

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 22 July 2014 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Sara Bashford (Chairman)
Councillors Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chairman), Jamie Audsley, Margaret Bird,
Pat Clouder, Matthew Kyeremeh, Stephen Mann and Andy Stranack.

Co-opted members:

Parent Governor Representative

James Collins

Parent Governor Representative

Mrs Vinoo John

Diocesan Representative

Elaine Jones

A1/14 CONFIRMATION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The Committee Clerk confirmed the appointment of Cllr Sara Bashford and Cllr Sean Fitzsimons as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively.

A2/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Simon Brew has sent apologies and will be represented by Cllr Andy Stranack.

Cllr Bernadette Khan has sent apologies and will be represented by Cllr Pat Clouder.

Co-optee Vinoo John has given apologies for her early departure.

A3/14 SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP, CHAIRING AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report, confirming the membership, chairing and terms of reference of the sub-committee, was presented by Solomon Agutu, Head of Democratic Services.

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

A4/14 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 FEBRUARY 2014

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2014 be signed as a correct record.

A5/14 DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

Members declared their governorships and their own and families' involvement in educational remuneration in the borough.

A6/14 URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

A7/14 EXEMPT ITEMS

There were none.

A8/14 SCHOOL PLACES AND ADMISSIONS

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Peter Greenhalgh, Executive Director, Children Families and Learning
- Pip Hesketh, Head of Service, School Place Planning and Admissions.
- Sylvia McNamara, Director of Learning School Improvement and Inclusion

The Executive Director provided an introduction on the current situation regarding school places and admissions in the borough, noting that this had become an increasingly pro-active service. As a result, bulge classes had been put in earlier than in previous years and parents had been advised that there would be additional classes to accommodate rising demand. In addition, the SCAP (School Capacity) return the council has to deliver to the Department for Education has led to significant rises in educational funding for the borough and officers had been successful at driving down the cost of meeting demand for school places.

Members were reminded that the report to the sub-committee set out the council's three year plan to meet demand for school places. However, officers were beginning to work with central government to start producing a five-year strategy in order to meet demographic changes in the borough in a strategic way.

Officers were asked how many children had been left without a school place and answered that all had been given a place.

Members discussed the impact of migration patterns on the demand for school places. Officers stated that there was a southward pattern in demographic movements. In addition, it was observed that households tended to live at addresses in the south of the borough for longer than households living in the north of the borough. Officers were questioned on the impact of "churn" on the provision of school places. they stated that schools needed to keep a few vacancies to address this, particularly in the north of the borough.

Members questioned officers on the areas of the borough with the highest demand for school places. They were informed that the schools with the highest and lowest demand for school places were dotted around all over the borough. It was noted, however, that there had not been a single vacancy in the whole of the central area and that pressure for expansion in this part of the borough was growing and being exacerbated by the paucity of available sites for new schools. It was noted in particular that sites in the centre were notably lacking in green spaces for sports activities.

Members queried the suitability of the Segas site, which has heritage status, as a proposed school. They expressed concerns regarding its vicinity to a busy road and its lack of green spaces for sports and recreation. Officers stated that this was not an ideal location for a school but that acute pressure for school places in the centre of the borough made it a necessity. They added that the density of some parts of Croydon was comparable to that of inner London areas and that original solutions would have to be found, such as sports facilities within school buildings or green spaces within a manageable distance of schools. In addition, many schools have established reciprocal links to make the best possible use of shared resources and offer good opportunities for sport and physical activity to their pupils.

The facilities at Priory Special School in Hermitage Road, Upper Norwood, were cited as an example of good practice. Its teachers also take advantage of local facilities, such as the swimming pool at the local leisure centre. Members heard of the staff's strong commitment to improving opportunities for their pupils to engage in physical exercise.

Members remarked that schools currently had to produce a school travel plan within a year of receiving planning permission. They suggested that future applications for planning permission should include a requirement for a "school sports plan", to ensure that provision is built into plans and that any issues arising from being located in a densely populated area have been properly addressed. Officers stated they would consider this proposal but stressed that any such plan would have to be *advisory*, unlike school travel plans, which are underpinned by legislation. Officers highlighted the resource implications of producing such plans and added that Sport England was a statutory consultee in any planning application for a new school.

Members asked whether issues relating to the demand for school places could detract the council from issues relating to educational standards. Officers vigorously refuted this, adding that educational standards were the top priority and stating that 81% of Croydon's schools were now judged good or better.

Officers were questioned on the consultation carried out with neighbouring boroughs on evolving demand for school places and the need to expand schools. They explained that consultation and information exchange took place through London Councils as well as through L.E.A.G., a forum for all senior school admissions officers in London. Croydon had been successful in sharing data with other

boroughs and had carried out negotiations with the Department for Education, as a result of which the borough had been asked to reflect cost issues when submitting returns for school places, and had received a higher funding allocation than in previous years.

Members questioned officers regarding the supply of primary school places. In reply to a question regarding schools in the south-west of the borough, officers explained that Chipstead Valley primary school had been chosen to have an additional class because it was popular, it had an excellent performance and it was able to deliver this additional class speedily.

Members discussed parents' motives for sending their children to secondary schools out of the borough. Officers stated that there was a *perception* that parents favoured grammar schools but that the actual range of motives was far wider. In addition, Croydon's performance was constantly improving and drawing pupils back to the borough. Officers stated that the borough was in the top quartile in the country for the percentage of pupils achieving A to C GCSE grades. The borough was also doing very well in respect of school improvement.

Members questioned officers regarding the availability of sites for secondary schools. It was suggested that some sites in Waddon be used to address the demand in the centre of the borough. Members also discussed the current premises at St Andrews school, and were informed that the school would benefit from a complete rebuild and rationalisation to make the best use of the site. Another establishment in the north-west of the borough, Lanfranc School, is also due to be rebuilt due to the poor condition of its buildings.

Officers were questioned about the choice of school places in the north of the borough. They replied that there was less need for school sites near home for secondary school age children and that parents had a preference for well performing schools in the north-east of the borough.

Officers were asked whether the borough needed a grammar school. They answered that efforts were made to achieve a good range of primary and secondary schools and added that it was the Secretary of State's responsibility to determine the type of any new school to be opened in the borough.

A member of the public attending the meeting was invited to contribute to discussions. He expressed his concerns regarding the suitability of a site for a free school in Norbury and for the Segas site in the centre of Croydon. He also expressed the need to have controls to ensure equality and diversity in all Croydon schools to ensure that the issues which had arisen in some schools in Birmingham would not arise in this borough.

As regards standards of education in academies and free schools, officers explained that a number of new regional commissions were being set up to improve accountability in these establishments. The borough itself had set up controls to ensure that all schools had an

inclusive ethos. Members were advised that these controls had recently be used to assess a recent application for a faith-based school. Officers added that, while the government financed free schools in full, council officers still endeavoured to meet with representative of such schools to ensure a strong curriculum offer.

In answer to the statement made by the member of the public, officers reiterated the need to use the Segas site as the borough would have insufficient places in two years' time if it was not converted into a school. No other sites had been found in central Croydon, central government had approved the site and was prepared to provide resources to adapt it to be used as an educational establishment.

Officers highlighted the fact that demand for secondary school places was forecast to expand significantly from 2018 onwards. In contrast, it was observed that the speed of growth in demand for primary school places was beginning to slow down.

Members discussed movements of pupils in and out of the borough. They were informed that Croydon was a net "exporter" of pupils, the difference between pupils living out of the borough but coming over to Croydon schools and those going to schools out of the borough being about 1,000. However, officers stated that this was a downward trend as the quality and attractiveness of schools in Croydon was on the rise.

Members expressed concerns regarding the lack of secondary school provision for severely disturbed pupils. They were advised that Priory School had been opened precisely to meet the needs of this group of pupils. Parents have expressed their satisfaction regarding the type of educational provision and the number of places offered, as this has reduced the need for them to seek places out of the borough. Officers added that this had also helped to reduce the need for costly school transport.

Officers also drew members' attention to the fact that 142 places had been created for pupils with learning difficulties in Croydon's mainstream schools, in response to a 5% yearly increase in the number of children with special educational needs in the borough. In addition, officers have worked together with other boroughs to produce more robust applications for additional resources to meet special educational needs.

Officers were questioned on the creation of free schools in the borough. They confirmed that the full costs of building and running such schools were covered by central government. However, they acknowledged that free schools did not necessarily correlate with local demand for school places. In addition, the council could be compelled to lease one of its proposed school sites to an organisation wishing to open a free school - this has already occurred in the borough.

Officers explained that they sought to have a pragmatic and constructive approach to free schools, and encouraged particular sponsors when they felt confident about their quality and performance. As regards overall quality and accountability, members were reminded that these

would be the responsibility of new regional commissions set up by the DfE. Nevertheless, Local Authority officers continue to consider themselves responsible for the overall quality of schooling throughout the borough regardless of school type. Officers reported improvement in academies sharing data with the local authority. They expressed the hope that free schools would also be willing to share data and work jointly with the local authority.

Members noted the fall in demand for 16+ provision and queried the need to open the STEM academy for this age group. Officers stated that there was a particular over-supply of classes teaching academic subjects at 16+ level, while there was an under-supply of science classes at that level. They added that many schools wanted a sixth form but did not necessarily offer courses in the "right" subjects. The challenge for them was to balance appropriateness with popularity and to attract students to courses which improved their future employment chances. Officers stressed that the local authority was seeking to plan high quality 16+ provision with a good choice of courses and that dialogue with local schools was improving.

Officers were asked how the local authority could work pro-actively with free schools and academies. They explained that the solution was to meet with regional providers and to acquire as much intelligence as possible in order to respond appropriately to new developments.

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

Members agreed the following conclusions:

- Members have concerns regarding the ability of a future school on the Segas site to provide its pupils with adequate opportunities for sports and physical activity. Such concerns will apply to any planning application on a site with very limited space for physical activity.

RESOLVED THAT:

- The process of establishing a new school should include encouraging the inclusion of a school sports plan in the planning application
- The Council should encourage early partnership work with local sports organisations to explore opportunities for sport in new schools.

A9/14

MINI-REVIEWS

The Chair encouraged members to put forward topics for mini-reviews, to be conducted by members with some officer support.

It was suggested that a mini-review be conducted on play space and sports provision in and out of school.

SUB-COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2014-2015

Nero Ughwujabo, Chief Executive Officer of the BME Forum, was invited to contribute his suggestions for this sub-committee's 2014-2015 work programme. He stated that it should include consideration of the following issues:

- matters relating to children and young people living in the north of the borough
- disadvantages pupils (including social disadvantage)
- equalities issues in the borough
- the role of the voluntary sector in providing mitigation for any potential inequalities and the quality of partnership work between the council and the voluntary sector

The BME Chief Executive Officer suggested that the sub-committee consider the following two topics and set out his reasons for putting them forward:

- Employability

There are significant concerns that schools are not preparing pupils sufficiently for work or further/higher education. In addition, work experience is not properly managed in the borough and insufficient resources are dedicated to ensure that it is used effectively. However, some schools do demonstrate good practice in these fields and need to share it with other educational establishments in the borough.

- Academies

Significant concerns were expressed regarding the track record of academies in providing a good education to all sectors of the community and the schools' accountability gap which needed to be addressed.

It was confirmed that the work programme for 2014-2015 would include agenda items on the above topics and that academy head teachers would be invited to take part in discussions.

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

- Youth Justice System: how effective and well-resourced it is
- The young people's economy in Croydon
- A feasibility study on business start-ups in schools to give pupils practical experience and a preparation for the world of work

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
1100 SOUTH EAST ASIAN AVENUE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60607-7073
TEL: 773/936-3000 FAX: 773/936-3000

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60607-7073
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TEL: 773/936-3000 FAX: 773/936-3000