

GLA Oversight Committee, 11 December 2014
Transcript of Item 8: Mayor's Mentoring Programme Update
Report - Quarter 2 2014/15

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): For the Mentoring Programme, which has always been the topic of much discussion at this Committee, the progress to date is that by the end of March this year, the programme exceeded the target of 1,000 mentoring relationships. Matching continued to the end of April and we have reached 1,115 matched relationships. The expected rate of mentoring relationships that last the full 12 months would be about 60%, which is very typical of mentoring programmes. Therefore, we would expect 669 of the 1,115 relationships to have lasted 12 months, which is on target.

The programme is, as you know, delivered by local delivery partners (LDPs). Most of them are working in one borough, although two of them are working across two boroughs. We have worked with the LDPs on how they report back, how they evaluate, to some extent on some capacity building and on some support with what can be quite demanding evidence and information that we require to release funding. We recognise that that is not always easy for small voluntary organisations to do and so we have helped them deliver that.

Our management agency, Rocket Science, has been following and tracking the achievement of the LDPs. We have published a summary of an interim report on our website by the Centre for Social and Economic Inclusion. I do not know, Amanda, if you want to add anything to that.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes. I would just say that the project is delivering against what we would expect at this moment. We have had some very active conversations with the LDPs about what happens as the programme moves to closure. Quite a lot of the organisations that are running the scheme for us are indeed existing youth organisations and so they would have - and indeed had - a relationship with these children anyhow. With this particular scheme, they will continue to work with them in terms of their participation in other youth activities in these centres.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You have already suggested that obviously we are now in a new phase of this whole project. You are not looking to recruit the mentors and mentees, but you are actually looking at how you sustain their relationships and so on. What challenge is that bringing to the team?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): We have had to work interactively with the LDPs to understand how they continue to engage the mentors and the mentees. We have done activities during half-term, during the summer period and indeed over the Christmas period. We will continue to actually work with the LDPs.

We are seeing across particularly the voluntary sector, of course, that local authorities are really disinvesting in youth services and that really poses a big challenge for these types of organisations. We have been working with them in terms of their sustainability plans and understanding how these organisations will continue to exist in the light of that funding shortage. They are the types of conversations we are having with these LDPs at the moment.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: OK. Obviously, the report we have before us has data for September. Do you have any more recent data that you are able to share with us?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): We will get the next report at the end of this month.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: In December?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: OK. Are you confident that you are going to reach your target for sustaining relationships?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): That is always the biggest challenge with these LDPs. We are in active dialogue with them and they are indicating that that is what they are going to achieve. We do not have any reason to think that they will not at this stage, but clearly, as I mentioned, some of these organisations are quite stretched now with the lack of funding coming through from local authorities and that does pose a risk to this particular project. However, we have no reason to believe that they will not at this stage.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Overall, do you feel that you are in a good place with this?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes. We know and understand an awful lot about what they are doing and we know and understand about how they link their particular programmes to other programmes. For example, there are the European Social Fund (ESF) programmes, which do work with children who are not in education, training or employment.

We know that a lot of our projects actually have very close links to schools and a lot of our mentoring happens within schools. There is a good symbiotic relationship with the schools having referred those pupils who are most at risk of truanting or who have chaotic backgrounds and are most at risk of potentially going off track.

We are very confident that that type of active dialogue is actually producing the results we want to see from this particular programme. Therefore, so far, so good, but again this is an externally delivered programme and from time to time we do have to delve into these LDPs to see where we can help. However, so far, so good.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I would add to that that of course there is a lot of variation in the way that these organisations work, but the overall evaluation of the mentoring is that the mentoring is very positive and works extremely well. We have had feedback from the mentors and the mentees that the relationship has been very beneficial to both parties. We can see that the model itself does work and is a very worthwhile thing to do. However, obviously each organisation has a slightly different way of managing that. How they use volunteers and how they use other people in the community to support their work will vary depending on who they are and the management.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Can we just touch a little bit further on the assessment of the demand that is likely to have continued to develop once this programme officially ends? What work have we done around that?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): As a team, we have really been looking at the ESF because there is a large tranche that we are planning for at the moment. We have had very active dialogue with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Skills Funding Agency, which of course are the main funders of the ESF youth programmes. There is a huge element of mentoring in the majority of their particular programmes. We are looking at which cohorts of young people those programmes are designed to reach as they have been commissioned and especially some of the more vulnerable groups like looked-after children and children from the Troubled Families initiative, which is playing out locally. Indeed, we have

collected an awful lot of information about what works with vulnerable young people. That is the type of policy work we are doing at the moment to inform our investment in ESF.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): The date for when this programme ends and ESF starts is what?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): ESF starts 2014 to 2020 and this programme finishes in 2015.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): A number of the organisations want to explore whether they can work with schools and use pupil premium funding to continue to offer mentoring as well. The idea was always to try to encourage this approach to be embedded within the structures that are out there. We know that schools do have funding available for some of this activity and they are trying to look at how they can continuously sustain the model.

John Biggs AM: I had a supplementary which is a little bit tangential but it is very important to me. It is a trend because it has popped up elsewhere in the context of another project at City Hall where there seems to be a growing expectation that we are going to substitute our current funding with the ESF or other European funding. Do you have a view on the likelihood of success of that and how critical then it is for this programme to continue that you get European funding?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): My view is that the objectives we have at City Hall also align with a lot of the objectives of the ESF and we have tried very hard to influence the basis on which ESF funding is organised and the principles. It is not an alien programme to the work that we are already doing. Of course, it makes sense to use the resources that are out there and that are available. This is a time of reduced public funding generally. There are also --

John Biggs AM: It is still public funding, of course. It just comes through. We give it to Europe and they give it back to us.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes. I completely understand that the ESF funding is public funding. I meant in terms of reduced public funding overall from many different sources. It makes sense, absolutely, to look at how we align with the ESF. However, the GLA will also continue funding programmes and we will look at how we do that and how the ESF fits into that.

John Biggs AM: In the event your ESF bids are unsuccessful --

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): The work of my team is actually integrated across local authorities with the Skills Funding Agency and with the DWP and collectively we are influencing what will be funded in London. The Skills Funding Agency has indicated to the London Enterprise Panel (LEP) that it will take its direction from them and of course we influence through the --

John Biggs AM: History will judge that as a very dangerous answer, for people who follow me at the Budget and Performance Committee. I do not want to unduly delay the meeting, but it is quite an important point.

The Government chose not to devolve to City Hall all the decision-making about the ESF but we administer it locally here. It is meant to be funding for a whole range of applicants and we need to make sure we do not give undue preference to internal applicants as part of that process. I do not expect you to answer this question because you are internal applicants, but - and maybe I would suggest we park this question - we need to make sure that when we are doing our administrative role and when we are trying to act fairly on behalf of

all Londoners, we are not substituting our cuts with European funding, possibly at an opportunity consequence for other worthy projects in London.

I am very happy for that question to be parked because it needs to be investigated elsewhere, but it is quite an important point if we are depending on other people's funding which we cannot properly guarantee that we can influence.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): We will pick that up and we will make a note of that and pursue it in other places.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Can I just follow on from my colleague and suggest that it be parked with the Budget and Performance Committee because --

John Biggs AM: Yes. All the boring stuff is, actually.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: -- I certainly would welcome some in-depth scrutiny on this whole area, as would many people, because it is just fraught with danger, double counting and all sorts of complications that we know of from past experience.

The area that I would like to raise with Amanda is around evaluation and it is an area I have touched on before and I still do not yet have a really good answer. I am going to just start from the basics and I am going to just put on record about the evaluation exercise. Can you confirm whether the evaluation questions and technique were built into this project at the start? The Mayor was looking for answers to the question of how you support young black boys and then, if you like, put forward an idea that mentoring would assist. That is a no-brainer because we know from experience that mentoring does assist.

The issue is whether you are going to evaluate it on a quantitative level where you can just put the figures out and say, "We set off to find 1,000 - we are calling them - mentoring relationships. We have done. They have happened. Full stop. Success", or are you going to be looking at the qualitative end of the evaluation and whether for these young people the goals were set? Was it, "In relation to after a certain time of having a relationship with my mentor, I would then get opportunities out of that relationship?"

Were these questions and was the evaluation methodology set in the project at the start? It is a yes or a no. If it was not, we can then move on.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): This particular project was initially developed in the London Development Agency (LDA) and then I understand it came across to the community safety unit.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: You have had a chance to look at it. Did you find the evaluation method in place or have you had to develop one or are you in the process of developing an evaluation methodology for this project?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Within the original paperwork that came across from the LDA, there was an impact methodology and our evaluation is based on that impact methodology. We are interested in the project achieving 1,000, but we are more predominantly interested in what sort of impact these mentoring relationships have on these young people. The evaluation methodology actually seeks to answer that question of the mentees in terms of what value they have driven from the mentoring relationship. We are looking at what value this gives to mentors so that we can look to increase those for young people. Also, we are looking at the types of models that these mentoring organisations are using.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: OK. Those are three distinct areas. Where are you, then, in the process? Have you had a sort of midterm look at this?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Have you commissioned your evaluator?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): The evaluator has been commissioned. We have the interim report and I believe we have sent you the interim report.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: It might be me. I may have missed it.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): You certainly requested it and I am pretty sure we did send you through a copy of it.

John Biggs AM: We had a summary of that process.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: OK. I am told we have a summary and so I must have seen the summary because my questions are based out of that information. That is based on a full mid-project evaluation?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes, that is the interim evaluation and we do interim evaluations just to know whether our programmes are actually on track and whether they are on track to deliver the impact we are looking for with these young people. The information that we have from that interim evaluation has given us the confidence to know that our project is making an impact and also to make some minor amendments to some of the delivery models to make sure that we make it more impactful.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: How did you go about choosing the evaluator? Was that subject to open access? Did you interview?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes, TfL competitively procured the evaluator on our behalf.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: All right. What time then is the full report due?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): The project ends in April 2015 and we would anticipate that the evaluation would probably happen no later than June.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: June 2015. I do not know who to ask this question to. I suppose it is the Head of Paid Service. June 2015 takes us into a new administration, does it not? No?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): No.

John Biggs AM: No, just merely a new Parliament.

Darren Johnson AM: Only in Parliament.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: I just rush in. I just want to get there and get through it and get over it!

John Biggs AM: It is just merely a new Parliament. It will be a brave new dawn at the Government but not here at City Hall.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: There we have it. We have loads of time. Again, with good practice - and certainly it is not that the European money's lost here - but one of the good practices that we have seen from years and years of European-funded work is the dissemination. I hope that you have factored in not the usual conference or roundtable or what-have-you, but it would be really good to hear that there can be some feedback to young people in terms of them understanding that mentoring as an activity is useful. Do you see what I mean?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Rather than a conference in London's Living Room when the great and the good come and smile and preen and carry on, something quite edgy could be done with disseminating this to young people so that they can get a sense that, "Yes, mentoring is OK and is something that I would seek". There is quite a lot on offer out there and maybe not many young people see it as a cool thing to do.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): That is certainly something we can look at and perhaps as a first step we can discuss it with the Peer Outreach Team, which of course is a --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: They are great; fabulous.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Great, yes, exactly. We can discuss with them what would be the best methodology to --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: That would be good. Just do let us know about that.

Andrew Boff AM: With regards to the evaluation, will you be analysing the reasons for failed matches?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): I do not have that detail to hand. Let me get back to that. I am pretty sure there was some stuff in the interim evaluation on that.

Andrew Boff AM: I am sorry. That is not in front of me, but it would be most interesting to know why the matches that did not work did not work and whether or not it was a mentee or mentor issue or something else.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): There are some findings initially about that. In some cases, mentors have moved on or have changed jobs and have found that they did not have the time to continue. Efforts were made to try to find new mentors. In some cases, there was not an appropriate match possible that the LDP could deliver. We can come back to you with that information.

Andrew Boff AM: It is just that we seem to have talked about this scheme for a long, long time and there was a view expressed that a failed match is actually worse than if you had not bothered at all in some cases. Some of these young men have never had a stable relationship of authority and have always seen the people they look up to shift, whether it is a teacher, a social worker, a parent or whoever. They had always seen somebody move on and the constancy was an important factor in this being a good thing. Analysis of why those matches failed and what we can learn from that to ensure that we get more robust matches in the future - and I do not even know what they are going to be because we are only halfway through and we are not all the way through the scheme - would be absolutely critical, I believe, when reporting back.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Alongside that, we would like to hear - and I am not asking you to comment today - about the advice you are giving to people. As projects wind down, the attrition rates may grow. What steps are we going to try to take to make sure those attrition rates do not get higher than what you have had throughout the project?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Our managing agent meets with the LDPs - and indeed my team meets with them, too - and that is one of the key things that we talk about in terms of how we keep the freshness and engagement of the mentors. Some of the funding is actually to allow those mentors to do relationship-building activities with the young people. A lot of the time they will do that within the youth clubs that they are operating within. That is the type of thing that we are constantly having conversations about internally. How do we make sure the young person actually stays actively engaged?

We are also working with the mentors to develop their skill and expertise in relating to young people and providing the right balance of befriending and challenging. That is always the tension with young people in terms of being able to push back and as an adult to grow aspiration and grow the young person whilst also coming alongside and befriending them and making sure they feel secure and confident to retain that relationship over a 12-month period.

Andrew Boff AM: Can we talk about the wind-up activities that you have planned with your LDPs? Sorry, have you --

John Biggs AM: No, I think we have covered it. OK.

Andrew Boff AM: Have we covered that?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Yes, we have.

John Biggs AM: We covered that. We covered the question about the --

Andrew Boff AM: Capacities.

John Biggs AM: I was going to make very much the point that Andrew [Boff AM] made. When Jennette [Arnold OBE AM] said, "Mentoring does assist", I was going to interrupt and heckle and say, "Good mentoring does assist". We all know from our own experience that the right match works and the wrong match does not.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: It is an oxymoron. Of course it is going to assist--

John Biggs AM: What that leads me towards with a more scientific approach to this, if you like, is that if we are doing an assessment it needs to be a mixture of a quantitative and a qualitative assessment. If we can assist as a public body, we should be looking at whether we can develop tools for us helping to improve our matching of mentors and mentees so that we do get ones that do work. It may be quite a high-level aspiration, but I am sure there are things we could do to make sure we get a better hit rate and can secure better outcomes for people.

The question I had just formally was whether you have data on the ethnicity and gender of the mentors. What proportion is black, since the programme is focused on young black men in particular? How many of them are men, since it is focused predominantly on young men who may have dysfunctional lives? Are you collecting that data?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes. Indeed, in the interim evaluation, it actually breaks down the ethnicity and the gender of the mentors.

John Biggs AM: All right. For the record, I should correct myself - because the minutes never record my superb sense of humour - when I said that the Budget and Performance Committee does all the boring stuff, I did not quite mean that. We just do it a bit more technically with our guests.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chair): Your Committee does!

John Biggs AM: We go and play computer games there!

Len Duvall AM (Chair): We could rewrite the minutes and edit the webcast! I am not sure we could do that!

Andrew Boff AM: It was the Audit Panel he was referring to!

John Biggs AM: We also note that 'Assembly Member Candy Crush' interjected at that point as well, otherwise known as Tony Arbour, who is notorious for his computer games in Assembly meetings. You can sue me if you like, but it is a matter of fact!

Darren Johnson AM: It is done discreetly on a small device and so it does not count!

Len Duvall AM (Chair): We can tell it is coming up to the festive season!

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Get him to take his tablet now!

Andrew Boff AM: What sort of wind-up activities do we have planned with the LDPs?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): What do you mean by 'wind-up activities'?

Andrew Boff AM: After the programme has finished, those young people still have a relationship. They still have the LDPs that we have talked to. Is there anything? Do we just walk away and let them get on with it or do we have further involvement to ensure that there is a successful handover?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): There are a number of different answers to that. The first is that the organisations themselves - the LDPs - are very actively exploring how they can continue to have relationships with the mentees and their mentors. We are having conversations with them about how they do that, whether they recycle mentors to work with other young people and whether the mentees could continue, as Amanda [Coyle] was saying, with other youth activities that the organisation might offer. They are very keen to continue that relationship.

In terms of our involvement, we are looking at whether there are ways in which we continue to work with the organisations and what that might look like. We are going through this whole process now of examining that and obviously we have to do the final evaluation of the programme as well.

However, actually, even though we have catalysed or initiated the programme, we are very keen to understand what the voluntary organisations and the charitable organisations feel is the right thing for them and for the people they work with. We trust the organisations that we have funded to have an intelligent view on what should happen next, if that makes sense. Rather than us imposing a view on them which is a uniform view, it is about understanding where they are and what is appropriate for the young people they have been working with.

Andrew Boff AM: In trying to elicit them to have a view themselves of mentoring programmes, if I were to ring them up, would those LDPs say that the programme has been a positive experience for them?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes. One of the key things we wanted to do was ensure that there was a mentor legacy as a result of this particular programme. What we are seeing is that quite a few of the mentors who came forward from the public recruitment have actively started working for these youth organisations. We have seen one or two who have come from a financial background and who are now helping these organisations on the financial side and on the funding side. Some of them will continue to mentor young people well beyond that particular programme and others now have a very strong and healthy relationship with these organisations. Therefore, we believe there is that mentor legacy within these organisations, which is clearly one of our aims.

Andrew Boff AM: I get that this is going to be a positive experience for the mentors and often that is the case. Good mentoring results in very good, strong commitments to those relationships. However, for the organisations themselves - your LDPs, not necessarily the mentors - was it a positive experience?

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): Yes. That is what I was trying to actually illustrate.

Andrew Boff AM: I am sorry.

Amanda Coyle (Assistant Director, Health and Communities): The breadth of the type of people whom we have attracted into this programme has been wider than just mentoring to young people. With them, they bring a series of skills into these voluntary organisations which typically they have not had before. That is the piece that they really benefit from because it stretches the reach of that organisation and brings additional skills into it.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you very much.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Any further questions? We should schedule you to come back probably in the second part of the new year. We should try to have you back before us to see where we go and just to see how your performance is continuing. Good luck in the final phase of this programme. Thank you.