

## MEETING OF THE

### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12 January 2016 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, Andrew Pelling and David Wood

Co-optees:

James Collins, Vinoo John, Dave Harvey and Leo Morrell

**Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
- Councillors Maria Gatland and Joy Prince

**A01/16 Welcome and Apologies for absence (agenda item 1)**

Apologies were received from Councillor Jamie Audsley, Elaine Jones and from Councillor David Wood (representing Councillor Audsley) for lateness.

**A02/16 Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2015 (agenda item 2)**

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

**A03/16 Disclosures of interest (agenda item 3)**

There were none.

**A04/16 Urgent business (agenda item 4)**

Under this item, members agreed to co-opt a Church of England diocesan representative as a voting co-optee, as notification of this nomination by the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education had reached the council early in the new year.

Mr Leo Morrell was nominated by Cllr Andrew Pelling. The nomination was seconded by Cllr Simon Brew. Mr Morrell was duly co-opted onto the sub-committee and the Head of Democratic Services confirmed that he had signed the Declaration of Pecuniary Interest shortly before this meeting.

**A05/16 Exempt items (agenda item 5)**

There were none.

**A06/16 Question time with the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning (agenda item 6)**

The following officers were in attendance for this item with Councillor Alisa Flemming:

- Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director (People)
- David Butler, Head of School Standards
- Lisa Taylor, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer

The Cabinet Member gave a presentation on the priorities for her portfolio. The key elements were as follows:

- Every school a school of choice for pupils and parents
- Children's social care: focusing on social worker staff recruitment and prioritising early intervention and a preventative approach
- Providing an all age approach to services for the disabled and pupils with special educational needs
- Inspirational youth provision for those with limited resources and linking youth provision with businesses to increase levels of provision
- Reducing the risk of child poverty through the provision of the Best Start programme
- Developing adult education through CALAT while addressing major reductions in government funding

The Cabinet member also outlined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to services within her portfolio and discussed the financial pressures they were facing.

As part of her presentation, Cllr Flemming highlighted the "troubled families programme" carrying out outreach and providing support to some of the families in greatest need in the borough. She also pointed to the generic help given to families in dire financial need through the "Gateway" programme.

The Sub-Committee was advised of the significant financial threat faced by the council as a result of a considerable fall in funding for young asylum seekers' services.

Members asked what action was being taken to improve the small number of schools whose performance was causing concern. They were advised that link advisers were working hard to improve standards where needed and that the regional schools commissioner also had an important role to play in challenging these schools to take the necessary steps. In addition, the recent appointment of some new head teachers had led to promising new approaches.

Members expressed their concerns regarding the impact of forced house moves on children's schooling. The Cabinet Member explained that through the Gateway project, if a family moves away from their home temporarily, a school

place is unlikely to be lost. However, if a move is permanent, there may be no choice but to find a school nearer the new address. However, the Cabinet member stressed that some schools were able to, and did exercise discretion regarding their decision whether to keep a child or not.

Members expressed concerns regarding the significant variation in the council's expenditure on school expansion in the borough. For instance, £11m had been allocated to West Thornton School whereas only £6.8m had been earmarked for Arena. Officers explained that West Thornton School was one of Croydon's outstanding schools and the expansion aimed to maximise benefits and minimise the disadvantage of building a brand-new school.

Members discussed the establishment of free schools and were reminded that free schools did not seek funding and support from councils or communicate with them regarding plans for a new establishment, but applied directly to the Department for Education.

The Cabinet Member was questioned regarding proposals for a seamless service from ages 0 to 65 for disabled people. She stated that integration of child and adult services would present a challenge in view of the multiplicity of service providers involved. It would therefore take place in a phased approach, with officers currently focusing on services to people aged 0 to 25.

Members expressed concerns regarding the possible increase in lateness to school due to changes in SEN transport provision. The Cabinet Member gave assurances that this was not the case and explained that route optimisation focused on ensuring that buses were used to capacity, thus ensuring better value for money. Plans are also being developed to train young people to travel independently, thus increasing their skills and saving money in the long term.

The Cabinet Member was questioned regarding youth provision in the north of the borough. She pointed to the leisure centre and to four "locality hubs" providing a range of activities for young people in Thornton Heath. The work of various faith groups and of uniformed groups such as the scouts was also highlighted.

However, she observed that the key difficulty facing young people and their parents was the lack of good publicity for the various activities on offer. Members agreed that better links needed to be established between providers and schools to improve publicity. Members stated that all activities had previously been advertised through one comprehensive publication, but that was no longer produced. The Cabinet Member observed that children and young people had their own networks and that it might be useful to tap into these.

The Cabinet Member was questioned regarding the closure of the Coulsdon CALAT centre. It was observed in particular that disabled customers living in the south of the borough might have real difficulties reaching other centres in Croydon. It was agreed by all that this was regrettable, although it was stressed that the closure was due to significant reductions in central government funding. Members stressed that many of the craft courses run at the centre were not available anywhere else in the borough. They also expressed concerns

regarding the future use, storage or loss of the costly specialist equipment such as kilns used at the centre. The Cabinet Member gave assurances that officers were exploring ways of retaining and using this specialist equipment.

The Cabinet Member was questioned regarding the discrepancy between the cost of services to looked after children in Croydon and in other boroughs. She was able to reassure members that services provided in this borough were not in any way inferior to those of other boroughs.

The Cabinet Member was thanked for her detailed presentation.

## **A07/16 Education quality and standards (agenda item 7)**

Officers were questioned on educational achievement in the borough.

Members enquired about the progress of white working class boys through Key Stage 4 to post-16 educational provision or employment. Officers explained that the statistics relating to young people “Not in Education, Employment or Training” (“NEET”) showed that performance had improved so much that the borough had moved from the bottom quartile in London to the top one.

Members also wished to know whether consideration had been given to changing school timetables in line with research on the times of day when people were most productive. They were advised that no such change had taken place yet.

In answer to a Member’s question, officers confirmed that teaching and learning reviews - and a range of other services - were increasingly carried out as a traded service, which involved a cost to the relevant school.

Members examined absences from school. They were advised that codes were given for different types of absence and that absences due to illness had risen nationwide, including Croydon, in 2014-2015. Members probed further, asking whether repeated absences were investigated. Officers replied that this was so, and that schools also carried out forecasts for persistent absenteeism with link advisers. If a pupil suffers from a genuine health condition, the appropriate support is put into place. If not, the appropriate steps are taken.

Members looked at the funding per pupil and asked what impact multiple deprivation had on the funding formula. They were intrigued by the fact that Croydon’s “statistical neighbours” received considerably more funding. Officers concurred that this was curious and added that the borough had gained a little from changing methodology but received very low funding in view of rising need in the borough.

Members discussed progress in Croydon’s schools as well as the concept of “progress-based exams”. Officers stated that progress in the borough’s schools was significantly above national scores even if attainment was below average. This year, schools have had the opportunity to use “Progress8” measures to test pupils and, while officers admitted they had not seen the results, they believed that they would show a positive picture. While many of the best pupils leave the borough after Key Stage 2, officers explained that progress measurements did not suffer. It was also observed that Ofsted increasingly scrutinised the added value brought by schools to

children's education.

Officers were questioned on the impact of the number of foreign pupils on overall school results. They stated that these children usually made astounding progress and that both Ofsted and link advisors challenged schools whose data showed an emerging disparity between the performance of different ethnic groups.

Members were advised that the Regional Schools Commissioner met with senior council officers regularly and that both parties provided each other with robust challenge on school performance and action taken to improve it. They also heard that the Regional Schools Commissioner had the power to issue warning notices, although he has not issued one yet. If a school continues to perform poorly, the final solution is a suggested change of sponsor.

Asked how quickly the Commissioner took action, officers stated that he did so very quickly after a concern had been raised.

Members questioned officers on exclusions. Officers explained that if a school was not listed in Appendix 3 of the report on school standards, this meant that they had not excluded any pupils.

The Vice-Chair expressed his concern regarding an article in the Croydon advertiser which contained damaging remarks about a group of pupils who were allegedly "not teachable". Officers stated that discussions had already taken place with the establishment concerned. He went on to highlight the challenges faced by some schools which have a high turnover of pupils, making it very challenging for teachers to follow their syllabus and for pupils to obtain top results. Officers were asked how this might be addressed. Officers replied that John Ruskin school offered courses at Key Stage 4 to pupils newly arrived from abroad which included classes on English as a foreign language and that Edenham school had created a reception class at Key Stage 3 for foreign pupils.

## **A08/16 The Education budget (agenda item 8)**

Officers were questioned about the funding allocated for the expansion of Harris Purley. They undertook to provide members with data on the Department for Education's contribution towards the £14m funding earmarked towards the expansion of the school.

Members discussed the revenue funding to be allocated to each pupil and were informed that, at £4855.90, this had increased only a little from the previous year. Members agreed that there was a need to recognize the disparity between deprivation in Croydon and the level of funding per pupil. Officers added that government was to bring in a new national formula in the next two years. They do not yet know how this will affect Croydon but it is predicted that Inner London is likely to suffer major cuts.

Officers explained that the education budget was discussed regularly between the Schools Forum and council officers. They added that there used to be far more flexibility on how funding was used, whereas this has become increasingly formula-based.

Officers were questioned on the pupil premium allocation, which is allocated on a per pupil basis for children who meet the criteria. They explained that this was £1360 per year from reception classes to year 6, and £935 per year from year 7 onwards, £300 per year for children of families in the armed forces. Looked after children are also eligible for a pupil premium allocation. Officers undertook to provide data on the numbers of children eligible for each band of Pupil Premium. Head teachers have a statutory duty to monitor the expenditure of their school on the Pupil Premium although the council can take on a role in deciding how an establishment's Pupil Premium is used if a school's use of the funding is judged to be inappropriate.

Councillors agreed that more clarification was needed on the following:

- the rationale for borrowing £113m to provide school places when the council itself has very limited powers or involvement in setting up new schools
- the substance of the negotiations held on plans for new school places.

**RESOLVED THAT:** clarification be sought on the rationale for borrowing £113m to provide school places and the substance of the negotiations held on plans for new school places.

**A09/16 Cabinet responses to recommendations of the Local Action Mini-Review on youth employability (agenda item 9)**

As Cllr Jamie Audsley, who chaired the review, was not in attendance at the meeting, it was agreed that discussion on this item should be postponed to the following meeting.

**RESOLVED THAT:** This report should be added to the agenda for the 15 March meeting of this Sub-Committee.

**A10/16 Scrutiny work programme (agenda item 10)**

Members confirmed the work programme for the rest of the year with the addition of the previous agenda item to the 15 March agenda.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm