

Overview & Scrutiny

Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission Minutes of 11th May 2021

Attendees

Sophie Conway (Councillor) (Chair)
Margaret Gordon (Councillor) (Vice Chair)
Katie Hansen (Councillor)
James Peters (Councillor)
Humaira Garasia (Councillor)
Richard Brown (Statutory Co-optee)
Jo Macleod (Co-opted member)

In attendance:

- Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Children's Social Care
- Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks & Play
- Anne Canning, Group Director, Children and Education
- Annie Coyle, Director of Children & Families Service
- Annie Gammon, Head of Hackney Learning Trust and Director of Education
- Fran Cox, Head of High Needs & School Places
- Chris Roberts, Head of Wellbeing & Education Safeguarding
- Maraian Lavelle, Head of School Places
- Amy Wilkinson, Integrated Commissioning Director for CYP & Maternity
- Sophie McElroy, Head of Wellbeing & Mental Health Services in Schools

Scrutiny Officer in the Chair

1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

- 1.1 Cllr Margaret Gordon nominated Cllr Sophie Conway for the position of Chair and this was seconded by Cllr James Peters. There being no further nominations, Cllr Conway was elected as Chair.

Cllr Conway in the Chair

- 1.2 Cllr Katie Hansen nominated Cllr Margaret Gordon for the position of Vice Chair and this was seconded by Cllr James Peters. There being no further nominations, Cllr Gordon was elected as Vice Chair.

2. Terms of Reference

- 2.1 Members of the Commission noted the terms of reference for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission.

3. Apologies for absence

- 3.1 Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Commission:
- Cllr Anna Lynch
 - Justine McDonald
 - Shabnum Hassan
 - Michael Lobenstein
 - Ernell Watson.

4. Urgent Items / Order of Business

4.1 There were no urgent items and the agenda was as published.

5. Declarations of interest

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

- Cllr Gordon was an Advisory Lawyer at Department of Health and would not ask any questions in relation to item 8 (Mental Health) on the agenda;
- Richard Brown as Executive Head of New Regents College declared an interest in item 7 (Pupil Movement);
- Cllr Peters was a governor at a school in Hackney;
- Jo McLeod was a governor at a school in Hackney.

6. SEND Performance & Recovery Plan

6.1 The Commission requested a strategic update on SEND services from Hackney Education Service (HES) in relation to service performance, finance and recovery plans. A short report was provided to the Commission for review.

6.2 The Director of Education and Head of High Needs and School Places introduced the report. It was reiterated that Local Authorities and SEND services were facing acute pressures in relation to increased demand for services against a backdrop of budgetary constraint. Local SEND services had an obligation to deliver high quality services to children and young people and officers were working with young people, their families and local stakeholders to deliver this.

6.3 A detailed review of SEND services was taking place in which a number of active workstreams had been created to support service improvement and to help reduce the financial deficit. A key aim of the review was to develop in-borough provision to ensure that more children could be educated close to home in Hackney. Not only would greater in borough provision reduce travel time for young people and costs to the service, it would support a more integrated model of service support with statutory and other support services.

Questions from the Commission.

6.4 Increased demand for SEND services is currently running at around 16-17% per annum. What strategic analysis has been undertaken around factors underpinning this increase and is demand set to continue to increase at current levels in future years? Is there any data on the types of SEND needs identified and SEND services required?

- The extension of EHCPs to young people to the age of 25 had contributed to a significant increase in the number of plans in operation. This had resulted in a growth in the size of year cohorts moving into the 18+ age group for a number of years. There had also been an increase in the number of children and young people who were being diagnosed on the Austistic Spectrum which had also contributed to the increase in the number of EHCPs (this increase was seen across all age groups). Increase in demand for SEND services had been experienced across all boroughs, though increase demand in Hackney was at the higher end of the scale.
- A key ambition of the Local SEND Partnership was to develop a more graduated response in which children in mainstream schools could receive a spectrum of SEND service support before it was necessary to apply for an

EHCP. With well trained staff and with reasonable adjustments, children with a range of SEND can be supported in mainstream schools before recourse to an EHCP.

6.5 Just over 40% of EHC Plans are completed in the statutory 20 week time period. What can we learn from higher performing local authorities to ensure more EHCPs are completed within statutory timescales? To what extent is this related to shortage of personnel and in particular Educational Psychologists?

- There has been a marked improvement in the performance of local services in completing assessments within the 20 week time period as this was now running at around 60%. Guidance set out in the Children and Families Act reform of SEND service now means that there is greater involvement of children and families in producing plans, and whilst this inevitably takes longer, better quality plans result. Whilst the service wanted to ensure that EHCPs were produced quickly, it did not want to sacrifice the quality of plans being drawn-up in the process.
- The increase in timescales for completing EHCPs has also been driven by the increase in demand (c17%) which is being supported by no additional increase in officers. It was noted that the assessments of many professionals, including Educational Psychologists, help produce EHCPs and this can be a lengthy process to coordinate. The service focuses on producing quality assessments rather than the timescales, which again means that this can be a lengthy process.

6.6 A key issue for SEND provision is the appropriate identification of young people who may need SEND support. The Education Policy Institute have recently published their national investigation of this issue which found that SEND support is dependent - not on individual needs and personal circumstances, but on what primary school young people attend particularly if this has a good record of SEND support. The same report also found that Academies have 'depressed rates' of SEND referral and support. What variations of SEND referral and support exist across schools in Hackney and how can we ensure that all schools are equipped to consistently and effectively refer and support young people with SEND?

- Whilst there was variation in local referrals at primary level the actual differences in number across schools was very small. It was crucial that school staff are skilled and trained to support children with SEND, particularly school SENCOs. Hackney Education Service provides a wide range of centralised support to equip local school staff in this role (e.g. dedicated training, conferences and local forums to share good practice).
- It was acknowledged that whilst many young people may have a high level of need, this may not qualify them for an EHCP, therefore the onus was on outreach support to ensure that schools had the wraparound support to help children with additional needs in mainstream settings.

6.7 Would additional support to schools to assist children with SEND include additional funding?

- The SEND team would review all aspects of provision, including school funding for SEND support, to optimise resources available through the High Needs block. Given that it was unlikely that a substantial increase in SEND funding from the government would materialise, local authorities and local

SEND services would need to find creative ways to fund local services in the future, which could include joint commissioning with Health and Social Care Partners as well as with neighbouring boroughs if this was appropriate.

- 6.8 The service is forecasting an overspend of £8.7m at the end of financial year 2021. Payments to independent and non-maintained schools have been identified as a significant cost pressure for the service. How is the SEND team managing this financial pressure in the short term, and what longer term structural changes are planned to reduce external commissioning and to reduce this cost pressure in the future?
- The Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks and Play noted that the cumulative deficit rolled over would be in the region of £13m at the end of this year and there is no guidance from the central government as to what measures can be put in place to mitigate this. The service had looked at areas of high spend which included the commissioning of independent provision and plans had begun to be put in place to address this and some capital spending had already been committed to support this.
 - It was noted that whilst some of these independent providers were located in-borough, most were not and that a full scale review of all these providers was taking place. It was noted that the SEND service would be reforming its SEND commissioning strategy as part of this review and ensure that these reflect local priorities and ambitions post pandemic. It was hoped that most children with SEND would be cared for and educated within the community and that only those children with the most complex needs would be placed out of the borough. There is a wider estates strategy to support this which will involve both entirely new provision and new provision attached to mainstream schools. It is been forecast that demand will continue to grow and thus it was important to find a long term solution (5-10 years) and to get best value for the public money spent. More detail will be available once the SEND service consults and agrees a way forward with local partners in this process.
- 6.9 In the context of 6.8, concerns have been raised about a local independent provider in respect of their poor relationship with the National Education Union and of the quality of education being provided. What oversight does HES have with independent provision commissioned by the SEND team to ensure that a good quality of education is provided, there is harmonious relationship between them and trade unions and staff are treated fairly and well?
- The Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks and Play was concerned at developments at the individual school in question, particularly as there had been 20 days of strike action there recently which was unusual in these settings. It was noted that the national representatives of the Union were now negotiating with the school to help bring about a resolution. The Cabinet member and Deputy Mayor Bramble had also met with the CEO of the group which operates the school and the headteacher. Whilst there was a belief that this was a good educational setting and that parents in Hackney actively wanted to place their children there, it was not apparent that the setting had good staff relations. Cabinet members had been given assurances that these relationships would be improved.
 - The Director of Education noted that there had also been specific concerns around the quality of education and that as a result there had been two

inspections, one by Ofsted and one by the Head of SEND in Hackney. Both inspections found the quality of education to be good. The school continues to be encouraged to resolve the dispute with staff.

6.10 Concerns around the individual school cited above, has highlighted the high annual costs that such provision to the local authority. It has been suggested that the annual cost of a pupil placement in this school was in the region of £60k compared to £30k for placements at The Garden School (maintained specialist school). How does the service plan to unlock funding to support a transition to more localised and maintained settings?

- It was noted that it was unsettling for children with SEND to move schools mid placement and therefore some places would be 'wired-in' for a number of years. In addition, there was no capacity in local specialist settings at present to accommodate any immediate transformation. A strategy is being developed to support this transformation and whilst central government funds would be available to contribute to this, it would not be totally cover such costs. A cost benefit analysis will be undertaken which should demonstrate the benefits of such an investment to the Council in a relatively short space of time.
- The SEND service will consult with both children and parents in developing any capital investment programme.

6.11 It was noted that feedback had been received from some parents which suggested that some children were getting as little as an hour of education a day or just in attendance for part of the day when 25 hours was statutorily required. Could further work be done to assure the Commission that there are adequate monitoring arrangements in place for independent provision to ensure that they were providing educational support for which they have been commissioned to provide to young people?

- Contractual arrangements and monitoring and review processes would also be included within the SEND review process which would develop standards on inclusion, attendance and children's progress. The SEND team would encourage any parent who is experiencing this issue to contact the SEND team to relay their concerns and these would be investigated.

6.12 Given that the Audit Committee had highlighted the issue of falling school rolls across the borough in mainstream schools, does this provide an opportunity to unlock spare capacity for SEND provision within existing school settings?

- This is an issue which HES is considering as it would be beneficial to make use of such space where appropriate.

6.13 In summing up the Chair noted that concerns about an independent setting had highlighted a number of issues which warranted further discussion and scrutiny. In this the Chair indicated that the Commission would look at the Commissioning process for SEND contracts at its meeting in July 2021.

Agreed: SEND Commissioning Process to be added to the July 12th meeting.

7. Pupil Movement

- 7.1 In response to the Commission's work on off-rolling in schools, Hackney Education Service agreed to provide annual updates on the number of pupil movements. This would be the first update provided which will assist the Commission to maintain oversight of the number and demographics of those children who:
- (i) Have been permanently excluded from school;
 - (ii) Are receiving education in an Alternative Provision setting;
 - (ii) Have moved from school into Elective Home Education;
 - iii) Have changed schools through the managed move process.
- 7.2 The Deputy Mayor introduced this item and reiterated the importance of keeping pupil movement under review particularly in relation to disproportionality. The report also highlighted the work of Hackney Education Service in tackling school exclusions, which was a priority for the Council.
- 7.3 The Director of Education noted some of the work that schools were doing in relation to pupil movement. It was noted that the pandemic and school closures had impacted on many aspects of pupil movements from and between schools. The council continued to prioritise inclusion among local schools. It was noted that whilst the pandemic had brought about a significant fall in permanent school exclusions, it was suggested that the positive work that schools had been undertaking in the past 12 months would have contributed to a fall regardless.
- 7.4 The Director of Education noted that the percentage of children moving schools in years 9 through to 11 had fallen. There was a small number of schools which had experienced significant in year turbulence which explained the high rates of pupil movement at these schools.
- 7.5 The Head of Wellbeing and Education Safeguarding made the following points:
- Many of the cases relating to Children Missing Education were those where families moved overseas during the pandemic which explained why figures rose sharply from April to September, but have fallen back since.
 - There has been a significant increase in the number of children in Elective Home Education, this was mainly due to Covid and the anxiety and health concerns of a number of families. For some parents this was a more positive choice, where they had enjoyed lockdown schooling and wished to continue to home educate their children. These trends have been mirrored nationally.
 - It was noted that a disproportionate number of parents of children from traveller communities and children from Black British ethnic origin had chosen to educate their children from home. HES had continued to support all these families and some children were now returning to mainstream settings.
 - An internal audit had been carried out of children missing education in Hackney which provided a positive assessment of the service and there were no recommendations for action.
 - The number of exclusions had decreased, partly as a result of school closures and new behaviour management systems introduced by schools. The disproportionality in these figures, with higher rates of young boys from Black ethnic groups being permanently excluded, continued to be a concern for HES. This situation was common to managed moves also.

Questions from the Commission

- 7.6 There has been a significant reduction in the number of exclusions over lockdown. Is there any other learning from lockdown which can contribute to fewer school exclusions in the future? How have the adjustment of school behaviour policies contributed to this decline in exclusions?
- There has been engagement and discussion with all schools during the lockdown period to help understand what new practices have worked and what should be kept, and new approaches to behaviour management was one such area of learning. HES has facilitated the sharing of such learning and good practice across local schools to inform more positive behaviour management strategies for children and young people.
- 7.7 One of the most striking aspects of all this data was the consistent disproportionate representation of children from traveller communities and Black ethnic groups across all pupil movements categories. This data would suggest that these groups of young people are either opting out, not feeling that they are adequately served or being excluded. Given that these groups of young people are also amongst the poorer performing pupils, this underlines the significant challenge and urgency that the authority faces to address these inequalities. What is the strategic focus for the HES to address these inequalities?
- HES was tackling these inequalities in a number of ways, including through the support of the Young Black Men's Project, local initiatives to tackle unconscious bias, support inclusive leadership and improve cultural competence across educational settings. The Black Curriculum had been developed and was well supported in local schools. There was also a dedicated Traveller Education Officer who was engaging with traveller communities to act as a bridge between families and local schools. All these initiatives are embraced within the ambition to make schools more inclusive, so that all young people are positively engaged and supported in mainstream settings.
- 7.8 To what extent does tackling disproportionality figure in the actions and activities of officers supporting these groups of pupils (e.g. exclusions, managed moves and Elective Home Education)?
- Tackling inequalities is not an add-on in the work of officers, but very much integral to their work. Officers all have had unconscious bias and equalities training which helps them to identify and address inequalities in their work. Officers work is research based and interrogate local data to identify disproportionalities and target their work accordingly.
- 7.9 There has been a significant increase in the numbers of parents choosing to EHE their children. What pressures has this placed on the service, and has there been any additional resource provided to help support families choosing to EHE their children?
- Staffing was increased from 0.5 to 1.0 WTE for EHE in the summer of 2020, which was before the substantial increase which took place in Autumn of 2020. At the beginning of the autumn term, schools were requested to refer all parents considering EHE to HES. This allowed HES to have an initial conversation with them to ascertain the reasons behind the move and to 'myth bust' preconceived notions about EHE. An agency teacher has been in place

since the autumn term to help the service keep on top of issues like assessments. In addition, the decline in school exclusions has freed up other officers to support the EHE service, particularly around parental engagement to check on the welfare of children and families and to support young people coming back into the school system. Schools had supported this process by not removing children immediately from school rolls, which allowed HES time to engage parents to help understand their concerns around mainstream schooling and their motivations for EHE.

- HES had also worked with health colleagues to develop clear and consistent advice and support to children and families with anxieties about Covid in mainstream schools, which was positive and helpful to the families concerned.

7.10 Could it be confirmed that the work of New Regents College which had supported a primary partnership placements programme had helped to reduce the number of exclusions of children from primary school?

- The provision of primary partnership placements had a positive impact on reducing primary exclusions, and there had not been an exclusion in this sector since 2018. The Re-Engagement Unit has also helped to support this work.
- The Deputy Mayor commended the work that had been undertaken across local primary schools and believed that there was learning from these interventions which could inform work to reduce exclusions in the secondary school sector. Local secondary schools were also working hard to address permanent exclusion.

7.11 The report notes the Fair Access Panel without any reference to what this body is or who sits on the panel. In this context, what are 'weighting credits'?

- Each LA is required to have a Fair Access Protocol Panel (FAP) for children not offered a place through the normal admissions route (e.g. new residents, children returning from exclusion, children with SEND). All schools are required to participate and the FAP ensures that children are distributed equally across local schools. Some children come with a different weighting in this process (e.g. children returning from the criminal justice system are given a weight of 6.0) and a school league table of the children is published each year. The FAP is chaired by an independent Chair, and a range of officers from Admissions, SEND, Welfare & Education Safeguarding also attend. Other specialist input (e.g. social work, education psychology) is provided on an adhoc basis where needed.

7.12 Knowing the increased safeguarding risks of school moves (be it EHE, exclusion or managed moves) what additional oversight and support is provided for these groups of young people? Is there any coordinated multi-agency assessment, referral or support systems in place for these young people?

- Young Hackney are present in all schools across the borough and can work with children and families in a preventative way. In terms of managed moves, the exclusions officer engages with and works with children and families and provides additional support and oversight through this process. Locally, managed moves do help prevent permanent exclusion and keep children in mainstream settings. When children move into EHE they will be formally assessed within 12 weeks, but officers will

generally engage with families much sooner to undertake an informal assessment, ensure that parents know what they are taking on and are aware of the risks.

- Schools have integral knowledge of the young person is important, thus if there were concerns about a young person who was moving into EHE, there would be a referral to the FAST team in the Children and Families Service.
- The service is looking to develop a multi-agency support model to identify young people at risk of exclusion and to establish a preventative approach to support these children to maintain their placements in school.

7.12 The report would suggest that the decrease in roll movements from 6% to 5% between years 10 and 11 may be attributed to a significant drop at a very small number of schools. Does this mean that many schools have not recorded a decrease in pupil movement? How is the 5% threshold determined?

- Many of the schools had relatively low numbers of pupil movement which had remained broadly static over this time. Where schools exceeded the 5% threshold of pupil movement, they were challenged on the reasons behind these.

Agreed: Further information on the pupil movement rates for individual schools (anonymised) and school types to be circulated to the panel.

7.13 It is known that children moving out of and between schools have a disrupted education which can lead to significantly poorer educational outcomes and have a longer term impact on CYP. What is Hackney Education doing to improve data tracking and outcome monitoring of these groups of young people (e.g. those who are excluded, school moves, children in EHE)?

- HES is moving from Capita to Synergy to improve data collection and monitoring. HES was also engaging with schools to get them to sign up to Orchestra, a data collection tool which would feed into the local authority. This would help to improve pupil tracking and outcome monitoring.

7.14 Although not a statutory requirement, would HES seek to collate data on internal exclusions that take place in school? Does HES have any oversight of the nature and number of internal exclusions?

- It was acknowledged that such data was limited, and in the most parts confined to the schools and their governing bodies. There is no requirement for schools to report this data to HES, but officers would consider if and how such data could be practically collected and collated. This would depend on the engagement of individual schools.
- This would also be an issue that School Improvement Partners would tackle in their feedback and improvement to schools. Additional guidance had also been provided to school governing bodies as to how such data should be reported locally for their assessment. Getting buy in from schools was critical for wider sharing of this data, and whether such data would be used for monitoring or practice development would likely be influential in this.

7.15 In summing up, the Chair noted that Pupil Movement is now a fixed item on the

agenda of the Commission and would engage with the Director of Education as to formalise content and timing of the report in forthcoming work programmes. It was suggested that this item may best be taken in late autumn to allow for data consolidation and validation.

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

8. Children & Young People's Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing

8.1 The Commission has requested an update on the Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing of children and young people in Hackney in particular:

- Strategic priorities for local services;
- Key strategies to deliver on these priorities;
- Funding for local services.

8.2 Deputy Mayor introduced the item and noted that mental health and wellbeing had been a real focus for schools and children returned in September. The report set out the integrated approach that local providers would take to better support children and young people through to the age of 25. The Integrated Commissioning Workstream Director for CYP & Maternity also highlighted the following issues from the report:

- The City & Hackney Emotional Health & Wellbeing Strategy was an integrated strategy for children and young people aged 0-25 years. The strategy had been developed in partnership with local stakeholders and was out for formal consultation until the end of May 2021. The focus of the strategy was on prevention and to tackle the disproportionalities that are experienced by young people.
- Children and young people had also contributed to the development of the report by helping to identify local priorities and helping to develop the wording for key messages.
- A subsidiary report also highlighted a number of current 'pinch points' in children and young people's mental health services where increased demand and activity was being recorded these included:
 - Services for 18-15 year olds;
 - Increase in acute presentations;
 - Increase in eating disorders.

Questions from the Commission

8.3 What are the factors behind the increased demand for acute services? Are similar increases being seen across London?

- Access data at the end of the report noted that there is an estimated prevalence of 10% of children diagnosed with a mental health condition, yet just 30-40% of these are actually accessing services. This indicates that there is a lot of unmet need within the community. Whilst figures in Hackney are better than most boroughs in North East London, these figures are still very high.
- There were a number of reasons which were contributing to higher demand for acute services which included:
 - The impact of the lockdown on young people in general;
 - Lack of work and employment opportunities for 16-25 year olds;
 - Increased levels of depression and anxiety which have been noted

across the country.

- 8.4 One of the trends highlighted in the report is the increased number of children who are late presentations or who are not known to the CAMHS services. Given that this would suggest that there are issues with the accessibility or acceptability of preventative services - how does the local CAMHS partnership intend to respond?
- The increased incidence of late presentation and more acute presentations has been a driver to reform local CAMHS services, and lays at the heart of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy which aims to shift the balance of local services and local investment to that of prevention. The investment in Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools programme which seeks to provide early help to children and young people illustrated this approach. The partnership was also speeding up digital interventions such as Kooth to expand the preventative offer. Partners were also working with the Young Black Men Project to ensure that services were both acceptable and accessible to a diverse range of communities.
- 8.5 Can an update be provided on WAMHS and how this is being rolled out across all schools. Has the programme been evaluated as yet, and what is the outcome of that? What are the next steps for this programme?
- In terms of evaluation, a formal assessment was undertaken at the pilot stage of the programme. The programme has since expanded and now operates in a further 39 schools in addition to the 40 schools in the original pilot. The evaluation framework is developing as the programme grows and expands its offer.
 - The next steps. The programme was running in 69 maintained schools and 5 Charedi schools. Whilst all schools are invited to participate, there were a number of schools, maintained, independent and alternative provision which were not part of the programme. There were a number of universal events and training programmes on offer through WAMHS but the service was aware that it did not have full engagement. WAMHS was therefore putting a proposal together on how to engage and involve these schools. There was not sufficient resource to roll out dedicated CAMHS worker support to these settings at the moment.
 - There are ongoing challenges with the programme, most notably a CAMHS worker vacancy rate of around 20%. There is also a high turnover rate of staff in CAMHS services.
- 8.6 Is WAMHS reaching all children with protected characteristics? Are young people consulted and involved in the development of WAMHS?
- In terms of WAMHS, the programme can be shaped by the needs of individual schools. With the support of a CAMHS worker and School Improvement Partner, schools carry out an audit once a year covering 9 different strands which include both children's voice and diversity and inclusion. Schools focus on 3 areas within this framework each year. In the best examples, this forms part of the school improvement programme. There was also a WAMHS pilot in a number of Charedi schools.
- 8.7 Can you provide an overview of waiting lists for access to key CAMHS services at present?

- There have always been waiting lists for CAMHS service and these were slightly longer at the moment. Services were working more flexibly to engage and meet children and young people and their families which was helping to speed up access and make contact more quickly.
- More problematic was access to really acute services - such as beds in Tier 4 settings. There was a shortage of such beds across North East London. Services were working with colleagues in children's social care to help step down children from acute settings more quickly to free up places when it was safe and appropriate to do so. Acute pressures at Tier 4 was of course having a knock on effect for services in Tier 3 (specialist but non-residential). A range of mitigations were being planned across the service.

8.8 In summing up, the Chair highlighted the need to continue to look at this area given the impact that the pandemic has had on young people's mental health. The Commission would work with officers to identify what specific area it would like to bring back to the work programme later in 2021/22.

8.9 The Chair thanked officers for their reports and for responding to members' questions.

9. Children & Families Mid-Year Report (April to September 2020)

9.1 Activity from the Children and Families Service is reported twice yearly to the Commission so that it can maintain oversight and monitor levels of service provision. Usually this report would record activity for the first 6 months of 2020/21 (April to September 2020), however, due to the impact of the cyber attack on the council, full data was not available. The report therefore provided an overview of activity and data together, with a more detailed piece on plans to review and reform the Hackney (Unit) Model of children's social work. Given that the latter related more to Commission's work in relation to the monitoring of the Ofsted Action Plan, the Commission instead focused on:

- The impact of the cyber attack;
- Leadership changes;
- Headline activity data.

9.2 The Commission agreed to defer the reform of the Unit Model to the 12th July agenda when an update on the Ofsted Action Plan would be taken.

9.3 The Group Director for Children and Education introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- The Group Director emphasised how important children's emotional health and wellbeing was as services emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic and that Scrutiny would have an important role to play in ensuring equity of access as services were rebuilt and reshaped.
- As well as Covid-19, the service had to manage a number of critical events including the cyber attack, the urgent need to address racial inequalities in services and reconfigurations of services.
- There was an imminent change of leadership with a new Director of Children and Families commencing in July 2021 and a new Group Director for Children and Education commencing in August 2021.

- Covid-19 had been a significant challenge in the past year, but the service had still maintained face to face contact with those children and families where required, in line with statutory guidance and using PPE to keep children, families and staff safe. Services were beginning to readjust back to normal operations as government restrictions in relation to Covid-19 were eased. New digital contact has had some positive long lasting impacts on the way that services are able to communicate and engage with each other.
- The cyber attack was a malicious attack where access to key information systems that support the Children and Families Service, including youth justice was lost. Although interim systems were developed by IT support, there was a significant period of time when access to children's data was disrupted. Whilst this data has been recovered, it is not fully accessible until due diligence on the data has been completed. The return to a fully functioning database will not be possible until the end of the year.
- It is difficult to compare activity for 2020/21 on previous years because of the pandemic and in particular the closure of schools. Up to the end of March 2021, the number of looked after children and those on a Child Protection Plan remained broadly static in the service. It should be noted that it was difficult to enact interventions with young people at this time due to Covid-19 restrictions, thus their journey through the service may have been somewhat slower than might be expected.
- There was a significant reduction in the number of contacts, referrals and assessments made by the service. The number of children who are assessed within 45 days has increased significantly to about 75%.
- Key data on the nature and number of contacts to the Children and Families Service is reported frequently to the DfE to enable the government to monitor the impact of Covid-19 on services.
- The CFS in Hackney is confident that practice developments taking place over the past year will not mean that activity levels will revert to pre-Covid-19 levels. A systems review will hopefully ensure that interventions are delivered sooner and assessments are more proportionate to families' needs.

Questions from the Commission

- 9.4 Has the loss of data in respect of the cyber attack affected the ability of the Council to protect children in Hackney and how?
- This is difficult to qualify. It was clear however, that service partners have been a great assistance in accessing historical records or undertaking checks for the CFS. For example, the Metropolitan Police provided additional support so that additional checks could be made as new cases entered the system. Whilst it could not be said that the cyber attack had no impact, officers wanted to reassure the Commission that everything had been done to mitigate the chance of increased risks for children and young people. It was accepted that not all risks could be covered in this area.
- 9.5 What impact has the cyber attack had on the service response to improvements required set out in the Ofsted Action Plan and any plans for future re-inspection of the service?
- It has become apparent that the practice development required post-Covid-19 and the requirements of the Ofsted Action Plan are aligned. The service has

maintained a commitment to practice development and improvement throughout the pandemic.

- The pandemic situation was unprecedented and a very challenging time to lead the Children and Families Service. The quality of assessments that underpins social work practice has been outstanding in this period and this will continue as the service adapts. The work to prepare for a future Ofsted inspection of the service has not stopped.

9.6 The report highlights a number of significant changes in leadership all of which are occurring at a critical time for Children and Families Service in Hackney - with the service facing the challenges of the cyber attack, the pandemic and of course - responding to the outcome of the Ofsted inspection. What reassurance can be provided to the Commission that there is not only service stability at this critical juncture, but also that the service maintains focus on the delivery of the critical improvements that are necessary for children and their families?

- The critical part of this leadership change is the handover, and the current Group Director was working with the newly appointed Director of Children and Families and the Group Director for Children and Education. The service improvements and practice developments are so entrenched that it is difficult to waiver from these commitments. These two key posts will have a robust induction to take them through these key strategic commitments. The interim Head of Corporate Parenting is an existing manager with a long history of service within the organisation and senior leadership had much confidence in this interim appointment.
- The Director was confident that senior managers across the service had built resilience across the service in the past 6 months which would maintain continuity and direction during this period of leadership change.

9.7 There have been significant declines in contacts (down 29%), referrals (42%) and assessments (down 26%) in the Children and Families Service during 2020/21. As children have returned to school in March 2021 and other agencies that interact with children resume normal operations, is there any change / increase in contacts, referrals and assessments? How is the service supporting expected increased demand for services?

- Part of this reduction in contacts has been brought about through the early consultation and collaboration between local partners to help respond to needs earlier without recourse to statutory childcare assessment or referral. The service would be disappointed if there was a significant increase in the number of referrals to follow, as the necessary practice developments have been put in place to hopefully reduce the need for statutory interventions.
- When schools return however, there will be some increase as children will feel more confident to engage and seek help from adults. There are plans in place to support the expected increase in demand.

9.8 Looking more closely behind the decrease in activity - what analysis has been undertaken as to the demography (or other characteristics) behind the decline in contacts, referrals and assessments? That is, what does the data tell us about the children who are no longer being referred for statutory intervention and support?

- Ideally, the decline in referral numbers would be accounted for by those children who didn't really need to be seen within the statutory process in the

first place, and who can be dealt with more appropriately in their current setting where the school or other provider is confident and able to meet their needs safely. There may be some neglect cases which have not come to the attention of referring agencies - so this analysis will need to consider where fewer referrals are coming from and what type of referrals are not coming through as before.

Action: As part of the Ofsted Action Plan Item for 12th July meeting, further data / analysis of the difference in contacts, referrals, and assessments would be provided to the Commission.

- 9.9 Are there any legacy benefits from dealing with the pandemic which will be incorporated into day to day operation of the Children and Families Service?
- Closer working across the partnership, including schools, has been a significant benefit from dealing with covid-19.. There has also been improved community engagement and contact with key local groups which has resulted in more trusting relationships being fostered as a result.
- 9.10 The Chair and Vice Chair thanked the Group Director for her leadership through this difficult period for the Children and Families Services and for the positive and thoughtful way in which she engaged with this Commission throughout all this time. The Deputy Mayor echoed this thanks to the Group Director and for all staff across the service.
- 9.11 The Chair thanked officers for attending and responding to questions from the Commission.
- 10. Post 16 SEND Strategy**
- 10.1 Members the recommendations of the Commission in relation to its work on the emerging Post 16 SEND Strategy. The response of the Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years Parks and Play would be published when received.
- 11. Work Programme**
- 11.1 A new work programme is developed for the CYP Scrutiny Commission each municipal year. An outline programme which includes standing items and items agreed from last year's work programme was included within the agenda and reports pack for members to view and note.
- 11.2 The Commission will consult with local stakeholders in developing the work programme. As part of this process the Commission will also seek suggestions from members of the public and other community groups and organisations. Publicity to this effect will go out in the next few weeks. Members of the Commission will also be contacted in the coming weeks to seek their suggestions for topics for inclusion within the work programme. Other local stakeholders such as Cabinet members, Senior Officers and statutory partners would also be consulted for suggestions for the work programme.
- 11.3 All suggestions will be published in the June 14th agenda pack for members to discuss and agree for the new work programme for the year ahead.

11.4 The Chair also noted that there had been media attention on the behaviour policy in place at a local secondary school. The Chair noted that this highlighted ongoing concern with this issue and that the Commission would keep this under the spotlight in its work programme in the coming year.

12. Minutes of the last meeting

12.1 A correction at 4.53 of the minutes was noted, where the minutes should read 'it would be helpful to have data against all other pupils rather than against White British for a more accurate portrayal.....'.

12.2 The minutes were noted and agreed.

13. Any other business

13.1 There was no other business. The date of the next meeting was noted to be 14th June 2021.

The Meeting concluded at 21.30