

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 2026** 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, Jenny Headlam-Wells and Nanouche Umeadi.

Co-opted Member Margaret Harvey.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Lotis Bautista, Julian Fulbrook, Patricia Leman and Tom Simon.

Co-opted Member Jules Belton 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 were received from Councillors Bautista, Leman, Fulbrook, and Simon.

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.

Farewell and thanks to Dame Christine Gilbert

The Chair thanked Dame Christine Gilbert, who had stepped down as Chair of Camden Learning, for her work and her contributions to the Committee.

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 9 December 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

7. YOUNG INSPECTORS REPORT 2025 AND PROGRESS UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE YOUNG INSPECTORS REPORT 2024

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Relational Practice and Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion.

The Director of Relational Practice introduced the report. The Service Manager FGC and Participation outlined the purpose and activities of the Young Inspectors programme. One of the Young Inspectors, Mary-Lynn, was in attendance to share their findings and experiences. The Senior Participation Development Officer, the Head of Virtual School, Participation & Progression, and the Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion were also present for this item.

The Young Inspector made the following points:

- They had been a Young Inspector for two years, investigating Personal Education Plans (PEPs) last year and Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision this year, both informed by their personal experiences.
- Being part of a community with other young people and creating something together was valued, particularly as some young people felt their voices were not always heard.
- The Young Inspector read out the recommendations, as set out in the report. They highlighted that processes were often slow and unclear, and that young

people did not always know where to go for support. Clearer communication, quicker responses and defined timelines would reduce stress and improve services. They emphasised the importance of early and equal access to support, celebrating achievements as well as meeting goals, and providing opportunities for young people to participate, build connections and access mentoring. They also highlighted the value of visible SEND celebrations in building community and reducing isolation.

The Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion thanked the Young Inspectors for their work on behalf of the service. They said the report was a testament to the hard work of the Young Inspectors and confirmed that the recommendations would be built into the service plan.

Members welcomed the report and highlighted the importance of the Young Inspectors and praised their work. The Chair invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- A Member raised concerns about an increasing number of older secondary school-age children opting out of school, particularly those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and asked for perspectives on the reasons for this, including issues such as bullying. The Young Inspector said there was no single reason, but highlighted a lack of sufficient support in classrooms and difficulties in relationships with other young people. They said that better support and opportunities to socialise and adapt to school environments could help, and that schools could do more to create fairer and more inclusive environments. The Young Inspector also reported instances where teachers did not facilitate pupils' needs and singled them out in class, often due to miscommunication or a lack of understanding of individual needs.
- A Member asked what changes they had observed when comparing the two years of the Young Inspectors programme. The Young Inspector said some findings were consistent across years, while others differed. It was said that engagement between professionals and young people had improved, although it was not perfect. It was explained that the composition of the group had also changed, with younger Young Inspectors involved this year, bringing fresh perspectives and lived experience of SEND through themselves, family members or friends. The programme evolved each year, with inspectors becoming more confident and focused over time, managing long days effectively and receiving positive feedback from professionals on the quality of their questions.
- A Member referred to the importance of celebrating SEND and the role of belonging in influencing attainment, and asked what more the Council could do to support young people with SEND. An officer said that as areas such as Black history, Pride and neurodiversity, SEND should also be recognised as an important aspect of identity. It was said that promoting pride in this part of who young people were, and doing so collectively as a community, could strengthen a sense of belonging.
- A Member asked what more the Council could do to increase equal opportunities, particularly in relation to work experience. Officers reported that Young Inspectors were passionate about this issue and felt they were being steered towards less academic pathways, despite wanting the same subject choices and

opportunities as their peers, which they described as an issue of equity. In response to a question about barriers, officers said feedback from Young Inspectors highlighted restrictions on subject choices based on grades or assumptions about ability, with some young people unable to choose subjects such as politics or biology and instead being directed towards vocational courses, highlighting the need for equal access to academic options.

- A Co-opted Member asked whether officers had met with school leadership teams to understand pressures within schools, including workload and barriers that affected their ability to offer additional support. An officer said that this dialogue was needed and was being progressed, with meetings scheduled through Camden Learning. It was noted that headteacher forums, including primary, secondary and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) forums, were booked for March 2026 to discuss shared challenges and what could realistically be delivered, taking account of schools' perspectives. Another officer added that it was important to support teachers and respect the work already taking place in schools, while aligning this with the work of the Young Inspectors. It was emphasised that young people should remain at the centre of decision-making and reviews.
- The Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families said the report findings had been discussed at the SEND Inclusion Board, where the views of the Young Inspectors had been heard. The Cabinet Member noted that there were plans to share the findings more widely with schools, including through a presentation to the Children's Trust Partnership Board. It was highlighted that school governors present had been encouraged to take the findings back to their schools and consider the level of SEND training provided to teachers. The Cabinet Member welcomed the report, said they would follow up on the issues raised, and praised the Young Inspectors for their work, suggesting they could be encouraged to become young governors in schools.
- An officer said the Council was working with an external trust that provided additional funding and resources, including support for an Education Navigator role, to help young people transition from further to higher education and explore university options nationally. The focus was not only on access to university but also on retention, with support offered around transitions, accommodation and wider support needs. The programme was in its third year and would include an evaluation of outcomes for young people as part of the funding arrangements. Further proposals were being developed to identify future funding and how this could best support children looked after.
- A Member asked whether officers accepted the recommendations that sat with the Council, including those relating to service waiting times, and whether progress could be reviewed in a year's time. Officers said that the annual SEND report would be presented the following month to this Committee, setting out year three progress against the SEND Strategy and a detailed plan for year four. Many of the recommendations were being endorsed and incorporated into the plan. The Member highlighted the importance of recommendations relating to response times for emails and calls. Officers confirmed that these were accepted and would be addressed, with further detail to be included in future reporting.
- A Member asked that this report be cross-referenced with the SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel report, noting that while that Panel had not heard directly from children and young people, this review had, and that clear cross-cutting themes

were emerging. The Member asked for updated information on autism diagnosis waiting times to be included in the February SEND report. The Member also highlighted concerns about the lack of opportunities and provision for young people aged 18-23 across the range of SEND. They noted that while the scale of work was significant and the aspiration of the offer was increasing, that further development was needed, including around apprenticeships and Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics (STEM) pathways, to respond to growing demand. Officers said they would ensure these areas were addressed and noted that, in relation to waiting times, the Council did not have control over all aspects of the system.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Children’s Prevention, Family Help & Safeguarding.

The Executive Director Children and Learning and the Interim Head of Corporate Parenting introduced and summarised the report, which provided an overview of achievements, progress and challenges in meeting the needs of Camden’s children in care and care experienced young people placed both within and outside the borough. The report also set out the priorities for 2026 and covered the period from December 2024 to November 2025.

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

- A Member welcomed the recent Ofsted report and highlighted the key achievements over the past two years, including Camden recognising Care Experienced as a protected characteristic across Council services. The Member referred to the care experienced hub and transitions for 16-25 year olds, and asked whether other services were responding more effectively to the needs of care leavers and whether further work was needed to raise awareness across departments. An officer said that, while some local authorities had made similar commitments, these were not always reflected in practice. Camden had taken this seriously, particularly within Housing and Education, and that corporate parenting was well embedded. It was noted that there was always scope to improve, but Camden showed a strong commitment and understanding. The key measure of success was the voice of young people and accountability to them, and that the strategy would only be meaningful if commitments were delivered in practice.
- A Member asked about additional challenges where young people had overlapping mental health issues or other needs, and whether this applied to the majority of cases. An officer said the pressures were multi-layered. A very small cohort of young people accounted for significant costs, often running into millions

of pounds, and that these young people could present risks to themselves and others, sometimes requiring Deprivation of liberty Orders in alternative settings. It was noted that many had experienced multiple traumas and had undiagnosed needs, making it difficult to secure stable and loving homes. While the vast majority of young people were placed appropriately, all local authorities faced challenges with a small group due to a national shortage of suitable accommodation at reasonable cost, with private providers profiting from this shortage.

- A Member said that, although the service was recognised as Outstanding, it was important to scrutinise areas of concern, and highlighted disappointment with the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), particularly the difference between Camden and London figures. An officer said the figures were a concern and had been identified as an area for improvement. It was explained that outcomes were stronger for 16-18 year olds supported by the Virtual School, with greater challenges in the 19-21 cohort, which could skew the overall percentage. It was clarified that the figure was in the low end of 60-70% rather than at 70%, and that a detailed data review had identified issues with how NEET status was recorded. It was acknowledged that improvement was needed, and that NEET panels would be reintroduced, with resources in place to address this. Further work was required to ensure data was accurately recorded and compared on a like-for-like basis, and that this had been flagged for more detailed review. It was noted that approaches used for under 18s could be extended to older young people. It was recognised the commitment of personal advisers, noted that Ofsted had been impressed by this, and emphasised that there was no complacency for corporate parenting in Camden and a continued focus on improvement.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

9. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE NATIONAL REFORM: PROGRESS UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding and the Director of Relational Practice.

The Director of Relational Practice introduced and summarised the report, which outlined the latest progress on implementing the Children's Social Care National Reforms in Camden.

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

- A Member welcomed the report and said it was positive to see long-standing issues being addressed through new funding. They noted that the work formed part of a wider transformation programme to build capacity and support social workers, and asked whether any changes were anticipated as the approach was rolled out across areas with different demographics and challenges. An officer

said that there were clear conditions for success in areas such as adult mental health and housing, and that officers were considering how these could be applied elsewhere. It was important to retain learning from the work and the approach to partnership practice. Although other areas such as schools, GPs and the voluntary sector did not have identical conditions, there were opportunities to scale up closer joint working.

- A Member said the approach was extremely valuable for improving decision-making between practitioners and, while it appeared simple, it was effective in ensuring people received the right support. The Member asked how locality bases operated in practice and whether different officers and workers were co-located in the same centres. An officer referred to the team configuration set out in section 3.4 and explained that practitioners were based together as a collective, attended multidisciplinary meetings, and discussed the same families. This enabled quicker and more innovative responses to need. The approach was intended to be replicated through family hubs, preventative interventions and youth centres, with access to specialist expertise through established relationships, shared responsibility, and a move away from silo working.
- A Member welcomed the funding for Camden and asked whether it had been awarded competitively or allocated. An officer said the funding had been allocated to support national government priorities and was likely based on a formula. The funding would be used to scale up work and address gaps, including supporting families affected by domestic abuse and young adults experiencing harm outside the home. It was noted that officers were seeking more relational and resource-focused approaches to meeting these needs.
- A Co-opted Member asked how many staff were involved, noting that the work depended on having sufficient capacity. An officer explained that the structure included a service manager and three team managers, with each team manager overseeing two social workers, two youth workers and domestic abuse workers, to support ownership and flexible, tailored responses. The officer added that, when considering three localities borough-wide, this involved around 100 staff, including social workers previously based in a central office and early help staff, who were now working differently. This was said to reduce divisions between services and enable more flexible, geographically focused work with families.
- A Member asked whether issues raised at ward surgeries could be followed up through a Member Enquiry to check whether a family was receiving appropriate support, while recognising that Members should not be given identifying details. The Member also asked whether there were opportunities to link ward surgeries more closely with this work, giving an example of autism not being recognised within the Housing points system. An officer said the model would not resolve all issues and that resources remained limited. Elected Members could submit a Member Enquiry to ask whether a family was receiving the right support. The focus was on meeting need earlier, with more families supported through early help teams or Family Hubs. The officer highlighted a strong preventative focus on families with children with SEND, and noted that Family Hubs would include practitioners with experience of supporting children with SEND.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

10. 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.

In response to a Member query, officers said they would discuss with Camden Learning the practicalities of sharing validated exam results information to Members earlier than February committee meetings. They noted that any information shared in advance outside of the committee meeting would not include analysis.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 23 February 2026, which was the final meeting of the 2025/26 municipal year. The provisional meeting dates for the 2026/27 municipal year would be included in the agenda for the next meeting.

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

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.09 pm.

CHAIR

Contact Officer: Anoushka Clayton-Walshe

Telephone No: 020 7974 8543

E-Mail: anoushka.clayton-walshe@camden.gov.uk

MINUTES END