

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 9 October 2012 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chairman)
Councillors Graham Bass, Jan Buttinger, Richard Chatterjee, Jason Cummings, Donna Gray, 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

A18/12 MINUTES OF 17 AND 25 JULY MEETINGS (Agenda item 1)

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meetings held on 17 and 25 July 2012 be signed as a correct record.

A19/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda item 2)

Apologies were received from Cllr Tony Harris (reserve: Cllr Jan Buttinger)

A20/12 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST (Agenda item 3)

Disclosures were made by the following councillors:

Cllr Jan Buttinger (Corporate Parenting Panel)

Cllr Donna Gray (Corporate Parenting Panel)

Cllr Bernadette Khan (Fostering Panel)

Cllr Jason Cummings (Chair of Governors at Woodlands CC and spouse employed by Jubilee Parenting who deliver courses commissioned by the Council)

A21/12 URGENT BUSINESS (Agenda item 4)

There was none.

A22/12 EXEMPT ITEMS (Agenda item 5)

There were none.

A23/12 PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION (Agenda item 6)

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director of Children Families and Learning
- David Worlock, Director, Social Care and Family Support
- Sarah Daly, Head of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Quality Assurance
- Dwynwen Stepien, Head of Early Intervention and Family Support Service

Members were given a presentation on prevention and early intervention services. This included the following points:

- Early intervention priorities, to extend the multi-agenda front door for early intervention, strengthening early help through a redesign of children's centre service delivery, strengthening the resilience of families with complex needs and improving provision to reduce the incidence and impact of domestic abuse and sexual violence
- Early intervention services at stages 1-3
- The escalating costs of intervention as needs become more acute
- Progress on multi-agency support

Members were advised that the Family Justice Centre played an important role in this work, with good support from the voluntary sector. However, it was noted that Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) were not receiving as many referrals as expected.

Members were advised that the Children Families and Learning Department was keen to enable schools to establish better contacts with early intervention services. The executive director was pleased to announce that schools had been using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in many more cases than a year ago. Asked whether schools were proactive in taking steps to arrange support for their pupils, the executive director stated that this varied widely from school to school. He added that new opportunities to do so were emerging with the Pupil Premium programme. Members were advised that this was introduced by central government to address underlying inequalities between children eligible for free school meals (FSM) and their wealthier peers by ensuring that funding to tackle disadvantage reached the pupils who needed it most.

Members expressed concerns that families in greatest need did not contact the appropriate agencies to access help, and asked how proactive local GPs were in detecting need and establishing contact with the relevant services. They were advised that key priorities for Croydon's Clinical Commissioning Group were care for the elderly and services for children, and that the Group were keen to reach these families and provide support, which should lead to savings through prevention. The executive director explained that GPs were keen to refer families to Children's Centres for additional support. Officers added that families in need were also targeted through health visitors, and that it was important for as wide a range of agencies as possible to be alert to their needs and able to refer these families to the appropriate services.

Members asked what evidence was sought about the success of interventions. They were told that monitoring was based on the pupils' CAFs but that monitoring

of these could be improved. Members sought information on how worklessness in troubled families was being addressed, and criteria for success in this area., they were told that an officer from Job Centre + had been seconded to the department in order to improve effectiveness in this area. The criterion for success was for individuals to have been in work for at least six months.

Members examined the eligibility criteria for the Troubled Families Programme. The officers' presentation listed the following four criteria:

- Education: households affected by truancy or exclusion from school
- Crime / anti-social behaviour in the family
- Worklessness: at least one adult in the household on out of work benefits
- High cost families including those with a history of domestic violence

Members suggested that mental health issues should be added to the above list as an eligibility criterion. They were advised that while this was not a criterion, three family support officers had the skills and training to provide support to households with mental health issues. Members were also advised that such a criterion could present problems as service providers were paid by results within six months and mental health issues took a long time to resolve.

A24/12 SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (Agenda item 7)

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director of Children Families and Learning
- David Worlock, Director, Social Care and Family Support
- Sarah Daly, Head of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Quality Assurance
- Dwynwen Stepien, Head of Early Intervention and Family Support Service

The executive director of Children Families and Learning gave a brief introduction to this agenda item. He stated that while the Ofsted inspection report was as good as could be expected, the department was not satisfied with the status quo and had much to do to progress from "adequate" to "good". Members were also advised that in view of Ofsted's risk-based approach, the borough may be inspected again on its child protection work by summer 2013.

The Sub-Committee were given a presentation on the Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report 2011-2012 and Business Plan for 2012-2013, incorporating proposed actions to address Ofsted recommendations.

Members were advised that safeguarding activity was rising and incorporated a significant level of risk, with about 40% of cases involving an element of domestic violence. The department's key focus will be on early identification and prevention and an effective officer training strategy while the multi-agency safeguarding hub will be addressing the needs of children at greatest risk.

To improve quality of supervision, the department had brought in an additional consultant practitioner resource and is preparing to roll out improved supervision guidance by 1 November 2012. In addition, the department is set to start carrying out regular quarterly samplings of casework audits and feedback from social workers to ensure that supervision is regular and effective.

Members commented that long waits for young people to access the services of Children's and Adolescents' Mental Health Services (CAHMS) were a recurring complaint. Officers stated that considerable efforts were being made to tackle this issue and added that, at the previous week's Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) meeting, CAHMS had reported on arrangements for improved access to services in some detail.

Members discussed staffing levels and expressed their concerns regarding the current numbers of vacancies and temporary staff. In addition, they commented on the difficulty in maintaining relationships with young people in the light of high staff turnover.

Officers admitted that the recruitment and retention of permanent social workers constituted a real challenge and that Croydon officers included a number of very young and inexperienced staff. In addition, members heard that Croydon was not considered to be an attractive place to work. This situation had led the department to recruit newly qualified officers from abroad, create a more attractive career structure, improve salaries and introduce consultant practitioners to develop the skills of young officers and encourage them to remain working on the frontline in this borough.

Members were informed that the new structure should be in place by April 2013, and should be cost neutral as middle managers were being replaced by consultant practitioners. However, they expressed their concerns about the possible impact of reductions in middle management on the case loads of social workers. They were given assurances that social workers' caseloads would be *reduced* to give them more time to develop better relationships with the young people in their care.

Members discussed the care of transient families and questioned officers on the challenges Croydon faced in sharing data with other boroughs regarding their case histories. Officers acknowledged that serious case reviews undertaken in the past demonstrated how serious a challenge such families presented. In addition, they remarked that many such families were very reluctant to work with council officers to tackle their issues. However, despite these difficulties, the council was working hard to ensure timely information sharing with other councils. It was also hoped that new IT systems would help overcome current hurdles.

Members went on to examine the social care services provided to traveller families. They were advised that the anti-social behaviour team had begun working with traveller families for the first time in the summer of 2012, with the participation of an education welfare officer who had been trained to pick up safeguarding issues. Members commented that traveller families should remain in stable sites for the sake of their children's education and welfare.

Members asked whether council budget cuts were likely to have an impact on safeguarding. They were advised that children's social care had incurred no cuts as it was a statutory service.

Officers were thanked for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED THAT:

The sub-committee agreed that mental health issues should be given their due weight when families' eligibility for the "Troubled Families Programme" was assessed.

A25/12 **SELECTION OF PROVIDER FOR THE SCHOOL ANNEX IN SOUTH NORWOOD** (Agenda item 8)

Members were advised that five expressions of interest from secondary schools in Croydon had been received and evaluated. The two highest scoring schools had been contacted with a view to being short-listed.

However, the department had decided to put a pause to the process and to take stock about the use of the site in the light of a massive increase in demand for school places. One option mentioned was the possibility of adding the location to another site to establish a brand new school. Members were advised that a report on the available options would be brought to the December Cabinet meeting.

A26/12 **SUB-COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2012-2013** (Agenda item 8)

The agenda for the 2013 was confirmed.

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm

