



London Borough of Hackney  
Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission  
Municipal Year 2018/19  
Date of Meeting Monday 16 January 2023

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

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<b>Chair</b>	<b>Councillor Sophie Conway</b>
<b>Councillors in Attendance</b>	<b>Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice-Chair), Cllr Alastair Binnie-Lubbock, Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott, Cllr Midnight Ross and Cllr Caroline Selman</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Cllr Anya Sizer and Cllr Claudia Turbet-Delof</b>
<b>Co-optees</b>	<b>Andy English and Monique Pink</b>
<b>Virtual Attendees:</b>	<b>Cllr Sheila Suso-Runge and Cllr Lynne Troughton</b>
<b>In attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care</b></li><li>• <b>Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Parks and Leisure</b></li><li>• <b>Jim Gamble, Independent Chair of City and Hackney Safeguarding Partnership</b></li><li>• <b>Rory McCallum, Senior Professional Adviser</b></li><li>• <b>Jacque Burke, Group Director for Children and Education</b></li><li>• <b>Kate Cracknell, Head of Wellbeing and Education Safeguarding</b></li><li>• <b>Billy Baker, Lead Officer, Pupils Out of School</b></li><li>• <b>Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help &amp; Wellbeing</b></li><li>• <b>Helena Burke, Leadership and Management Adviser</b></li></ul>
<b>Members of the Public</b>	<b>None attended in person.</b>
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**Councillor Sophie Conway in the Chair**

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

- Paul Senior, Director of Education;
- Cllr Claudia Turbet-Delof;
- Cllr Lynne Troughton;
- Cllr Anya Sizer;
- Richard Brown (Co-opted member);
- Steven Olalerrre (Co-opted member);
- Salma Kansara (Co-opted member).

1.2 The following member connected virtually:

- Cllr Sheila Suso Runge.

## **2 Declarations of Interest**

2.1 The following declarations were received by members of the Commission: Monique Pink reported that she was a governor of a primary school in Hackney.

## **3 Urgent Items / Order of Business**

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

## **4 City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership - Annual Report (19.05)**

4.1 The City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (CHSCP) annual report is a standing item within the work programme so as to allow the Commission to have oversight of child safeguarding work taking place across the borough. Members of the Commission were invited to review the Annual Report of CHSCP for the period April 2021 to March 22 which included assessments of safeguarding and learning across all those services which work with children in Hackney, and the outcomes of local Safeguarding Practice Reviews (SPR).

4.2 The Independent Chair introduced the report, and highlighted the following key issues (noting that discussion of unregistered settings would be taken at the next item).

- There had been good progress in relation to the Cyber Attack and the associated recovery programme;
- Consistent practice standards had been developed for the councils' early help offer and there were new systems for assessing neglect;
- There had been a number of improvements around the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with daily briefings taking place and a new connection with early help hub;
- Local partners had improved the way that adolescents were safeguarded (e.g. a greater understanding of the pathways to harm) which has been verified within a LGA Peer Review;
- Private fostering remains an issue of concern for the locality, and further work was needed to help identify such arrangements in the community;
- The police have been challenged on their lack of engagement with the LADO and this is being reviewed by the local police leadership;
- The Child Q SPR was being revisited to assess progress against the recommendations and a final update report is expected shortly;
- As the outcomes of the Child Q SPR indicated, there is an ongoing issue with racism, and partner agencies will now be required to evidence their anti-racist work;
- Major risks had been in relation to significant changes in the local leadership, but in the view of CHSCP, the new leadership continued to work at pace to address safeguarding priorities;

- A 10 minute video summary of the annual report would be released which would help improve accessibility of CHSCP documentation.

### **Questions from the Commission**

**4.3 The cost of living crisis was likely to be placing local families under severe pressure which may have wide ranging safeguarding implications for both children and their families (e.g. increased prevalence of anxiety and mental health, or increasing incidence of neglect and domestic violence). Has City & Hackney Safeguarding Partnership a) undertaken any detailed assessment as to the likely impact and implications for local services? b) been given assurance from local services that they have made adequate preparations in terms of service planning, service capacity to meet any expected increases /variations in needs? c) confident that there is a multi-agency preventative (early help) offer to help address emerging safeguarding needs?**

- CHSCP remains concerned about the cost of living crisis and has convened a number of extraordinary meetings with partners who have shared contingency plans which have been put in place (e.g. Children and Families, Fire Service and Housing Service). The CHSCP would be happy to share this work with the Commission.
- The next CHSCP Board meeting would continue to focus on the cost of living crisis, particularly in relation to how it was impacting on the health and wellbeing of front-line staff and their ability to effectively safeguard children.

**4.4 The Commission welcomed the work taking place to improve engagement with the LADO, but noted that local police and probation services have a zero (0%) attendance at the CHSCP Board. Given the outcomes of Child Q, the need to improve anti-racist practice in policing and the numerous cases of police misconduct now emerging, it is important the police engage and involve with local safeguarding organisations. What is being done to improve police engagement locally?**

- Police engagement with the LADO has been poor, and this situation is not common to Hackney alone. This has been raised with local police leaders and the CHSCP were content that progress was being made.
- Poor attendance of the police at CHSCP Board meetings had been noted, and was especially disappointing as these meetings were on-line. This had also been raised with the local police leadership both verbally and in writing. The same is applied to the probation service, but it was acknowledged that this service had undergone a number of significant national reviews during this time which has meant major changes for leadership and operating models. Both services have now re-engaged more positively since March 2022.
- In terms of accountability, the Independent Chair would be meeting with the Deputy Assistant Commissioner to assess police progress against a number of local action plans (e.g. Child Q).

**4.5 What are the safeguarding priorities for the current year 2022/23?**

- The CHSCP has continued its drive to go back to basics and to ensure that there are effective processes to identify and address cases of neglect. Over and above this however, is the need for all safeguarding partners to adopt a safeguarding first approach and to ensure that all children are seen, heard and helped. The Independent Chair noted that there was good collaborative working and strong leadership across the safeguarding partnership. The development of anti-racist practice across the partnership also remains a priority.

**4.6 What challenges does CHSCP envisage from across the partnership in making sure that the police adopt a systemic approach to anti-racist practice?**

- CHSCP noted that organisations declaring that they are anti-racist was of course welcome, but the next step was in providing evidence to substantiate this position would be challenging to organisations. The acknowledgement that

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agencies have racist practices was the first step in the journey of progress and improvement. It was acknowledged that the police struggled with this in the initial aftermath of Child Q. All agencies need to be continually alive to this threat however, including local schools, and the partnership would continue to test these settings to ensure that they have a culture which respects diversity of young people. Anti-racism will not be accepted as a statement or a strategy unless it is evidenced. It is important that the local leadership pursues this approach at all levels and in all places. The evidence that will be needed is the challenges that organisations have made, the investigations that have been carried out and the sanctions that have been applied. CHSCP would apply this to the police, and of course, to other safeguarding partners.

**4.7 Can CHSCP update the Commission on the roll-out of adultification bias training across local agencies? Has there been sufficient take up across all agencies - in particular, among local Metropolitan Police officers?**

- There are recommendations within the expected update as to how, when and who should deliver local adultification training. There has been excellent input from external agencies and there was a strong local network of individuals with lived experience who could also contribute to this training, and provide additional local value to this process (relationship and network building). One case of note in which positive change has been recorded was among health partners who have positively advocated for children and challenged partners.
- In total, around 400 practitioners had engaged in adultification bias training. In terms of the police, a special training session had been set up for police officers working from schools (Safer Schools Officers) and there has been attendance by MPS at other regular training sessions.

**Agreed: CHSCP to provide up to date information on the training uptake of adultification bias training across the partnership, and for Metropolitan Police specifically.**

**4.8 The Commission welcomed the approach of CHSCP to require evidence to substantiate commitment and progress for anti-racist practice and wider safeguarding work. The Independent Chair noted that young people have been consulted recently as part of the Child Q SPR, was this to establish impact and progress achieved since the review was published?**

- The Independent Chair did not want to reveal information that would be provided in the Child Q update report, but the authentic voice of young people have been included within this review update. Whilst the CHSCP has used a holistic approach in terms of young people generally, its central focus has been on how harm manifests itself to young black people. The young people's involvement in this process would be retained where they would be routine and frequent advisers.

**4.9 Whilst there are clearly national drivers behind local staffing concerns, is assurance being sought for local plans to address this in a coordinated way from partners? What are the key related local safeguarding risks?**

- Into the pandemic, the number one priority was the health and wellbeing of the workforce, how they were kept safe, how they could work remotely but keeping children in line of sight and interoperability with other partners. What was clear was that staff went over and above the response required, but ultimately there was a price to be paid for that in terms of possible staff burn-out and fatigue. An audit was undertaken from across the partnership to see what could be learned and applied in other similar circumstances. Staff retention is a critical issue for all agencies across the partnership and this has now been brought to the fore again with the cost of living crisis.
- Workforce stability was an issue for every partner agency; children's social care was grappling with high levels of social work vacancies and reliance on use

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agency workers instead of social workers; the police was using a high proportion of new probationers for policing. Alongside this, the demands and the complexities of safeguarding workloads which added to the burden of front line staff and services as a whole. As previously indicated, this issue would be the focus for the next partnership board meeting and work priority over the next few months.

- The Group Director pointed out that health and social care services were working alongside each other to support staff as staffing issues were broadly similar and much could be learnt and shared from each other's experience. In terms of social worker recruitment, most London boroughs have signed up to the London Social Worker Workforce Pledge, which would set agreed payment thresholds for social workers (to prevent boroughs competing for and inflating costs for staff) and to not recruit social workers as agency staff until after they had left a previous post of 6 months. There were broader questions as to why social workers were choosing to sign up as agency workers rather than stay permanent which required authorities to look at their own working practices. Research also suggested that proportionally higher numbers of staff from black and global majority backgrounds were leaving the workforce because they felt that they could not progress professionally or managerially. In this context, services have to look at their own ethos and offer to staff, and Hackney has invested to make a difference through its award winning anti-racist practice work. Hackney also offers retention payments for those service areas where it is difficult to maintain even agency staff. Caseloads are also higher where there are high numbers of agency staff, as cases cannot be progressed as quickly as compared with permanent staff.

**4.10 A consistent theme running through the annual report is the risk that social media platforms can present directly for children (mental health and anxiety) as well as exacerbating other safeguarding risks. From a local perspective, what are the key local threats and risks that social media presents to young people and is there a local (partnership wide) strategy or approach to address these concerns to ensure that these risks are being addressed consistently across the borough?**

- This was a timely issue as the On-Line Harm Bill was due to return to parliament for consideration shortly. This will raise the issue of corporate accountability for social media platforms which breach on-line safety rules. The Safer Schools App was launched for Hackney schools which comes with alerts and warnings. A recent example of this was in relation to a social media challenge for young people, which may have involved self-harm. Getting information out in a timely manner was critical to ensure that concerns or threats were addressed quickly and effectively. CHSCP would encourage all councillors to make sure that local schools download and use the App to help them address on-line harms as this was for schools, teachers, students and their families.

**4.11 Demand for all aspects of local mental health provision from young people is increasing and waiting lists for young people needing care and support were growing – for example, the waiting list for First Steps was reported to be over 12 months. Are officers confident that there is a strategy to address waiting times among local leaders and to ensure young people get the help that they need more quickly? How confident are local services that virtual or line mental health support is effective? Is this an adequate alternative to face-to-face provision?**

- It was acknowledged that CAMHS services were in the most difficult position they had ever been in. In part this was due to the underinvestment by the national government not only in CAMHS services, but across the board in children and education services as a whole. Therefore children's concerns and anxieties were greater, and when these are taken onto the internet these are exacerbated or accelerated. In terms of effectiveness of on-line services, the lessons learnt from the pandemic was that access to properly certified and accredited counselling on-line was an alternative therapy and helped to keep

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professionals in touch with young people. In such a time of acute needs and demand, services needed to pivot to what works best for the greater number of children and young people. This would however take time to fix.

- It was noted that through WAMHS, CAMHS workers were attached to every school in Hackney who were equipping schools to work preventatively and to reduce the need for CAMHS interventions. In terms of the on-line work, there was a range of interventions from self-referral to a website (Kooth) to on-line therapeutic support from a qualified practitioner. There was also Silver Cloud which was a website for older young people which was directly monitored by a CAMHS worker.
- The Independent Chair of CHSCP stressed however that there was a real crisis with access to CAMHS services, and whilst there was a lot of good work to mitigate access problems, fundamentally these would not be enough given the scale of the challenge faced by CAMHS services in Hackney and elsewhere.

**4.12 A number of questions were raised in relation to safeguarding adolescents a) who is responsible for developing a strategy for effective safeguarding of adolescents? b) what has been the impact of closing routine referrals for eating disorders? c) is overcrowding seen as a risk for children going missing, if so, how is this being addressed? d) what can the Hackney care leaver offer learn from counterparts in the City, particularly in relation to accommodation and health support?**

- The Independent Chair reported that partners have been on a learning curve in relation to safeguarding adolescents in recent years, but was confident that services were working together more effectively in supporting the needs of this cohort of young people. It was difficult to compare provision between City and Hackney as the former supports such a small cohort of children in total compared to Hackney (City has a population of around 1,100 children in *total*).
- The Group Director noted that in respect of eating disorders, providers and Commissioners had consulted with children and young people using the service and their parents to refresh the pathway of support available and to help minimise the numbers of children presenting in crisis. This same collaborative model had also been developed for LGBT service users for CAMHS. It was emphasised that there was no lack of will or resources to secure improvement, but there was a national shortage of qualified therapists who could support the expansion of services.

**4.13 Under the recent reorganisation of safeguarding arrangements, 'relevant agencies' are required to cooperate with local safeguarding partnerships. What response has the partnership had from locally designated 'relevant agencies'? How is the safeguarding partnership reaching out to and engaging all those local agencies (particularly in the voluntary and charity sectors) which may support or work with children and young people?**

- The CHSCP is able to designate 'relevant agencies', those organisations and agencies whose involvement the safeguarding partners consider may be required to safeguard and promote the welfare of children with regard to local need. CHSCP had 'designated' local academies which were relevant to investigations regarding Child Q, and therefore these agencies will be required to participate in safeguarding self-assessment processes, which will provide a line of site and a level of assurance that had not been available previously. This power is used proportionally, but generally relevant agencies will be signposted to appropriate resources and training that may be needed.

**4.14 Does the CHSCP have any information around the timing of the IOPC report into the police strip search of Child Q?**

- CHSCP was disappointed that 9 months on from the Child Q SPR, there was no report from the IOPC. Most recent communications have noted that the lead

investigating officer had been stood down at the beginning of the year and a new officer was being appointed. No further information was available at this time.

**4.15 Many looked after children placed in residential care or with a foster carer some distance from Hackney, away from supportive networks of family and friends and statutory services. Data from the previous meeting notes that 16 children have been placed more than 20 miles away, of which some are more than 170 miles away from Hackney. Is the safeguarding partnership confident that there is an effective protocol, risk assessment process and support to prevent/minimise safeguarding harms for those children placed outside of the borough?**

- The Group Director reported that they had oversight of all children in accommodation at a distance (greater than 20 miles) from Hackney and was required to authorise all such cases. Placing a child away from Hackney was not desirable, but the limited supply of residential and secure accommodation often meant that officers had little choice. In addition, some children were required to be placed away from Hackney for their own safety. There were acute problems in terms of access to secure accommodation as no local options were available. It was noted that the London Association of Directors of Children's Social Care were collaborating to commission more local provision. Before such placements are authorised the Group Director would be required to consult the child, Head of Service and the Independent Reviewing Officer. In many instances these authorisations are temporary, and the case reviewed again at a later date to see if the placement was still required and to assess if there are alternative arrangements closer to Hackney. It was reiterated that it was always the intention to ensure that children are looked after as close to Hackney as possible.

**4.16 A representative of Hackney Youth Parliament (HYP) noted that there was a very limited (if any ) profile of CAMHS workers in local schools, which was suggested earlier by officers in relation to WAMHS provision. There were also long waiting lists for access to counselling and other talking therapies. Can CAMHS workers be more visible in schools and support children more directly?**

- CAMHS workers in schools are preventative so do not work with children directly. The role of CAMHS workers in schools is focused on up skilling teaching staff to identify and refer children for help and to have an agreed approach as to how mental health can be addressed preventatively in the school.
- Young people's voice is one area of work within the WAMHS project to make sure the range of young voices are heard and represented.

4.17 The Chair thanked everyone for attending for this item and for responding to questions from members.

## **5 Unregistered Educational Settings - Review Update (19.50)**

5.1 In response to local safeguarding concerns, the Commission undertook a review of unregistered educational settings (UES) in 2017/18 and made a number of recommendations to improve safeguarding and oversight. However, in the continued absence of any new primary legislation, attempts by agencies and local partners to establish regulatory (planning, fire regulation, health and safety) and safeguarding oversight of children that attend UES have proved challenging. Therefore, given the ongoing safeguarding risks to children, the Commission retains regular oversight of this issue within its work programme

### Hackney Education (HE) and City Hackney Safeguarding Partnership (CHSCP)

5.2 HE noted that the Council's position on UES has not changed since the last update and this area of work continues to be an area of high risk as the safety of children attending UES in Hackney cannot be assured. There is an active UES Protocol which

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local partners and regulatory agencies use to help identify UES, but given the absence of legal controls, these agencies are powerless to intervene. The Schools Bill had given officers some cause for optimism as this may have enabled local agencies to have improved regulatory control over UES, but this Bill was shelved in December 2022 and was now unlikely to proceed.

5.3 CHSCP reported that many local agencies, itself included, had invested considerable time and effort into engaging the Orthodox Jewish community on this subject, but had achieved no progress. It was far from acceptable that such a large number of children remained out of the 'line of sight' of safeguarding authorities. There remains, therefore, a de facto two tier system of safeguarding depending on which 'school' local young people attend.

5.4 The Group Director reported that a letter had been written to the Secretary of State for Education (SoS), setting out the safeguarding concerns of the authority. The Group Director had requested a meeting with the SoS to identify if it was possible to improve regulatory control of UES through other parliamentary procedures (statutory instrument).

5.5 The Independent Chair emphasised that the situation was intolerable, as the authority carried all the risk for those children attending UES but had no authority to act or intervene to protect them. Even now, the authorities cannot be sure of where these children are and where they are being educated. This problem has been evident for many years, and it would seem that this is unlikely to be resolved until some tragedy occurs. This could not be allowed to continue. Anyone with authority or influence, including members of the Charedi community, needs to make clear that change needs to happen to make sure these children are safe. Central government had failed to act.

#### **Questions from the Commission**

**5.6 Are local officers confident that there are no further avenues of communication and engagement with the Orthodox Jewish community which may achieve progress to improve safeguarding in UES?**

- The group Director noted that there was very positive and healthy engagement with the Orthodox Jewish community on many levels, including health, immunisations, SEND and curriculum development with Independent Schools. The UES issue however, is a significant concern for the authority as children remain unsafe in these settings as we have no oversight.
- There are 6 other authorities where there are significant Orthodox Jewish communities and the Group Director has been in contact with counterparts in each. The authorities planned to have a 'next steps' conversation after the Schools Bill was shelved. In other areas where there was less pressure on space, premises had been offered to the Orthodox Jewish community which had helped to build bridges with the community on this same issue. It was noted however, that the Orthodox Jewish community in Hackney had always been more committed to education through yeshiva than other Orthodox Jewish communities in different areas.

**5.7 At the Education Select Committee, the SoS noted that improved regulation of UES could be an area which could be picked up in parliament, even after the demise of the Schools Bill. Has the Group Director received any feedback from the SoS as to what potential parliamentary options might look like? Are there ways in which the Commission and the scrutiny process might assist local efforts?**

- The letter to the SoS was sent a short while back and as yet, a response had not been received. It was important to keep this issue at the forefront of local safeguarding concerns, and officers would welcome any further help to keep this issue in the public eye.
- The Independent Chair indicated that contradicting statements about the necessity of primary legislation for this issue had been given before and there



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was no certainty that a statutory instrument would bring the desired results. He noted that progress would continue to be slow, until this became a priority for the central government. There needs to be greater public awareness of this issue, so that every parent that sends their child to a yeshiva or other UES which is out of safeguarding 'line of sight' is aware of the risks their child faces.

**5.8 Given that the Independent Chair suggests more work should be done to engage parents from the Orthodox Jewish Community, how has the newly appointed dedicated systems leader parental engagement addressed the issue of engaging parents from this community? Are there any plans for more robust parental engagement?**

- The Independent Chair noted that whilst there were good relationships with certain members of the Orthodox Jewish Community for specific issues, the problem remains specifically with those that operate local yeshiva. It is important that the leadership of the Council keeps this issue in the public consciousness and that the leaders within the Orthodox Jewish community are held to account. Local action is needed locally alongside continued political lobbying.

**5.9 Can further information be provided as to the nature of the risks which sit with the Council and other local agencies in respect of UES?**

- There are many associated risks; inadequate adherence to fire safety regulations; adults who are not properly trained or vetted have access to children; children in unsafe conditions. It is known that such safeguarding issues exist within the community, as they have been reported in other jurisdictions (e.g. Australia and USA). At present in the UK, it appears unlikely that any action will be taken by the central government, unless some tragedy precipitates this.

**5.10 Have local Rabbi's been engaged on this issue?**

- The Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations have been engaged, including the Rabbi who is responsible for health and safety in yeshiva. It was clear however, that there is no central authority or accountability for yeshiva, and where some are governed (or indeed owned) by parties outside of the jurisdiction (UK).

**5.11 A recent government report has highlighted real safeguarding risks of out of school settings (OOSS) such as extracurricular clubs (sports, dance, music), religious settings and tuition centres - these included corporal punishment, child sexual abuse or exploitation, health and safety and radicalisation. As Hackney was part of this pilot project, what risks were identified locally and what practical developments have been developed in response.**

- The OOSS project mapped 330 settings across Hackney. These were vastly different ranging from football clubs, music clubs and dance clubs. It was difficult to pinpoint the reason for low engagement with this project aside from the fact that whilst there is safeguarding guidance, such organisations have no statutory responsibility for safeguarding. In terms of legacy from this project, officers developed an on-line safeguarding portal which OOSS could utilise to support improved safeguarding in their respective settings (e.g. best practice, links to advice within the Council). A formal report was produced by the Council summing up the work of the Council in relation to OOSS.

5.12 The Chair noted that it would seem necessary for the Commission to write to the central government to highlight the serious and ongoing concerns around local UES and to request that some urgency of action is required.

**Action: The Commission to write to the Secretary of State to highlight ongoing safety and safeguarding concerns around UES in Hackney.**

5.13 The Chair also indicated that the Commission would like greater clarity as to what has happened when UES have been identified and would write to the Group Director for further information.

**Action: The Commission to write to the Group Director for further clarification on the actions taken against identified UES in the past 12 months.**

5.14 The Chair noted that this issue would continue to remain in the work programme of the Commission until such time as effective health and safety and safeguarding protocols have been established for all educational settings.

## **6 Outcome of School Exclusions - Review Update (20.20)**

6.1 In response to ongoing high rates of permanent school exclusions in Hackney, the Commission undertook a review of the Outcomes of School Exclusion which reported in December 2021. The review made 18 recommendations to the Council. Responses to the recommendations were approved by Cabinet in March 2022. The Commission agreed to review progress against the recommendations 9 months after agreement by Cabinet, and the update report was presented to the Commission by officers.

### **Hackney Education (HE)**

6.2 HE was committed to reducing school exclusions in Hackney and the response to the recommendations detailed in the Commission's review form the backbone of the strategic response of the council and its partners. Actions from the plan are linked to individual officers and these are reviewed monthly at the meeting of the Reducing Exclusions Officers Group. Officers reported that permanent exclusions had fallen by 20% in the autumn of 22/23 compared to previous figures of 21/22.

6.3 The Re-engagement Unit (REU) launched its universal secondary school offer in September 2022 and had thus far received referrals from 70 students, 20% of which had an EHCP. It was noted that 'persistent disruptive behaviour' had traditionally accounted for around 35% of permanent exclusions locally, which would suggest that there have been missed opportunities to intervene. Early data for 2022/23 would suggest that the proportion of children excluded for 'persistent disruptive behaviour' had declined which was encouraging. The REU had delivered 30 training sessions to over 500 school staff.

6.4 The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care noted that whilst there had been a reduction, local exclusions still remained high and disproportionately impacted on black and global majority students and children with SEND. The Deputy Mayor emphasised that it was important not to lose sight of the disproportionate impact of exclusion when assessing those interventions aimed to reduce them.

### **Questions from the Commission**

**6.5 From a governance perspective, can officers set out which HE body has oversight and responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission. Has the service developed an Action Plan to support it? Are specific officers working to deliver agreed recommendations? How often are the recommendations reviewed?**

- The recommendations form part of the Reducing Exclusions Action Plan which is reviewed monthly by the Reducing Exclusions Officers Group.

**6.6 The number and rates of permanent exclusions of pupils is now publicly available at the individual school level. In the interests of transparency and accountability, will Hackney Education now commit to regularly publish school exclusion data at school level?**

- Exclusion data would now be in the public domain which was helpful, but HE had not discussed as yet whether it would publish local figures. HE pointed out

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that it was working very closely with secondary schools and making sure they are accessing local training to support early help, challenging behaviour and crisis intervention. It was important that Hackney adopted a partnership approach with local schools to effectively reduce exclusions.

6.7 The Chair noted that parents are an important part of this equation and would most likely welcome data on school exclusions or suspension as much as exam results success. This information was critical for parents to make informed decisions about which school their child might attend. The Chair indicated that if schools did not think that there were concerns with the number of children they excluded, then they would not mind this data being public. If permanent exclusion was a necessary part of the sanctions policy for school behaviour policies then the publication of this data was a means to justify the schools approach.

**6.8 Whilst permanent exclusion rates in Hackney have declined, the Commission noted that so to have rates declined across all London boroughs, and local exclusion rates are still amongst the highest across all London boroughs. The most recent publicly available data (Autumn term 2021/22) notes that Hackney has the second highest rate of permanent exclusions in London and the second highest rate of suspensions in London. Whilst it is positive that fewer children are being excluded, the data would suggest that something different is happening in Hackney and we are still not making progress quickly enough compared to other London boroughs. Why are rates in Hackney still higher than most other boroughs?**

- HE acknowledged that the rates of school exclusion are still too high, especially when compared to statistical neighbours. It was noted that Hackney is transparent about the need to prioritise tackling exclusions and adopts a child centred approach to diversion and to make sure all school moves are in the best interests of the child. The expanded early help offer would be critical to addressing the needs of children to help prevent exclusion. For those children the authority has not been able to help early enough, HE has also mapped out a diversionary pathway for children who are at the point of exclusion, where a named officer in HE would be able to develop a bespoke set of options which may avoid exclusion (e.g. SEND).
- The Group Director also noted that a Diversity and Inclusion Systems lead had been appointed who was a former deputy head teacher in Hackney and worked closely with the leadership of local secondary schools in supporting anti-racist practice. All primary and secondary heads were engaged on this issue. The Young Governors programme was also supporting young people (and young people from black and global majority backgrounds) into local school governing bodies to bring greater accountability to school leadership.
- HE also noted that Joint Analysis Reviews (JAR) had been introduced with schools to look at exclusions through an intersectional lens, particularly in relation to the SEND needs of children. A process has also been instigated with all of the Multi Academy Trusts (MAT) and secondary federations in which local challenge is provided by the Director to the relevant MAT chief executive where rates of exclusion or suspension were high.

**6.9 SEND remains a significant factor in local exclusions, where 34 pupils who were permanently excluded in 2021/22 - 5 had an EHCP and 18 were on SEND support - meaning 68% therefore had identified special needs at the point of exclusion. Is HE confident that local schools are complying with guidance around the exclusion of children with SEND?**

- HE undertakes a drill down with the school for every permanent exclusion to understand the reasons for that exclusion, especially when the child has SEND. On the whole, schools were generally compliant with guidance around exclusion of children with SEND. However, there were three Independent Review Panels last year which required governing bodies to review their decision based on the

SEND needs of the child, and two of these children were reinstated back into school. As a whole schools were compliant, but where schools were failing on this duty they were being picked up and challenged.

6.10 The Chair and Deputy Mayor agreed that given that there had been no permanent exclusions of primary school children it was clear that local primaries had made considerable commitments to inclusion, which secondary schools had not maintained. It was noted that further work around the transition of pupils from primary to secondary would be needed to help children adjust to secondary education and maintain their place in mainstream education.

**6.11 A member of Hackney Youth Parliament asked if teachers were sufficiently trained to support children with SEND, especially when additional needs may not be readily or easily identifiable?**

- HE believed that teachers were trained to recognise different types of SEND in children and that there was a broad range of local training available to support this. There were now multi-agency planning meetings taking place each term in every school to look at the SEND needs of children across the school. There were lots of opportunities to access training via the REU, WAMHS and SEND teams.

**6.12 A member of Hackney Youth Parliament noted that in the review, some school behaviour policies were noted to be excessively punitive and failed to identify children's underlying needs, both of which contributed to school exclusion. Has there been any audit (by Hackney Education or schools themselves) of local school behaviour policies to ensure that these do not disproportionately impact on different groups of children and comply with equalities duties? It was also noted that school search policies can be intrusive and penalties can be excessive (5 days for a phone). What leverage does the authority have in relation to academies as opposed to maintained schools when considering behaviour policies?**

- All schools were required to write their own behaviour policies but these should comply with statutory guidance (e.g. equalities duties) and these are formally monitored and assessed by Ofsted. The HE role is to work with schools to ensure that these are as effective as possible in relation to education performance and health and wellbeing. It does not have the authority to act in relation to specifics of individual policies (e.g. whether phones are allowed). It was emphasised that all policies must provide reasonable adjustments for children with additional needs.
- It was important that children and young peoples lived experience should form part of this consultation in formulating behaviour policies.
- In terms of the difference between academies and maintained schools was that whilst the latter *must publish* their behaviour policies, the former only *should publish*. Whilst it was clearly the responsibility of school heads to develop school behaviour policies and there was no requirement to consult or involve young people in this process. In Hackney however, there were many examples of students being involved in the development of school behaviour policies.

6.13 The Commission discussed how student voice was captured in schools, and whether those children selected to participate in certain representative functions are an authentic voice of the school. The Chair and Vice chair were of the view that more could be done to evidence good practice to local schools and share exemplary models of behaviour policies with local schools. It was noted that there are growing concerns around the use of zero-tolerance behaviour policies, which some local schools still operate but yet there was little evidence presented in this forum as to their effectiveness.

**6.14 Where does the Re-Engagement Unit (REU) sit in relation to challenging systemic inequality, that is, is the service perpetuating disproportionality if it is**

**seeing a higher number of referrals black and global majority students? If there is no challenge to the system, then the extended REU is building capacity to deal with systemic injustice rather than challenging it.**

- The REU does work systematically with the school, family and peer group as well as with the child. The REU works with schools to audit their skills set to help them identify and support children who may need additional help, and encourage them to analyse their school data to see if there are any gaps which they may need to fill (in terms of support, training for staff). There are two steering groups supporting the delivery of the REU (one for primary heads and one for secondary heads). The most important feedback loop however, was from parents of children who were vulnerable to being excluded from school. This information was used to inform REU discussions with schools, which in turn influences their own strategies and approaches.
- The REU role is also linked to a more strategic response, as this information contributes to the work of School Improvement Partners (SIP). SIP's now have an extended remit to also prioritise inclusion in their work with schools.

**6.15 Whilst the data shows that there were a significant number of children who were excluded who had SEND, was there any further data on whether these children had any outstanding requests for support before they were excluded? For example, were any children on a waiting list for an educational psychologist?**

- In terms of unmet need, the school would need to demonstrate that they had met the needs of that child prior to exclusion, otherwise the exclusion is likely to be overturned. In practice however, many children are later found to have additional needs after they have been excluded. The PRU undertakes a full assessment of children's needs once they have been excluded, and this process often uncovers unmet needs of the child. If a child was excluded for a single serious incident however, this may limit any recourse that they may have for appeal on the basis of the school not meeting the child's needs. The school would need to demonstrate that it had done everything in its power to address the needs of the child. It was also noted that the REU was also multidisciplinary including teachers, clinical psychologists, psychotherapists and a mini CAMHS unit. There is no cap on the number of referrals that a school can make, and the REU works to build internal school capacity to better support children in their care.

**6.16 How confident is the authority that the exclusion appeals service is working, and that local governing bodies are discharging their duties effectively, particularly when this relates to unmet needs?**

- One of the reasons why exclusions were so low in primary school settings was that the PRU had developed partnership placements, in which children could receive additional support through a short term intervention. It was reiterated that no child should be excluded for an unmet need, and where this is identified schools are challenged to put support in place.

**6.17 In its review of exclusions, the Commission spoke to many families of children with SEND, including from Turkish speaking communities, and many of their children had been excluded from school despite having additional needs. In numerous cases however, it was clear that children had an EHCP but which was out of date (sometimes not updated since primary school attendance). This group of parents also indicated that their culture led to a reluctance to challenge the decisions or authority of schools, which was perhaps not recognised in appeals processes. In this context, it is unclear what representation is available to support parents?**

- HE suggested that whilst it was unable to be present at such appeals, it would offer guidance to the school where it was believed that the process had contravened guidance and protocols (e.g. breaches of the Equalities Act). The

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LA role is one of guidance, but would reach out to parents where necessary to ensure that they were supported by appropriate advocacy services.

6.18 The Chair noted that the Commission had a number of further questions and would submit these off-line and publish in the next agenda.

6.19 The Chair thanked officers for their update and the continued efforts that are being made to address school exclusions in Hackney.

## **7 Free School Meals (Childhood Food Poverty) (21.10)**

7.1 In response to growing levels of childhood poverty and the ongoing cost of living crisis, the Commission undertook a number of site visits to local primary and secondary schools to assess what could be done to develop and extend free school meal provision and how schools were working to address childhood food poverty in general.

7.2 The Commission heard evidence from a number of local head teachers and questioned local officers at its meeting in October 2022 and produced a short summary of its findings from this work. It was hoped that these findings will inform the work of the childhood food poverty task force established by the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care which was expected to report in February 2023.

7.3 Members of the Commission noted and agreed with the letter.

## **8 Work Programme - Update (21.15)**

8.1 There were a number of updates to the work programme which were noted and agreed.

8.2 Child Q follow up scrutiny was agreed for 28th March 2023 (jointly with Living in Hackney). This session will review the update of the local safeguarding practice review, and local partners responses to the Commission's findings and recommendations. There will be public engagement ahead of the meeting to inform questioning for the scrutiny session.

8.3 The Cabinet Q and A (Cllr Woodley) session for 27th February 2023 had agreed on the following areas:

- Children's Centres;
- Support for parents of children with SEND;
- Demand and waiting times.

8.4 A paper is being produced by local services on support for young parents (March 20th 2023) setting out how young parents are supported locally. This would encompass Children and Families, Public Health (Health Visitors, School Nursing and Family Nurse Partnership), Midwifery, Young Hackney and Children Centres. A focus group is being planned ahead of the meeting to take place week commencing 6th March 2023 which a small group of members may wish to attend.

8.5 At its April 17th 2023 meeting, the Commission would look at the accessibility of CAMHS and officers are preparing a report for this. In addition, a focus group will be convened ahead of the meeting to enable members to talk with a selection of CAMHS providers (22nd March 2023).

## **9 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (21.20)**

9.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 30th November 2022 were noted and agreed.

9.2 The Commission noted the additional information on children placed in residential and secure settings away from London contained in the information pack which was requested at the last meeting.

## **10 Any Other Business**

10.1 It was noted that an accessible version of the exclusions review was being developed.

10.2 Members discussed an item on the upcoming Living in Hackney meeting around the policing of drugs. Whilst the focus of this scrutiny item was on adults, it was suggested that with the consent of Chairs, CYP may also input into this item. The Chair would discuss with the Chair of living in Hackney if members of CYP could attend.

10.3 The meeting closed at 9.45pm. The date of the next meeting was noted to be 27th February 2023.

Duration of the meeting: Times Not Specified

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