exit interviews also suggested that social workers did not want to stay in Hackney as opportunities for progression were comparatively limited. As a result, the senior social worker grade had been introduced to allow more staff to progress internally. A bonus scheme had also been introduced for permanent social work staff in those service areas where it was known that there were retention issues. There was also a refer a friend scheme which also attracted a bonus for referring staff. There were of course other issues which may negatively impact on recruitment, such as for example, availability of affordable housing and parking. This was a constantly changing environment in which the service needed to respond to ensure that its staff offer remained attractive and competitive.

4.15 One in seven looked after children had 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months. What was the service doing to increase placement stability? Are placement breakdowns analysed to understand what has been learnt to help improve stability for others?

- (HoS) It was accepted that this figure was high compared to statistical neighbours, but this was against a background of greater instability. It was noted that in-house foster carers have greater placement stability with LAC than independent fostering agencies (IFA). The fostering service offers a wide programme of training and takes great care in matching placements so that LAC are placed with foster carers who can best meet their needs. As with other LA's, many of those entering care are older adolescents who may struggle with attachment and where it is difficult to find foster carers that can meet their needs.

4.16 (Hackney of Tomorrow) Care leavers noted that they had experienced periods of high turnover with their social workers that supported them, and aside from having to update and develop new relationships with different social workers, young people noted that the approach of social workers was not always consistent? What was the overarching approach of social workers, was this practice holistic, trauma informed and anti-racist? Are all social workers trauma informed - are all practitioners being trained in this approach?

- (DCSC) This is something the service recognises, and has been developing a new practice model which is systemic, trauma-informed and anti-racist. The service did want care leavers to have stability with their social workers and was, as set out in previous responses, working to increase staff retention. Ensuring that all practitioners were systemic, trauma-informed and anti-racist was an important step in consistently meeting the needs of care leavers and other children in care.

4.17 Social work assessment and practice is having a disproportionate impact on some groups of children, particularly those from black and global majority children and their families (as in the S47 example in the report). What is Children's Social Care service doing to identify and remedy those practices which are having a disproportionate impact on local children?

- (HoS) S47 assessments are where there are the greatest disproportionalities in the data. Dip samples revealed that police colleagues were more likely to opt for S47 assessment for black and global majority children than white children and closer examination revealed differences in the way that thresholds were applied (distinguishing between harm and significant harm). In response, the service had met with police colleagues to share these findings and to discuss how thresholds and those judgements that underpin them could be applied more consistently.
- (HoS) The service had also identified disproportionality in the assessments which have led to an outcome where 'no statutory social worker action is necessary', not only in between black and global majority children and white children, but also within black and global majority communities. The service had commissioned a third party to look into this further with a focus to engage and develop networks with local parent groups from different faith and community groups. The aim was to raise awareness to improve understanding of social care systems, what support was available and those circumstances where authorities might intercede in families. It was hoped that this work would extend and develop knowledge and understanding of children's social care systems across different communities and reduce the need for statutory assessments and interventions.

4.18 Are the systemic, trauma informed and anti-racist values clear in processes to on-board staff to ensure that they are aware of the Hackney values and approach?

- (HoS) To make sure staff are recruited with the right ethos, these values are embedded within the competency questions and are a key part of the interview assessment process. So all staff have a clear message when entering Hackney that this is an anti-racist service and staff need to be active practitioners of this approach. There is a wide programme of staff training and development on anti-racism which also supports this approach.
- (DCSC) With any new practice model however, it takes time to embed as it is trying to change the culture of the organisation. This was between 3-5 years. It should be noted that Hackney was not starting at zero or was currently operating at a 'deficit model' as Hackney had always been systemic and in many ways such as anti-racists practice, was already leading the way.

4.19 The data suggest that ¼ of children are on a child protection plan (CPP) for less than 3 months and over 1 in 3 children are on a child protection plan for less than 6 months. What does this suggest about the consistent application of safeguarding thresholds? Are children being placed on a CPP unnecessarily and are there disproportionalities within this data?

- (HoS) Children can be on a CPP for many different circumstances and reasons why a child may be moved off a plan may vary, that is; the family makes the necessary adjustments very quickly, the child is moved into care or children move out of the borough. The service would not want children to be on a CPP for very short periods of time as this would suggest that there is some risk aversion within the assessment. Dip samples have been taken of this area of service and have not identified significant levels of risk aversion for 3 and 6 months transfers. More work was clearly needed across the partnership however, so that there was greater consistency in how agencies recognise the different identities of children in respect of safeguarding as well as making sure that services were anti-racist and trauma-informed. This year, the service would be developing an anti-racist approach to child protection conferences.

4.20 Following on from above, the Commission also wanted to know what external assessment and accountability was placed on the children's social care anti-racist approach? What have we learned from other authorities as to where they feel that most impact can be achieved in this sphere?

- (HoS) Ofsted are on a journey themselves in their own organisation in understanding anti-racist practice and the impact that this has within their own assessments. In the inspection of local youth justice services, HMIP noted that whilst there were still strong disproportionalities within the local data, it commended Hackney on its anti-racist practice. One of the most common reasons that children are placed on a CPP is in relation to domestic violence and or abuse, and it is worth noting that the DAIS in Hackney was one of the first to develop an anti-racist and older persons lens within the assessments that they undertake. There was more work to be done however, to ensure that culturally appropriate services were offered at the earliest opportunity, for example, there may be other more culturally appropriate services which may be able to work with the family to achieve change on a non-statutory level which may be more acceptable to families.
- (DCSC) In fairness, Hackney was among the leading authorities in this work and significant numbers of other authorities were approaching the borough for advice, guidance and support in this area of practice. This was not to say that the borough does reflect on its on practice and not look to learn from other boroughs, as the organisation was always willing to learn to improve the culture of practice.
- (DoE) Also noted that the DCSC and other Hackney officers were invited to the national conference of Ofsted inspectors in 2023, which was a testament to the high regard of local practice.

4.21 Many care leavers learn about services or benefits which may be of help to them opportunistically, rather than through their social workers. How does the service ensure that social workers and personal advisers are kept up to date on the opportunities available for care leavers, so that there is equal access to education, training or other benefits which may assist them? How do we ensure that care leavers get consistent advice and support?

- (DCSC) The service does try to make sure that personal advisers and other practitioners supporting care leavers are up to date in key areas of provision, such as housing and benefits advice.

4.22 (Hackney of Tomorrow) Quality and affordable accommodation is paramount for care leavers stability and progression, yet care leavers are still reporting they are being placed in unsuitable accommodation. Can officers update the Commission on the implementation of the new supported housing strategy? What assurances can be provided that care leavers are being placed in accommodation which they can afford?

- As a product of closer working with housing colleagues, from this year, care leavers can be on the housing register from the age of 18. The service acknowledged that some time back some of the available housing for care leavers was not suitable in that these were quite cold and just did not feel like homes for care leavers. The care leaving service did have a strategy to make sure all care leavers were placed in suitable accommodation, preferably in-borough, but this was not always possible. The reality however was that there was very limited housing stock in Hackney which meant that options for care leavers and other young people were limited.

4.23 Following on from the above, the Commission sought to clarify whether the housing quota for care leavers would remain? Being on the housing register does not give entitlement to social housing, and many young people are required to wait a long time to receive an offer. What priority is accorded to care leavers on the housing register to make sure that they are able to access housing?

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- (DCSC) Both the quota and the automatic enrolment would still be in place in April as this is a complex area and will need to settle in. Housing services have indicated that this is not sustainable given the number of properties becoming available. Care leavers remain a priority for the Council as a whole, not just the social care service. The authority does have a responsibility to make sure that housing for care leavers is of good quality, liveable and affordable, but the housing market was really challenging.

4.24 In terms of recruitment and retention, what does the service do to understand the views and needs of staff? Is a survey of staff attitudes and morale regularly undertaken and are exit interviews regularly held with all departing staff. How is the service adapting non-salary benefits to support recruitment?

- (HoS) Regular exit interviews are undertaken by someone who is not their line manager and learning from all these is collated and analysed by the workforce development group. There are a number of consistent themes in why people leave, Brexit was a key reason recently as many social workers with European connections felt that they could not stay in the UK. Similarly, the cost of living and its impact on families is now a significant issue as many people have sought cheaper accommodation outside London. Opportunities for career development was also cited in many exit interviews, and as was reported earlier, there had been some adjustments to the local career structure in Hackney which now allows for more progression within the social care profession.
- (HoS) Regular staff surveys were conducted across the council which assesses a wide range of issues including wellbeing, whether or not their voices are heard and how well they feel they are supported. Data was not available at the meeting.

4.25 Placement/accommodation stability is equally as important for care leavers as it is for looked after children, but does the authority monitor how many times care leavers may be moving accommodation? Could standards be developed?

- (HoS) 74% of LAC are with foster carers and 26% in residential care. As previously indicated, the in-house foster carer arrangements tend to be more stable than other placements. Additional wraparound support was always considered to help maintain stable placements. In terms of supported accommodation, the council was changing its policy and this will not be available until a child reaches the age of 18, as these children will be placed with a foster carer under a 'foster care first' approach.

4.26 One of the concerns of the Commission from its work with housing support for care leavers was that some care leavers who chose to study outside the borough lost some of their rights to social housing. Has this been rectified so that children are penalised for their success or achievements? Are we confident that these children are not prejudiced by the system in any way or lose their entitlements?

- (DCSC) Some care leavers that move away from Hackney do not want to come back as it is very expensive for young people to live here. For those that do, the authority does try to support them as best we can, though affordable high quality housing options in Hackney remained limited regardless of care status. Care leavers that moved away would not be prejudiced or lose out on existing entitlements.

4.27 Given that the session was overrunning, the Chair requested if other questions which there had not been time to be asked could be presented for a response at a later time. There were a number of issues which there had not been time to take within the meeting. This same issue applied to young people from Hackney of Tomorrow.

**Agreed: Scrutiny would present a number of questions to Children's Social Care which it (and representatives of Hackney of Tomorrow) were unable to ask due to**



time limitations. Responses to these questions would be published in a future scrutiny agenda.

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

## 5 Budget monitoring (Hackney Education & Children's Social Care) (20.05)

5.1 Budget monitoring is a key area of the scrutiny function, in which the Commission reviews: In-year budgets; Management actions to address overspends/ underspends; Progress against agreed savings proposals. Historically, the Commission has taken separate budget monitoring reports for both Hackney Education and Children's Social Care. Given the greater alignment of these services, the Commission has agreed to take a unified budget monitoring report, so that there is single oversight of all children's budgets within the council.

### Introduction from Corporate Finance Officers

5.2 The following issues were highlighted by officers in relation to the budget monitoring paper presented to the Commission for the financial position of children and education services to the end of October 2023:

- After the application of reserves (£3.6m), this directorate was expected to be overspent by £3.8m;
- The majority of this overspend is linked to corporate parenting (£2.7m) in relation to pressures in placement costs.
- Other areas of overspend were in Access and Assessment, Safeguarding and QA and LAC.
- In Hackney Education an overspend of £4.3m is forecast, mainly as a result of ongoing cost pressures in SEND provision. The cumulative overspend for SPEND will be around £21m by the end of 2023/24.
- Early Years is anticipated to be overspent by £660k as a result of lower than anticipated income arising through the pandemic and changing patterns of children centre usage.
- OBIS directorate is expected to break even after the application of reserves.

### Questions from the Commission

5.3 What impact has high levels of inflation had across the service? Are there any indicators that these inflationary pressures were receding?

- (HoF) Inflationary pressures were experienced across the service, but particularly within the Commissioning budget, as providers were increasing the cost of services that they provide to the council. This was the case for commissioned services across both children's social care and SEND services. Rising inflation had specifically impacted on fuel costs which has had a significant impact on the SEND transport budget. As contracts come up for renewal, providers were making the case for increased funding to offset inflationary pressures in relation to staffing, energy and other rising costs.

5.4 Can officers provide further detail around the cost pressures in the corporate parenting team (currently a projected £4m overspend)? What management actions are being taken to address this and are they effective, given that overspend in this area appears to be intensifying / increasing? How can fewer looked after children (as noted in the previous report) be reconciled with rising costs for corporate parenting?

- (DCSC) It was noted that corporate parenting costs were increasing as residential placements were in high demand and local authorities were in effect, competing for these places. Safe and therapeutic placements were in short supply and in many cases these were expensive and not local. In terms of management actions, the 20 highest costing placements were under direct oversight by the DCSC to ensure that children were being placed appropriately in terms of care needs and costs. Some of the child-staff support ratios were as high as 4 to 1,

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so these were expensive placements. Challenge was provided to make sure that these ratios were appropriate to the need of the child. Such arrangements were regularly reviewed to ascertain if care levels were correct, and if there was potential to step down the staff-child ratio of support.

5.5 Following on from above, the Chair asked what do we know about the care providers for these residential settings? Were all staff trained to provide therapeutic support? Is Hackney looking for specific assurances around what it is paying for in the model of care and support provided? In reality, if there is a 4-1 ratio, these are not social workers, but mostly likely security and other staff? What does an affordable safe and therapeutic intervention look like?

- (DCSC) officers suggested that this was not the case, but acknowledged that the authority was paying for children (often with complex needs) to be safe and well cared for in an environment which is friendly and homely. The Director was consistently seeking assurance that commissioned services were providing what was being paid for. If children were not receiving the care that is required then they would be moved. Many local authorities struggle with this issue, as there was simply not the capacity in residential care to take all those children in need. There needed to be much greater control from central government to manage these settings to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of quality settings which have appropriate capacity at a reasonable cost.
- (DoE) Similar issues were experienced in supporting children with SEND, where children have equally complex needs and who need high levels of care and support.

5.6 Members of the Commission noted that it would be really helpful to have a better understanding as to what these residential settings looked like, to understand what is being provided for Hackney children in their care. Visits are clearly impracticable and not appropriate for the Commission, but it would be helpful for members to have further written information about the provider and what support is offered to children.

- (DCSC) Visits were undertaken by social care staff as they have to quality assure what is provided and this is done for all children wherever they are placed. All of these settings are regulated by Ofsted. There are settings which are not regulated by Ofsted, and this is not where the authority would want to place any children, but sometimes we do not have a choice. Sometimes unregistered providers who the authority may place children with indicate that they will register with Ofsted, but clearly, this takes some time and children are often moved by the time that they are registered. All of these homes can be very different, sometimes just a single home offering a placement for one child.

Following up this point, the Chair indicated that given the amount of expenditure that is being spent on these residential settings and the pressures that this is creating in other areas of the budget, members needed a much clearer understanding of what was being provided and the associated costs involved. Whilst the Commission is confident that officers are undertaking visits and making these assessments, members did need a better understanding of these residential care providers which are accounting for much of the budget spend.

5.7 What more can be done on a pan London basis, or indeed, in physical development here in Hackney itself? Neighbouring authorities are facing the same pressures, what can be done to work with these authorities to develop more localised and cost effective solutions?

- (DCSC) Hackney was working within the NE London Consortium and across London as all local authorities are facing the same challenges. There are a couple of authorities which are building their own children's homes, which of course could benefit all of London authorities as we could place children there. This is also on the national agenda and more effective market provision was raised with the DfE inspector at a recent informal visit. At the moment providers

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had authorities 'over a barrel' given the limited capacity and increased demand for services.

- (DoE) This is a common issue across children's social care, education and SEND, and it may be that a deep dive by the Commission into this may be particularly helpful.
- (DoF) Reported that discussions had recently commenced in terms of identifying properties which could be used to deliver children's social care services. This was at an early stage, but the Corporate Director of Finance was keen to explore options in this space and it was hoped that progress could be achieved in 2024.

The Chair and the rest of the Commission greatly welcomed this new development.

5.8 The report noted that future funding for OBIS beyond this financial year needs to be identified from existing children and education budgets. Can officers set out if OBIS will continue to operate from April 2024 and the level of funding needed to support this Directorate. Where will funding come from if this service is to continue?

- (DCSC) It was noted that the Director of Obis was not present and officers did not feel comfortable answering this question, but more information could be provided

**Agreed: That further information on the future funding of OBIS beyond 2023/24 would be provided to the Commission.**

5.9 Some services which are provided are undoubtedly an investment, delivering savings elsewhere for the council. Is there any evidence that some of the services listed here in this budget monitoring are clear, invest to save priorities? For example, Young Hackney and the social dividend that comes from this work?

- (DCSC) There have been some very positive outcomes from the work of Young Hackney, but there has to be very careful thoughts about the future model for delivery of this service. YH has been a highly respected and valued service for the past 10 years, but it is time to reflect and review its approach.

5.10 Family Interventions and Support Service (FISS) is forecasting an overspend of £1.445m at year end, which is equivalent to 20% of the budget allocation for this service. Can officers explain what factors are driving this overspend in FISS? What actions are being taken to address this and what evidence is there that they are having an impact?

- (DCSC) This cost pressure mainly related to staffing in this area of the service as there has been a significant problem in recruiting permanent members of staff. As a consequence, the service has had to recruit an increasing number of agency staff to support the service which is more expensive. Given the size and evolving needs of the service, there was unlikely to be a situation where the authority would never need agency staff, but clearly, the service would prefer more permanent members of staff. There is recruitment and retention strategy which it is hoped would reduce reliance on agency staff and reduce associated costs. A management restructure will also take place which will help to reduce costs in this area of spend.

5.11 There is a £943k cost pressure for Looked After Children and Leaving Care Services. Can officers set out what are the key service pressures which are contributing to this overspend? Are the factors behind this overspend - short-term pressures or longer term issues (e.g. housing related)? What management actions are being taken to address the cost pressures in this budget?

- (DCSC) Again, this overspend is primarily connected to social care providers which are commissioned by the authority. Similar to the above, there was also a high level of agency staff use in this service area which was contributing to the budget pressures.

5.12 The council has a great apprenticeship programme and members of the Commission enquired whether there were opportunities to train and develop home

grown talent which can support the wider children's social care functions (for example, family intervention and support workers)?

- (DCSC) Apprenticeships are very positive, but eventually all these recruits in social care / social work will be required to go on study for their ASW training course (for qualified status). Greater connections to universities and those other settings training our staff would help to develop recruitment pathways to Hackney. Last year there were 3 apprentices for social work in Hackney in 2022, but this year there are just 1.

5.13 As was noted in last year's budget monitoring report, there continues to be a significant underspend (£152k) in the clinical services budget. Noting from the previous report the significant increase in referrals for clinical services (32% increase) how is the service underspent? Are there long waiting lists for this service? Is activity at expected levels?

- (DCSC) This service is dependent upon highly skilled specialised staff and it has been difficult to recruit to these posts which has created an underspend in the service. This service works closely with CAMHS Alliance where children (on a Children in Need Plan or a Child Protection Plan) can be directly referred into the Clinical Service rather than wait for CAMHS support. Many of the users of this service indicate that the approach of CAMHS is much 'softer' than the CAMHS approach, where for example, cases might be closed if there is a DNA. The service had also lost personnel to a neighbouring authority which was paying more than Hackney.

5.14 Can officers explain what the £394k virement to the Domestic Abuse Intervention Service was? Is this purely relating to service demand? Is this a one-off budget alteration?

- (HoF) A number of factors contributed to this figure. Some of the contributions from partners were lower than expected which has led to this position.

5.15 The report notes that £500k of staff savings from a staffing restructure within children's social care is expected for 2023/24 and 2024/25. Are savings on-track to be delivered for this year? Will any restructures coincide with expected Ofsted inspections?

- (DCSC) This was an internal management restructure and it was hoped to be on target for this year. The LGA was very clear that the children's social care service needed to streamline its management of the service, and therefore a delayering exercise was planned. The savings are required for this year, and this cannot be delayed any further to wait for Ofsted inspection to occur. The service is conscious of morale and is therefore taking a tiered approach to the restructure. Informal consultations have started with affected staff and there had been positive feedback, but this would be an open process with ongoing dialogue with affected staff. It was also noted that there were a significant number of agency staff within these affected positions which needed to be provided with notice of any proposed staffing changes.

5.16 Can officers provide further detail on the £650k of savings which have been identified for this year in the targeted and specialist interventions for young people that need extra support? What services does this affect and which cohorts of young people does this impact upon?

- (HoF) This was a second part of a base budget review of services where £350k was earmarked for 2022/23 and £650k for 2023/24. Some of the measures included in this cost savings included the Prospects contract, the deletion of an Assistant Head of Service post and aligning business support across Young Hackney and family support service. Some of these savings had been delivered, and if there was a shortfall at the end of the year, a mixture of grant funding or other one-off measures will meet that gap. Next year, services will be reviewed and delivered in the base budget.

5.17 A vacancy rate saving of £900k is set for children's social care services. Will this be achieved? What assessments have been made as to the impact that this may have on services?

- There is a council wide vacancy factor of 3.5% which is applied to all directorates. This equates to £1.7m across both children and education services. This is reviewed on a ¼ basis, and if the staffing quota is full and the vacancy rate saving looks unlikely to be achieved, then budget holders are encouraged to look to non-staff budgets to achieve the savings. At period 7, there was an acceptance that this would be achieved. It was also noted that some front line services were difficult to hold vacancies, and there would be exemptions here.

5.18 The report notes that all savings are on track to be delivered by April 2024 - yet the report has these marked as 'amber' in RAG rating. What risks are associated with these?

- In terms of the £250k for commissioning marked as amber, as the directorate has taken on a commissioning specialist in a consultancy role to identify how some of the commissioning functions might work together more closely and achieve savings. £90m is spent on commissioning services therefore this £250k has been invested to see how these services can be more aligned across health, education and social care. It is marked amber because this is reviewed at ¼ points, but it is expected to be delivered but if not there will be a mitigating use of reserves.

5.19 What does the £1.13m underspend in the Direct Schools Grant (DSG) budget relate to? What income is accrued through the DSG? Or is this an overachievement of income? How can underspend in the DSG Income budget line be used to offset the whole Hackney Education budget (which it appears to in the report) noting that DSG is to passport funds direct to schools?

- (DoE) The Schools Forum administers the DSG and how this is spent among local schools. Where there is an underspend this sometimes relates to an underspend in schools or some parts of the system have not utilised all the resources available. Where there is an underspend, it is incumbent on officers to have discussions within the Schools Forum as to how this is pass-ported to local schools. This balance does not figure in the General Fund.

5.20 What does the £666k overspend in the Early Years Budget relate to? What management actions are being taken to address these?

- (DoE) Hackney Education had commissioned a review by Ernst & Young to review provision, and would be bringing proposals for a new operating model for the sector and to ensure that this is managed more effectively. A report is expected at Cabinet in January 2024 setting out these proposals.

5.21 Hackney Education derives a significant amount of income from traded services to local schools and schools outside the borough (e.g. School Improvement Partners). How is income from traded services holding up in the current context of financial pressures within schools? Are there areas of trade which are experiencing specific difficulties, and what action is being taken to improve performance?

- (DoE) A review of traded services had been undertaken and those services for which there was no longer a sufficient or sustainable demand, may need to be reassessed. The spending habits of local schools were changing, therefore, this required Hackney Education to keep all traded services under review as they must respond to local needs.

5.22 The Commission made clear that it appreciated how challenging the financial position of the council was and that this placed officers in very difficult situations in having to prioritise services, and identify those areas where savings could be made. Cuts have been made across the whole of local government over the past 10 years and these have had a significant impact on services and the communities which they

support. On behalf of all the Commission, the Chair thanked all officers for their work in such difficult times.

## **6 School Behaviour Policies (Draft Scoping Report) (20.55)**

6.1 An outline scope of the Commission's proposed review of school behaviour policies was presented to facilitate a discussion so that members can agree:

- The aims and objectives of the review;
- Local stakeholder and key contributors for the review;
- Proposed actions to consult and involve.

6.2 The following comments were noted from members of the Commission to support the review:

Cllr Troughton - it was disappointing that DfE guidance was still using outdated terms such a 'misbehaviour' and 'good behaviour' which are value laden, especially when behaviours were about the needs of the child. It was suggested that the review could help 'move the dial' around to more progressive terminology such as unwanted behaviour, or behaviour that impacts negatively on other people (i.e. descriptive rather than value behaviour).

Cllr Sizer - in respect of the special needs aspect to this review, it will be important to assess the role of EHCPs, to test the association between good plans which have been fully implemented and those that have not and how this impacts on behaviour of children in school.

Cllr Conway - one of the biggest challenges for this review is to make sure that the voices of parents and children are heard and reflected in the narrative of the work and its outcomes. Likewise, engaging schools in this process will also require careful consideration. It was important to have engagement from local stakeholders, so that the Commission can get 'buy-in' from local stakeholders. The voice of young people should sit front and centre of this review

Cllr Gordon - the context and need for this work was clear. It would be helpful to incorporate a review of the evidence base and conduct a literature review of this area to start off and to identify experts who can contribute to this investigation.

Cllr Conway - it was agreed that a literature review would help to identify from the evidence base what works, noting that this will need to explore definitions of 'works', that is, the possible range of outcomes from behaviour policies (children performing well, feeling safe, low exclusions etc.)

Cllr Binnie-Lubbock - it is rather disturbing to note that within the national survey, that over half of children did not feel safe everyday they went to school and the impact that this may have on pupils and their learning. The review should examine this aspect of school behaviour policies. In terms of buy-in from schools, it would be useful to understand if there have been any legal challenges to school behaviour policies or other ways of effecting change. It would also be helpful for the review to clarify what behaviour policies look like from a parental perspective and how this figures in wider determinants of school choice for their child.

Cllr Conway - in respect of the above, it was noted that there is a legal challenge going through the courts at present which may allow parents of excluded children to claim legal aid. Legal perspectives in this review would be helpful.

Cllr Young - the review should be more explicit about the role of school behaviour policies as a tool for identifying needs, and how these can be used to deliver support to

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pupils rather than punishment. How is the balance addressed in school behaviour policies? Would it be possible to look at the views of children who have been through the school behaviour system and come through it and to have their reflections.

Cllr Conway - it would also be informative to understand what local parenting programmes are teaching and how these reconcile with the ethos and principles of local school behaviour policies.

Cllr Troughton - Schools step-in when there are issues, but there should be more guidance and practical support for parents. Maybe the review could reflect on the role of the children and family hubs as these will assume a more prominent role in parenting support once established?

Cllr Laudat-Scott - It will be important to include school staff in the broadest terms, as behaviour policies are implemented by non-teaching staff as well as teaching staff and school leaders.

Cllr Sizer - parenting from the adoption community will be trauma informed and therapeutic, but there is not a one size fits all parenting philosophy but this is very broad.

Cllr Suso-Runge - the review should also seek to involve governing bodies as these bodies validate and approve school decisions and make sure that they conform to regulations.

Cllr Binnie-Lubbock - it would also be helpful to understand if there are any gaps between the behaviour policies in terms of the written policy document and the implementation of the policies in schools.

Cllr Young - in terms of the aims and objectives, it would be important to set out what the expected outcomes and outputs of the review might be in addition to a review report e.g. a model behaviour policy.

Chanelle Paul - where there are cases of mental health issues in school which require CAMHS support, it will be helpful to understand further the schools role in notifications to ensure that this is fully captured locally and to better understand the local picture.

Director of Education - it will be important to have a tight set of aims and objectives to avoid mission creep. There must be some tighter definition of what the review is aiming to achieve in terms of school behaviour policies as this will integral to stakeholder buy-in and achieving change.

6.3 The comments provided will be used to develop a clear set of aims and objectives, which will be presented to the Cabinet member and senior officers for consultation, and final approval here at the Commission.

**Agreed: The scrutiny officer will develop the aims and objectives for the review in liaisons with the Commission and, once Cabinet member and officers have been consulted, create a work schedule for delivery.**

## **7 Work Programme 2023/24**

7.1 The Commission noted the updated work programme report. The main changes were thus:

- The rescheduled meeting lost through the pre-election period will take place on May 22nd 2024;

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- The item on unregistered educational settings will not take place in January 2024 as scheduled due to the by-election taking place and the need to conform with requirements of the pre-election period.

## **8 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

8.1 The minutes of the last meeting (30th November 2023) were not available in time for distribution ahead of this meeting and will be included in the agenda for the next meeting of the Commission (15th January 2024).

## **9 Any Other Business**

9.1 There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 9.50pm.

9.2 The next meeting of the Commission will be held on 15th January 2024.

Duration of the meeting: Times Not Specified