

PRESENT

Committee Members

Cllr Walaa Idris (Chair)
Cllr Mohammed Bakhtiar
Cllr Toby Benton
Cllr David Lindsay
Cllr Dori Schmetterling
Cllr Sonia Zvedeniuk
Richard Derecki
Estella Gomez
Amanda Sayers

Others Present

Cllr Mary Weale, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Council Officers

Luke Curran, Governance Officer
Shelley Duffy, Assistant Director of Education
Jacquelyn Harrison, Head of Family Care and Resources
Jacqui Hird, Scrutiny Manager and Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Bella Jessop, Scrutiny and Policy Officer
Glen Peache, Director for Family Services
Hilary Shaw, Senior Advisor – School Inclusion and Post Education

MINUTES

72 SECONDS' SILENCE

All present observed 72 seconds of silence in memory of the 72 residents that lost their lives in the Grenfell Tragedy.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Will Pascall.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 BI-BOROUGH SCHOOL INCLUSION STRATEGY

The Chair introduced the item and thanked officers for providing the report, but noted the report lacked detail on both the increasing roll, behaviour and resources challenges in schools, and the emerging good practice and forward planning shared between Borough Maintained Schools during 2023.

The Chair requested that the report be updated and presented for scrutiny at a later date, to be confirmed under agenda item 6, the Work Programme report.

5 LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Chair introduced the item and invited officers to comment on the report. Officers highlighted the local offer for care leavers was a key element of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities and was due to be updated during 2024. The Committee was being invited to comment on the existing strategy as part of the process of developing the updated offer.

The Chair invited members of the Committee to comment or ask questions on the report. Members of the Committee:

1. Asked how the existing strategy was developed. Officers advised the first version of the strategy was coproduced with young people, with further updates made based on gaps identified during rolling quarterly consultations with Care Leavers.
2. Discussed financial support available to Care Leavers and questioned whether it was sufficient. Officers advised financial support was limited as care leavers over 18 were eligible for benefits, but the Council offered some support for 16-18 year-olds to help support independent living.
3. Critiqued a lack of information on employment and training support within the information booklet. Officers outlined some of the support available, including ringfenced employment and training opportunities within the Council, and wraparound support from social workers, and welcomed the challenge to appropriately highlight that support in the updated offer.
4. Requested further information on the Council's objective to make care experience a protected characteristic. Officers explained a recent care review had recommended care experience be categorised as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act. Whilst not endorsed by the Government, local authorities had implemented the change locally to ensure care leavers were considered more as a priority in the development of Council policies and strategies.

5. Emphasised the importance of wraparound support including integrated health and social care package for the large number of care leavers that came into care as unaccompanied asylum seekers.
6. Challenged the Council to signpost Care Leavers to local organisations in the Voluntary and Community Sector, including faith groups, rather than generic national organisations for additional support. Officers welcomed the feedback and resolved to ensure the signposted support was appropriately balanced in the future.
7. Sought reassurance that appropriate due diligence was undertaken by the Council for all partner organisations. Officers confirmed that the Council would not signpost Care Leavers to any organisations where there were safeguarding concerns, but committed to signposting care leavers to organisations that could provide support on a broad range of issues and allow care leavers to make informed, independent choices as adults.
8. Highlighted a lack of information within the care leavers information booklet on support for young women and girls, and issues such as sexual violence and exploitation.

The Chair summarised the discussion, thanked officers and members for their contributions, and requested that the final revised Care Offer be shared with the Committee when it was available.

6 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT

The Chair introduced the item and invited the Committee to discuss the Work Programme.

The Committee AGREED that the Bi-Borough School Inclusion Strategy be added to the agenda of the meeting scheduled for 27th June 2024.

Cllr David Lindsay provided an update on progress with the Committee's Working Group on integrated 0-11 provision in the borough, and highlighted that the Working Group was focusing on the transition at around age five and school readiness.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

Chair