

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 11 February 2014 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chairman)
Councillors Eddy Arram, Graham Bass, Justin Cromie, Jason Cummings,
Donna Gray, Steve Hollands, Bernadette Khan, Manju Shahul-Hameed and
Donald Speakman

Co-opted members:

Parent Governor Representative Mrs Vinoo John

A28/13 MINUTES OF 15 OCTOBER AND 17 DECEMBER MEETINGS
(Agenda item 1)

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meetings held on 15 October and
17 December 2013 be signed as a correct record.

A29/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillor Bernadette Khan for lateness,
Councillor Donna Gray for early departure, Councillor Richard
Chatterjee (reserve: Cllr Donald Speakman), Councillor Terry Lenton,
Councillor Michael Neal, Parent Governor Representative James Collins
and Diocesan Representative Elaine Jones.

A30/13 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST (Agenda item 3)

Cllr Jason Cummings disclosed that he was Chair of Governors at
Woodlands CC and that his wife was employed by Jubilee Parenting
who deliver courses commissioned by the Council.

A31/13 URGENT BUSINESS (Agenda item 4)

There was none.

A32/13 EXEMPT ITEMS (Agenda item 5)

There were none.

The following officers and stakeholders were in attendance:

- Peter Greenhalgh, Executive Director, Children Families and Learning
- David Butler, Service Manager - Standards (KS1 - 4 results and G+T)
- Kate Ambrosi, Improvement Advisor 14-19 (A-level results)
- Anna Mansaray, Head of Learning Access (behaviour and attendance)

Members expressed their appreciation at the improvement in attainment and exam results in 2012/2013.

Members enquired why there was little information regarding the attainment of A-A* grades. They were advised that education authorities were not measured nationally on numbers of A-A* grades. However, members were given assurances that the performance of level 6 pupils would be tracked to ascertain whether their exam results matched up to their abilities.

In answer to a member question, officers stated that they strove to have a good working relationship with all schools in the borough, including academies. Although this is not a statutory duty, the department have discussions with academies if issues emerge and escalate the handling of these issues if necessary.

Members discussed the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), a teacher assessment of children's development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (the end of the academic year in which the child turns five). Following an independent review, the new parameters for the Profile were introduced in September 2012 and the first assessments took place in summer 2013, leading to results which were significantly lower than the previous year, and the national average outcome. Asked about their underlying causes, officers stated that the hypothesis remained that teachers in Croydon had been overcautious in their assessments. They added that there had not been any arrangements for moderation across local authorities at the moment. However, by the end of 2013-2014, every school in the borough will have received guidance, training and moderation visits to help practitioners make more accurate judgements of children's levels of development.

Officers were questions regarding the support given to the six schools which had been assessed as being below the nationally specified "floor standard (or minimum expectation set by government) for attainment (60% at level 4 for combined reading, writing and mathematics). They explained that there had been an increase in schools receiving intensive support, which included quarterly visits by the link officers and school progress review meetings. The education authority's powers of intervention also included warning letters and setting up interim executive bodies if school performance presented particular cause for concern.

Members were reminded that Ofsted inspections had become significantly more rigorous, replacing the "satisfactory" score with

“Requires improvement” and holding robust discussions with schools on their governance.

Officers were asked whether they could track how many pupils reaching levels 5 and 6 at Key Stage 2 remained in Croydon schools. They stated that pupils were monitored from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 and that, despite the fact that the borough lost a good number of high performing pupils to selective schools in two neighbouring boroughs, its Key Stage 4 remained well above the national average.

Members compared the performance of Croydon’s schools with London-wide results. They were advised that London schools had been among the lowest performing in the country in 2004. Since then, however, they had made faster progress than elsewhere through the “London Challenge” project, which channelled significant funding and manpower to improve quality of teaching. As a result, schools across London now performed slightly better than those of this borough in Key Stage 2, although Croydon’s results for Key Stage 4 were in line with the London average. It was noted that, while Croydon was not included in the “London Challenge” initiative, the borough shared many of the demographic characteristics of an inner London borough.

Members scrutinised attendance and exclusion statistics for 2012-2013. They were advised that reductions in exclusions had been due to the introduction of “fair access panels”. Through these, schools examine the circumstances of children at risk of exclusion in depth and work with families and partners to help a child address these. Members heard that the introduction of fair access panels for secondary schools in September 2013 had had a significant downward impact on numbers of exclusions.

It was also noted that while the use of exclusions was not an effective way of upholding good behaviour, these could be used particularly if one pupil’s persistent disruptive behaviour had a significant negative impact on a whole class. Members were given assurances that schools were challenged if it was felt that they were using exclusions inappropriately.

Members were advised that new cohorts in primary schools were displaying very complex social needs, which could constitute a barrier to learning. Officers emphasised the importance of leadership in managing behaviours and setting positive objectives for pupils.

Members enquired how many educational welfare officers were employed to provide support to pupils. They were advised that the team consisted of 9.8 staff, who came from a variety of different backgrounds, including some from social services. One member of the team specialises in statutory work and another provides a traded service to schools. Officers added that EWOs would be working increasingly closely with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to provide support to pupils at risk of exclusion.

Officers were questioned on the use of the Pupil Premium. They stated that it amounted to £900 per pupil per year, and to £1900 per pupil per year for looked after children. They added that one of the most important judgements made on a school was the assessment of the impact of the PP on the progress of children eligible for this funding. To help schools use the PP as effectively as possible, officers had been working with teachers to disseminate information on good practice in this respect. Asked whether there were checks and balances regarding the use of PP and whether it was “trackable”, officers stated that they were involved in comparing the progress of pupils on PP with that of pupils not eligible for this funding to ascertain whether there was a significant difference between the progress of these two groups.

Members noted the statistics provided on grant funding for primary pupils in LA maintained schools in London and remarked on the comparatively low levels of funding for this borough. Asked what action had been taken to seek an explanation for these low levels of funding, officers stated that the Executive Director, the Cabinet member for Children, Families and Learning and the Leader of the Council had secured an appointment with David Laws MP, Minister of State for Schools, to discuss this matter. The discrepancy between Croydon and other boroughs was due in part to a historic formula, which did not take into account evolving demographics and rising levels of deprivation in the borough.

Officers were thanked for their fulsome responses to Members’ questions.

RESOLVED THAT:

More attention be given to the performance of more able children in the borough.

A34/13 Children and Young People: Council social care services

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director, Children Families and Learning
- Gavin Swann, Head of Safeguarding & Looked After Children Quality Assurance
- Sukriti Sen, Head Of Children In Need

Members sought assurances that recruitment and retention of staff in this service had improved. They were advised that the number of permanent managerial staff had grown, particularly at a senior level. Officers added that the service was undergoing a major recruitment drive with an emphasis on quality. A good recruitment package which included training had been drawn up to attract high ability staff to take up and stay in permanent posts in the long term.

Members discussed the academic achievement of looked after children. It was noted that a good number had obtained further and higher education

qualifications and Members regretted that these significant achievements had not been picked up by the local press. Officers were asked whether there were any differences between the educational achievements of asylum seeking children and those of local children. They stated that the attainment of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, who displayed very high levels of resilience and motivation to learn, was significantly better than that of British looked after children, whose challenging emotional development presented a significant hurdle to effective learning. Officers explained that a “virtual school”, consisting of a team of officers led by a senior manager, had been set up to support the educational achievement of looked after children, with very positive results. Work was also taking place to help foster carers to support the educational progress of children and young people in their charge.

Officers were questioned on the number of children currently taken into care in the borough. Officers explained that while social services nationwide had responded to the “Baby P” events by becoming more cautious and taking more children into care, Croydon had taken the view that making every effort to keep families together with the help of targeted support was a better long-term approach. The department had set up a “rapid response service” to address crises as they emerged and help families improve their resilience. However, the recent influx of a number of families with complex needs and child protection plans into the borough was likely to present a challenge to these services: the service was dealing with 380 child protection plans this year, in contrast with 320 last year.

Members noted that Croydon’s Children’s Social Care and Family Support Service had last been inspected in May 2012 when it was found to be adequate, with good capacity for improvement. They asked officers how long it would take for the service to be judged as “good” by Ofsted. Officers stated that while it might yet take some years to reach this level, they felt that the service was safe, with some examples of good practice, and continuing to improve.

This item ended with a discussion regarding members’ involvement in scrutinising the safeguarding function. It was suggested that this would include visits and observations of services such as MASH and the triage team, visits with social workers and foster carers, and meeting children and families to understand their experiences. Members suggested that an item on safeguarding in the following municipal year might be preceded by a visit to MASH, discussion with a small number of families and relevant staff, thus providing a more realistic context for discussions at the subsequent meeting. It was also suggested that members attend sessions at family courts to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by children and families .

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) The list of scrutiny activities for the 2014-2015 should include an item on safeguarding, preceded by visit to MASH, discussion with a small number of families and relevant staff
- 2) That members of the 2014-2015 sub-committee should consider a visit to family courts to gain an understanding of the challenges illustrated in family court cases

A35/13 SUB-COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013-2014 (Agenda item 8)

The following topics were suggested for the 2014-2015 work programme:

- safeguarding
- the impact of the pupil premium

The Chair thanked members and officers for their contributions to the work of the sub-committee in 2013-2014.

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm