

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14 October 2014 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Sara Bashford (Chairman)
Councillors Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chairman), Jamie Audsley, Margaret Bird,
Simon Brew, Bernadette Khan, Matthew Kyeremeh and Stephen Mann

Co-opted members:

Parent Governor Representative	James Collins
Teacher Representative	Dave Harvey

Also in attendance: Cllr Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
Cllr Maria Gatland, Shadow Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning

A11/14 MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2014 be signed as a correct record.

A12/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were sent by Elaine Jones (Diocesan Representative) and Vinoo John ((Parent Governor representative), DCI Sian Thomas and Sally Innis, Croydon CCG .

Sub-Committee members expressed their disappointment at the non-attendance of these key partners within the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board

A13/14 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

There were none.

A14/14 URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

A15/14 EXEMPT ITEMS

There were none.

A16/14 CO-OPTION OF TEACHER REPRESENTATIVE (agenda item 6)

Dave Harvey was introduced by the chair and gave an outline of his educational experience, which he felt would add value in his contribution to the work of this sub-committee.

A17/14 PARTNERSHIP WORK ON SAFEGUARDING (agenda item 7)

The following officers and stakeholders were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director, Children, Families and Learning
- Catherine Doran, Independent Chair of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB)
- Ian Lewis, Director of Social Care and Family Support
- Gavin Swann, Head of Service, Quality Assurance and Children's Safeguarding
- Laura Butterworth, Safer London Foundation
- Sue Schofield, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
- DI Matt Robins (Metropolitan Police)
- DI Mark Hine (Metropolitan Police)

Catherine Doran gave an introduction to this agenda item. She highlighted the following challenges:

- the rising numbers of safeguarding cases
- the rising level of risk which children and young people in the borough are vulnerable to
- the rising demands on local resources to carry out safeguarding duties to a satisfactory standard
- the high staff turnover, which constitutes a challenge throughout the country
- the need to embed learning from serious case reviews into everyday practice

On the positive side, the chair of the CSCB highlighted developments such as the innovative work between health services and early years council services, improvements in data collection such as the implementation of the social care information system.

She ended her introduction by commenting that quality assurance needed to be strengthened despite its significant recent improvements, and that the voice of the child was not yet at the heart of services, although this too was improving.

In answer to a member's question, officers explained that virtually all the staff in services to looked after children were permanent employees. As regards child protection, the percentage of agency staff has fallen from 40% nine months before, to 31% in autumn 2014. While this needed to improve further, it was observed that Croydon compared favourably with many other boroughs in this respect.

In answer to a further questions, officers gave assurances that staffing levels were constantly under review. However, it was acknowledged that social work recruitment in London was very challenging. There were insufficient numbers of social workers of a sufficient calibre across the capital, especially in child

protection work. Members were also advised that it was quite desirable for many social workers to work through agencies as they generally offered higher salaries. Officers added that London boroughs were in the process of putting together a pan-London approach to recruiting social workers to create a level playing field and better terms for staff.

Asked about the reasons why social workers left this area of work, officers quoted national research conducted in 2013 which showed that this profession was given up because of the high pressure of the work (the principal reason), the high level of risk, the heavy case loads and the very high expectations of staff carrying out this type of work. The research showed that on average, social workers stayed in this line of work only half as long as staff in professions such as teaching or nursing. In addition, those that did stay did not remain in frontline posts for very long.

Within the Safeguarding Partnership, police officers in attendance at the meeting stated that there had been staffing issues in the areas of specialist command, child and sexual abuse. Staffing levels in these areas have now been ring-fenced in order to resource these areas as well as possible.

A safeguarding officer working for the Safer London Foundation gave an overview of their staff's views of social work. She stated that, while the voluntary sector could not offer the salary levels enjoyed by council staff, social workers employed by this organisation benefited from a good support network, good links with related stakeholders and from job satisfaction, derived from providing support to children and their families.

Another officer, representing the NSPCC, stated that all the social services staff in this organisation was fully qualified and had smaller, protected case loads, and derived job satisfaction out of working as part of an effective team and having a positive impact on children's lives.

Council officers were asked whether they recruited individuals from the Frontline academy, which aims to fast-track graduates into social work. They stated that Croydon had one of the largest cohorts from the academy.

Members challenged council officers regarding the effectiveness of incentives offered to retain permanent staff. They were advised that the council offered a hierarchy enabling staff to rise through the ranks. Another incentive used was a training programme on systemic family work, which had been taken up by 60 social workers in its first cohort and another 60 in the second cohort. However, officers highlighted the risk of offering such training to permanent staff only, as this could weaken the quality of service provided by agency staff. Indeed, officers acknowledged that the quality of service provided by agency staff was highly variable, whereas that of permanent staff tended to be higher as the council had more power over quality.

Police officers in attendance were questioned on the training of their officers in the area of children's safeguarding. They answered that all the new officers recruited in 2013 had had in-borough training in this area of work.

Members went on to question the Chair of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board regarding the effectiveness of its partnership work. She informed

members that the Board kept attendance records for their meetings, and that these were monitored and analysed to uncover any stakeholders' failures to participate in them. Asked how the Board ensured the stakeholders attending the meetings were the most appropriate representatives of their organisations, she explained that current procedures specified the seniority required, and that the Board would challenge organisations if unsuitable representatives were sent to contribute to the Board's work.

The Chair of the Board also stated that the Board had formal work programmes, whose outcomes and impacts were monitored by its Executive Group. In addition, the quality of the casework carried out was analysed by the multi-agency audit programme.

Police officers were asked how the work of the Board was fed back to appropriate officers and acted upon. They explained that serious case reviews were fed back to Command and acted upon at Chief Inspector level.

Members expressed concerns about where overall responsibility for safeguarding lay, in view of the large number of agencies and groups involved. They were advised that the Board had responsibility to hold these agencies and groups to account, while the Council and other agencies were responsible for providing the services and good information on their provision.

Members stressed the effectiveness of offering hands-on support to families and children in difficult circumstances. Officers stated that such support was given through the Family Resilience Service and through Community Support Workers providing very practical support as well as advocacy to families in distress.

The Chair added that members of the Council also had a responsibility to visit service providers and liaise with the Board to ensure that safeguarding was rigorously carried out. However, members commented that their enquiries about safeguarding cases often met with a refusal to divulge information as the case was deemed to be sensitive. As a result of this, they found it very difficult to ascertain whether their enquiries had led to a satisfactory outcome or whether services to children at risk were of a sufficient quality.

It was suggested that serious case reviews might provide an opportunity to improve communications with members of the council, who could be invited to contribute at the commissioning and completion stages of these reviews. Members were also encouraged to visit teams working at the front line of safeguarding services, both as another way of monitoring quality assurance and as a way of providing encouragement to staff working in a demanding field.

Members highlighted out of borough placements as being particularly hard for them to monitor. Members heard that out of borough placements were considered if a child or young person had a special education requirement which could not be met by any establishment in Croydon. There are about 30 such placements and the borough chooses schools which Ofsted assessments have shown to be good or outstanding. Officers explained that these young people received regular visits from Croydon social workers.

Officers were asked how the Board could make sure that sufficient and

appropriate services were provided to any child or young person. They explained that Ofsted inspections examined the percentage of spend per capita and that regular benchmarking took place on acceptable levels of spending.

Officers acknowledged that resourcing support to children and young people at risk was a significant challenge. In 2013, the borough experienced significant demographic growth, partly due to migration to outer London boroughs, and to a rise in the number of case assessments. As a result, their completion suffered considerable delays. Members were informed that the number of children protection cases went up by 120% in the last twelve months. In response to the above issues, an assessment team had been put together to tackle the challenges they presented.

Action taken so far to manage resources as effectively as possible in the face of growing need has included the following:

- asking whether the council is taking the *right* children into care, as a result of which the number of indigenous children in care has gone down
- focusing on providing in-house foster carers and employing fewer agency foster carers

As a result of these changes, officers have been able to move more resources into the *prevention* of risk.

Officers stated that another challenge faced by the borough was the cohort of 475 looked after children and young people from other boroughs. The Council's social services and the Police were currently working to ascertain how they could work with the other boroughs concerned to maximise resources for services to these children and young people.

Officers highlighted the usefulness of the Pupil Premium, which was designed to support children on free school meals who have vulnerabilities. They explained that schools could use Pupil Premium funding to fund any services needed to address issues experienced by eligible children and young people. They added that if this funding was used more extensively, less children would need to be referred to social services for support.

Representatives of voluntary groups attending the meeting explained that co-location of related services could lead to sharing information on new funding opportunities and making good use of synergies between services to provide more holistic support to children and young people at risk. This was their experience of being based at the Turnaround Centre, where a wide range of services to children and young people are provided.

Members observed that a recent report on children's safeguarding had been presented at Cabinet '*for noting*' and that such reports tended to carry less weight than papers with more substantial recommendations. They asked whether:

- safeguarding could be considered more than once a year
- such reports could have more substantial recommendations
- a closer link could be established between the corporate parenting panel and this scrutiny sub-committee in order for members to follow issues relating to looked after children

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning acknowledged the need to raise the profile of corporate parenting. Moreover, there was strong agreement that members of the councillors wished to get more involved in the safeguarding of children, although they acknowledged that they needed training in order to fulfil this role effectively and ask the right questions. They also expressed interest in getting access to information on the board's meetings and were advised that they could gain a good understanding of safeguarding issues through information packs and that the minutes of Board meetings were published on the borough's safeguarding website.

Members revealed that both they and officers needed to have a better understanding of members' role as corporate parents, and that some form of training could help both parties work together more effectively to support looked after children and young people.

It was observed that while all members had access to part A minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel, which could provide useful information on its involvement in the welfare of looked after children, non-members of the panel had no access to confidential data in Part B minutes. The Chair of the Board stressed that the key priority was for stakeholders to have access to the type of information needed for their specific role.

As safeguarding was concerned, members considered whether all councillors should have a safeguarding role or whether some should take on more significant responsibilities in this area. While no decision was made regarding this question, it was agreed that all members should have a greater involvement in children's safeguarding than at present.

One member highlighted the fact that, in her experience, many safeguarding meetings did not include a report from the child's or young person's school. She stressed that this was a serious gap and that relevant stakeholders should be kept up to date on the individual's progress at school and quality of relationships with their peers and teachers. Council officers undertook to follow up this matter, as information from schools was essential to the quality of safeguarding meetings and to the audit process.

Members asked whether safeguarding practices and procedures in small schools and sports clubs were scrutinised. Council officers stated that small establishments such as Saturday schools and sports clubs were not monitored, and that this would be followed up.

Officers were questioned on safeguarding activity relating to privately rented dwellings, particularly in the north of the borough. It was acknowledged that many were occupied by more transient households, with a higher than average risk level in terms of social deprivation and safeguarding. Members asked whether housing providers were challenged regarding their safeguarding responsibilities. Officers replied that an online training needs analysis on housing services in Croydon had been completed in September, and that housing officers without access to a computer were being visited to complete their analysis in hard copy. Early results show that housing officers need strategic operational training. Relevant staff are working to determine how best this can be delivered.

It was acknowledged in this context that the challenges for quality assurance were to identify gaps in safeguarding across the organisations working in the borough, and to provide a framework which allowed for a variety of different referral or reporting routes regarding safeguarding issues.

Asked what the greatest challenges in safeguarding were at present, the Cabinet Member stated that partnership work needed to improve further, and that links to communities in the borough needed to be strengthened to maximise safeguarding.

Members agreed the following conclusions to this agenda item:

- Training should be provided to members so that they could gain a better understanding of the issues and legislation involved, as well as the services being provided to safeguard children and young people in the borough
- Members should obtain more information relating to the safeguarding of children and young people, e.g. minutes of relevant meetings
- User-friendly member guidance should be provided to help them absorb the data available on safeguarding, in order to understand trends and emerging issues
- Clear steps should be taken for Scrutiny members to become more pro-active in the area of safeguarding, not only through one yearly meeting, but on an ongoing basis - this might include carrying out site visits to scrutinise the quality of children's safeguarding
- An agenda item should be included in the 25 November sub-committee meeting to agree recommendations and actions on children's safeguarding

RESOLVED THAT:

An additional agenda item be added to the 25 November sub-committee meeting to agree recommendations and actions on children's safeguarding

A18/14 CHILDREN AT RISK OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (agenda item 8)

Officers and stakeholders in attendance were the same as in the above agenda item.

The Chair opened this item with a reminder of the gravity of this item and of local agencies' responsibility not to shy away from tackling reports of child sexual exploitation, as had occurred in Rotherham.

The Chair of the Croydon Children Safeguarding Board gave assurances that it took this offence very seriously, and had set up a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) sub-group to address issues in the borough.

Members were informed that an audit had been carried out this summer of the needs of Croydon's most vulnerable children and young people. The audit report had highlighted the risk factors making Croydon's young people particularly vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. The following groups were felt to be at highest risk of CSE:

- unaccompanied asylum seeking young people leaving care and thus no longer under the supervision of social services
- looked after children from other authorities who may not be monitored closely

in view of their distance from the referring borough or council

Representatives of voluntary sector organisations gave an overview of the services and support they provided to children and young people at risk of CSE. The NSPCC representative provided the following statistics regarding the individuals to whom they provided support:

- 48% are white British and 52% from a wide range of other ethnic groups
- 76% are over 14
- 33% have a history of going missing
- 19% have been trafficked into the UK
- 17% have been diagnosed with mental health issues

Members were advised that, as far as local trends were concerned, children and young people were most likely to meet future perpetrators online or be vulnerable to “peer on peer” abuse.

Officers were asked what safeguarding and protection work was being done with sports clubs in the borough. Members were informed that a protocol was in place in some clubs but that it was not known how widely this good practice was followed. Officers gave assurances that as far as council leisure facilities were concerned, all approved processes were in place. As far as smaller independent sports groups and clubs were concerned, officers undertook to seek further information regarding systems in place to address the risk of CSE and to share this with the committee membership.

Members also questioned officers on safeguarding guidelines for local councillors whose work included communications with children and young people. Officers stressed that they were committed to working with any local groups or stakeholders to improve safeguarding practices.

Members highlighted the particular vulnerability of trafficked children, some of whom were likely to end up in a brothel in the borough. Officers highlighted the fact that the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board held a monthly meeting on trafficked children.

It was acknowledged that brothels constituted a particular challenge for the borough. Members were advised that many of them moved to a new location after they have been exposed by the police and that young people at these establishments put themselves at risk if they attempted to seek help from local agencies. However, officers explained that some successful communications had been achieved through contacts via Facebook, e-mail, etc.

Referring to the above-mentioned audit of the borough’s most vulnerable children and young people, officers gave assurances that there was no evidence of systematic organised sexual exploitation in the borough, or of large scale exploitation through brothels. However, officers acknowledged that more information and data sharing were needed on the activities of brothels in the borough as some cases might well be going unnoticed. Officers undertook to carry out further work in partnership with the NSPCC to ascertain children’s and young people’s movements while missing from home through “return home” interviews.

It was also observed that the voluntary sector could play a significant role in

this respect as it was felt to be more approachable by children and young people at risk. In particular, it was suggested that partnership work with the organisation Croydon Community Against Trafficking could make an impact in this respect. In addition, the role of members as contact points and community leaders with a good understanding of local issues was emphasised, although it was acknowledged that trust needed to be improved for members to become widely known contact points.

Members enquired whether prosecutions had been attempted. However, officers admitted they were still at an early stage of this work and that data currently available was not detailed enough to provide sufficient evidence for successful prosecutions.

Members questioned officers and voluntary sector representatives regarding the ethnicity of perpetrators. They were advised that a large study had been carried out in London, last reporting in March 2014, and that the ethnicity of known perpetrators documented in the study had been varied, with white British males in the majority. Police officers stated that the ethnicity of the 52 latest reports of suspected CSE activity in the borough had been as follows:

- 22 white
- 24 black
- 2 Asian
- 2 of Arabic appearance
- 2 of unknown ethnicity

The ethnicity of the latest individuals prosecuted for CSE had been as follows:

- 12 black
- 2 Asian
- 2 white
- 1 unknown

Officers gave assurances that in Croydon, ethnicity did not constitute an obstacle to tackling child sexual exploitation.

Members questioned officers regarding the number of missing children in Croydon. They were advised that three male youngsters were missing who were looked after children.

Officers were asked what key improvements needed to take place in order to ensure that the situation in Rotherham could not be replicated in Croydon.

They stated that the following three areas needed to be prioritised:

- developing the right culture among local agencies, a challenge for the Croydon Children's Safeguarding Board
- ensuring that front line staff and managers are accountable to the Board for their services and actions
- focus on good practice, including outreach work carried out by the voluntary sector and community leaders, such as members

Members questioned whether real transparency and accountability could be achieved through meetings such as this one, partly as it would be a challenge for members to become fully cognisant of all the issues involved and for them to probe them in depth, and partly because the voice of the exploited child was not heard in such meetings. And yet, it was acknowledged that Scrutiny was

the statutory location of accountability.

It was observed that possible action to help members to ascertain whether safeguarding was carried out effectively could include the following:

- training for councillors, to help them work with local agencies on CSE issues or cases that are reported to them
- providing members with a clear outline of the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies involved in children's safeguarding
- giving members the opportunity to monitor the progress of cases to find out how effectively children and young people at risk have been protected, how pro-actively missing children were dealt with and whether perpetrators had been prosecuted

A plea was also made for local agencies and community leaders to take young people's vulnerability seriously rather than interpret their damaging sexual relationships as "life-style choices" which local services could do nothing about.

It was suggested that committee chairs should work with relevant officers to agree a few options on the future scrutiny of children's safeguarding and that these proposals should be drawn up by May 2015.

A19/14

SUB-COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME INCLUDING REQUESTS FOR MINI-REVIEWS (agenda item 9)

Members confirmed the work programme for the rest of the municipal year, including the addition of an agenda item regarding follow-up work on children's safeguarding.

A request was made for heads of free schools to be invited to take part in the 25 November sub-committee meeting.

In addition, Cllr Audsley gave a brief overview of the mini-review he had undertaken on 'how Croydon can develop a high quality education to employment brokerage and support service for young people and employers'. It was agreed that

RESOLVED THAT:

- (i) An agenda item regarding follow-up work on children's safeguarding be added to the 25 November sub-committee
- (ii) Heads of free schools be invited to take part in the 25 November sub-committee meeting
- (iii) an agenda item be added to the 3 February 2015 meeting on the final report of this mini-review.

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 10.05pm