

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 16 June 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 and Vinoo John, Parent Governor representatives

**Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Shafi Khan, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
- Councillor Stuart King

**A19/15 Confirmation of the appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman**

Councillor Andrew Pelling nominated Cllr Sara Bashford as Chairman. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Margaret Bird.

Councillor Bernadette Khan nominated Cllr Sean Fitzsimons as Vice-Chairman. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Simon Brew.

Councillors Sara Bashford and Sean Fitzsimons were duly appointed as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the sub-committee.

**A20/15 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received by Dave Harvey and Elaine Jones.

**A21/15 Sub-Committee membership, chairing and terms of reference**

This report was noted.

**A22/15 Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2015**

**RESOLVED THAT:** the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2015 be signed as a correct record.

**A23/15 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST**

There were none. Sub-Committee members declared their school governorships.

**A24/15 URGENT BUSINESS**

There was none.

**A25/15 EXEMPT ITEMS (agenda item 7)**

The sub-committee agreed that Appendix 1 of report B1 be discussed under Part B of the agenda but that all other parts of the report be taken in Part A as they did not contain commercially sensitive material.

**A26/15 School places and admissions (agenda item 8)**

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director (People)
- Jenny Duxbury, Head of School Place Planning and Admissions
- Pip Hesketh, former Head of School Place Planning and Admissions

Members expressed their thanks to Pip Hesketh for attending the meeting despite the fact that she had now left this post.

In the introduction to this item, members were reminded of the enormous growth in demand for school places over the last few years, leading to 5000 additional primary school places in the last four years. The challenge to find school places was about to shift to secondary schools, although officers said the pressure would not be as great in view of the number of existing vacancies and the announcement in January that two new free schools were to be established in the borough, one on the Victoria House site, which was due to open in 2016 and another, sponsored by Wallington Grammar School, which was due to open in 2018 although the site had not yet been confirmed. Members were advised that one possible site was located in Featherbed Lane, in the east of the borough. Officers were asked to ensure that the word "grammar" would not feature in the school's name. They replied that the choice of name was up to the funding agency and the sponsor, although they would try to influence its choice.

Members observed that opening a new school in Featherbed Lane would mean long journeys for school children as much of the demand for more school places would come from the south of the borough, where primary schools currently had a number of bulge classes. Asked whether there would be sufficient places to address this need, officers gave assurances that there would be sufficient capacity and that some secondary schools would like to expand. Chipstead Valley school had held a consultation on expansion and Heathfield school in South Croydon would also open soon.

Officers were questioned on the availability of school places for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. They explained that many of the arrivals were in the 14-16 year age group and had to be placed by the council. Officers highlighted the personalised curricula drawn up by John Ruskin school for such pupils, which had very good outcomes. As regards young people aged 16 and over, members were advised that there were arrangements in place with other boroughs for placing new arrivals and sharing resources needed for their education.

Officers were asked to explain who determined the site of a school and how the council could influence this process. They were advised that a

free school could agree a site with the Education Funding Agency (EFA), who had the final word on the decision, without consulting the council. However, constructive communications with the council did take place in Croydon.

As regards establishing new academies, officers explained that a competition was run between interested sponsors after which the council made a recommendation to the Department for Education (DfE) on the best choice of sponsor for the proposed new school. The DfE then makes the final decision.

Members discussed the use of temporary accommodation for bulge classes or while waiting for the completion of new school buildings and expressed concerns about the impact of such premises, especially over long periods of time. Officers commented that the Education Funding Agency was responsible for the building of Harris Invictus, which was taking much longer than expected and thus necessitating such temporary classrooms.

Officers were asked about the role of the council in liaising with TfL on transport needs arising from school expansions or the building of new schools. They replied that this sometimes occurred through the capital delivery hub, and by publishing expansion plans in the local papers. They commented that the borough had a few TfL roads e.g. A232, A236 and A23 and that any expansion in their vicinity had to be highlighted to TfL.

Members highlighted the fact that Christchurch school needed to be expanded but that the only objection to doing so was the heavy traffic on the A23. Officers stated that this could represent a significant criterion if a risk to children is identified. They added that a traffic management plan was an intrinsic part of a planning application for a new school. Members pointed out that school travel plans based on traffic management plans did not carry much weight as borne out in the recent construction of new schools and emerging hurdles to encouraging non-car transport. Officers acknowledged that there was huge variation in the culture of different schools and that a “no drive” policy was impossible to enforce, although some schools had been very good at encouraging young people to walk. They added that the existence of 20 mile an hour limits had helped to foster a “walking culture”.

Officers were asked what the rules were regarding consultation with local councillors on changes to schools, such as expansions, new schools, etc. as councillors needed to reassure residents in their wards about ongoing developments. Officers explained that ward councillors should be informed of changes well in advanced but apologised for the fact that this did not always occur. The executive director undertook to produce a procedure to ensure that ward councillors were kept regularly informed of changes to schools e.g. openings, closures or expansions from very early stages.

The sub-committee discussed the fact that Croydon was - and was likely to remain - a net exporter of nearly 1,000 children to other boroughs.

Asked what schools these children went to, officers explained that a significant percentage went to private schools, with parents applying for a Croydon academy as well as an independent school and making a decision between the two quite late in the day.

it was explained that, being a large borough, Croydon had extensive borders, and were in constant dialogue with neighbouring boroughs regarding school place planning and capacity.

Members enquired about the changing ratios of different faiths in the recent population growth. Officers replied that some analysis had been carried out on this despite the difficulties presented by the fact that the application process did not include obtaining information on children's faiths. However, Members heard that the Catholic and Church of England dioceses collected their own information based on baptismal data. Asked what the process was for applying to faith schools, officers explained that parents had to make a standard application through the council and complete supplementary forms for diocese schools to meet criteria set by these establishments.

Members highlighted the risk of a looming shortfall in places at faith schools based on baptismal records and stated that only one school had any capacity to meet this shortfall. However, officers pointed out that baptismal records did not necessarily translate into parental preferences. In addition, the council was having constructive conversations with faith schools to address this issue. Members asked for officers to provide them with the numbers of pupils being taught at faith schools in the borough.

Members heard that all schools including faith schools were obliged to prioritise places for looked after children.

Members questioned officers about offers of school places to children arriving in the middle of the year. They were advised that twelve had applied but had not yet been placed. Nine were waiting for primary school places and three for secondary school places. Members were informed that all had complex personal histories.

Members were informed that Victoria House primary Pupil Referral Unit was about to move to purpose-built accommodation in Bramley Banks. Officers explained that the number of pupils would be the same and that governance had been improved to help staff to learn from each other.

Officers were questioned on the provision of places for special educational needs (SEN). Officers pointed to the council's SEN strategy, which had been presented at the July 2011 Cabinet meeting. Officers did recognise that there were challenges with regard to sufficient places, but they had expanded provision locally and established resource facilities in mainstream schools, with some examples of excellent practice, particularly with regard to autism.

Members questioned officers regarding children who were taught at home. They were informed that there were about 80 such children in the

borough, that there was a monitoring procedure with six-monthly home visits. The officer in charge reports to the Departmental Leadership Team who have oversight of the monitoring process and the children's needs. Members heard that the officer in charge was very experienced as regards safeguarding issues concerning children taught at home.

Officers were questioned on the work of the Fair Access Panel. These meet to provide managed moves to offer pupils at risk of exclusion a fresh start where this is appropriate. Members highlighted reports of delays in obtaining decisions on medical appeals and asked whether they might be isolated cases or evidence of a trend. Officers stated that parents of such pupils should get a decision no later than other parents, and that there was no reason why these should be delayed.

Officers were thanked for their fulsome replies to members' questions.

At the end of this item, members came to the following conclusions:

- A protocol for notifying ward councillors of proposals for new schools or changes to schools at their earliest stage should be drawn up and implemented
- The council should adopt a fresh approach to school place planning including in-year planning, to provide places at or near the locations where the demand is greatest
- The council should investigate effective options for encouraging faith schools to increase their offer of school places
- More efforts need to be made by the council to encourage and facilitate the use of walking, cycling and public transport to new schools

#### **A27/15 Scrutiny work programme (agenda item 7)**

Members confirmed the work programme for future sub-committee meetings.

It was suggested that some scrutiny work might be carried out on the following areas:

- home schooled children
- the use of public spaces for physical exercise and sport

The meeting ended at 9.40pm