

Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission Minutes of 12th January 2021

Attendees

Sophie Conway (Councillor) (Chair)
Margaret Gordon (Councillor) (Vice Chair)
Ajay Chauhan (Councillor)
Clare Potter (Councillor)
Katie Hansen (Councillor)
James Peters (Councillor)
Sharon Patrick (Councillor)
Clare Joseph (Councillor)
Sade Etti (Councillor)
Humaira Garasia (Councillor)
Justine McDonald (Statutory Co-optee)
Jo Macleod (Co-opted member)
Ernell Watson
Shabnum Hassan
Michael Lobenstein

In attendance:

- Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Children's Social Care
- Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Early Years, Families and Play
- Anne Canning, Group Director, Children and Education
- Annie Gammon, Head of Hackney Learning Trust and Director of Education
- Annie Coyle, Interim Director of Children and Families
- Chris Roberts, Head of Wellbeing & Education Safeguarding
- Yusuf Erol, Head of Finance, Children, Families and Education Services
- Jim Gamble, Independent Child Safeguarding Commissioner, City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Rory McCallum Senior Professional Adviser, City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Richard Brown, Head of Urswick Secondary School

Cllr Conway in the Chair

1. Apologies for absence

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Commission:
- Shuja Shaikh.
- 1.2 Apologies for lateness were received from the following members:
- Cllr Sharon Patrick.

2. Urgent Items / Order of Business

- 2.1 In response to the third national lockdown, the Commission received an update from the Director of Education and the Director of Children & Families Service. This was taken after Item 3.

3. Declarations of interest

- 3.1 The following declarations were received by members of the Commission:
- Cllr Chauhan was a member of NEU and a teacher at a school external to Hackney;
 - Cllr Peters was a governor at a school in Hackney;
 - Jo Macleod was a governor at a school in Hackney.

Urgent Item - Covid-19 Update from Directorates

U.1 The Chair welcomed the Director of Education and the Director of Children & Families to the meeting. At the outset, both Directors and their staff were thanked for the help and support they have provided to local children in young people during the pandemic to date.

Education Service

- U.2 the Director of Education provided a brief update to the Commission on the most recent developments for schools and education in relation to the third national lockdown. A summary of the key issues is presented below:
- Schools remain open to vulnerable children and those children of key workers. Those children who do not have access to IT facilities are also able to attend. As a result of the broadening of the vulnerability criteria there are more children on site and some schools have needed to prioritise children attending (with guidance from the Education Service);
 - With the experience of two earlier lockdowns, the authority was confident that schools had a robust programme of on-line teaching available to pupils.
 - Secondary schools had been preparing for mass testing (lateral flow tests) though the urgency of the roll-out has diminished with the lockdown and fewer children on site. Schools had the equipment and would be testing those children that were on site. Testing pilots would also be running in both primary and early years settings locally.
 - All three special schools are all open with the support of SEND transport. Covid testing was also taking place in special schools alongside SEND transport staff.
 - Whilst early years settings are required to be open fully, concerns remain about the increased risk to staff and children given the limits to which social distancing can be applied.
 - The Council is lobbying government to change its plans to continue with the early years census in January 2021, as the number of children on roll would be significantly lower than would be expected, and would have a detrimental impact on future funding;
 - Almost all schools have received IT devices from the government programme, and schools were generally in a better position than they were in the summer. It was clear however, that additional devices were still needed.
 - New arrangements for exams have been announced, and although these have yet to be finalised, it was understood that teacher assessments would play an important role in the assessment process. SATS for KS1 and KS2 had also been abandoned.

Overview & Scrutiny

- Schools had been asked to step in to provide FSM either through hampers, vouchers or use of Edenred Scheme. Given the issues raised over the quality of FSM provided at the moment, a longer term solution was expected to be announced shortly.
- The Education Service continued to work with the Children and Families Service to support vulnerable children.

Children & Families Service

U.3 The Director of Children and Families presented to the Commission key issues arising in the service:

- The service has developed guidance to ensure that staff are able to operate safely and also keep local children and families safe;
- Every family within the Disabled Children Service had been contacted in the last lockdown and this exercise was being repeated and would be completed by 22nd January 2021.
- Young Hackney continued to support young people virtually and through the active outreach programme.
- The Vulnerable Children's Group, which is composed of officers from Education, Early Help and Social Care, continues to meet to develop and maintain oversight of vulnerable children.
- As expected (and has been experienced in other authorities) referrals into the FAST Team have reduced since the start of the 3rd lockdown.
- As far as possible, the CFS was continuing to operate a 'business as usual' programme in the safest way possible.

Questions from the Commission

U.4 Had any assessments been carried out on the impact of virtual learning and children being isolated at home? How had virtual schooling impacted on child wellbeing?

- Schools are working to develop a varied programme of activities for children receiving their education at home. Lessons may be live or recorded which allow for different levels of engagement and varied learning pace.
- It is undeniable that there were concerns around children's wellbeing, not only in relation to their home environment, but also their mental wellbeing. It was noted that referrals had increased for mental health services. In response schools had also increased pastoral care for students and every child is at least seen weekly by a tutor. Many schools continue to have form time and year group and all-school assemblies.

U.5 What advice is being given to schools to help them prioritise children who are able to attend in this third lockdown?

- The advice to schools is that vulnerable children should be prioritised. Critical workers who are single parents also gain priority as too do children whose parents are both critical workers.

U.6 In relation to ongoing issues relating to the digital divide (devices and internet access), what is known about the quantum of need locally? How is the council improving access to IT?

Overview & Scrutiny

- At the outset of the pandemic, it was estimated that over 2,000 laptops were needed locally but this would have been reduced by recent allocations. Needs were of course changing particularly as family circumstances change and evolve. Advice about free internet access was being collated and disseminated among local schools. A further school audit was planned to ascertain current IT needs.
- A local school had 235 laptops delivered on Monday 11th January and these were being configured for use and delivery to pupils.

U.7 School staff and pupils were receiving abuse about wearing masks in and around the school perimeter. What role can the council play in improving awareness of Covid related safety measures around schools?

- The Council would look to update advice and guidance issues through the Communications team to ensure that this reflected the principles of health and safety adhered to in local schools.

U.8 As many early years settings are dependent on parental fees for income, how will early years settings fare financially in the 3rd lockdown?

- It was an uncertain picture for early years at the moment, as future funding methods have not been agreed and published. A number of smaller settings who have been able to furlough staff, have remained closed in this lockdown.
- The Cabinet member for Families Early Years and Play noted that central government was being lobbied to retain existing funding levels for early years using the January 2020 census data. Further information about finance was expected from the Department of Education shortly. It was important that information was provided soon to ensure that the sector retained confidence in both central and local government.

U.9 Covid 19 has created additional pressures on the local authority in finding appropriate placements for looked after children. Can the Children and Families service provide assurance that all placements of looked after children - including in semi-independent care settings - are made with providers which are registered with Ofsted and of good quality?

- The service reassured the Commission that at present no children had been placed in any setting which was not registered with Ofsted (and subject to regulatory oversight).
- All looked after children's placements were managed through the Children's Resource Panel which reviewed and monitored looked after children's placements in residential care.
- Placement stability was very important for young people and additional resources were being used to help children maintain placements where this was needed. It was acknowledged however that national conditions were difficult and that the use of the unregistered placement would be an absolute last resort.

U.10 The Chair thanked officers for updating the Commission.

4. Children and Families Service - Budget Monitoring

- 4.1 Budget monitoring is a key function of Overview & Scrutiny and the Commission reviews in-year budgets of services supporting children and young people. The Children and Families Service produced a budget monitoring report for 2020/21 which highlighted key budget lines for the Children and Families Service. The Head of Finance for Children, Adults and Community Health presented the report highlighting the following:
- Including the use of government grants and reserves, £73.1m of funding has been provided for services within the Children and Families Service in 202/21. A forecast overspend is projected of £3.6m, this was mainly due to budget pressures in the Corporate Parenting budget.
 - Each residential placement costs on average £200k per year and there were a number of management actions in the Corporate Parenting budget area to help reduce costs.

Questions from the Commission

- 4.2 The Commission sought clarification on the use of £1.6m of reserves set aside for increased staffing for Ofsted, and whether this was used for requirements set out by Ofsted or to offset budget pressures in the wider Children and Families Service?
- Additional funding was provided to support improvement required by Ofsted this was focused on two areas a) £900k was used to increase capacity in the assessment team which had experienced significant pressures in 2019 b) £700k was used to bring additional managerial oversight to case management, the appointment of external inspection partner as well as additional capacity for leadership and systems management.
- 4.3 What factors are driving the increased pressures in the Corporate Parenting budget? Is shortage of supply driving up prices? How is the CFS ensuring that value for money is being obtained for the placements? Can any services be provided in-house?
- There is extraordinary pressure within the system to secure quality and value for money placements. £200k annual costs for residential placements were not uncommon. A number of projects had been established to assess how the provision of early help may reduce the need for these costly placements (e.g. Edge of Care Board). It was acknowledged that Covid 19 and the Cyberattack had limited progress in this area.
 - Hackney was working across other boroughs in North East London to develop a collaborative commissioning process for children's residential placements.
- 4.4 The Mockingbird Project is cited as a management action to reduce costs in the Corporate Parenting budget. If this is a service reduction, is this not counter productive in that the Council needs to extend support to the in-house foster care team and make it more attractive to improve retention and increase take-up by local foster carers?
- The Mockingbird Project was designed to help improve placement stability by building a wider and more enhanced model of foster carer support. This was

an' investment to save' management action and there are no planned cuts for this service.

- 4.5 Whilst acknowledging that there are very complex issues behind residential childcare budgets, these cost pressures have been identified for some period of time in Corporate Parenting. Has sufficient priority been given to finding long term solutions which can help to reduce budget pressures?
- The financial pressures on children's service are significant both within this council and nationwide. Covid-19 and the cyber attack provide an opportunity to review and reset the budgets for this service. The engagement of partners will be critical to the budget reset however, as a new local settlement will be needed in how services are resources, for example the borough-wide early help offer.
 - There is a paucity of good quality value for money placements for children at present which is driving up costs. To give a recent example, the local authority was no.37 on a waiting list for a specific residential placement for a child in the week beginning 4/1/21. Where possible Corporate Parenting will provide extensive wraparound care and support to a vulnerable child if this can reduce the need for residential care.
- 4.6 With referrals and assessments into the Children and Families Service decreasing by $\frac{1}{3}$, can you provide further detail as to why there is a forecast overspend of £461k in the Access and Assessment Team?
- Whilst referrals into the system have reduced, the journey of children through the system has been slower due to the limitations placed on the service by Covid-19 (e.g. time taken to assess and deliver interventions and court delays). Thus the service is holding young people for longer at present.
 - It was also noted that the number of referrals did not always reflect the complexity of cases which may require additional and more longitudinal care and support.
- 4.7 The Chair concluded that it would be useful for members of the Commission to meet officers within the Corporate Parenting team to further understand the placement commissioning process. This could help inform the planned review of the Commission for this year.
- 4.8 The Chair thanked officers for attending and responding to questions from the Commission.
- 5. City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership**
- 5.1 The Annual Report of the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership is presented to the Commission each year for review. The Independent Child Safeguarding Commissioner presented a number of key issues from within the report which are summarised below:
- 2019/20 was a year of transition to the new arrangements for safeguarding, in which the LA, CCG and Police became the main safeguarding partners.
 - As a result of Covid, meetings of the Safeguarding Partnership had become more frequent, but shorter in duration and more focused.

Overview & Scrutiny

- The strategic aims of the partnership had been adjusted in response to Covid 19, these now included the health and wellbeing of the workforce; a recognition that safeguarding practices would need to be adapted to reflect new and emerging risks and the loss over oversight of children during lockdown and interoperability - ensuring that there was a consistent digital framework which safeguarding partners used to communicate and share information.
- Covid presented a number of challenges to staffing, but it was clear that staff had rallied and had gone over and above to ensure service continuity. There is a need to ensure that there is sufficient capacity and Occupational Health is correctly focused to the needs of staff.
- There have been a number of emerging safeguarding concerns which have arisen during the pandemic a) increased incidence of head injuries among young people and b) increased incidence of child accidents in the home. This data is being evaluated to help identify specific risk factors and to inform preventative interventions. Similarly, on-line risks to children have increased for children during lockdown as children were spending more time on-line.
- The number and quality of safeguarding training sessions delivered in 2019/20 has increased. Attendance has also improved, though there were still some areas where improvement was needed. It was likely that improvements in attendance would be continued into 2020/21 as training has shifted on-line.
- The Partnership continues to engage with the Orthodox Jewish Community in an attempt to improve safeguarding arrangements at local Yeshivas. This work is ongoing and there has been some positive engagement with the community in this process.
- The Partnership is seeking to develop a process involving Child Safeguarding Statements which would be updated every two years. These would encourage and support a process of self-assessment to help demonstrate how local agencies meet safeguarding requirements.
- The CHSCP is and overseeing is driving the development of anti-racist practice in child safeguarding and would encourage partners self-assessments to reflect this.

5.2 The Independent Commissioner also wished to place on record the CHSCP's thanks and gratitude to all frontline staff who had worked hard to ensure that children have been effectively safeguarded during the pandemic. This included not only health staff, but educators, police and those working in the voluntary sector. The Commissioner also noted that local safeguarding work had benefited from strong leadership from the Council during this time.

Questions from the Commission

- 5.3 A letter was sent to the Council from Interlink about safeguarding in Yeshiva but had not yet received a response?
- It was noted that this letter concerned a training offer to be delivered by interlink to the Haredi community and was being handled by the Safeguarding Children's Partnership. A response would be sent.

Overview & Scrutiny

- 5.4 There are new plans to develop a Scrutiny Board to strengthen the Partnerships approach to independent scrutiny. Can the CHSCP explain who will sit on this Board and how will the Board function to improve independent scrutiny?
- The proposed new Safeguarding Board would include the Lead Scrutiny Member in the Council and the Independent Commissioner who would work with leads at LA, Police and CCG to collaborate and agree areas of scrutiny each agency would focus upon. This would remove duplication and streamline and focus scrutiny to better effect.
- 5.5 Under the new arrangements for serious child safeguarding cases, do individual safeguarding partners (Council, CCG, and Police) solely determine which cases are reviewed? Does the CHSCP have any role in such decisions?
- When a case arises which causes concern, this is presented to the Safeguarding Partnership at which all agencies are represented. The ultimate decision as to whether a case goes forward for further review is that of the Independent Commissioner. The Chair also sets the terms of reference and the parameters for any review.
- 5.6 The annual report notes that there has been an increase in the number of referrals to the LADO. Can you explain what factors may be behind this increase?
- Increase in referrals to the LADO was seen as a positive indicator as this would suggest an increased level of awareness of risk and knowledge /understanding of the LADO's role among local officers.
- 5.7 The Children and Families Service has seen a decline of about $\frac{1}{3}$ in the total number of referrals it usually receives since the start of the pandemic. What is the Safeguarding Children Partnership's view on how to improve surveillance and oversight of children and young people to ensure that safeguarding risks are being identified and help is available to those who need it? How can services work together to improve oversight? Can a child self-refer vulnerable and in need of help and support?
- With reduced oversight of children during the pandemic, it was clear that new ways of developing safeguarding interventions would be necessary. Partnership and effective communication and information sharing is central to this process. The partnership has audited all partners to ascertain how local safeguarding systems had adapted to the lack of oversight of children due the lockdown. This is not easy, as it underlined the centrality of schools in provisioning regular oversight of children and young people.
- 5.8 At page 42/43, the annual report notes the significant year-on-year variations to Children on a Child Protection Plan e.g. a 30% increase to March 2017 followed by a 39% decrease to March 2018. How can such large variances be explained? Has there been significant changes to local thresholds, management decisions or other local policy and practice which give rise to such wide variations? What outcomes was the Safeguarding Partnership hoping to see from any internal review of the Ofsted inspection?

- Such variations would prompt questions on the systematic application of thresholds. This application of thresholds does require some work by the Partnership over the coming year and this would focus on the 'front end' of the care pathway where perhaps too many cases were being referred which do not require any statutory intervention. In this context, a lot of effort goes into assessing and referring families when more preventative intervention could have been provided earlier. It was underlined however, that thresholds were a partnership issue as it required all stakeholders to understand these and to refer appropriately within them.

5.9 How were safeguarding systems being adapted in response to the increased number of children who are now in Elective Home Education, some of whom are on Child Protection Plans? It was also noted that there have been difficulties in engaging the Gipsy and Irish Traveller Communities since the pandemic and that to date, attempts to encourage children to restart school had been unsuccessful. What strategies was the Partnership employing to overcome these challenges?

- The Director of Education noted that if a child was on a Child Protection Plan the child would be monitored closely by both the School and Children's Social Care. All parents home educating must be assessed for the education that they are responsible for providing.
- The Director of Education noted that there had been real and genuine concerns within the Traveller Community about Covid which had impacted on school attendance. A dedicated officer was liaising with the Traveller community to help build confidence and to help them re-engage with schools.

5.10 What level of bereavement support is available for vulnerable children and their families?

- This was an important local issue. Information has been sent out to all partners on this issue. In addition, how individual partners had supported bereaved children during the pandemic had been audited by the Commission to help develop and extend good practice. This was also undertaken in relation to staff bereavement.

5.11 At page 56, the annual report notes a worrying increase of 73% in acute mental health admissions for children and young people via the Homerton Hospital since the start of the pandemic. What assurance do we have that local preventative and early help services provided through CAMHS are accessible, appropriate, and acceptable to young people? Has the RAG rating system of the CAMHS providers been tested? Is there sufficient recognition of the digital divide and access to private settings when support can be provided virtually?

- The Partnership was alive to this issue as significant pressures on mental health services have been noted as children's needs increased. The Partnership would look at CAMHS provision locally and work was being undertaken to ascertain how quickly young people were assessed and referred for support they needed.
- The Partnership was also committed to reviewing early help provision across the partnership to ensure that the correct application of thresholds and pathways into the FAST team.

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- Since the start of the pandemic there has been a spike in mental health needs among young people and an on-line preventative offer has been developed in response (e.g. Kooth). CAMHS had also prioritised those young people that continue to need face-to-face support using RAG ratings similar to that adopted by Children and Families Service. Those assessed to be in lower need have been visited less frequently. There is of course some additional risk in this and partners were alive to these, but there were no easy solutions.
- The Director of CFS noted that a working group had been set up to support young people in acute mental health settings, to ensure that the placement remained the most appropriate setting for them.

5.12 The Commission had a number of further questions which there was no time to respond to but it was agreed a brief written response be provided for the next meeting:(these are provided at the end of this section).

5.13 The Commission welcomed the Safeguarding Partnership's suggestion to move toward quarterly reporting as this would move away from 'historical' discussions of within annual reporting. The Chair suggested that it would be useful to meet with the Independent Commissioner to agree format and focus of future CHSCP reporting at CYP Scrutiny in 2021/22. The Chair thanked the Independent Commissioner and Senior Professional Adviser for attending the meeting and responding to questions raised.

Agreed: Chair and Independent Commissioner to meet to discuss future scrutiny arrangements

Agreed: that short written responses be provided to the following:

1. To improve accountability, the Safeguarding Children Partnership is considering requiring partner agencies to complete Annual Child Safeguarding Statements. How will these plans be published, and will there be opportunities for these to be tested or challenged?
2. To what extent have local 'Relevant Agencies' (who then have a duty to comply with child safeguarding requirements) cooperated with the local Safeguarding Children Partnership? Are there any local compliance issues in any sectors?
3. What testing and challenge has the Safeguarding Children Partnership provided for virtual assessments developed by Children and Families Service and other children's services to ensure that they are robust and help to safeguard local children? How is the Partnership disseminating information and best practice about virtual assessments across local agencies working with children and young people?
4. The Ofsted inspection highlighted the need for earlier involvement and improved information sharing from safeguarding partners (in particular from the

Police) in strategy discussions and decision making. Has any improvement been seen in the engagement and involvement of the Metropolitan Police over the past 12 months?

5. Effective safeguarding of children is dependent on effective partnerships not only amongst professionals but also with the community. The Commission has received reports which note that social care intervention rates are disproportionate for some groups of local children, particularly with children from Black Caribbean and some other minority ethnic backgrounds. What work has the Safeguarding Children Partnership undertaken in relation to combat racial inequality and to support cultural competence in assessing safeguarding risks and assessments?

6. How is funding for Safeguarding Children Partnership determined and apportioned between partner agencies - is there a national formula? How does funding for the Safeguarding Children Partnership in City & Hackney compare to neighbouring boroughs? For transparency should individual contributions from partner agencies be included in annual reporting?

6. Unregistered Educational Settings

- 6.1 In 2017/18 the Commission reviewed Unregistered Educational Settings in Hackney and made a number of recommendations for improvement. Given the complexity of this issue and the difficulties encountered in making sustained improvements, the Commission continues to maintain oversight and to review and monitor progress against the recommendations.
- 6.2 The Education Service presented the report, key highlights of which are summarised below:
- The curriculum taught at local Yeshiva was too narrow for these to be considered as Independent Schools, therefore were more likely to be defined as religious institutions given the absence of secular teaching. Parents of children attending Yeshiva consider their children to be Electively Home Educated which was a point of tension, as children being Electively Home Educated are required to have an element of secular education.
 - The DfE was aware of this tension and has recently conducted a public consultation related to this matter. The government was proposing that any setting which offered education for children, irrespective of the breadth of the curriculum taught, would be expected to register with the DfE and be subject to the same regulatory framework as Independent Schools. If implemented, this may improve regulatory oversight of children and young people in attendance at Yeshiva.
 - Unregistered Settings Protocol has been established to improve regulatory and enforcement coordination of key partners (e.g. police, planning, education, children's social care).
 - The Out of School Settings project continues to work with local organisations to help improve safeguarding in non-statutory settings which work with children and young people.

- The Education Service had met with Interlink and representatives from local Yeshiva to discuss safeguarding proposals to ensure that recruitment conformed to safeguarding principles and that effective safeguarding systems were in place. Although discussions were at an early stage, it was reiterated to stakeholders that progress was needed.

Questions from the Commission

- 6.3 The report noted that following the closure of an Independent School last year, the school reverted to an unregistered setting, meaning that a further 387 children were now outside the regulatory control and safeguarding oversight of the Local Authority. Were these children automatically put on the Elective Home Register? Given that the Local Authority now has the details of the parents (which was a barrier to regulatory action before), what action has been taken by the Council to support this group of parents to ensure that their children receive an appropriate and effective education?
- These children have been recorded as a subset of Children Missing Education as they cannot be considered as being Electively Home Educated as there is no secular learning. Some parents have engaged with the Education Service and have been able to provide evidence that their child's education at the Yeshiva is being supplemented with secular education and have therefore been placed on the Elective Home Register and subject to regular review.
 - In terms of Children Missing Education numbers were relatively small at the current time given the decline in the numbers of children and families moving in and out of the borough. The work is supported by 0.5 WTE officer and the Education Service is currently recruiting additional capacity to the team. This will enable additional focus and support to be provided to those 387 children who had previously attended the Independent School and were now attending local Yeshiva.
- 6.4 At 4.7 of the report it was stated that Yeshivas do not provide a 'suitable' education. Could this be clarified?
- As Yeshivas provide a solely religious education, by legal definition, this is not considered a suitable education. If there is no secular education then it cannot be considered as suitable. If Yeshivas are providing a wider curriculum, then of course, they will need to register as an Independent School and therefore comply with the regulatory framework for these settings.
- 6.5 The Commission noted that an Unregistered Settings Protocol was established in September 2020. Can further details be provided a) to confirm whether the Metropolitan Police and Lond Fire Brigade are included and b) details of the Stage 2 Incident which occurred in September, including what enforcement action was taken?
- The Police and Fire Brigade are both included in the Unregistered Settings Protocol. Stage 1 shares intelligence about the location of new unregistered settings. Stage 2 is where health, safety or safeguarding incidents have occurred. Two Stage 2 incidents have occurred since September in relation to

a fire and to Public Health concerns (Covid 19). Further investigation of the fire revealed that the setting was in fact an Independent School.

- 6.6 The Commission noted from last year's update that an audit of safeguarding arrangements at all Out of School Settings was being undertaken (including Yeshiva). Can you provide further details of the outcome of this audit, as this will provide the Commission with further context as to how Yeshivas compare to other Out of School settings in complying with safeguarding requirements?
- A dedicated project team was working with Out of School settings to support the development of safeguarding protocols and processes. Data was not available at the meeting and a briefing would be provided to the Commission.
 - The Independent Commissioner noted that Michael Lobenstein had been very supportive in helping to engage and involve Yeshiva on safeguarding issues. Issues did remain with the curriculum and in gaining knowledge as to where Yeshiva were located. It was acknowledged however, that further statutory developments were needed there to be progress in this area.

Agreed: The Education Service would provide a briefing for the Commission on the Out of School Settings Project.

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

7.0 Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Children's Social Care - Q & A

- 7.1 Relevant Cabinet members are invited to the Commission each year to respond to questions within their portfolio. Cllr Bramble, the Cabinet member for Children, Education and Children's Social Care attended to the meeting to respond to three policy areas identified by the Commission:
- A. To address how Covid-19 has impacted on the number of children being Electively Home Educated - and the arrangement that the Council has to ensure that these children are receiving an appropriate education and effectively safeguarded.
 - B. With reduced oversight of children - how is the Children and Families Service working with local partners and the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership to help identify and support children at risk?
 - C. How has Covid-19 impacted on the provision of extracurricular activities and what role can the council play to develop and improve young people's access to local sporting, cultural and other community resources as the pandemic eases.
- 7.2 The Cabinet Member firstly thanked everyone connected with children's education and children's services for all the support provided to local children and families throughout the pandemic. This included not only Council staff, but also the wider partnership and voluntary sector who had continued to provide

high quality services to young people despite the limitations and constraints of the pandemic.

Elective Home Education

7.3 The Cabinet Member reported the following in respect of Elective Home Education in Hackney:

- Since March 2020, 166 children have moved to EHE. This has had a significant impact on the service and how children and families are assessed and supported. Covid has restricted how these assessments have taken place. Assessments were generally taking approximately 12 weeks to complete. There were two staff in the EHE team (1.5 WTE) undertaking these assessments and signposting parents to help and support available. Information on EHE was also available on the council website.
- Parents were responsible for all on-costs of education including any private tutoring arrangements and any other teaching resources used. Some parents were under a misconception that these costs were funded by the Local Authority.
- 148 children were currently on the EHE Register and 24 had returned to mainstream education.
- A significant increase in referrals to EHE came in September 2020, with some parents continuing to home educate in response to the pandemic. As of December 2020, there were 289 children registered and receiving home education.
- Children and Families are assessed to ascertain if a suitable education is being provided through EHE. If the education is suitable, then an annual review is scheduled. If requirements are needed then more frequent checks are undertaken.
- Parents are still not required to register their children if they are EHE, so assessment and support can only be provided to those children and families known to the service,
- Whilst not suitable for all children, Children on a Protection Plan or Children in Need can be home educated.

Questions from the Commission

7.4 What support is available for parents home educating children with SEND?

- If a child has an EHCP, then those arrangements stay in place for the child.
- Information and guidance is provided to parents whose children who have SEND and are in EHE. It remains the case that it is the responsibility of parents to support children's needs, including SEND. There were home education support groups which can offer mutual support to parents.

7.5 Is there any further data on the demographic of children entering EHE? Are there any patterns or trends? Is there any association between increased uptake of EHE and increased household vulnerability to Covid?

- Although data was not to hand, it was noted that for many of the children that moved to EHE in September 2020 there was a household vulnerability to Covid, and therefore this presented a safer option.

- Some parents had enjoyed teaching their children at home in the lockdown and wished to continue.

Agreed: that further demographic data on those children in EHE to be provided to the Commission.

- 7.6 For children moving into EHE, is there any vulnerability assessment undertaken to assess if additional support may be needed?
- 79% of children and families assessed for EHE were identified as receiving a suitable education, with the 15% requiring improvement or for whom it was assessed that provision was not suitable.
 - Advice, guidance and information is provided to parents on effective EHE and there were support groups for families. It was reiterated that it was the responsibility of the parent to provide for all educational support and it was the duty of the LA to assess whether such support was 'appropriate' and 'effective'.
 - It should be acknowledged that both schools and the Education Service provide extensive support to parents throughout this important decision.
 - The Education Service holds a twice yearly conference to support parents who are home educating their children. This not only provides key information about effective EHE, but also provides an opportunity for parents to meet and develop their own peer support networks. A range of voluntary and community bodies were also able to support parents in EHE.

Children and Families Service

- 7.7 The Cabinet member outlined the response to the Commission's questions on improving surveillance and oversight for the Children and Families Service.
- The Cabinet member thanked the CHSCP for all its work in this area and in supporting local agencies and staff in providing effective safeguarding of local children.
 - CFS has been under intense pressure not only in relation to the pandemic, but also in responding to the cyber attack.
 - A key development from the pandemic has been the closer working relationship between CFS and the Education Service and oversight and support provided to vulnerable children and young people. The systems and structures created to support this will continue beyond the pandemic.
 - Young Hackney continued most of its offer on-line and so was able to maintain contact with local young people in need, particularly those with mental health challenges.
 - The Council operated a helpline during the pandemic for children and families to get information and signpost to support. It was important to ensure that experienced front-line staff were at hand during initial screening so that informed advice and support could be provided. This will help parents to get help earlier and in the least 'invasive' way.
 - The CFS was using the Working Together 2018 safeguarding framework to help frame assessments and ensure that these were holistic and captured the real lived experience of children and young people.

Overview & Scrutiny

- A dedicated Contextual Intervention Unit has been established to offer practical and pragmatic support for social workers.

Questions from the Commission

- 7.8 How does the Context Intervention Unit work across the CFS and the rest of the Council and partners (e.g. housing, education, parks)?
- The Context Intervention Unit mainly works with older children as their safeguarding risks evolve to factors outside the family home. The CFS is embedding this work across the service, but this is at an early stage.
 - The learning from the initial Contextual Safeguarding project was still being disseminated, and it was hoped that the principles of contextual safeguarding will soon be reflected in everyday practice.
 - There has been a contextual safeguarding training offer developed for staff.

Agreed: that an update on Contextual Safeguarding is taken as part of the CYP work programme for 2021/22.

- 7.9 Is there any data on which categories or groups of young people where referrals have decreased disproportionately?
- Most referrals to the Children and Families Service come through local education services, so there was a significant decline in the number of children from these age groups. To compensate for this, the CFS and Education Service worked together to develop a list of vulnerable children and ensure that they received regular contact and support.

At 21.58, the Commission voted to extend the meeting by 10 minutes to 22.10.

Extra Curricular Activities

- 7.10 The Cabinet member outlined the response to the Commission's questions on the impact of Covid 19 restrictions on extra curricular activities in schools.
- Whilst schools have worked hard to provide a balanced curriculum, it has been difficult with the requirements to maintain bubbles and social distancing requirements. Some activities such as breakfast clubs and after school clubs have continued.
 - Whilst many sports and team activities have been restricted, other physical activities have been taking place such as the daily mile challenge (around the perimeter of schools).
 - The School Music Team had been helping to migrate to an on-line tutoring system, though it was clear that music provision had been greatly reduced in both primary and secondary school settings.
 - School assemblies are generally on-line which does provide some collective experience for children throughout the pandemic and when schools have been closed.

Questions from the Commission

- 7.11 When the schools reopened in September a reduced curriculum was offered with fewer opportunities for extra curricular activities. What impact has this had on

young people who experience difficulties in accessing the main curriculum, such as those children with SEND or have lower attainment?

- Ensuring that schools remain Covid compliant was a priority for schools and this presented difficulties in offering extracurricular activities. Schools were also under pressure to help children catch up with learning lost during the lockdown.

7.12 What financial help is available for out of school clubs to ensure that these are available as lockdown eases?

- The Mayor and Cabinet member were aware that this sector needed financial support and would continue to lobby central government for additional funding for this sector. It was noted that health and safety requirements and other sundry costs were increasing pressures on school budgets which limited spending on other areas.

8.0 Child Friendly Borough - Cabinet Response

8.1 As part of its work programme for 2019/20, the Commission made a number of recommendations to support the Child Friendly Borough initiative, including improvements to future consultation and engagement with children and young people. The Cabinet response to these recommendations is contained within the link to this agenda. It was noted that all recommendations had been agreed.

8.2 The Commission also highlighted a number of developments which would now take place as a result of its work to support a Child Friendly Borough:

- The Communications and Engagement team were developing a toolkit to improve consultation and engagement with children and young people across the council.
- The Statement of Community Involvement (a planning document which sets out how developers must consult and involve the local community) will now include specific guidance on how to involve children and young people in planning decisions as a result of recommendations of this Commission.

9.0 Work Programme

9.1 The Commission noted the work programme for the remainder of 2020/21.

10.0 Minutes

10.1 The minutes of the last meeting held on 7th December are contained within the report pack. Actions arising from the last meeting:

- The Commission has drafted a response to the Child Friendly SPD proposals which were presented at the meeting on the 7th December and submitted these to the consultation. This will be published in the next agenda (8th February)

Overview & Scrutiny

- In relation to discussions around Childhood Poverty, further information is being prepared for the Commission on the Discretionary Crisis Support Grant in readiness for the next meeting on the 8th February.

11. Any other Business - Directorate Updates

11.1 The date of the next meeting was the 8th February 2021.

The Meeting concluded at 22.10.