

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 17 July 2012 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chairman)
Councillors Graham Bass, Richard Chatterjee, Jason Cummings, Clare George-Hilley,
Donna Gray, Tony Harris, Steve Hollands, Yvette Hopley, Bernadette Khan, Terry
Lenton, Michael Neal and Manju Shahul-Hameed

Co-opted members:

Parent Governor Representatives: Mr James Collins
Mrs Vinoo John

Diocesan Representative: Mrs Elaine Jones

Non-voting teacher representative: Mike Dawson

A01/12 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTEE VICE-CHAIR (Agenda item 1)

Cllr Steve Hollands nominated James Collins for this role, seconded by Cllr Yvette Hopley.

RESOLVED -

That James Collins be appointed Vice-Chair .

A02/12 APPOINTMENT OF TEACHER REPRESENTATIVE (Agenda item 2)

The Member Services Manager informed the Sub-Committee of the result of the election to the vacant teacher representative position and it was agreed to appoint the elected candidate to the Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED -

That Mike Dawson be appointed to the Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee as a co-opted teacher representative, serving until 30th April 2014.

A03/12 APOLOGIES (Agenda item 3)

Apologies were received from Cllr Bernadette Khan and Elaine Jones.

A04/12 DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda item 4)

The Chair read out the new announcement regarding declarations of pecuniary interests.

Cllr Steve Hollands made a voluntary disclosure regarding agenda item 10 as his wife is employed by an academy locally.

Cllr Tony Harris declared an interest as he is a trustee of Surrey Clubs for Young People (SCYP).

A05/12 URGENT BUSINESS (Agenda item 5)

There were no items of urgent business.

A06/12 EXEMPT ITEMS (Agenda item 6)

There were none.

A07/12 COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE (Agenda item 7)

The report was noted with the amendment that Cllr Sean Fitzsimons had been appointed Chair of this sub-committee.

A08/12 PROVISION OF ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (Agenda item 8)

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director of Children Families And Learning
- Simon Townend, Head of Youth Service
- David Worlock, Director of Social Care and Family Support
- Ian George, Journeys Strategy and Commissioning Manager
- Hayley Lewis, Head of Customer Communications and Strategy

Also in attendance were:

- Sara Sayma (Youth Parliament)
- Alysha Coe and Nisar Ahmed (Croydon Youth Council)

Simon Townend introduced the report, highlighting the six strands of the Shaping Up Transformational Change Programme and the Locality Youth Offer Framework.

This introduction was followed by statements by guest speakers Sara Sayma, Alysha Coe and Nisar Ahmed.

Sara Sayma (Youth Parliament) highlighted the need for young people to prepare for work. She drew the sub-committee's attention to the fact that young people were not clear about how to find work experience opportunities or how to equip themselves effectively for future employment. Sara felt that this lack of knowledge could lead young people to study for inappropriate qualifications and make the wrong choices.

Sara went on to highlight the need for better advertising of activities for young people, and the limited choice of activities for young people in more rural areas such as Selsdon, Kenley, or Sanderstead.

Nisar Ahmed spoke as a member of the Children in Care Council. He highlighted the significant problems young people in care experienced with their education. He stressed their need for additional help and support with their studies. Nisar stated that he had been involved in the council's commissioning work and felt that more young people needed to get involved in this way.

Alysha Coe spoke on behalf of the Youth Council. She explained that the age limits for various activities were too rigid and that organisers made wrong assumptions about the appropriateness of an activity for a specific age range. Alisha felt that there should be regular meetings with young people to ascertain their views regarding the provision of activities for them, followed by the implementation of agreed choices.

Young people were asked how they would publicise activities for young people. The sub-committee heard that Facebook and Twitter were good advertising media, but that advertising in schools was most effective.

The sub-committee was told that the range of activities should be more exciting and could include pursuits such as jewellery, camping or rock and tree climbing. Asked about their preferences regarding the possible provider of young people's activities eg the council or the voluntary sector, young people concurred that this was not an important consideration.

Nisar Ahmed called for homework clubs to help young people get good academic qualifications. This was particularly important for young people learning to speak English. Asked about current homework club provision by schools, he conceded that this was not very effective and that carers did not express much interest in the activities of foster children.

Young people also highlighted the need for regular and prolonged contact with mentors, social workers or other individuals providing support. If this was not maintained, they felt this should not be initiated in the first place.

Members summarised current gaps in provision:

- engagement in developing an appropriate programme
- homework clubs
- better communications regarding the provision of activities

It was stressed that the role of the local authority had changed and that it had become a broker, not a provider of services. The council now had to focus its limited funding on those young people in the borough who were most in need.

The sub-committee discussed the needs of children in care. Engagement with this group of young people has changed and the range of activities available to them has widened. Members heard that the feedback from the Ofsted inspection carried out in May 2012 was very positive, praising the well organised and joined up nature of the services provided to young carers. Members were also advised that funding for young carer provision had been increased thanks to joint work with a voluntary sector partner.

It was acknowledged that many social workers and foster carers were not aware of the range of activities available to young people, and that more efforts should be focused on helping them to keep up to speed with current provision. The useful work of uniformed groups was recognised and the council could foster links between these groups and foster carers.

The sub-committee questioned officers on the effectiveness of various different forms of publicity. They asked which type of media might best suit a specific audience, how one might assess the impact and usefulness of each method, and how one might evaluate the potential cost of different methods of communication.

It was observed that some media, such as e Decaux posters, were fairly costly while others, such as social networking sites, were free. The sub-committee heard that Mosaic profiling (a consumer classification system that gives users access to credit rating agency Experian's demographic data) was used to identify what communications worked best in what locations. Members were also advised that a weekly e-mail was sent out to all schools regarding current issues, and might also be used to publicise activities for young people.

Officers also highlighted the various existing groups which were consulted on services to young people, eg the children and families partnership and the youth forum.

The sub-committee heard that the council was about to conclude its pilot of the Journeys programme. 260 young people had been consulted on the proposals for this programme through a questionnaire and focus groups, and a wide-ranging programme had been put together in line with young people's expressed interests. For instance, young people had expressed a need for work experience, as a result of which two work placements had been organised for the young people concerned in line with their expressed interests. Young people had also been given the opportunity to improve their IT skills by developing a web-based data set on all the activities available to children, young people and their families.

Officers were challenged regarding the unwillingness of schools to share their facilities with voluntary organisations offering Saturday and evening homework clubs. Members were advised that the funding for extended schools had come to an end but that many of the activities offered through them had survived. Officers stressed that they wished to know of any schools that were unwilling to share their facilities, and that they were keen to support the activities of voluntary organisations.

Members of the sub-committee asserted that the most rewarding activities were those which included an element of challenge. They also expressed concerns over the fact that the activities mentioned were only targeted at 11-19 year olds. Officers agreed that the earlier one intervened to help a child, the more effective the intervention was likely to be, and that various schemes were in place to provide very early intervention where necessary.

Asked how they measured the success of their services, officers explained that the six strands of the Shaping Up programme would be measured in

different ways. For instance, the effectiveness of the Turnaround Centre was assessed through the reduction in number of entrants into the justice system. They added that their work was becoming ever more evidence-based.

Members queried the way "hubs" or clusters of wards and services had been organised. It was highlighted that Heathfield formed part of the east locality youth hub but that no youth services were provided from that ward. Members also questioned the grouping together of wards such as Waddon and Selhurst.

Officers replied that locality shaping had been developed around school clusters, and that grouping all wards into perfectly matched clusters presented a significant challenge. The aim was to identify key communities and their travelling habits and make activities as accessible to them in view of the existing provision of transport and appropriate premises.

Members agreed that the provision of activities for young people should be reviewed the following year to assess progress made in developing communications and matching activities to young people's interests.

Young participants to this meeting were thanked by the sub-committee. It was agreed that the following year's meeting should also involve young people and that they should be consulted on the best place in which to hold such a meeting.

Officers were also thanked for their attendance.

A09/12 CROYDON'S DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT AND FORMULA GRANT (Agenda item 8)

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director of Children Families and Learning
- Richard Simpson, Director of Finance & Deputy S151 Officer
- Ian Geary, Finance manager

Members were reminded of the significant changes the Dedicated Schools Grant was about to undergo. On 28 June 2012, the DfE announced the final details of the revenue funding reform for 2013-2014. This will be the first step towards the introduction of a new national funding formula which is aimed at making funding to schools simpler, more transparent and fairer.

There will be three blocks of funding within the DSG:

- Schools
- Early years provision
- High needs pupils

Latest proposals recommended that the majority of schools funding should be delegated to schools and that the element retained centrally by the LA should be minimal.

Members enquired whether funding for the above three blocks was going to be ring-fenced and received assurances that they would.

Consultation on the settlement for 2013-2014 was to end towards the end of summer and officers would receive information on funding levels in November or December 2012.

Members challenged officers about the appropriateness of offering traded services to schools in the borough. Officers replied that the council was already operating in the educational market and offering a range of services (eg educational welfare) at differential rates for academies and local authority run establishments. Officers felt that the council needed to develop their services even further to generate enough trade to cover current staffing costs. The council was exploring the possibility of externalising the service and development a trading company to reduce operating costs.

Officers explained that the relationship between the council and schools would constitute an important factor in the success of its traded services. However, in order to face up to the competition in this market, the council was also considering teaming up with an existing service provider to strengthen its profile.

Officers stressed that while council funding was to shrink significantly, its responsibility to intervene in poorly functioning schools remained. This was why the council aimed to retain in-house a small group of experienced officers with the skills needed to deal with failing schools.

Members asked whether the local authority would be expected to take responsibility for Pupil Referral Units and exclusions. Officers replied that academies could decide to offer their own provision. For instance, Harris Academy are exploring the possibility of setting up their own PRUs.

Members questioned officers regarding the school admissions and place planning services. They were advised that a decision had been made to reduce school admissions teams in 2010-2011. This had led to performance issues at a later date. Members were advised that school admissions were not a function funded through the DSG but through the council's general fund.

Members enquired whether the council was able to work positively with all establishments in Croydon to carry out effective capacity planning for the future, which involved considerable information sharing. They were advised that officers used their brokering skills and influence with all schools to do this effectively. They highlighted a report going to Cabinet in autumn regarding proposals to expand primary schools in response to the high demand for school places. They are currently working with an academy to manage this expansion. Officers stated that if the council experienced problems with a recalcitrant academy, they referred the issues to the DfE as they had responsibility for all children and young people in Croydon.

Asked about their relationship with schools considering academisation, officers explained that they had had termly governance meetings at which presentations had been made about the pros and cons of this option. In addition, schools receive help with the conversion process from a link officer.

Officers were thanked for attending the meeting.

A10/12 CABINET RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE IMPACT OF ACADEMY SCHOOLS AND FREE SCHOOLS ON SCHOOLING IN CROYDON (Agenda item 10)

Members noted the report.

A11/12 2011-2012 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT (Agenda item 11)

The sub-committee agreed the updated agenda for the meeting.

RESOLVED -

That the following additional items be added to the work programme:

9 October 2012 meeting:

- Early Intervention agenda, including Stage II and III intervention processes
- Selection of provider for school annex at Sth Norwood school

5 February 2013 meeting:

- Adapting to the changing context of education

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 9.23 pm