

# Overview & Scrutiny

## Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission Minutes of 12th July 2021

### Attendees

Sophie Conway (Councillor) (Chair)  
Margaret Gordon (Councillor) (Vice Chair)  
Lynne Troughton (Councillor)  
Katie Hansen (Councillor)  
Anya Sizer (Councillor)  
Jo Macleod (Co-opted member)  
Steven Olalere (PG Representative)  
Salmah Kansara, North London Muslim Community Centre

### In attendance:

- Cllr Sarah Young
- Cllr James Peters
- Cllr Caroline Selman
- Shabnum Hassan
- Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Children's Social Care
- Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks & Play
- Diane Benjamin, Director of Children's Social Care
- Annie Gammon, Head of Hackney Learning Trust and Director of Education
- Annie Coyle, Independent Consultant (Inspection readiness project)
- Wendy Edwards, SEND Contract Consultant
- Joe Wilson, Head of SEND
- Fran Cox, Head of High Needs and School Places
- Naeem Ahmed, Director of Finance, Children, Education, Adults, Health and Integration
- Lisa Aldridge, Head of Safeguarding & Quality Assurance
- Huw Bevan, Head of Family Intervention & Support Service

### Cllr Conway in the Chair

#### **Welcome and introduction**

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting and those members of the public who were viewing the livestream. It was noted that this was a hybrid meeting with members of the Commission in attendance and with officers connecting virtually.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Diane Benjamin, the new Director of Children's Social Care.

#### **1. Apologies for absence**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Commission:

- Cllr Anna Lynch
- Cllr James Peters (connected virtually)
- Cllr Humaira Garasia
- Cllr Caroline Selman (connected virtually)
- Cllr Sarah Young (connected virtually)

- Richard Brown
- Shabnum Hassan (connected virtually)
- Ernell Watson

## **2. Urgent Items / Order of Business**

2.1 There were no urgent items and the agenda was as had been published.

## **3. Declarations of interest**

3.1 The following declarations were received by members of the Commission:

- Cllr Gordon noted that she was a member of the Member Oversight Board for Children's Social Care and would not participate in Item 6 - the Ofsted Action Plan Update.
- Cllr Peters was a governor at a school in Hackney;
- Shabnum Hassan, was a governor at a school in Hackney;
- Cllr Sizer was a parent with a child with additional needs (in relation to item 4);
- Jo McLeod was a governor at a school in Hackney.

## **4. Commissioning of Independent SEND Provision**

4.1 At its meeting on May 11th 2021, the Commission received a report on SEND performance and financial recovery plan. In response to local concerns about independent SEND provision, it was agreed that a further follow-up report would be provided to allow the Commission to explore:

- The nature of independent SEND provision and how such services are commissioned;
- The type of contracts issued to independent provision and how these are monitored and reviewed;
- The cost of independent SEND provision.

4.2 The Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks & Play and Director of Education introduced the report to the Commission highlighting that an internal review of Independent SEND Commissioning had been in progress and that the report highlighted the work undertaken to date. It was acknowledged that a large number of young people with SEND are supported within Independent provision, many of which were located in settings outside the borough and that this report would give reassurance to members about how these services are commissioned.

4.3 In supporting children with SEND, Hackney Education Service was aiming to deliver on a number of key objectives:

- Ensure that every child has access to a place of learning and support;
- Respecting the rights of parents to choose their child's placements;
- Ensuring that there is a good range of quality placements for parents to choose from;
- Making sure that placements offer good value for money to the Council.

4.4 As of January 2021 there were 2,645 children and young people with an EHCP in Hackney, 1,543 of which were supported in mainstream schools and further 373 placed in local Special Schools. A further 474 children were placed in Independent and Non Maintained Special Schools (INMSS) both within and external to the borough.

- 4.5 There has been a significant increase in the number of children placed in INMSS: 474 children with an EHCP were placed in independent SEND provision in 2020/21 compared to just 272 in 2016/17. This has resulted in a significant increase to the spend on INMSS from £8 million to £13.8 million over the same period. The significant rise in the number of children with an EHCP being supported within INMSS settings has necessitated a review to ensure that local commissioning is robust in face of increased service demand and contract monitoring requirements.
- 4.6 A significant number (256) of the young people in the cohort of children placed in INMSS were from within the Orthodox Jewish Community. Most parents choose to have their child educated within Orthodox Jewish settings, and the SEND team currently commissions 23 different schools to meet the needs of this community.
- 4.7 Hackney Education is also developing a School Organisation Strategy which is considering how the school estate can provide more in-borough maintained options for children with SEND in light of falling rolls within the mainstream sector. In this context, it should be understood that the INMSS report is part of a wider transformation strategy for SEND services which is responding to increased demand for services against a backdrop of ongoing financial pressures.
- 4.8 It was understood that as part of the review of INMSS, HES had undertaken a benchmarking exercise with a number of other local authorities which provided assurance that Hackney was facing similar pressures in relation to increased demand and rising costs of SEND provision. The SEND service was working with Health and Social Care partners as part of the transformation and improvement programme to ensure that quality services were being commissioned which were delivering good outcomes and value for money.
- 4.9 More rigour was being introduced to contracting with INMSS providers moving onto National Schools and Colleges Contracts (NSCC). To date, 42% of INMSS were on the new NSCC. The SEND team had also undertaken a number of INMSS market engagement exercises with all schools and colleges in the sector to develop shared intelligence and to develop working partnerships which can better plan for the needs of young people with SEND in the future. The SEND service reassured the Commission that each child had been individually assessed and were appropriately placed within an INMSS provision that met the needs of the child as were set out in individual EHCP.
- 4.10 The review had identified a lack of specialised provision for children with SEND in the borough which was illustrated by the fact that currently 56% of young people with an EHCP attending an INMSS setting did so outside of Hackney borders.
- 4.11 The SEND team has also developed a Market Provision Map in which all providers are now required to complete an application form as part of the accreditation checks process. This form seeks assurance about the robustness of individual settings delivery model, and will form part of a new system of permanence management and contract monitoring for the service. In addition, Hackney is a member of Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group which will inform outcomes monitoring and value for money for schools commissioned within the INMSS sector. These

developments will further help to ensure that the team is placing children in provisions which meet their needs at the best available cost option.

#### Questions from the Commission

- 4.12 What are the strategic ambitions of the INMSS review and how does this link with the School Organisation Strategy? In increasing Hackney provision, what sort of SEND provision is the service seeking to develop?
- The School Place Planning Strategy sits within the Education Estate Strategy. The latter has four priorities: moving additional SEND provision in Borough; managing falling rolls in primary settings; preparing secondary schools for falling rolls within 2-5 years, and: developing a sustainable and effective education estate for the next 10 years.
  - In respect of creating additional capacity for SEND provision within Hackney, the council is seeking to increase capacity by developing satellite provision attached to existing local Special Schools. Secondly, more Additional Resource Provisions (ARP) will be developed in mainstream settings to enable them to support young people with ASD, Moderate Learning Difficulties and Speech and Language and Communication Difficulties. Finally, the SEND team will be working with schools to develop a 'graduated response' to enable more children with SEND to be supported in mainstream settings.
- 4.13 Currently is there any spare capacity among local Special Schools?
- There are 3 Special Schools in Hackney (Ickburgh, Stormont House and The Garden) and all three schools are at capacity and operate a waiting list for when places become available in-year.
- 4.14 In relation to the Education Estates Strategy, how will this address the needs of the local Orthodox Jewish Community (OJC), who appear to be reliant upon the INMSS sector for SEND needs of their children?
- A key aim of the strategy is to provide equity of service for all communities across the borough, and there is a definite need to improve access to good quality provision within the OJC. There is an example of good dedicated OJC provision within the borough called Side By Side Special School and the SEND team was working with this service to formalise commissioning and to understand how provision might be extended. The service was also working with Interlink and the communities that they represent are reflected in the Estates Strategy particularly Side by Side .
  - The service was also working with those schools which support boys aged 13+ from the OJC with an EHCP as the service currently had little oversight or an assessment of informed practice. There is an opportunity to reset this relationship and address any inequalities within the system. The intention of the review is to address OJC reliance on INMSS settings for SEND provision. Parental preference plays an important role in selection of SEND provision, and the SEND service aims to develop good quality service options for the OJC.
  - Side by Side is an Independent School adjudged 'good' by Ofsted for pupils with complex needs including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)

- HES was also seeking to develop more professional development input into the INMSS sector to ensure that these are within the 'good' or 'outstanding' category. There were also concerns around the curriculum offered within these settings and HES was seeking to develop support for key subjects offered.

4.15 How is the service responding to young people whose SEND needs may have varied as a result of the pandemic?

- The SEND team is instigating a system of annual reviews for every child with an EHCP to ensure there is an updated assessment of children's needs. This will also ensure that collectively, the SEND team is aware of emerging local needs (e.g. girls with autism). In this way the service is continually reviewing local SEND needs. This is a significant challenge for the service however, given that there are over 2,600 children with an EHCP in Hackney.

4.16 Whilst the SEND team has ambitions to increase Hackney based SEND provision and reduce reliance on INMSS settings, a large number of children are still supported in these settings and are likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future. What assurance can the service provide about the quality of INMSS settings or highlight if there are concerns around any specific types of settings. It is noted that 58% of INMSS had not moved to the new NSCC contact monitoring, so how satisfied is the service of the efficacy of contract monitoring and quality assurance for these settings?

- Monitoring is undertaken at two levels: organisational and the individual child.
- In terms of the individual monitoring of the child, annual reviews are undertaken which assess the child's needs and how well these are being addressed by the INMSS. The review tracks the outcomes and progress and is undertaken as a joint assessment with contributions from parents and the EHCP Coordinator.
- At the organisation level, although 42% of INMSS providers had signed over to the NSCC, this was expected to rise as this transfer programme had only been in operation for 6 weeks. Sign over to the new contract will help to monitor individual organisation performance. Before a child is placed in any INMSS, the SEND Team will check the Ofsted report of the setting and ensure that the setting is Section 41 registered.<sup>1</sup>
- The SEND service will also assess if other Hackney learners have attended this setting and how good their learning outcomes had been. A panel is in operation which approves every placement within the INMSS sector to ensure that the needs of the young person are met at the commissioned setting.
- A Senior Contracts Monitoring Officer was appointed in January who will be prioritising those settings which are rated as Inadequate or Require Improvement by Ofsted. Improved contract monitoring will also help to acquire a breakdown of how the fees for these services are calculated. A renegotiation of fees has also been commenced with some providers which had helped to cap costs.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 41 schools – These are independent special schools which have been approved by the Secretary of State under section 41 of the Children and Families Act (“CAFA”) 2014 as schools which a parent or young person can request to be named in an EHC plan. This means parents or young people have a right to request that this type of school is named in an EHC plan in the same way they can request a maintained school.

- 4.17 What outcome monitoring is undertaken of current contracts with Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools and importantly, how does this inform future commissioning? Is there any historical outcome data for these settings?
- This data is recorded and tracked in the pupils annual review process over time.
- 4.18 How is the service involving local parents with SEND in these decisions about INMSS and future strategy involving this provision? Is the service reaching a broad range of parents?
- The SEND team works with the Parent Carer Forum not only to share information, but also to help co-produce that strategy. There is also a SEND Partnership Board which has a number of working groups which all have parent representatives. Whilst the service works closely with HiP, the needs of young people with SEND were wide-ranging however, and it was recognised that there were other parent groups with whom the service wished to develop a working relationship. The team were working with an organisation called Contact which is undertaking a best practice review of parental engagement which will not only provide a picture of what is currently being provided but also help to identify if there are any gaps in local provision and how best to take this forward locally.
  - It was also noted that there was also work taking place to develop Youth Voice within the service. The service will be looking to further develop opportunities for young people with SEND to contribute and feedback on service development and improvement. This is still a work in progress, but the service has high ambitions and is a priority for the team.
- 4.19 What impact has the cyber attack on the Council had on this work?
- The SEND team were not directly affected by the cyber attack, though social care partners were. The social work service had been in contact with education partners to help rebuild case information.
- 4.20 Section 4.1 sets out the new Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System (PDPS) which is to be introduced to support commissioning INMSS. How will the views and feedback of children and their parents interface with this tool?
- The PDPS allows commissioners to develop pre-qualification or accreditation checks data on all providers. The PDPS in effect builds a list of INMSS providers which have been checked and for which due diligence has been undertaken for every provision named on an EHCP. This is then a resource for the SEND service.
- 4.21 The Chair thanked officers for attending and summed up the information provided by officers. It was felt that the information provided had been very frank and open and highlighted the challenges faced in commissioning INMSS SEND settings. It was expected that the Commission would continue to look at how independent children's services are commissioned and the quality assurance processes that underpin that commissioning process. It was also noted that this remains a very significant area of spend and risk for the Council and would therefore remain in sight in terms of budget monitoring.

## 5. Budget Monitoring Children and Families Service

5.1 Budget monitoring is a key element of the scrutiny function and the Commission monitors in-year spending on services for children and young people across respective Directorates. The Children and Families Service budget outturn for the year to end of March 2021 was presented for review.

5.2 The Director of Finance introduced the report noting that all figures contained within it were provisional at this time (although no material change was expected). Key data highlighted from the report were as follows:

- After the application of reserves (£3.86m commissioning reserve and a £1.6m Ofsted Improvement reserve) a £3.3million overspend was anticipated for Children & Families Service;
- Additional expenditure arising from Covid accounted for £2m of the overspend;
- The main areas of overspend were in the corporate parenting budget which, after the application of the commissioning reserve, recorded an overspend of £4m. Residential Care is the most significant area of overspend where services have 40 children placed at an average cost of £200k per placement per annum;
- Independent fostering placements are twice as expensive as using the in-house fostering team and this was also an area of significant overspend;
- A Social Care Grant of £9.3m was received to support adult and children's social care which was distributed evenly between these services;
- There were underspends in Clinical Services (£217k), Management (£944k) and Safeguarding and Learning Team (£182k) which contributed to an improved overall financial position;
- In terms of management actions taken to help reduce costs the Post 16 Commissioning panel has been set up to help address costs across the wider health, education and social care partnership. Further still, all high cost placements are reviewed weekly to ensure that children are stepped down where this is appropriate. The Workforce Development Board was also undertaking a strategic assessment of future staffing needs for the Directorate.

### Questions from the Commission

5.3 Understanding that £2m of the overspend was related to Covid 19, what proportion of the additional costs attributed to Covid are anticipated to continue into the 2021/22 budget?

- The bulk of the Covid 19 overspend related to increased staffing costs and delays in social care placements for children, and as such these costs are not expected to continue into 2021/22. It was acknowledged that this scenario could change however if there was a 3rd wave in the year ahead. The Finance Team was beginning to undertake preliminary financial modeling that possible future waves of Covid 19 would have on the Children and Families Service budget.

5.4 It was noted that there has been a reduction in the number of No Recourse to Public Funds Applications, can further details be provided as to what factors might be underpinning this?

- Although numbers had been falling, there had been a small recent increase in the number of families presenting for No Recourse for Public Funds (NRPF) assessment. The CFS was working with the University of Wolverhampton 'What Works' which is an early intervention project for families likely to seek NRPF. The decline in number of applications was attributed to the impact of Covid and increased border restrictions.

5.5 What factors are underlying the increase in demand and budget pressures for both Under 18 and post 18 semi-independent placements? What options does the Council have to help contain costs for semi-independent placements?

- CFS had undertaken a forensic review of the use of 40+ children in residential care and 46 semi-independent care. There are a number of key lessons from this piece of work:
  - 1) The service was confident that children are placed in high quality semi-independent care and well supported;
  - 2) Many young people presenting are around 16/17 years of age who are often troubled with acute housing needs. Placement options for these young people are relatively limited as few can be placed in foster care. In response the service has further developed and improved the joint assessments process when these young people first access the service, where the service has tried to support the young people and address needs through a social care framework rather than solely housing.
  - 3) A number of these children would be better cared for by a foster carer, but there needs to be additional work to improve the recruitment of local foster carers. These foster carers need additional support to help care for 16/17 year olds who have very specific needs.
  - It was noted that whilst there has been an increase in the number of children being placed in semi-independent care over the past 18 months, the most recent data would suggest that this has levelled off over the past 3 months. This has been the result of tighter assessments at the 'front door' and more engagement with families, and holding families to account more in supporting the needs of this cohort of adolescents.

5.6 Could further clarification be provided on the areas of underspend in the CFS budget and whether these were due to Covid? Has this contributed to a better financial position?

- It was acknowledged that there had been areas of underspend but these were marginal compared to additional costs for Covid. The Finance Team were reviewing how Covid had impact on services with a particular view about how this may generate future efficiencies.

5.7 In terms of residential care homes in which children are placed, can further details be provided as to where these are located? What impact does an out of borough placement have on young people? Is there any intention in developing a more localised response where additional capacity is created closer to home?

- No data was available on the number and location of children in residential care placed out of the borough, though this could be provided to the Commission. CFS agreed that it was important to keep children safe and



protected and where possible close to their family and social networks. For some young people with highly complex needs, a residential home was the best option, though the placement options were very limited. A placements manager oversees this process and ensures that placements do meet the needs of young people. For all these placements there is an emphasis on therapeutic input to ensure that children are developing and their needs are being addressed with a view to bringing them back into other less intensive care options such as foster care. Out of the 40 children that were assessed in the forensic review, the majority were deemed to be in the correct setting and that just 4 could have been placed in foster care. These children had very high needs which were being met well by the residential home. There would be a residential placement review across the service every 6 months,

- Hackney is part of a consortium of other Children's Services across NE London which does support 3 children's homes, which CFS does have access to. It is really important to match needs of young people to these settings, and whilst there had been a number of vacancies in the past few months children from Hackney could not have been placed there as their needs would have disrupted the home and other children there.

**Agreed: CFS to provide data /mapping on the residential homes in which children are placed.**

**Agreed: Forensic analysis of the review of residential - semi-independent care to be sent to the Commission.**

5.8 The report has indicated a dependency on reserves to offset overspends in the CFS. How sustainable is this approach?

- At present CFS was having to contend with a significant surge in demand for children's social care services. The Finance team were looking to look at demand planning and income stream over the next 3 years to understand further what the service pressures are likely to be. This exercise has commenced and will complete over the summer and will hopefully result in a cost reduction plan to bring the budget back in line.
- It was expected that the Social Care Grant would continue and increase in the future, but it was accepted this was not sustainable and that a more comprehensive settlement would be needed.

5.9 The Commission had earlier heard about new developments in commissioning INMSS for SEND provision which will improve contract monitoring and value for money assessments. Is there any potential learning from these new developments in the SEND team which can be applied to commissioning children social care provision?

- As part of the cost reduction plan for 2021/22 CFS had been meeting with high cost residential homes to build a better understanding of how fees were calculated. In this process it was noted that some residential settings had been charging for 24 hour care when young people were actually in education during the day. Whilst there was a much more forensic look at the fees being charged, in general there was very little leeway given the nature of the residential children's home market.

- 5.10 The number of children being placed in independent foster care appears to be rising at the expense of in-house foster care placements. What is the service doing to increase recruitment for in-house foster carers?
- The service is aware of this issue and wishes to recruit more foster carers. 15 households were currently being assessed for eligibility for the in-house foster care team. There has been a realignment of the fostering team over the past 6 months where the recruitment team and foster care team are now working more closely. Now foster care social workers also undertake assessments that would have previously been made by the recruitment team, this is beneficial as the foster carer can provide professional support to new foster carers who they know through the assessment process. This has been important to help retain foster carers.
  - As a result of Covid, people were re-evaluating their lives and there had been an upsurge in the number of people seeking to become foster carers. A key issue remains however is that there is a mismatch between the expectations of new foster carers (who are looking to foster young children) and the reality that the main demographic of children entering care are children aged 14+. A permanent recruitment manager was also now in place.
- 5.11 The commission noted that housing was a significant barrier to foster carer recruitment. Are there any ways which the council can address this issue more corporately?
- CFS had been working with finance to assess how prospective foster carers could be supported to extend their homes when they had insufficient bedroom capacity. If a loft conversion or extension could be built this would enable new foster carers to be recruited, and given the relative high costs of residential care, this would have a short payback period. There were contractual issues to consider however, such as whether the foster carer would be required to continue fostering. There were concerns around the enforceability of such arrangements.
- 5.12 What does the data reveal about foster carer retention in Hackney?
- There was a comprehensive training programme to support in-house foster carers. There is an issue around retention of foster carer retention as the skills expected of foster carers is evolving in response to the evolving needs of children entering care. There were real contextual safeguarding risks for many children which foster carers often found difficult to manage and address, and the service was working with foster carers to help improve their skills and confidence to be able to retain these placements. Foster carers have to hold children through some very turbulent times in their lives and the skills, patience and expertise they demonstrate in doing so should not be underestimated.
  - The Mockingbird Hub was also being used to support foster carers on the ground as was increased levels of peer support. Officers were also developing a non-academic pathway for accreditation at Level 3 so that this can be used for further career development.
- 5.13 The Chair thanked officers for attending and responding to questions from members of the Commission. The Chair noted that there had been financial pressures within the corporate parenting budget for a number of years and it was right that the

Commission retain oversight of this to ensure that adequate measures are in place to contain these without compromising services to young people. It is hoped that the work of the Commission in respect of adolescents entering care will contribute to this issue.

## **6. Action Plan Arising from Ofsted Inspection**

[Following an earlier declaration of interest, Cllr Gordon excused herself from this item.]

6.1 Ofsted inspected the Children and Families Services in Hackney in November of 2019 where children's social care was adjudged to 'require improvement'. Six areas were identified as requiring improvement:

1. The quality of information-sharing by partners and the quality of decision-making within strategy discussions.
2. The assessment of the impact for children of living in neglectful environments to inform authoritative and child-centred practice.
3. The quality of assessment and planning for children subject to private fostering arrangements.
4. The timeliness and effectiveness of pre-proceedings work, including the quality of contingency planning.
5. The welfare of children who are missing education or who are home educated is safeguarded.
6. The effectiveness of management oversight by leaders and managers at all levels, including the effectiveness of oversight from child protection conference chairs.

6.2 In response to the inspection, the Children & Families Service drew up a Childrens Social Care Action plan which was submitted to Ofsted for approval in March 2020. The Commission scrutinised progress against this action plan in November 2020. Two reports were submitted as part of the ongoing scrutiny of the improvements required by the Ofsted inspection:

1. An update on the Children's Social Care Action Plan
2. Proposals to review the Unit Model of Social Work in Hackney

6.3 The Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Children's Social Care introduced the Action Plan Update. The Cabinet member thanked officers in preparing the update and for the ongoing work to improve children's social care in light of the Ofsted report. It was noted that the Council was trying to be as open and transparent as possible about the work to improve, and all updates were published on the website as it was important that the local community hold the council to account.

6.4 Officers highlighted a number of key issues from the report:

- Audits were showing a positive trajectory on information sharing across the safeguarding partnership;
- A training and development programme for all staff in dealing with child neglect had been commissioned for all staff;
- Over 90% of assessments are completed within statutory time frame of 45 days;

- 12 children are in private fostering arrangements, a small but very vulnerable cohort of young people - case audits had found that practice for 10 out of 12 was rated as 'good' or 'outstanding';
- The CFS has also strengthened its supervision offer by front line managers to improve effective oversight of cases.
- Children's summaries have been introduced on the front of case files which is important in the context of the interim information management systems which have been introduced;
- A new monthly meeting with staff has been developed to provide an additional perspective to improve quality assurance, this is very much a 'bottom-up' process in which front line managers can raise issues with senior management.

#### Questions from the Commission

6.5 Metrics detailed within the report would suggest that whilst progress is being made in some areas, there are a number of metrics which show that further improvement is still required (e.g. information sharing, children living in neglectful environments). How confident is the service that sufficient and timely progress is being made in readiness for a future inspection?

- The improvement journey is still progressing for CFS and the acting Director of CFS had taken on a supporting role for the new Director, to ensure that the service was ready for the next Ofsted inspection. The key areas for improvement that were highlighted by Ofsted (lack of management oversight, drift and delay in decision making, children staging too long in neglectful circumstances) have all undergone significant improvement though it will take some time to embed all these new systems. Every authority has to be ready for an inspection as this can come at any time, and the service was confident that it can evidence improvement for the service areas required for an expected Ofsted focused visit between July and December. It was acknowledged however that the CFS was still on a journey to obtain a good rating from Ofsted in an inspection of children's social care.

6.6 Well supported, positive and engaged staff are central to service improvement yet it is clear that front line staff have faced acute pressures over the past 18 months as they have had to deliver practice improvements required for Ofsted alongside dealing with the impact of Covid and the cyber attack. What assurance can be provided to the Commission about the morale of children's social care staff? Have any audits or surveys taken place? Has there been any increase in staff turnover in the past 12 months? What additional resources and support mechanisms have been put in place to help staff?

- The CFS is acutely aware of the pressures that staff have been under over the past 18 months and is at the forefront of concerns. Although staff morale was assessed to be good at the last inspection, it cannot be complacent on this and has a number of programmes and plans in place to support this. New communication systems with staff were developed over the pandemic and the service is now at a point of transition in which it is trying to retain the positive elements of how the service adapted (virtual meetings). 'Schwartz Rounds' have been piloted in CFS which is a themed support approach for staff, giving them space to discuss the emotional impact of their work.

- No data was available on staff turnover at the meeting, but in general it was reported that compared favourably to other neighbouring authorities. It was noted however that the pandemic had prompted staff to re-evaluate their lives and careers and it was clear that some staff had left (e.g. to return to their home country).
- Early this year, a new cohort of social workers had been recruited from the pool of agency workers which was a positive development, and CFS would be working to ensure that this group of staff are well supported and maintain their positions within the service. An additional 12 newly qualified social workers had also been recruited who would be joining CFS over the summer.
- It was important that the service not only created structures which listen to the views of front line staff, but help to embed suggestions for improvement into practice.
- It was also noted that caseloads across CFS were good where social workers were on average looking after between 12-17 children (slightly more within the assessment team). This has been a conscious decision of the CFS. The shift from the unit model to a more individually accountable model of professional practice has also enabled a higher level of management support for individual caseloads.

6.7 Is the CFS satisfied that children are not living in neglectful situations or situations of harm for too long before action is taken?

- The CFS had undertaken an enormous amount of work in responding to this issue identified by Ofsted and the service has directed additional support to the management and support of children's plans. There has been much work to improve the management sign-off of interventions and review of casenotes. It was suggested that the previous Hackney model in which a consultant social worker oversaw a caseload of 34 children and young people with a collaboration of social workers supporting these children was not effective in identifying the progress that children were making. It was also noted at the time of the last full inspection that consultant social workers had in the region of 80+ children within their caseloads limiting the oversight that could be provided. There is now improved individual accountability within the structure where individual social workers are accountable for their professional practice. There is now a three tiered layer in which social workers are supported by Consultant Social Workers who are in turn supported by a Practice Development Manager which will increase managerial oversight and reduce the risk of children being left in neglectful circumstances. The introduction of the Children's Resource Panel has brought a systematic approach to supporting children from prevention right through to permanence.

6.8 The Commission noted that just 54% of children being electively home educated (specifically those with an EHCP) had been provided with an annual review. Why were so few being undertaken and what was the service planning to do to increase the number of reviews?

- The EHCP review process is the responsibility of the SEND team who would be best able to respond to this question. It was noted that this service had worked hard to improve the quality and consistency of these assessments.

- 6.9 What steps is the CFS taking to ensure that the workforce reflects the community which it supports?
- Officers did not have data to hand, but reassured members of the Commission that workforce data was monitored quarterly for the whole of CFS. At practitioner level the service is broadly reflective of the community, though there is some room for improvement. In terms of permanent practice staff there is a higher proportion of white staff whereas among agency staff there is a higher proportion of practitioners who are Black. The service has written to individual agency staff encouraging them to become permanent and this has been successful. In terms of senior managers, there is a disproportionate number of white staff which CFS hopes to rectify through inclusive recruitment, the Anti-Racist Action Plan and succession planning. The service is also working to develop the cultural competency of staff for working with children and families who may not be of the same cultural background as them.

- 6.10 The Hackney model has been in operation for a number of years, what has changed to prompt the re-evaluation of the Hackney model? What are the strategic intentions for the review of the model?
- The Hackney model was innovative in 2008 which through the provision of additional administrative support helped social workers to spend more time with children and families with whom they worked. Changes in resources and increased demand has changed the context for social work, and staff had raised concerns that the model was not giving them enough time to do what was expected of them given the number of children being held within units. The Ofsted focused visit and inspection with its assessment of the need to improve managerial oversight was also a catalyst for change. In the end, the model was mismatched to the demands and expectations of the service and the level of support that children and families need.
  - The landscape of children's social care has evolved significantly since 2008 for example there is now much greater emphasis on contextual safeguarding in assessing risks to children and young people and there is now much greater awareness and understanding of the impact that domestic abuse has on families. The Clinical Service has been critical to the success of the Hackney model and still plays a significant role in supporting children, families and staff across CFS. The Clinical Service has adapted and modernised and is now central to the Hackney model. In essence the Hackney model hasn't been erased, it's been updated and refreshed.

- 6.11 The Chair thanked officers for attending and responding to questions from members of the Commission. In summing up, the Chair noted that it was important to maintain oversight of the key metrics which underpin the measurement of improvement of children's social care in readiness for a future Ofsted inspection.

## **7. Work Programme**

- 7.1 The updated outline work programme was discussed by the Commission. Since the last meeting the Chair and Vice Chair had met with both Cabinet members to discuss the work programme going forward into 2021/21 and will also be meeting senior officers in the coming weeks. The Commission will be consulting and

updating the Commission as we go forward in agreeing the work programme over the summer.

- 7.2 The main additions to the work programme are as follows:
- Maternal mental health disparities will be taken at a joint meeting of the health in Hackney and Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission on October 11th 2021.
  - A briefing paper had been received by the Commission on housing options for children leaving care. The Chair and Vice Chair together with members from Living in Hackney will meet officers to scope this item.
  - In respect to the impact of LTN on children and young people, the Chair and Vice Chair together with members from the Skills, Economy & Growth Commission to scope and plan for this as part of a broader item on decarbonising transport.

- 7.3 The Commission will be updated on new development over the summer with a finalised programme published in October 2021.

## **8. Minutes**

- 8.1 Matters arising - at 5.5-5.6 the Commission discussed borough wide attainment data for children and young people sitting exams for 2020 and in the forthcoming year. The absence of this data is concerning as this is central to assessments on the attainment gap, an ongoing piece of work of the Commission. The Commission will meet with officers to see how best to take this work forward.

- 8.2 The minutes of the meeting held on the 12th June 2021 were agreed by the Commission.

## **9. Any other business**

The date of the next meeting is at 7pm on 6th October 2021.

**Meeting closed at 9.45pm**