

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 25 July 2012 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chairman)
Councillors Graham Bass, Carole Bonner, Richard Chatterjee, Jason Cummings, David Fitze, Donna Gray, Tony Harris, Steve Hollands, Yvette Hopley, Adam Kellett and Terry Lenton

Co-opted members:

Parent Governor Representatives: Mr James Collins
Mrs Vinoo John

Diocesan Representative: Mrs Elaine Jones

Non-voting teacher representative: Mike Dawson

A13/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr Manju-Shahul-Hameed (reserve: Cllr Carole Bonner)
- Cllr Clare George-Hilley (reserve: Cllr Adam Kellett)
- Cllr Michael Neal (reserve: Cllr David Fitze)
- Elaine Jones

A14/12 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST (Agenda item 2)

Cllr David Fitze explained that he had a personal interest as a Director of the YMCA.

A15/12 URGENT BUSINESS (Agenda item 3)

There was none.

A16/12 EXEMPT ITEMS (Agenda item 4)

There were none.

A17/12 CALL-IN: GRANT-FUNDING TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS FOR THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAMME (Agenda item 5)

Cllr Tim Pollard, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning, was in attendance with the following officers:

- Linda Wright, Head of Inclusion, Learning Access and SEN
 - Sylvia McNamara, Director of Learning and Inclusion
- The following representatives of the public were also in attendance:
- Nero Ughwujabo (Croydon BME Forum)
 - Sasha Rhoden (Croydon Supplementary Education Project)
 - Alderwoman Gee Bernard (Croydon African Caribbean Family Organisation)

In line with the Council's Constitution, the sub-committee formally agreed to proceed with the call-in.

Cllr Donna Gray was invited to set out the reasons for the referral. The following points were highlighted:

- The disproportionate impact of cuts on the deprived north of the borough
- Insufficient consultation on the proposals
- Concerns regarding the performance statistics provided

The Cabinet Member was invited to respond. He made the following points:

- Central government grant funding for central services have been substantially reduced and most of the funding for additional services is paid directly to schools, who purchase the support services they feel they require; schools are also more autonomous than before and have more control over their curricula
- There have been substantial improvements in standards and Croydon's results are now well above the national average. Schools have an incentive to ensure that BME results are satisfactory in order to achieve good averages borough-wide.
- The council has to contend with 27% budget cuts over three years.
- The funding allocated to school improvement in 2006 yielded very positive results, but what was done at that time cannot necessarily be replicated in this financial climate.

The Chairman invited the representatives of the public to address the Committee with their views on the called-in decision.

Chief Executive of the BME Forum Nero Ughwujabo explained that the BME forum was funded to support BME voluntary organisations, to express the voice of the BME community and to act as a critical friend to local organisations.

He stated that education was always the top issue for the BME community, in view of its long history of under-achievement, particularly in the Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities.

He acknowledged the recent improvements in educational performance and put them down in part to the good work of voluntary organisations. He also emphasised the role of these organisations as "community anchors".

Nero Ughwujabo lamented the proposed cuts, particularly in view of the previous round of cuts in voluntary sector funding. This seemed to run counter to the spirit of "Big Society". He explained that a lot of organisations were run on minimal grants, with most of their funding coming from parents and members of the community and represented very good value for money. He envisaged that many would have to close if these grants come to an end, leading to a deterioration in BME educational results.

Sasha Rhoden, Project Director for the Croydon Supplementary Education Project, highlighted the severe impact the proposals would have on the organisation, which would face closure.

He explained that the organisation had a history of raising the attainment of black and other minority ethnic groups, particularly in maths, science and cultural studies. He added that it currently worked with 120 trained mentoring volunteers. It had succeeded in obtaining substantial funding including grants from central government, and delivered a very good return on this funding. He emphasised that communities continued to express a need for supplementary education, but that there was ever more limited funding to address this demand.

Alderwoman Gee Bernard, founder and president of the Croydon African Caribbean Family Organisation (CACFO), explained that she originally came into the political arena over concerns for young people's educational prospects. She explained that education was key to the development of any human being and to his / her involvement as a citizen. She added that education was cheaper than ignorance as it helped to develop children into responsible and productive members of their community.

Gee Bernard explained that she had seen many young people leave school without being able to write. She acknowledged the community's efforts to tackle this situation and provide support to young people as well as their parents and asserted that providing such support was a matter of duty.

Cllr Louisa Woodley, Shadow Cabinet Member for Communities and the Voluntary Sector, was invited to speak. She spoke of the supplementary schools set up in the 1960s and 1970s to address BME parents' concerns about their children's educational achievement. The schools endeavoured to provide support to more able students as well as those who experienced difficulties. Councillors later decided to provide council funding for these.

Councillor Woodley expressed concerns about the impact of the proposals on BME communities as she highlighted the ethnic groups with disproportionately high numbers not in employment, education or training (9.6% of black Caribbean and white British mixed race residents and 6.6% of Black Caribbean residents). She also highlighted the fact that 52.8% of residents on Job Seeker's Allowance were black Caribbean and mixed race white and black Caribbean.

Members questioned officers on the Cabinet report.

Asked about the size of the supplementary education community grants, officers explained that all but one received discretionary grants of under £10,000. It was acknowledged that withdrawing these council grants would have an effect on the organisations' ability to obtain match-funding.

The sub-committee heard that while the total educational budget was considerable, the amount available for discretionary spending was very low. The only areas on which the council is able to spend this funding are:

- Youth services, now targeted at groups with special needs as the funding has contracted considerably and the services are commissioned rather than provided directly by the council

- School improvement
- Early intervention with a small number of high need families, some of whom fall into the category geographically and conceptually in need of supplementary education

Members heard that concerns had been expressed about the loss of council provided universal youth services after budget cuts. However, community groups had successfully taken over responsibility for this area of provision.

It was suggested that voluntary organisations providing a successful service should establish links with local schools so that these might fund them to provide support services. Members were advised that some transitional funding would be available for one year to help organisations adapt to changing funding systems.

Members were advised that a national educational priority over the last four years had been to close the gap in educational achievement between the best and the worst achievers, and that schools had attained a greater sense of responsibility for *all* their pupils. To this end, they have been encouraged to link in with various organisations currently providing support services for various educational needs.

Asked whether groups had been made aware of the transitional funding available to them, officers replied that the council had not yet initiated communications with them as a result of the call-in.

It was observed that underperformance also affected groups of white boys and that they too needed additional support to attain good educational qualifications. Officers confirmed that this was being done.

Members discussed additional support for children and young people who experienced difficulties with their education. It was highlighted that early intervention funding was virtually exclusively channelled to schools in the north and west of the borough, where the need was most significant.

Members sought and received assurances that transitional funding would allow voluntary organisations to continue functioning up to the point when the commissioning process for their services commenced. In addition, they heard that schools were now required report publicly for their use of the pupil premium funding paid out to address educational inequalities.

Members asked to receive information on transitional funding arrangements to be provided to the sub-committee.

Concerns were expressed that schools were more likely to use out-of-borough services than those of local voluntary educational organisations. Officers responded that they would use the school improvement grant to broker links between schools and local organisations.

Members heard that Saturday schools provided by community organisations did not suffer from the stigma of mainstream supplementary education and that the key issue was not the closure of Saturday schools but the need to change funding streams for these.

Officers explained that, in view of changing funding systems, the council saw its

future role as a broker, not a provider of services. They stated that they would be willing to meet with schools to address supplementary school provision and explore the potential for obtaining such services from community groups. Members heard that the intended aim of the council was to continue supporting all schools to improve performance even when they were not in crisis.

It was suggested that this issue be raised at a forthcoming meeting between the council and head teachers, to which representatives of the voluntary sector might be invited.

Despite the above proposals, doubts were expressed regarding the opportunities for voluntary organisations to provide services to schools, as the relationship between them had recently deteriorated following rises in charges for using school facilities.

Members discussed mentoring services. They heard that the £15,000 budget would be used to provide intensive reactive mentoring by the Integrated Youth Services to young people at risk. In addition, the council was exploring the possibility of providing preventative mentoring as part of a personalisation package of activities and support for young people, with referrals from a range of organisations.

The Chair invited the sub-committee to agree a decision regarding the referral of the Cabinet decision.

The view was expressed that the proposal should be deferred, that the use of transitional funding should provide a breathing space and that schools should be approached to give community groups an opportunity to bid for commissioned services.

Members agreed that:

- Central government would be cutting educational funding to councils
- Overall, the council would have to make 27% cuts over three years
- Funding would be directed to schools
- The local education authority had lost a lot of its powers
- There has been a significant improvement in BME educational attainment
- The role of supplementary schools was valued

The key question to address was how best to establish links between schools and community organisations providing supplementary education.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The sub-committee agree to uphold the Cabinet's decision
2. The sub-committee value the work done by community groups to improve the educational attainment of BME groups and their command of English, and would like to see this provision continuing
3. The council should use its brokering role to help support effective community groups
4. The council should clarify its transitional funding arrangements as soon as

possible and work with groups to explore alternative sources of funding

5. The Sub-Committee receive information on transitional funding arrangements at its October meeting
6. The council should facilitate a meeting between head teachers and community groups to explore the possibility of these groups providing services to schools

Officers were thanked for attending the meeting.

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 9.07 pm