

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 17 March 2015 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

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

James Collins, Parent Governor representative

Also in attendance:

Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children,
Families and Learning
Councillor Tony Letts, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

A11/15 MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT: the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2015 be signed as a correct record.

A12/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Elaine Jones (Diocesan Representative),
Dave Harvey (Teacher representative), Vinoo John (Parent Governor
representative) and by Councillors Alisa Flemming and Stephen Mann
for lateness.

A13/15 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

There were none.

A14/15 URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

A15/15 EXEMPT ITEMS

There were none.

**A16/15 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINI-REVIEW
CONDUCTED BY CLLR JAMIE AUDSLEY (agenda item 6)**

The following officers were in attendance:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Acting Executive Director - People
- Lisa McCance, Head of Economic Development
- Jivko Hristov, Economic Strategy Manager
- Tony Slonecki (Capital South Croydon work experience brokerage service)

The following representatives of the "First Step Croydon" Campaign, were also in attendance and contributed to the presentation of findings:

- James Asfa
- Louise Lee
- Nigel Taylor
- Steve Gooch
- Thirza Legg

A short film was shown to set out the issues addressed in the mini-review, namely the importance of work experience as a first step towards employability and the hurdles, such as the lack of personal connections and social networks, standing in the way of a successful work experience placement.

It was stressed that links between businesses and schools needed to be improved in order to make more work experience placements available to young people in the borough.

Other difficulties were quoted, including the high costs of university fees and the challenges of securing an apprenticeship.

Members questioned officers regarding the readiness of school leavers to secure employment. They stated that this mini-review demonstrated the gap around the provision of work experience as well as the fragmentation in current systems to improve young people's employability.

Members discussed the advantages and disadvantages of work experience brokerages. It was observed that a single point of contact would be useful for businesses but that brokerages had to be very low cost to be used by schools and colleges.

Members also heard about the Barclays Life Skills, work experience and apprenticeship programmes. The Life Skills programme has a link to the Lives Not Knives organisation, who supply candidates for the Barclays work experience programme. Members were informed that insurance company Allianz also provided a programme of work experience for school pupils, as well as recruitment opportunities for young people aged 21 and above. It was acknowledged that many large corporations had schemes to provide work experience and employment to young school leavers.

Members highlighted professional institutes such as the Chartered Institute of Surveyors as organisations that schools should work with to maximise work experience opportunities.

Cllr Audsley was asked what age group the mini-review had focused on and replied that the main focus had been the 16 to 19 age group, although the needs of slightly older individuals had also been acknowledged.

It was observed that steps to develop employability skills in young people should be undertaken much earlier than at the age of 16 to

ensure that school pupils are thoroughly familiar and comfortable with them by the time they leave school. It was added that these employability skills include “soft skills” such as resilience, perseverance and good interpersonal skills. The point was also made that disappointing exam results in Croydon would make it difficult for many young people to secure employment.

Another issue raised was the inconsistent quality of careers advice and support in schools. The hope was expressed that businesses involved in the Westfield Hammerson might provide such advice to school leavers in the next few years.

Members highlighted the possibility for schools to involve their pupils in projects which would mirror a realistic work environment. It was acknowledged that this was already happening but was not a widespread practice.

Members were advised of the key goals for the First Step Campaign this year, which were to work with councillors to develop a brokerage, to offer good quality work experience placements, to develop an award and an annual award ceremony to celebrate best practice in developing the employability of local school leavers.

The Committee agreed to present the recommendations of the mini-review to Cabinet.

Resolved: That the recommendations of the mini-review conducted by Cllr Audsley be presented to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

Recommend to Cabinet that the council should:

(Supporting schools and colleges)

1. Explore potential service models that would also enable the proposed Jobs Brokerage Service to meet the key service features schools, colleges and youth providers also desire

2. Continue to work with the First Step Croydon campaign in 2015-2016 to further improve provision of high quality work experiences in growth sectors such as: health; science and technology; construction

3. Develop a campaign with young leaders and educators to raise aspirations and standards in preparing our young people for work. To include: unifying and spreading existing elements of good practice across the town - work readiness commitment; skills passport (Capital South); work experience celebration event (Capital South); resources for workshops and employability trainings that can be used by all.

(Supporting students and young people)

4. As part of this work, develop a clear and transparent approach to fairly allocating opportunities generated across the town

5. Work with young people to explore the development of the following service features as part of the employability support to be provided through the new job brokerage service:

- an open and accessible directory of work experience opportunities
- a structured online preparation programme for young people undertaking work experience enabling them to be properly prepared and benefit from work experience where they are having to self-organise and take responsibility for their preparation
- the integration of employability workshops; mock interviews ; careers talks; support in reflecting and evaluating their placement to support the right career choice
- the opportunity to create a commercially viable product through project work
- volunteering as a complementary or alternative experience to work experience

6. Ensure young people are at the heart of creating the “Croydon Work-readiness Commitment” so they understand and are able to hold themselves, their schools and colleges, employers and Council to account in its delivery. Make this recommendation real by: A) Creating a logo/ First Step Croydon “quality mark” that employers would have on their websites to indicate their involvement and link through to explain how to apply for opportunities, when they would occur etc. Education organisations could have a corresponding mark communicating their support for employers and contact details for their employability co-ordinator. B) providing recognition (skills passport). C) celebration for the work they undertake in becoming work ready (celebration event)

7. Each secondary school and College in Croydon should have at least one designated work experience co-ordinator and the application process for work experience should be carried out by young people themselves

(Supporting employers)

8. Explore potential service models that would also enable the proposed Jobs Brokerage Service to work with employers to offer education opportunities across the town at the same time

9. Organise a series of business round table events to discuss the proposed EEBSS and identify further key features employers require any pros and cons from their perspective

10. Support schools, colleges and employers to understand each other’s needs to enable effective co-working e.g. in the case of Croydon College, each business which has links with the establishment is given a named “account manager” with whom all communications take place

11. Consider how business rates and other incentives could be used to further encourage employers to contribute educational opportunities to achieve implementation of the “Croydon Work-readiness Commitment” to include:

- Business rate relief for SME’s

- Subsidised membership of key trading associations and/or BID's
- First Step Croydon newsletter as part of the council backed employability campaign providing exposure and communication of businesses' work
- Shared provision of opportunities e.g. large employers and SMEs in their supply chains sharing resources, support, organisation etc. to make provision more achievable

12. Explore the possibility of using Croydon's Contact Centre to improve the effectiveness of education-to-employer relationships

13. Ensure the Council will be an 'exemplar employer' in the provision of employability opportunities and will promote best practice to Croydon employers. To support the spread of best practice, the Council should adopt the logo/ First Step Croydon "quality mark" that employers would have on their websites to indicate their involvement in the "Croydon Work-Readiness Commitment"

A17/15 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE (agenda item 7)

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Acting Executive Director - People
- Ian Lewis, Director, Social Care and Family Support

The Director of Social Care and Family Support gave a brief introduction to the report and stated that in his first year in his post, he had built on the work done by his predecessor. He added that the council was facing a picture of rising demand, with a growing population and growing deprivation, with keen efforts by officers to nip emerging problems in the bud. In addition, services are striving to tackle the needs of a rising number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Set against these needs is a continuing challenge with the recruitment and retention of social care staff.

Members were advised that a number of audits of cases had recently taken place to identify key issues for children's social care.

Officers acknowledged the need to improve the quality of social care management, and stated that training had been organised to achieve this.

In reply to a question, officers explained that the emergency duty team was run by the children's social care division but was a generic social care service, which was becoming increasingly busy. Officers explained that there was only one officer on duty after office hours but that he/she could access back-up if needed. The manager was sometimes present but usually on call. Officers have access to the full electronic record system. Officers stressed that issues that might go on into the evening or from the evening into the following day had to be shared between the emergency duty team and day-time staff so that relevant officers might be prepared to take any appropriate action required.

Officers were questioned on the management of risk such as that of child sexual exploitation. Members stated that paperwork on risk management was of a good standard but questioned whether this was reflected on the ground.

Officers replied that they were aware of the extent of issues such as child sexual exploitation in the borough and that it was essential that the borough should not be complacent about its handling of the risk and of individual cases. They added that new staff had been appointed to co-ordinate this work systematically, and that officers were working pro-actively with the police, Pupil Referral Units, hotels, cab companies, etc. to tackle this issue.

Officers highlighted the night-time economy and the presence of major transport hubs as risk factors affecting children's safeguarding. Groups of children and young people at particular risk were looked after children from other local authorities and missing children.

Officers were questioned about the threshold for taking children into care. They explained that a 'child in need' was one whose significant needs could not be met without the addition of specific services. They added that care order proceedings were initiated when children or young people were deemed to be at risk of significant harm or undergoing significant harm. However, a "section 20" care order, which was requested by *parents*, had a higher risk threshold. Members were advised that the courts tested assessments of risk rigorously when a court order was sought. Officers stated that every effort was made to keep children or young people with their immediate or extended family, unless the risk this presented left no choice but to seek a care order.

Members questioned staff on progress in recruiting and retaining social care staff. Officers replied that action taken so far was helping to retain staff and that there was greater stability across all services with a reduced number of agency staff, although the assessment service was experiencing challenges in staff recruitment and retention. Its greatest difficulty was the sheer number of assessments it had to carry out, which had risen to about 400-500 per month. It was observed that this problem was affecting councils throughout London.

Questioned about the weaknesses and threats facing the service, officers explained that it was experiencing a steady and incremental improvement but lack consistency in quality of service and data recording. Members heard that three of the weaker areas were services provided to children with disabilities and court work, although both were now improving, and the transition from child to adult services.

Asked about the service's direction of travel, officers explained that it had been estimated at their last OFSTED review in 2012 that it would take about five years for the service to improve to the point where it would be judged "good".

Offices quoted examples of feedback provided to the service to demonstrate its rising quality:

- An assessment carried out to investigate accusations against a member of staff came to the view that the accusations were not justified and that the social care assessment process was carried out 'in an open and transparent culture'
- The department was given feedback about its staff recruitment process which was said to be "rigorous"
- Staff in the adoption service were told that they had made significant improvements, which might lead to a "good" rating after another year of improvements

Asked who monitored the large number of statistics provided on children's social care, the director of Social Care and Family Support explained that he and team managers examined a weekly twenty page report to monitor ongoing issues and identify any emerging trends. The report was also used in "one-to-ones" to monitor staff performance.

Officers were questioned on the council's adoption service. They explained that the number of adoptions was satisfactorily high and that the matching ability was generally good. It was observed that ethnic background was important both for the adopters and council officers. The one group which was difficult to find adoptive parents for was that of BME boys. Officers also admitted that there was a backlog in processing adoption applications.

Members sought assurances that the voice of the child had an impact on the services provided by officers. Officers explained that the council's "participation strategy" applied right across council services and sought to obtain service users' views regarding their needs and the services they received. However, officers acknowledged that it was something of a challenge to obtain representative views from children and young people. In addition, work was taking place to make the council's "children in care council" more effective but progress was slow. Officers explained that they also had data from an independent advocacy service but had not been very effective at collating the information received.

Officers were questioned on the appropriateness of their statistical neighbours. They explained that these were not chosen by the council but by central government and that they changed as the demographic profile of the borough evolved.

At the end of the above discussions, members thanked officers for their answers and unanimously wished to put on record the view that social care staff needed to be given recognition for the very demanding work that they did.

Members agreed to scrutinise children's services five years after the last Ofsted inspection in spring 2012, to ascertain whether they have attained a "good" grade as forecast after the publication of the Ofsted report. They also agreed that the "traffic light system" already being used by the borough's Health and Wellbeing Board should be used to indicate progress or lack of it in the various elements of children's social care.

RESOLVED that:

- children's social care, including targets set and steps taken to achieve them, be scrutinised in spring 2017 to ascertain whether the service has improved enough to warrant a "good" grade.
- that the "traffic light system" should be used to indicate progress or lack of it in the various elements of children's social care.

A18/15 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (agenda item 8)

Members confirmed their suggestions for the 2015/2016 work programme.

RESOLVED: that the topic suggestions listed in paragraph 2.3 of the work programme report be put forward for consideration by members shaping the work programme 2015-2016.

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 9.45pm