



London Borough of Hackney  
Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission  
Municipal Year 2023/24  
Date of Meeting Monday 19 February 2024

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>	Councillor Sophie Conway
<b>Councillors in Attendance</b>	Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice-Chair), Cllr Alastair Binnie-Lubbock, Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott and Cllr Sarah Young
<b>Co-optees in attendance</b>	Any English and Chanelle Paul
<b>Apologies:</b>	Cllr Ifraax Samatar, Cllr Anya Sizer, Cllr Sheila Suso-Runge and Cllr Lynne Troughton
<b>In Attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mayor Caroline Woodley, Cabinet representative for Families, Early Years, Parks &amp; Play (On-line)</li><li>• Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care</li><li>• Cllr Sam Pallis, Cazenove Ward</li><li>• Jackie Burke, Group Director Children and Education</li><li>• Paul Senior, Director of Education and Inclusion</li><li>• Amy Wilkinson, Dir. Partnerships, Impact &amp; Delivery NHS</li><li>• Nancy Bending-Becket, Project Manager, CAMHS Alliance / Hackney Education</li><li>• Sophie Mcelroy, Senior Programme Manager, CAMHS Alliance/Hackney Education</li><li>• Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help &amp; Wellbeing</li><li>• Sarah Bromfield, Head of Children's Centres &amp; Early Help</li><li>• Lolita Brown, HR Operations Lead Education</li><li>• Laura Stagg, Parent Engagement System Leader</li><li>• Beatrice Hackett, Parent representative Seerbright CC</li><li>• Natalie Aguilera, Parent representative Fernbank CC</li><li>• Yuliua Keselman, Parent representative Seerbright CC</li><li>• Matt Paul, Branch Secretary, UNISON</li><li>• Steve Edwards, Branch Secretary, Unite</li></ul>
<b>Members of the Public</b>	1 member of the public attended
<b>Meet recording</b>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtlBsWHACTc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtlBsWHACTc</a>
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**Councillor Sophie Conway in the Chair**

**1 Apologies for Absence**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from:

- Cllr Sheila Suso-Runge
- Cllr Lynne Troughton;
- Cllr Ifraax Samatar.
- Cllr Anya Sizer;
- Jo Macleod (Co-optee).

**2 Urgent Items / Order of Business**

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

**3 Declarations of Interest**

3.1 The following declarations were received:

- Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott was a member of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

**4 Super Youth Hub (7.05)**

4.1 The Commission scrutinised plans for the development of Super Youth Hub, which aims to provide integrated health and wellbeing services for young people across City & Hackney. Funds have been secured to develop a two-year pilot project across a number of neighbourhood areas which will start from April 2024. This was a brief update item to help the Commission further understand this planned development and how it will interconnect with other work streams and services that support young people in Hackney. It was also an opportunity for the Commission to input into project development ahead of the commencement of the pilot.

Presentation by officers

4.2 Officers from the CAMHS Alliance presented a summary of the project to members of the Commission, highlighting the following:

- The Super Youth Hub (SYH) offers an integrated approach to the delivery of health and wellbeing services to young people across City & Hackney. The SYH was being developed in response to rising demands for young people's health and wellbeing services together with young people's stated concerns in both navigating and accessing such services. One of the principles of the SYH is therefore to develop capacity and improve accessibility of local health and wellbeing services.
- Plans for the SYH were informed by an action research project which indicated that young people preferred to access services in settings with which they were familiar and through staff with whom they trusted. The SYH pilot aims to develop a network of services across two neighbourhood areas and has two key objectives a) to 'uncomplicate' the local system of health and wellbeing services and b) improving access by young people to local services.
- The SYH also incorporated plans to develop a one-stop shop for health and wellbeing for young people which was most likely to be located within Forest Road Youth hub and would include both GP and sexual health services as well as other health services.
- Plans for the SYH would also include a detailed communications strategy with services, parents and of course young people, the latter being co-designed and produced with young people themselves. There would also be an accompanying

programme of outreach to VCS to reach young people in different settings and to promote equity of access.

- Plans for the SYH are being modelled on the approach taken in Tower Hamlets (Spotlight) which also developed an integrated health and wellbeing service and which has achieved excellent outcomes.
- The key professionals within the SYH will be public health (substance misuse and sexual health), primary care, mental health, Young Hackney and CVS.
- Coproduction has been a central tenet of the SYH and young people have been involved at all stages to date (e.g. peer research and Young Advisor role) and would continue (e.g. establishment of a Youth Steering Board, recruitment of HWB influencers to help engage young people).
- Over £300k has been provided through NHS NEL Outcomes funding which is being used to support 3 new posts (clinical lead, operational manager, system navigator) who will lead in the development and delivery of the pilot.
- The pilot will be set up in the London Fields, Shoreditch Park and the City neighbourhood which will start in spring 2024 and will last for 2 years.

#### Questions from the Commission

4.3 Early help services, which are central to the development of the Super Youth Hub - are under significant pressure. For example, Young Hackney, which is integral to the Super Youth Hub project, is proposing to reduce universal and targeted provision by 30% over the next 2 years as cited in the January 2024 Cabinet report. Have these pressures been acknowledged within project development plans? How will this project address high rates of STIs among young people?

- Without exception, local services are evaluating the services that they have and how these are delivered within the pressures of their budget, and Young Hackney is in the same position. Not only have young people been central to the co-production of this project, but other local services have also been in close collaboration, and Young Hackney (YH) has been at the centre of planning and design. This is by necessity as the SYH model will be youth worker led and utilise existing youth services facilities at Forest Road for the physical space from which this project will be delivered. Having trusted youth workers to front the SYH is important, so there has been really close coordination with YH in this development so that these two areas of work are aligned.
- In relation to STI's, plans for the SYH have also been co-produced with the Public Health team. Many of the young people's services provided through public health are in a recommissioning stage and this project has been collaborating within that process. Monthly strategic meetings take place for all connected partners in this project.

4.4 The report sets out that £319,154 of funding has been received from NHS North East London Outcomes funding. Can officers provide further clarification if this funding of £319,154 is the total budget for the Super Youth Hub? Noting the financial pressures within council services, can officers confirm if the 'support' to be provided by Public Health, Young Hackney is financial, and if so how much? Or is this initiative being funded exclusively from NHS grant funding?

- This was seed funding derived from an underspend in the City and Hackney CCG budget which is to be used for service transformation. As the funding is short term (for two years) the project team will be looking for opportunities to build sustainability into the SYH and had already had conversations with PH around additional funding.

4.5 The Commission recently scrutinised the decommissioning of the CHYPS Plus service which whilst offering an integrated sexual health and wellbeing service, operated from locations where young people congregated, was poorly attended. If this integrated model of youth health and wellbeing provision did not work, what is different about the Super Youth Hub that will ensure its success? Are officers confident that the integrated

model of wellbeing services is acceptable to young people and will deliver improved capacity and support for young people?

- Whilst young people's sexual health services are being recommissioned, young people will still be able to access the main site at the Clifton Centre. An outreach service will be provided to the SYH in Forest Road which itself will have an outreach service to schools and VCS settings. This model was about testing this new approach to ensure that services were acceptable to young people and that they used this service in sufficient numbers. As a service supporting young people, there needed to be a constant process of assessment in trying to find and engage young people where they naturally congregate.
- This project would constantly seek to involve professionals working with young people to ensure that there is regular and ongoing intelligence on those settings where young people are located. As these locations are dynamic and evolving, it is important that the SYH team remain alert to such intelligence and ensure that the model is reaching different cohorts of young people. Thus whilst there would be centralised services in this model, the SYH would need to think creatively on how it was to reach more marginalised groups of young people.

4.6 One of the expected outcomes from the development of the Super Youth Hub is a reduction in local health inequalities. How will the Super Youth Hub intend to achieve this? How will the SYH engage marginalised groups of young people, especially those that may not attend youth settings, in particular those children from the Charedi community?

- This is partly answered in the response above, as benefits of the SYH relates to the improved engagement and support of young people, particularly those from marginalised or vulnerable groups. In this context, the SYH will help to address local inequalities by engaging such young people and delivering support and or services in a timelier and preventative manner. Similarly, the SYH would aim to train and upskill local services to help improve the knowledge and understanding of local youth needs across the health and wellbeing services.
- In reaching different groups of young people the first access points were critical, in particular, those trusted adults with whom these young people are in contact. The SYH project will explore how it can integrate with broader consultative processes (which may at present just target adult audiences) to reach more young people as well as how to reach out to other more defined settings (such as sports clubs) to help develop new networks with young people.
- In terms of the Charedi community it was recognised that this pilot was in the south of the borough and not in those areas where the Charedi predominantly reside. One area where it might be possible to reach different communities was through sport and physical activity and to build health messaging through those ways. In all areas, it was important to work with trusted leaders in respective communities. It was acknowledged that the SYH had further work to do to ensure that SYH responded to the needs of young people from the Charedi community and this offer might look for members of this community. There were some examples of very good partnership work with the Charedi community which had brought very positive results which would be used to inform SYH developments (e.g. SLT and a Charedi version of WHAMS).
- It was also noted that there was other health inequality work which would contribute to the development of the SYH, including dedicated programmes to address inequalities in maternity services and a youth justice integrated needs assessment, SEND needs assessment and mental health needs assessment. This was helping to build a clearer picture of local health inequalities and those resources available to address these.

4.7 Segmentation of the local community and understanding different needs would be central to the approach of the SYH. What actions have officers undertaken in ensuring that there was a full understanding of the differing needs of local young people? Does

the team delivering this development reflect the diversity of young people and will this help frame or inform the strategy for the SYH?

- This data has been collated from across a number of services as well as data collection focused upon young people themselves. There had also been extensive engagement with VCS and health and wellbeing partners to help develop a more developed and granular understanding of the needs of local young people. It was recognised that many of the staff involved in this project were white women and this emphasised the need for further engagement and involvement of local residents and community groups to enrich understanding of the needs of young people. Engaging CVS settings were critical to this process as they were experts and knowledgeable of their own communities. An inclusive recruitment process would be undertaken for the three funded posts to support the SYH as this would help to bring a lived experience and understanding to these roles. It was emphasised that young people from a diverse range of backgrounds participated in the action research and would also be recruited onto the steering group for the project.

4.8 The pilot in the south of the borough is scheduled to run for two years which is a fairly long period of time. Can further details be provided about the milestones within the project which will present opportunities to reflect and evaluate the progress of the project, in particular those planned KPIs or outcome measures?

- The participant action research was the start point for this project to understand what young people wanted from services. The aim is to undertake a similar piece of action research toward the end of this pilot project to understand how patterns of service use may have changed. This will complement a whole range of other quantitative data relating to other metrics (e.g. uptake of STI testing). The first part of this project however, is about building relationships and embedding the pilot project and the second year is about how this works in practice. The reason that this project is over 2 years is because it takes this amount of time to build trust and relationships with young people. There was a more detailed evaluation plan in place to support the SYH project.

4.9 The Chair thanked officers for attending and presenting on plans for the development of the SYH. It was hoped that a future update could be taken next year to review progress on this development for youth services.

## **5 Children Centres Childcare (Reconfiguration) (7.35)**

5.1 On January 22nd a report Cabinet set out a number of proposals for the reconfiguration of childcare provided across 11 children centres in Hackney and to agree a public consultation. This consultation would run from 31st January 2024 to 24th April 2024. The Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission agreed to participate in this public consultation process and invited officers to the meeting to present these proposals and to respond to member questions. The Commission also invited a number of parent group representatives to the meeting to present their initial response to the proposals together with union representatives to present the perspectives of potentially affected staff groups.

5.2 The Chair noted that at the time of this meeting, the consultation had just begun, and the impact and implications of the proposals for children, parents and staff will take some time to filter down within the community. In this context, the chair also reminded parents that their participation in this scrutiny process did not in any way limit their further engagement with the public consultation process, and urged them to continue to engage and be involved in any planned events supporting the public consultation process.

5.3 After this meeting, the Commission would review all verbal evidence together with all the written material received and make a formal submission to the public children centre

consultation via the Cabinet lead for this area. This response would be made public in the next available agenda.

Presentation by Officers

5.4 The Director of Education welcomed scrutiny of the childcare proposals affecting childcare provision at local children's centres. The DoE emphasised that Hackney had a long history of good early years provision, of which children's centres were an important part. The financial challenges facing the council had however required officers to reframe the local early years offer and specific proposals have been put forward in respect of 4 children's centres. The evidence base for these proposals has been provided by the work of the Affordable Childcare Commission and the Ernst & Young Review of childcare provision at local children's centres. The proposals set out an adjusted local offer to best meet local needs and to ensure the longer term sustainability of local children's centres.

5.5 The Head of Early Years also highlighted the following issues in relation to the proposals:

- It should be noted that Hackney was one of only 3 LA's across London which continued to offer subsidised childcare.
- The extension of the free childcare provision from April 2024 through to September 2025 offered an opportunity to reduce subsidised childcare provision and to ensure that early years' services are delivered efficiently.
- Fewer children were being born in Hackney which meant that there were less children in the childcare system. Also the number of 2 year olds entitled to free childcare had reduced from over 2,000 in 2017/18 to just over 1,000. The housing crisis meant that there were also increasing numbers of families choosing to move or being re-homed out of the borough.
- DfE had provided new funding (for 3 years) to LA's to extend wraparound childcare for 4 year olds and upwards to help promote uptake of breakfast club, after school clubs and holiday provision.
- These proposals offer an opportunity to rethink how subsidised child care is provided and how vulnerable children and families can be prioritised and best supported across local childcare provision.
- Whilst the LA does have a duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare available locally, it does not have a duty to provide childcare itself or offer subsidised childcare provision. The service had worked with the DfE in respect of childcare sufficiency, and the DfE had confirmed that there was sufficient local capacity to support the expansion of free childcare in April and September 2024. The service would continue to assess local provision to ensure that there were sufficient places. It was noted that analysis had demonstrated that there were surplus places in all wards and all neighbourhoods.

Presentation by Parents Group Representatives

5.6 Parent representatives thanked the Chair for the opportunity to be able to present their views on the proposals to the Commission. Parent representatives presented a summary of their concerns (attached to these minutes). Key points from this presentation are summarised below.

- The proposals for the impacted children's centre had come 'out of the blue' and the timeline for the consultation gave little time for parents to fully understand the proposals and to engage with the consultation process.
- It was unclear as to what the purpose of the consultation process itself was as it was felt that there was little scope to influence the proposals and outcomes.
- It was concerning that there had been little engagement or response to the recommendation made by parents in the previous consultation previously conducted in 2021.
- The Childcare environment has significantly changed since the last consultation, as the Ernst & Young report made clear, the extension of free childcare would

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deliver significant savings for the council, in excess of what was set out in these proposals.

- The Ernst & Young reports highlighted 7 cost saving and income generation recommendations which had yet to be fully explored or implemented, and these were not mentioned as alternatives in the consultation survey.
- Parents also questioned the use of data to support the consultation, in particular occupancy data as there was no detail of when and how this was acquired.
- Parents challenged the notion that there was a surplus of affordable childcare as these were in high demand across the borough and nationally, where research suggested that 46% of parents had gone into debt or needed to use savings to pay for childcare. Childcare was also a significant driver of poverty, especially for single parents.
- Parents noted that the Ernst & Young report indicated that there were inconsistencies in admissions processes, and were frustrated that this had not been improved since the last consultation.
- It was also noted that the quality of support provided by children's centre childcare was unparalleled, and the loss of 200 places would have a significant impact. These settings were also diverse and inclusive and instrumental in helping to close the attainment gap between lower income families and their peers.
- For the lowest income families, the weekly childcare fees at children's centres was £207, almost half the cost of the average cost of sector wide childcare at £395.
- Parent representatives also suggested that the childcare sufficiency assessment did not fully consider the needs of working parents.
- Children centre were highly qualified childcare professionals well equipped to identify delayed development needs of children, and the possible displacement and loss of these staff would be detrimental to support available to local children.
- Children's Centres were community assets and a focus for many activities for local families and a source of wider connections and support within the community more broadly.
- The consultation does not mention the potential loss of extended services from the children centre sites (should they move to independent provision or close) including breastfeeding programmes or support for refugee families.
- Parents indicated that the consultation did not conform to the Gunning principles which requires the consultation to be conducted when proposals are at a formative stage. Also, no alternative options are provided within the consultation process.
- An equality impact assessment should also have been undertaken on the different proposals prior to the consultation, to help inform responses.
- Parents noted that they had been denied an opportunity to present a deputation at Full Council and had missed the deadline to present at Cabinet. Parents group representatives wanted dialogue with decision makers and to ensure that there was accountability in this process.
- Parent representatives also highlighted the illegibility of graphs within the consultation documentation and references to out of date (not the most recent) data.
- Parents also noted that the assertion that there were over 500 vacancies in school nurseries was not a like for like comparison in respect of the childcare that would be lost from children's centres as these mainly only offered childcare in term time and many would not support children aged under 2 years of age. The cost of wrap around care was also unaffordable at up to £90 per day and over £450 a month.

#### Presentation by Unison (Union)

5.7 The Branch Secretary of the Union presented to the Commission, noting the work that parents group representatives had already done in engaging other parents

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gathering evidence on the impact of the proposals. The Branch Secretary also highlighted the following points:

- Staff at impacted sites were feeling a variety of responses to the proposals including shock, anxiety and anger. Many were long standing employees who had provided valuable help to children and families in Hackney over many years.
- Staff were very anxious about the prospect of losing their job and the uncertainty of finding alternative employment. Staff were also concerned about the potential loss of services to those who may need it most.
- The Union was concerned that after the previous consultation (to close Fernbank and Hillside) was discontinued in 2021, that there was a rush to get this current consultation 'done and out of the way'. The Union also contend that the Council broke its own constitutional rules by not allowing the public fair access to the reports when these proposals were put forward on 22/1/24 (the report was published late and reports were made exempt).
- The consultation fails to note that the proposals would lead to around 50 staff losing their jobs, most of these are women and from black and global majority backgrounds.
- The rationale for putting two children's centres out for tender (or closure) was questionable. Whilst the consultation report suggests that low occupancy was a driving factor for the closures, the Union had evidence that current occupancy at Fernbank was at 105% and that there was a waiting list for places and operated at a surplus last year. The Union has also requested more up to date information on occupancy rates across all centres and is made public to inform the consultation process.
- Mitigations for the possible closure of Seebright suggest transfer to nearby Mapledene or Anne Tayler, which is not viable as both these centres are full and operate a waiting list.
- The move to extended services and Children and Family Hubs from a number of children's centres will also depress childcare demand, including at Seebright which is already at risk.
- The plans to put out for tender both Fernbank and Seebright go against the Councils longstanding commitment to insourcing. It was the view of the Union that private providers would unlikely take on the provision of affordable childcare without detrimental changes to the service or workers' pay and conditions.
- The consultation does not ask for views on any alternative plans put forward by management, solely on those plans for privatisation or repurposing. This suggested that this consultation was not a real listening exercise, but moving forward toward a predetermined outcome.
- It was important that key services such as children's centres are retained for community use, and the Council should consider use of £160m reserves at its disposal.
- The Council does have options including delaying or buffering the proposed cuts, or delaying plans until the impact of the expansion of the extended free childcare had been fully assessed.
- Union members have indicated that they do not accept these plans and intend to fight for the centres and the services that they provide.

#### Presentation by Union - Unite

5.8 The Branch Secretary of Unite firstly acknowledged the work of parents in producing their response to the proposals for children's centres. Unite had attended meetings when these proposals were put forward to staff - and made the following points:

- Staff working at local children's centres were devoted to children's centres and their role in supporting local children and families, some of which were amongst the most vulnerable in the community;
- Parents were not being kept fully informed of the proposed changes and the impact that these would have on their children and there needed to be greater transparency on behalf of management and the council;



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- The union's prime duty was to preserve jobs and further commitment was needed from management as to how it would seek to retain jobs within this process, especially as these proposals would disproportionately impact female part-time workers.
- The management have also suggested that there should be a standardisation of roles across children centres. The Union believes this will be detrimental to the provision of high quality and effective services, as this will not allow roles to develop and respond to local needs of individual children's centres.
- The Union also questioned whether there was any scope to increase capacity should a change in funding or the data (on which these changes are predicated) be uncovered?

#### Questions from the Commission

5.9 The Chair commenced this part of the meeting by emphasising that both officers and councillors believed in and supported the role of local children's centres and councillors did not want to be in this position of having to reduce services.

5.10 The Budget report agreed at Cabinet 22nd January agreed £4m of savings proposals across the Children Centre budget over the medium term financial plan (2024/5-2026/7). How does this financial decision intersect with this consultation process? What scope is there in this consultation to vary the proposals and financial outcomes? If the proposals set out in the consultation are 'rejected' - does the Children Centre budget still have to find £4m of savings elsewhere in its budget, or will the council have to look outside of children's centres or Education budget to find alternative savings?

- In terms of the £4m of savings, the council has asked for this saving out of its early year's budget. The service is running at a substantial deficit, and officers noted over a number of years that this needed to be addressed otherwise this would increase. It did increase to £0.5m in 2021 but the consultation to close two children's centres at that time was paused and the deficit continued to increase. This is because there has been no growth in the budget and operational costs continue to rise. With no growth money expected for children's centres this requires that things are done differently to address the deficit.
- The council has a shortfall of £57m over the next 3 years and it has to find ways to meet this shortfall as it is legally obliged to set a balanced budget. As much as any officers dislike to upset provision and take services away from residents, the Group Director could not justify making any changes at all to provision, as this would exacerbate the financial pressures on other directorates across the council. The consultation responses would be assessed but savings would need to be found within the Children & Education Directorate. This was a difficult process for everyone involved.

5.11 The Ernst & Young Report (EYR) (at page 7 /8) notes that the extension of the government's free childcare provision up to September 2025 will result in substantial additional income to the children's centres of approximately £5m net - which will mean that the subsidy which the council provides to parents for childcare will reduce from £6.2m currently to £1m in September 2025. Will the projected increase in income at above named children's centres that the extended free childcare not make these centres more financially viable? If the proposed childcare changes go ahead at Hillside, Oldhill, Fernbank and Seebright children's centres - how will this impact on this expected future income level?

- In 2018, there were 20,375 preschool children in Hackney and now there are around 18,800, and projected to fall by 2,000 over the next 3-6 years. The authority was working with GLA projections and DfE around future demand to make sure that it was meeting its statutory duties. It was important to see these proposals in that context.
- In relation to the outcomes of the EY report, this tallied with the landscape which internal analysis had revealed. It was also important to look at these proposals in

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the wider context of childcare and the number of different providers there are in Hackney: over 100 PVI settings, 150 childminders and all of these had vacancies.

- In terms of vacancies, it was important that this was monitored at the start of each term in September, not in February or March as all settings generally took on more children as the year progressed. Centres could not afford to have spare places at the beginning of the term in order to meet their income targets. If there is a desire for a viable and sustainable provision, then these proposals should be considered.
- In relation to the £5m of additional income set out in the EY report, this was as yet unconfirmed and was speculative. If the expected take up materialised the authority could potentially achieve this level of income, but based on the current numbers this was far from certain. The reports make clear that this will be kept under review until there was greater clarity of the take up of the extended free childcare places. It was emphasised that whilst the authority has a duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare, it does not have a duty to provide affordable childcare. It also has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for children in need to be supported. Cabinet commissioned a separate review of affordable childcare which was separate to this review, but the focus was not on children's centres. If the authority did realise this income from the extended free childcare, then it need not do anything and could come back at the end of the process and say that these nurseries can be retained. It was emphasised however that this was as yet unknown, and the best indicator of future behaviour was past behaviour. This was an opportunity however to deliver a more sustainable model of children centre provision.
- As of today (19th February 2024) 200 parents had been issued with a code as part of the expanded free childcare offer, but it was likely that these children were already in places, so these are not new children. It is still not known how many new children will register as a result of the extended childcare offer.
- This engagement session was also about involving staff to get their ideas about what could be done better. This was the start of the process.

5.12 It was noted that one of the key issues to arise from the previously paused consultation on children's centres was the need for greater marketing and awareness of local childcare provision. Has this been followed up? What was being done to market the children centre childcare offer?

- Marketing was always on the agenda with centre managers and was raised at monthly meetings alongside take-up of places and financial planning. Many of the centres will have posters up outside indicating whether there were childcare places available. Some of the children's centres are delivered by schools and in these settings where education is free at the point of delivery. Children's centres required a specific skill set in managing a service which was not free, but in fact a small business and this was evidently a challenge for some settings (despite support being provided). The reason the affordable childcare commission was commissioned was to understand all those factors which were impacting on the childcare market. This was an independent review, procured independently with the involvement of parents which has produced recommendations for the council to do things differently. All the children's centres have an individual profile and specific reach within their respective communities.

5.13 The E & Y report also highlighted improvements that should be made across the operational and financial management of the children centre service. What progress has been made in implementing these recommendations? It was also not clear as to what level of savings they are likely to achieve and if this may impact on the proposals being put forward.

(No response)

5.14 The Vice Chair noted that the system of early years funding was both challenging and complex which was difficult for officers to oversee and manage. It was also suggested that the timing of the Affordable Child Care Commission report is such that many have not had an opportunity to fully reflect the possible implications of this and how it may impact on these proposals. This being said, it should be recognised that children's centres are unparalleled centres of diverse, inclusive and affordable childcare education which offer a gold standard for child care for parents in Hackney and that more should have been done to promote them within the community. Whilst statutory duties may not extend to the provision of affordable childcare, as a council, it was important that this should be an ambition for all local families. During the course of the consultation it would be helpful if further information could be provided around the E & Y Report calculations for additional income and how this reconciles with the savings required for the children centre budget.

- The Early Years' service works with Homerton and HV and MW services to promote childcare provision at children's centres, so every parent that gives birth in Hackney will receive information about local children's centres. This arrangement was tested by officers to ensure that this information was being regularly provided. SLT services were also good at bringing children into local children's centres and many thousands of children are coming through the doors of children's centres for universal and other services. It was acknowledged that some families often moved, and that it was necessary to keep promoting the service and the Local Offer and the Family Information Service (FIS) continued to do this.
- All the children centres have outreach teams to try and reach families at the earliest point possible as soon after children are being born. The centres work closely with both midwives and Health visitors to ensure prompt registration. Centres also worked closely with FIS and other extended services outside of childcare provision (e.g. stay and play) which are important opportunities to engage with parents and promote take up. Fundamentally, families are using childcare differently post pandemic which presents a challenge to be able to fill children centre places. The LA commissioned both schools and VCS children centres to provide childcare and it was their responsibility to make sure there was adequate marketing of their childcare provision.

5.15 The Chair echoed the above, emphasising that, given that the basis of the proposals to reduce provision at certain centres was based on attendance and take up, further evidence needed to have been provided about the promotion of these specific services within the community. The Chair also noted that greater clarity was needed on why certain children's centres had vacancies whilst others had waiting lists, and how much was this attributable to different approaches to managing vacancies across the children centre network. It was also unclear why a more centralised or cooperative approach could not be operated in managing vacancies across local children's centres rather than individually. Is there any way to administer this centrally so that these gaps do not appear across the system? How can CC make sure that there is a better fit in responding to the childcare needs of parents?

- These are the same issues which were raised in the E & Y report. It is important to remember that the principle of parental choice is critical in the uptake of childcare provision, be it a childminder, a children centre nursery or a school nursery. Of course, some parents will only want two or three days per week, and in this context, children's centres (and other childcare settings) will have to try and match this request with the needs of other parents. The alternative is just to offer full-time places but clearly, that would present challenges for some groups of parents. This was a very difficult juggling act for centres to manage.
- It was also noted that the costs of childcare had significantly increased, this was on the back of increased operational costs (staff, utilities, business rates). Children's centres were also tied to council policies and procedures which limited their flexibility (e.g. use of agency staff). The children's centres were working within the constraints of a large organisation in which they were expected to

conform. Smaller businesses may be more agile and better respond to local needs, and if bidders can be agreed for these services, this will mean that these services will not close. The services would also be procured on the basis of the council's early years' principles.

5.16 How extensive is the analysis that's been done of how to actually devise an implementation plan exploring ways to realise that £5m gain? Where is that report? To underscore the contention that it seems there's been one course of action explored and that's the route being pushed forward, there seems very little indication that much if any work has been done to meaningfully map alternatives.

- The key element to start off with was analysis of what will the extended childcare realise in additional income in both April and September 2024 as the new funding elements are introduced. Whilst this was beginning to be mapped, at the moment these were only assumptions and the service would need to closely monitor the actual take up and how many of these were new parents. Whilst the DfE is predicting an increase in demand for childcare, it is too early to say if this was the case and translate to local childcare settings, as this would not be known until September 2024. The service would continue to monitor the situation and reassess conditions at the end of the process after the consultation, but it was important not to predetermine the outcome. It was important to put this in the fullest context, which was that most parents were using childcare in Hackney, but for the most part, they were using PVI settings rather than children's centres.

5.17 Since the last consultation in 2021, what additional investment has gone into children's centres for improved financial management? In particular, as cited by the E & Y report, improved income targets, greater controls on overspends and alignment of operating policies.

5.18 The Chair noted that the Cabinet report at 7.3 notes that these proposals are those put forward to date and that 'further consideration needs to be given to identifying further savings given the budget gap that remains and the need to revisit all areas of discretionary spend.' It would seem that the proposals offer a short-term solution to this issue as many of the issues which have been discussed have been raised before in the 2021 consultation (e.g. places uptake and business management). Whilst it was not clear what would be agreed as a result of the consultation it was hoped that these would be addressed to hopefully prevent this coming before the commission again in 2 years' time with a further set of reductions. The Chair emphasised that members and officers were of the same understanding that there was insufficient funding to be able to resource these services, which are known to be important to the community, to adequate levels. The Commission needed to be sure that the council was using all its levers, powers and other resources available to it to the maximum extent to minimise the impact that this funding shortfall is likely to have on children's centres.

5.19 The Ernst & Young review highlights the challenges of staffing arrangements across children centres not only in terms of recruitment and retention, but also in respect of developing sustainable staffing models covering 10 hour opening times. Outside the 4 children's centres which are the focus of this consultation, there are no proposals as to how the children centre service will respond to this staffing challenge.

*And:*

In terms of the potential outsourcing of two children's centres would these be tendered on the basis of providing full-time childcare throughout the year (including holidays)? If centres were outsourced, what would be the staffing arrangements? Will staff be taken on at the same terms and conditions and be required to have the same level of qualifications? Has there been any market testing to see if there is an interest in these centres?

- Officers declined to answer this question as this may be seen as predetermining the outcome, but this piece of work had not been undertaken as yet. Officers

were genuinely interested in the outcomes of the consultation and what might be suggested from contributors in this respect. The reason why this option has been developed is to help safeguard children's centre. TUPE arrangements would be in place to support staff transfer and this would protect their rights. If the right providers were found it was hoped that the consultation would provide a steer on how to proceed. No officer wants to lose provision or places, but an expert was needed to operate these services as it required specialist skills and knowledge to make these childcare businesses work. The feedback from the consultation will help to shape and inform the tendering process.

5.20 Woodberry Down (which had a low occupancy rate) was rejected for closure because of recent capital investment and regeneration of the area. Instead the consultation report sets out a number of cost saving options to be applied to Woodberry Down (e.g. reduced use of agency staff, more effective building management and maintenance, improved budget management). Given that the cost pressures within children centres have been ongoing for a number of years - why have these actions not been taken sooner? Have all other children centre's in scope for repurpose or put out to tender been through this cost efficiency process to ensure their viability? Can officers reassure the Commission that all children centres have been subject to these efficiencies to improve costs?

- Officers were pleased this point has been raised as this coincided with the recommendations of the E & Y report and their 10 recommendations to improve income and reduce expenditure across the children centre estate. Whilst a different approach was being taken with Woodberry Down, these recommendations would need to be applied across all centres. For the reasons already mentioned, children's centres operate within a large organisation and were required where there had to be decisions made at a corporate level as to how the council does business, and this required children centres to adhere to a range of policies which was challenging for their effective and efficient operation (e.g. managing of premises, rates, staffing and use of agency). There has to be a commitment from the organisation to take up these proposals, in addition to the four proposals currently the subject of this consultation.

*As a follow up:*

5.21 It was not clear in the consultation that these efficiencies were being proposed across all centres, and there is no detail as to the level savings that these efficiencies and or income proposals might realise, which would be pertinent to the debate.

- Whilst this information was not in the consultation document it was in the FAQs.

5.22 The Cabinet report indicates that vulnerable and disadvantaged families as well as those who do not speak English may need additional support to engage with this consultation. How are such families to be engaged and supported to respond to this consultation?

- There had been a multiple pronged approach to consultation with active outreach to local families to support their participation. Children centres were also using universal services such as Stay and Play to help reach out to parents to enable them to engage with the consultation. There is specific work in both Charedi and Turkish/Turkish-Cypriot communities to reach these communities also.

5.23 The report notes that the Consultation is being undertaken in alignment with the Gunning principles. Are the proposals at a 'formative stage' where there is a realistic and meaningful opportunity to vary these proposals being put forward within the consultation?

- Yes, hence the engagement sessions.
- There had been wide ranging consultation about the need for integrated SEND provision in early years in principle, before Hillside was decided upon as the location for the early years ARP.

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- In terms of the Oldhill proposals, the consultation was actively looking for input from staff and other stakeholders to help shape and inform proposals.
- In terms of the other two sites proposed for outsourcing, options to continue to run the service as it was currently would need additional financial resources and this would need to be taken up and agreed by the council as a whole. Alternatively, if other providers were to be commissioned, this consultation would provide an opportunity to help shape what service is provided and the nature of the provider. If there is another way to take this forward, such as a social enterprise, the offer is on the table to do so.

5.24 How does the current consultation differ from the previous consultation? What is the rationale for new approaches taking place in 2024?

- The current consultation will be connecting with parent forums in operation at children centre sites. The consultation documents are also taken out to families as part of general outreach activities of children centres. These documents have also been provided to local schools to help reach a wide range of families. It was understood that currently, there was a very low take up of the consultation with few responses being received from current service users which would mean that staff would need to continue to promote this to local families.

5.25 Understanding that if agreed, the implementation of some of these proposals will commence in September 2024 (e.g. establishment of ARP). When is the key decision expected on the future of children's centres expected to be taken at Cabinet? As the outcome of the tender process for Seebright and Fernbank is not expected to be known until the 'autumn', will there be a separate key decision around the future of these two children's centres?

- In terms of the timeline, there would be no implementation before August 2025. These proposals and the consultation were agreed by Cabinet in January and the consultation would run until the end of April 2024. Initially it was expected that, following the analysis of consultation feedback, a decision would be taken on the future of children's centres by Cabinet in July 2024. A further re-evaluation of the process however would suggest that this would now unlikely to be before September 2024. The service would then work on the implementation plans up to August 2025, but this was dependent on the outcome of the consultation. The tender process for Fernbank and Seebright would only start once this had been agreed by Cabinet. If the procurement process did bring a possible partner, then this would start a formal consultation process with staff. The proposed savings of £4m were over a three-year period.

5.26 The Chair was uncertain whether these timelines gave sufficient time to fully appraise the impact of the extended free childcare on local services and possible impact on children's centre income.

- Officers will know from April from the HMRC those families applying for extended childcare provision. Whilst exact numbers were unknown as yet, this would expect to deliver some savings to the council as parents move from subsidised care to funded free childcare. At each of the proposed expansion stages, this will replace some proportion of the council funded childcare (April 2024 for all 2 year olds and September 2024 for 9 months for 15 hours). It would not be known how many children would remain in Hackney until September 2024.
- A statutory consultation was not needed for the Children and Family Hubs because the council was not required to. A statutory consultation is being undertaken for these children centre proposals, hence that this is a 12-week consultation. The children and family hubs consultation was 8 weeks (in July 2023) as this was not a statutory consultation.

5.27 Mayor Woodley acknowledged the challenge that parents faced, particularly as they were coming back a second time. There was a broad feeling of regret that the

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council was in this situation of having to consider restricting provision of this important service rather than additional investment. It was emphasised that there was a creative and committed staff team overseeing this, it was hoped that proposals will if approved be implemented in as sensible a way as possible. The Mayor was a strong believer in insourcing services, so these proposals were difficult to put forward, but Cabinet Procurement and Insourcing Committee would adhere to core principles of social value, living wages for staff, if this did end up with a decision to procure. The Mayor also reiterated the severe financial pressures that the council was under with a £57m shortfall over the next 3 years; a £4m shortfall in Children and Education and £10m in adult social care. It was painful for the council to come back to look for savings from frontline services, and it was acknowledged that it would be difficult for some families and that it was therefore important to work together with all partners to mitigate the impact. The early years' service has made significant progress in developing Children and Family Hubs, which whilst they don't provide funding for any childcare, help to extend support to local families in need. The Affordable Childcare Commission report has also been published and the Council will respond to the recommendations made within that report. It was emphasised that the children centre consultation was difficult and challenging for staff but this process was being engaged with in good faith.

5.28 Given that this was a parental decision; the Commission would welcome any actions that the council could take to promote local childcare settings for the extended childcare offer. The Chair reiterated that no-one wanted to be in this situation of possibly having to reduce services to local children and families, and thanked everyone for all the reports that have been produced and presented at the meeting this evening. The Chair thanked everyone for attending and for responding to questions from the Commission. The Commission will consider all the submissions and contributions received and submit a response to the formal consultation before it closes on April 24th 2024.

## **6 Sexual & Reproductive Health of Young People (21.15)**

6.1 The Commission assessed the draft Sexual & Reproductive Health Strategy together with plans to discontinue the CHYPS Plus Service (dedicated sexual and reproductive health services for young people) at a meeting earlier this municipal year. The Commission has produced a response together with a number of recommendations which members are asked to note.

6.2 The Commission's response has been formally submitted to the Cabinet member for health, adult social care, voluntary sector and culture for a response, and when this is received it will be published in a future agenda.

**Noted: Formal response to Sexual & Reproductive Health Strategy**

## **7 Work Programme 2023/24 (21.20)**

7.1 Members noted the work programme for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year:

- The next meeting would be on the 11th March and would focus on school absence and emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), and school attainment. The Commission would be conducting a number of focus groups ahead of the meeting to support the scrutiny process.
- Two items confirmed for the May 22nd meeting: Disabled Children Service and SEND Area Action Plan.
- Members would need to confirm items for the planned meeting in June 2024 - which was most likely to be a joint scrutiny session with Living in Hackney covering housing support for care leavers, and either an update on Safer Schools Policing or the Youth Justice Plan.

**Noted: The work programme for the remainder of the year (2023/24) was noted and agreed**

## **8 Minutes (21.25)**

8.1 The minutes of the 15th January were noted and agreed.

### **Agreed: Minutes of the 15th January 2024**

8.2 Members were asked to note responses to questions from a previous meeting (18th December 2023) on Children's Social Care. There were no matters arising from these questions and were noted.

**Noted: Children and Families response to questions from the Commission on Children's Social Care Annual Report**

## **9 Any Other Business**

### Next Meeting

9.1 The next meeting of the Commission will be held on 19th February 2024.

9.2 There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 9.35pm.

Duration of the meeting: Times Not Specified