

GLA Oversight Committee, 22 October 2015**Transcript of Item 6: Mayor's Mentoring Programme**

Len Duvall AM (Chair): I welcome our guests: Munira Mirza, the Mayor's representative, and Amanda Coyle, the appropriate Director responsible for the Mayor's Mentoring Programme.

Joanne McCartney AM: Has the mentoring programme formally come to an end yet or is it in the final process of winding down? Can you give us an update about where it is at present and are any of those mentoring relationships still ongoing?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): The programme is complete and we are just reviewing the final close out report of the programme.

Joanne McCartney AM: As far as you are aware, are any of those mentoring relationships still ongoing? Are they permitted to carry on?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): There are quite a few mentoring relationships ongoing quite simply because these mentoring relationships are borne of community groups and organisations and a lot of these organisations run youth clubs. Where the relationships have been particularly productive, we know that those delivery partners have not officially closed out those relationships quite simply because there has been value sought, both from the mentee as well as the mentor. We have left it up to the delivery organisations to use their judgement and we have given them the autonomy to make those decisions locally. What we do know is that our financial arrangements in terms of compensation are complete.

Joanne McCartney AM: Can I then ask about some of the mentoring relationships themselves? Looking at the report about the evaluation - or non-evaluation because of the difficulties of it - the mentoring relationships seem to have a significant breakdown [over] past six months. Your target was that there should be 80% of those relationships still in existence after a six-month process. It was 77%, which was slightly down. At nine months, your target was 70% to still be ongoing and it was actually 12% below that at 58%. At 12 months, there were just over half of them still going.

Was it a disappointment with the programme that those relationships did not last? What were the reasons that you believe for those?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): It is probably worth just giving you some background in terms of how we arrived at those targets. We did a considerable piece of research to look at what type of expectation we could see from similar programmes.

There are two that I would make reference to. There is a programme called Big Brothers Big Sisters, which is a volunteering-based programme and has a strong evidence base. We also looked at the results from organisations like the Prince's Trust, which again use volunteers to mentor young people.

We always knew when we set up this programme that we wanted to put in stretching targets for these delivery partners and so we pitched our targets at the top end. The targets that we selected were, as I said, aligned to a programme called Big Brothers Big Sisters and that is how we arrived at the targets.

From a project point of view, the results we have are actually very encouraging. That is for two reasons. First off, the delivery partners we chose to work with are very small, grassroots organisations. We wanted to work with those types of organisations to get a better understanding of the cohort and to get a better understanding of the needs of those young people. We also recognised that the majority of the delivery partners work in neighbourhoods that are very deprived and they are drawing on children who typically have quite chaotic lifestyles. Therefore, we feel that the results we have had from this programme are quite encouraging, actually, simply because our delivery partners were able to continue to maintain relationships with these children, who are from backgrounds that are particularly chaotic.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. You highlighted that there was an issue with smaller organisations and the report also says that there were financial issues because they were less able to deal with payment-by-results models. Did that mean that there was a 'postcode lottery' in the quality of mentoring relationships across London depending on the scale and size of those delivery partners?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): I do not think that is really fair to say. This is an innovative programme and we were looking at different models of mentoring. We were not overly prescriptive in terms of the setup of each of those delivery partners because we wanted to explore with them and learn what works and what does not work. Therefore, I do not think there was a 'postcode lottery' in that sense.

However, it is worth recognising that these organisations did deploy different models of mentoring. You can see that in the report. Some of the mentoring was conducted in schools, some of it was conducted in community organisations and some of it was conducted in other locations outside either of those two categories. We wanted to get that knowledge and insight from them.

The issue to do with payment-by-results is valid. We were working with smaller organisations and what we did learn is that there was a significant amount of capacity building that we had to put in place. I hope you had a sense from the evaluation that we did make a lot of in-programme adjustments to make sure that the delivery partners were able to sustain the programme financially and were also able to draw on more wider support from the managing agent to assist them with some of the administration and some of the financial rigor that we need in a programme like this.

Joanne McCartney AM: One of the evaluation points was that a lot of the mentors had dissatisfaction about the level of training and support they were given. Did you have to step in and try to do something about that as the programme progressed?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): We worked very closely with the managing agent, Rocket Science. Indeed, Rocket Science started to put in place monthly meetings with the delivery partners with a view to supporting them and with a view to getting those delivery organisations to share knowledge and expertise. With the benefit of hindsight, we recognised that supporting mentors is important but also comes with a financial cost. Whilst we pegged the payment-by-results to the success of the mentoring relationships, there did need to be some upfront payments to the delivery partners to sustain and support those mentors.

Joanne McCartney AM: Can I go back, perhaps, to the original principle and the reason that this proposal was set up? I chaired the Assembly's Time for Action Panel and update. When the Mayor first raised this, it was about tackling youth violence in particular and responsibility, especially in young black men, who were particularly at risk of entering the criminal justice system. We have seen youth violence increasing again in this city. Knife crime with injury is up. This is at the same time that this programme is stopping.

There have obviously been issues with this programme, but has the Mayor now given up through the core Greater London Authority (GLA) actually tackling violence amongst that cohort and is he solely leaving it to the police to pick up the pieces? Is this part of the preventative work that is now being withdrawn?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): There will be a legacy from this programme. We are currently in the process of finding a new delivery partner to deliver a new programme, which is about early intervention and which builds on the learning from this and the Leadership Clubs, which we also funded.

There is quite a lot of work being delivered out of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) youth crime prevention strategy and a considerable amount of funding is going to organisations and the gangs agenda. We have worked very closely with MOPAC on that. There is quite a considerable amount of work still being done in this area.

Joanne McCartney AM: We have looked at the MOPAC funding and this very early intervention is something that Stephen Greenhalgh [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] does say he wants to engage in. However, we know that budgets are being cut drastically in future. The Commissioner [Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] has told us that this preventative work is something that the police may have to draw back from.

It does seem to me that, although we have criticised this programme in part because it has not been as successful as we had wanted, we did welcome the risk of taking it on and trying to do something. It does seem to me that this is the sort of preventative work that could be improved and should be continued in some form. The Stepping Stones replacement is about the transition from primary to secondary [education], which does not seem to me to really address what the core principles that this programme, as initially envisaged, was meant to tackle.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It builds on the learning from this programme, which is that at an earlier age you are able to address some of the problems even more effectively. That has come out of conversations with the local delivery partners and a greater understanding of some of the challenges that these children face. Ten-to-16 is a transitional period. That is when children transition from primary [education] to secondary [education]. We are talking, for a lot of children, about a similar cohort, really.

Joanne McCartney AM: Is Stepping Stones particularly aimed at children who have been identified as at risk or is it a general programme delivered to all children?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): It will be a targeted programme for those children at risk. This Mayor's Mentoring Programme was, effectively, a very small programme and so our thinking in terms of the next programme was how we get the learning from this programme to go to scale.

One of the sources of funding within schools is the Pupil Premium and that has been used by schools in a variety of ways. Through our discussions with the schools and our learnings from this programme, we wanted to be able to look to see whether there was something we could provide to schools to give them direction about how to use that Pupil Premium. That way, we would be able to take the learnings from this programme and roll it out at scale across all London schools and to all of those children who get the Pupil Premium.

Joanne McCartney AM: That is something, perhaps, Chair, that we need to follow up in future because the prevention of violence is something that should be [a matter for the] core GLA, not necessarily just MOPAC.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): One thing I have been unable to discover in any of the evaluation reports – and this must be for you, Munira – is the value for money. This programme costs more than £1,000 per client. As far as I can see, that was the only target that was met, ie involving 1,000 mentees, but the drop-off rate was very high. I do not think any of the initial targets were met other than that one. How can this enterprise be value for money?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I can say something and then Amanda can comment. The value-per-unit is comparable to other schemes that we have looked at. Payment was by results and so we only ever paid on the basis of the effectiveness of the model. Everybody recognises that it is quite a challenging group to work with and, therefore, it is not comparable to other mentoring programmes that may be more generic or less targeted. However, we feel confident that it has delivered a similar level to other mentoring schemes that target children in the same way.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Does that mean that the other mentoring schemes were – how shall I put it – not as successful as it was hoped that they would be, either?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): There is a general view that mentoring is successful. We benchmarked against other mentoring schemes that have good reputations, but there is always a high rate of attrition when you are dealing with children who are particularly vulnerable.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): In terms of the unit rate for this particular programme, this is very much at the lower end. By comparison to programmes like European Social Fund (ESF) programmes, the unit rate is significantly lower.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): How are those other programmes funded? Who funds these other programmes that cost more than this? Are they publicly funded?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): Things like the ESF programmes are funded by the public purse. Does that answer your question?

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): It is difficult. Looking at this, the only people who appear to have had any substantial happiness from this, if I can put it that way, are the mentors. It seems to have been very successful for them but not awfully successful for the mentees.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Sorry, on what basis do you say that?

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): I read the report. The total number of the respondents to the questionnaires was just about 10% and, to get those people to respond, you had to give them vouchers and you had to give them this, that and the other. It does not seem to me to be an enormously great success rate if you are going to measure success in terms of the people who are willing to co-operate at the end of the programme by completing the questionnaires if approximately 10% were willing to fill them in and they had to be bribed.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): I would not say it is bribing. What we did was incentivise them to participate. The reason I say that is because that is

widely recognised across youth organisations as something that they do in terms of continuing to engage children within their youth activities.

Where we had real difficulty was that our evaluation mandated that we must get parental consent. Quite a lot of these young people, as I said, come from very chaotic background and often their parents may not even have an awareness of what they are doing after school and whether they are going to youth clubs and so forth. That really did hamper our ability to be able to interview a wider cohort of young people. Through my visits to the local delivery partners, it was the common issue that they were finding in terms of actually engaging with our evaluator.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): There seems to have been an enormous variation in the success rates of the local partners and I recall that right at the very beginning of this - more than two years ago - we were very sceptical about it. It was the University of East London and I have forgotten who the other partner was. You decided to take this route, having a group of smaller partners, but the variation in their success rates seems to have been really very wide indeed.

Was there never a time when you thought that some of your partners were not being successful and maybe should be ditched?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): We went through a competitive process to select these delivery partners. We were very clear up front what we wanted from those delivery partners. We did purposely choose a wide variety of those delivery partners. They ranged from very established community youth provision like the Salmon Centre just down the road from here to other organisations that were very embryonic, for example, Bang Radio. We wanted to be able to test how we attract and engage those young people who are at the margins of risk and have not presented themselves in terms of a criminal record or anything like that. Through the programme, we were looking to innovate and were looking to see the best types of delivery organisations that can deliver mentoring schemes.

Part of our learning through the programme was understanding what types of organisations can communicate to young people and what types of organisations can support young people over a longer period of time. As I mentioned, we do have quite a range of delivery partners.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): From the lessons learned, you have said that you should perhaps be looking at larger partners than some of those that you had. Did I hear you say in response to the earlier question that you are proposing to run such a programme again?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): We have said that we will run a programme about early intervention for a targeted group that builds on the lessons of this. It involves a degree of mentoring support, which this and the Leadership Clubs programme also did. We intend for that programme to lead to a wider impact across London through toolkits, advice and support for schools that are dealing with this kind of cohort.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): That means a different kind of partner, then, if you are doing it through schools?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The Stepping Stones programme will have a single delivery partner that helps us work with a number of schools and so we will not be using the model that we used for this mentoring programme, which was with the seven or so local delivery partners.

Navin Shah AM: From the information now before us, there is some evidence about difficulties in gathering robust data about the mentee experience with the project. As far as you both are concerned, what is your view on the level and quality of data of the mentee experience?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): There are a number of lessons that we have learned: starting the evaluation process much earlier in the programme; being able to capture data from the very beginning. Because the programme went through a number of changes and because of the nature of the programme, we amended all the way through and so that was not possible. In hindsight, that would have been the ideal thing to do. The nature of programmes like this is that you are constantly changing and you are constantly responding to how things happen in reality on the ground.

On the mentee experience: it is not unusual when you are working with young people to not be able to get fully answered surveys from them. That is just the nature of working with young people, particularly those who are probably slightly disengaged from school, who are not confident about writing and so on.

However, the management of the programme, the engagement with the local delivery partners and the engagement with the mentors was fairly consistent and strong.

What was the impact on the mentees? Based on what we know from the 100 or so who were asked, it was positive and they did report increased confidence about communicating, better results at school and better engagement at school, things that we had anticipated and hoped for. That has been positive. However, we are cautious about making very dramatic statements or grand statements about the impact for obvious reasons: because of the data limitations.

Navin Shah AM: The problem is how you expect the GLA to determine ultimately the value of the project without having robust information and evaluation data itself.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): We do have data --

Navin Shah AM: Already, you had Tony [Arbour AM] quizzing you about the value of the project and whether it was value for money in terms of how the youth were being influenced. There is data. Jo [Joanne McCartney AM] mentioned the issue about under-25 youth crime rising and so on in the last year. The GLA, obviously, needs to determine how effective the programme is. Without the data, we are struggling.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It is not that there is no data. There is data.

Navin Shah AM: It is the robustness of the data.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): This is comparable to many youth engagement projects. It is very unusual in a youth engagement project. We are being very honest about the limitations of the data. It is very hard to say for certain what the impact is of a project of this scale. I feel that I can say confidently that it has had a positive impact on the children who went through it.

Navin Shah AM: Are you looking at measures to improve how you can gather better statistics and better data so that you can then deliver a better-quality project?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes, certainly in the next iteration. We also initiated some years ago Project Oracle, which is all about trying to improve the evidence base of youth engagement. This project and everything else that we do in our youth and education programmes go through

Project Oracle. For everything we do, there is an expectation that there will be evidence and data gathered and an ability to assess fairly and properly the impact of that work.

Navin Shah AM: Amanda, do you want to add anything?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): Yes. It is probably worth noting that we did a lot of work with the delivery partners upfront to be able to get them to collect data on their cohort. Whilst the evaluator would not accept that because it did not come with parental consent, we did get the evaluator to work very closely with the delivery partners to be able to integrate the information that they had.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Look, it is fair to say - and we have said it before but we should place it on record now as we come to the end of this process - that since you two individuals have been in charge of this process, much as it is a difficult project to do and is a complex project, we had a bit more confidence around this table in terms of what was being delivered in the past, which, quite frankly, was pretty atrocious. At the tailend of this project you have done very well to get to grips with it and make it deliver something for young Londoners in terms of the evidence we have had.

We need to follow up about the new project and where you take it and so we will write to you shortly. We probably need to understand the financing of it because we are a bit unclear on that. We will follow up that formally to you both. Thank you for the work that you have done in terms of this and we look forward to the new project. Thank you.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director of Health & Communities, Greater London Authority): Thank you.