

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 9TH DECEMBER, 2025** at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Sylvia McNamara (Chair), Matt Cooper, Julian Fulbrook, Jenny Headlam-Wells and Patricia Leman.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Lotis Bautista, Tom Simon and Nanouche Umeadi

Co-opted Members Jules Belton, Margaret Harvey and Camden Youth Council representative

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors Marcus Boyland (Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families) and Sabrina Francis (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture)

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from Committee Members were received from Councillors Bautista, Simon and Umeadi and Co-opted Members Jules Belton and Margaret Harvey.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

There were no declarations.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Webcasting

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live to the internet and would be capable of repeated viewing and copies of the recording could be made available on request. Those participating in the meeting were deemed to be consenting to being filmed.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were no deputations.

5. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There was no notification of urgent business.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

7. CAMDEN SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Children and Learning.

Tim Aldridge (Executive Director Children and Learning) presented the report. Other partners in attendance were Thomas Kearney (Met Police - Detective Chief Inspector - Public Protection Central North BCU), Paul Ridley Met Police Acting Detective Superintendent Public Protection Camden and Islington), Stephen Hall (Chief Executive Officer, Camden Learning) and Robert McCulloch-Graham (Camden's Independent Scrutineer). The report provided a strategic oversight of the quality and performance of the multiagency safeguarding efforts and an assessment of local services performance and effectiveness, highlighting areas of strength and weakness. The report also outlined how the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements were evaluated and detailed the actions being taken to enhance safeguarding practices aiming to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

The Executive Director Children and Learning in his presentation highlighted that:

- Camden's safeguarding partnership included: the Council, NHS Integrated Care Board, Metropolitan Police, and Camden Learning.
- The partnership worked together to keep children safe and to check whether services were making a difference.
- Updated safeguarding arrangements now placed more focus on listening to parents and children and making shared decisions.
- Ofsted and other regulators had rated local services highly, including Children's Services as Outstanding.
- The ongoing work had linked safeguarding with other boards, such as Community Safety and Youth Justice.

The Committee was also informed that the key priorities areas for 2024–26 remained the same as the previous years but there were some wider commitments that included

- Responding to national social care reforms
- Better support for victims and children moving into adulthood
- Tackling disproportionality
- Strengthening safety in early years, schools and colleges
- Understanding how child poverty increased risk

The Chair thanked partners for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- In relation to free school meals and poverty a member noted that 44% of children were eligible for free school meals and asked how Camden compared with other boroughs, in response officers said child poverty was a major concern and a real challenge in Camden which was a borough of great diversity with areas of affluence and poverty. The Council was working with partners including academic partners to understand the drivers and impact of poverty and what steps could be taken to address and support families to mitigate against the impacts of poverty. Officers agreed to provide borough comparison figures to the Committee after the meeting.

Action By: Executive Director Children and Learning

- In relation to safety in private and voluntary early years settings, members raised concerns particularly following the recent serious safeguarding case at a private nursery in the borough. Officers explained that the Met Police had led on the investigation. The Safeguarding Partnership had conducted a rapid review in relation to the matter and shared that rapid review with the National Safeguarding Panel. Following that review, it was agreed that a local Child Safeguarding Practice review should be carried out. The partnership was in the process of appointing an independent person to lead the review and set out the terms of reference which would also include how the partnership would engage with parents and families that had been affected. The review was likely to look at the specifics of the local situation and the setting which had enabled these crimes to take place and make local and national recommendations. Ofsted was the regulator for such settings but Camden provided advice and training
- A member queried how priorities for the partnership were identified requesting for earlier Committee involvement in the consideration of priorities. Officers and the Independent Scrutineer explained that priorities came from data, trends and partnership debate. The Independent Scrutineer advised that he scrutinised involvement across the partnership to ensure that there were full commitment and participation from all members of the partnership, including the inclusion of Young people's voices. Priorities could be brought to the Committee earlier for member input.
- In relation to Domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), Members asked how Camden checked that actions in this area were effective. Officers and the police said that Specialist Domestic Abuse workers were embedded in children's teams as part of the initial response, linked up with the local communities and provided advice to the family help teams about what

issues to consider when working with a family affected by domestic abuse. Multi-agency risk meetings and joint training supported better responses and effective intervention. New police strategies based on research and randomised controlled trials was an attempt to improve the learning in this area as well as provide a focus on child-centred and trauma-informed work. The importance of learning together as a partnership and understanding complex areas such as neglect was emphasised, particularly in distinguishing between families who were struggling and those unable to manage adequately.

- With regards to Housing and safeguarding, Members asked how well Housing Services understood the risks, especially for families in unsuitable housing, children with autism or high needs and families sharing rooms. The Committee was informed that Housing colleagues were part of new neighbourhood multidisciplinary teams. Safeguarding concerns could influence housing points, but housing pressure was severe. Training and "professional curiosity" were expected across all frontline services. Prevention and earlier support were key. The independent scrutineer added that Housing was now central to safeguarding due to rising homelessness. There was a multiagency training approach to Safeguarding which was everybody's business. There was an expectation which was more prevalent nowadays than it was a few years back that people were aware of safeguarding signals. Professionals needed to notice risks in the home and escalate where needed.
- In relation to support for transgender young people, a member asked how partners reached young people accessing private hormone treatment and who may distrust services. In response Officers commented that this was a growing challenge. The partnership was exploring how to engage young people better and how to manage risks from online private healthcare.
- With regards to Corporate parenting links, Members asked how this safeguarding work connects to the Corporate Parenting Board. Officers confirmed that links were strengthening and a corporate parenting report would come to scrutiny soon.
- The Chair asked whether Children educated out of school (EOTAS) appeared in home-education figures. Officers confirmed they do not, as EOTAS was different, but they remained known to services.

RESOLVED

THAT the Committee:

- Comment on and note the outcomes achieved by the CSCP set out in the 2024-25 Annual Report.
- Provide feedback to the local statutory safeguarding partners for children.
- Note the report.

8. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BEST START FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: DECEMBER 2025

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families.

Councillor Marcus Boyland (Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families) presented an overview of work across early years, schools and children's social care.

The key points from the presentation were:

- Camden had around 20,000 children and 56 schools.
- Children's Services were rated Outstanding in every area.
- Temporary accommodation had risen sharply.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) Campus: A partnership between Camden Learning and Google which was a major success, providing digital learning with Google and others.
- School governors: diversity improving but more progress needed.
- School attendance was improving but still too low; more work planned.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND):
 - Investment in school capital
 - Exceptional Needs Grant to help children before Educational Health Care Plans (EHCPs)
 - Expanded SEND team
- Family Hubs: more funding secured; pregnancy grant of £500 for low-income parents.
- Child poverty: strong focus in Raise Camden partnership; removal of the two-child benefit cap welcomed.
- Health: work underway on vaccine pathways, oral health and home-based vaccinations.
- Corporate Parenting: a new strategy was in place, and more legal support planned for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

In relation to School Inclusion Support Officers (SISOs), in response to a Committee Members question about whether these were the same as former Education Welfare Officers, the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families confirmed that they were and served a similar purpose, but numbers were limited due to funding.

With regards to vaccination levels, Members asked how schools could help improve vaccination uptake. The Cabinet member explained that work was taking place with youth groups, school nurses, Family Hubs and health partners to reduce fear and raise awareness.

In relation to AI Campus sustainability, Members asked what would happen if a major partner like Google withdraws. In response the Cabinet member advised that skills were being built into schools through teacher training.

Outreach programmes ran independently of Google. Camden could draw on the wider Knowledge Quarter for future partners.

RESOLVED -

THAT the Committee note the report.

9. UPDATE OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, YOUNG PEOPLE & CULTURE

Consideration was given to the update of the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People & Culture.

Councillor Francis (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People & Culture) presented a themed update on Camden's youth hubs to the Committee. The key points from the presentation were:

- Youth hubs were safe, welcoming places for ages 10–19 (and up to 25 for SEND).
- The offer included: one-to-one help, careers advice, sports, arts, and drop-in sessions.
- Hubs helped young people access support in a relaxed environment.
- Three hubs operated in: Somers Town, Netherwood, and Highgate.
- Hubs ran Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programmes.
- 805 young people attended hubs last year; 273 gained skills or certificates.
- Work included drug and alcohol support, transition programmes (Year 6–7), and work to improve access for neurodivergent young people.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

Members commented that the Hubs were brilliant and the update provided a useful and focused look at what was going on. A member commented that they would like to take up the invitation to visit a youth hub and looked forward to doing that.

With regards to local youth activities, Members praised youth hubs and highlighted smaller estate-based projects. The Cabinet member acknowledged these and emphasised the importance of both large hubs and smaller local offers.

In relation to Youth hub participation data, Members requested more detailed demographic information, including participation by ethnicity and gender. The Cabinet member agreed to provide more data at a future meeting.

Action By: Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding

RESOLVED:

THAT the Committee note the update.

10. INSIGHT, LEARNING AND IMPACT REPORT: CHILDREN AND LEARNING DIRECTORATE - QUARTER 2/MID-YEAR 2025-26

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director of Children and Learning.

The Executive Director Children and Learning summarised the report, focussing on key areas of challenge, opportunity and learning across each division of the Children and Learning Directorate.

He highlighted that:

In Children's Social Care:

- Disproportionality continued to be a challenge.
- Child protection numbers were stable but higher than statistical neighbours.
- East Neighbourhood Prototype testing new family-led approaches.
- New Lead Child Protection Practitioner role starting to improve family engagement.

In Early Years and Family Hubs:

- Target to reach 79% of children achieving a “good level of development” was stretching.
- Long-term funding for Family Hubs secured.

In Youth Safety and Offending:

- Rise in weapon possession offences.
- Stronger work experience offers for young people in the youth justice system.

In Education and SEND:

- Falling school rolls continued to create pressure.
- High demand for Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP) assessments affecting 20-week time limits.
- SEND team strengthened, there was more focus on communication with families.
- Awaiting national SEND reforms early next year.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

With regards to SEND and tribunals, a member commented that the report felt vague and did not mention Camden's high tribunal loss rate, requesting that more detail be provided in the report on concrete actions, especially on school closures and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).

Officers advised that the report was a high-level summary, not a detailed action log and priorities in the report focused on top-level risks. Agreeing however, that tribunal work was significant, and more detail about the tribunals would be provided in the February SEND report to the Committee and advising the Committee that the aim was to resolve more cases before they reached the tribunal.

In relation to school place planning, Members said falling rolls had multiple causes (private schools, housing shortages, Brexit, Covid). Officers agreed indicating that detailed work with schools was well underway, including meetings with headteachers

and governors. It was noted that Camden was a net importer of 700 secondary pupils, but more work was needed to keep standards high and attract families.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Committee note the report.

11. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER 2025/26

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Children and Learning.

The Executive Director Children and Learning introduced and summarised the report.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

The future meeting dates were noted.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIR DECIDES TO CONSIDER AS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END