

## **Scrutiny & Overview Committee**

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 6 March 2018 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber - Town Hall

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair);  
Councillor Jan Buttinger (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Patsy Cummings, Stephen Mann and Vidhi Mohan

**Also Present:** Councillor Hamida Ali and David Wood

**Apologies:** Councillor Carole Bonner

### **PART A**

#### **9/18 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2018 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### **10/18 Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

#### **11/18 Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### **12/18 Children's Improvement Plan Update**

The Executive Director of People and the Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social care were in attendance to provide an update on the progress of the Children's Improvement Plan.

The Committee were provided with an update on ongoing activities since the last meeting, including partnership monitoring meetings with the Police and NHS, where discussions had taken place to assess the direction and pace of travel. There had also been also been mandatory training for managers and social workers on the Strengthening Families model that was due to be adopted across the whole service from April 2018. Good feedback on the training was received by those that had attended.

The Committee further learned that a detailed review of the Early Help service had taken place and they were currently working on developing the Early Help strategy with a view to implementing it later in the year. Officers had also explored the proportion of social worker tasks that could be undertaken by the early help team.

As part of the Quality Assurance framework, quarterly spotlight meetings had taken place with unit managers to ensure accountability was maintained and challenges were understood, in order to be clear on what was happening across frontline services. Important work around contextual safeguarding and how better multiagency partnerships could work to keep children safe was also ongoing.

The recording systems in the department were now aligned to the new model of working. Additionally, the Children's services budget had been increased with £10.9m invested and agreed as the base budget for 2018/19.

The department continued to face many challenges, with high demand for assessment and pressures from high caseloads remaining prevalent. The service had also experience a considerable increase in complex needs cases. Caseload in the assessment team remained high with better stability seen in caseloads in care planning teams.

The Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) team became the single point of contact as of 5 March 2018 and Ofsted acknowledged that this was the stronger part of the service. Early Help staff were being deployed to assist with some of the administrative tasks where possible.

There had been notable improvements in fostering reviews and pathway plans for care leavers had been consistently completed on time. There had also been improvements in the management of casework and outcomes for care leavers were satisfactory.

In recruitment and retention, 41% of the workforce were agency staff, however there had been a rise in social worker conversions to permanent contracts due to the effects of stability in leadership. A payments total rewards scheme was due to be launched in April 2018 to attract permanent staff which included a career development scheme. A recruitment package was in the process of being finalised to make Croydon financially attractive to prospective employees.

A Member questioned what short term measures were being put in place to support social workers and their caseloads whilst longer term solutions were being sought? Officers advised that this remained a key challenge and that the average caseload was 35 cases and they were working closely with agencies to recruit good social workers. A review had been taken on the

possibility to buy in contractors but there was no assurance that this would be the safest option, a view that was supported by the commissioner. Additional service managers had been brought in to realise the aspects of the Ofsted challenge of ensuring that the thresholds for assessments had been accurately applied in each case. Officers proposed a future meeting of Scrutiny to specifically look at recruitment and retention.

The Committee further learned that the Director's Network had been in discussion and signed an agreement on capping agency rates but not all London boroughs had honoured the agreement. Nationally, work was underway on various schemes such as the return to social work scheme. There was also the possibility of introducing an apprenticeship later in the year and a range of different routes were being explored to encourage more people into the profession.

In response to a Member question about the emerging picture from the Return Home Interview (RHI) data, officers stated that it was still too early to produce conclusive data on trends relating to missing children. The team was working to interpret some of the intelligence and had been working closely with the police on identifying groups and trends.

Members enquired about the quantity of foster carers in the borough. Officers confirmed that fostering recruitment had been outsourced due to the current contract concluding. There was a need for more foster carers as there had been a rise in the number of LAC children profiles with more local children coming into care. The team had also worked to move from 50% to 90% of cases receiving supervision and it was anticipated that they would be close to this target within 3 months.

A Member queried what had been done to improve child protection indicators which had seen some improvement recently but still required improvements around the adequacy of visits and time frame for reviews. Officers advised that this was being reviewed on a weekly basis with social workers to determine what needed to be done to improve figures. There would be a reviewer in place to manage long term child in need cases.

The Chair asked for an explanation about what in hindsight was considered wrong with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and what had subsequently changed. The Committee was informed that whilst the partnership seemed well organised, its effectiveness had been questioned, the line of sight was not clear and there had been duplication of work. They had since looked at what key Boards needed additional support and how this could be best achieved. A Working Group had been established to identify further improvements and how Sub-Boards could add value to the key issues

identified, but more was still to be done in regards to growth and how to create a collaborative agenda.

In response to the Chair's question on what difference this would make to the improvement plan, officers stated that that the LSP would focus on one priority at a time and had made a decision that its first priority would be tackling youth violence. The LSP board sought to reinforce collaborative work across all services in the borough.

In response to the Chair's query on the progression of change and review of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB), officers advised that they had been working with the Chair of the Board to establish the responsibilities of the key statutory partners. A consultation on changes to be made had just been published and it was anticipated that the full statutory guidance would be available by April 2018

The Chair thanked officers for their responses to questions.

### **Conclusions**

- i. Further information was required on the effectiveness and reality of the partnerships as their objectives were currently difficult to grasp.
- ii. The Safeguarding boards to attend and present at future Scrutiny meetings.

13/18

### **Question Time: Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Justice**

Councillor Hamida Ali, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Justice was in attendance to give a presentation on key areas of her portfolio.

#### **Community Safety**

To assist in improving Community Safety the Council had secured Section 106 funding to upgrade the boroughs CCTV systems. Tighter controls on drinking zones had been established and the Domestic Violence Strategy had also been upgraded.

#### **Youth Crime**

In tackling youth crime there was a focus on addressing key issues including further community engagement, which was seen as the key to tackling issues. Other work streams included working with schools, continued multi agency working and working to secure more funding and resources for the borough.

#### **Community Fund**

A report has been considered at 19 March Cabinet meeting to detail how funds had been spent. Despite challenges, voluntary agencies had been able to deliver on services. The Cabinet Member expressed her pride on the achievements of the smaller voluntary agencies, the work they had completed and the services they had been able to deliver within the budget awarded.

### **Local Strategic Partnership**

The LSP would be focusing exclusively on young people, the services that were being offered and their safety in the borough.

### **Gateway Services**

The department had continued to deliver high standards of service. In particular the work relating to Universal Credit and working closely with the community and partners to deliver preventative strategies.

### **Financial inclusion**

Membership for Croydon Plus had increased by almost 50% and the Credit Union was now back in credit, with reserves up from £6k in 2015 to now approximately £112k.

In response to a Member's question on what targets had been set to reduce serious violence and knife crime, the Cabinet Member responded that tackling these issues remained a high priority. The Mayor and Police Crime Plan detailed clear objectives which were a shift from the previous approach. There were planned reviews of the Safer Croydon Partnership to ensure that the infrastructure in place could adequately support action plans. In measuring progress, the Metropolitan Police had been given a clear performance data pack to ensure that they detailed all the work that had been completed and forensic data to be tracked.

Members expressed concern about the rise in violent crime and queried what analysis had been undertaken. The Committee were advised that large scale analysis of violent crime in the borough had been completed and the findings would be reported to a future Committee meeting. Clear patterns had been identified, with a prevalence noted in some geographical areas. There had been a substantial increase across the country in the last few years, with the London Assembly having recently completed a study which highlighted that although serious youth violence was on the increase, the majority was not necessarily connected to gang activity.

The Deputy Cabinet Member stated that officers had been working jointly with partners to come up with solutions through investigations and deep dives into specific trends around incidences. The key priority of future campaigns was

to tackle the issues surrounding young people carrying knives as a safety mechanism to protect themselves.

Members commented that the preventative work that had been completed was good, but extra funding for community groups should be made available in order to ensure that investment in this area continued. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that often too much investment went into reactive response and it was challenging for Local Authorities to combat this culture. Community groups had met to discuss a more strategic approach to tackle the present issues. Increased youth engagement through avenues such as the Young Mayor and information from the Youth Congress would further assist in addressing the problems raised.

The Deputy Cabinet Member stated that a holistic approach was needed and organisations and partners had to start looking at the bigger picture and influences such as diversions from certain lifestyles. The government also had to take matters seriously and provide more funding to support existing services.

The Committee also learned that the Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board (CSCB) had revised its structure and as a result had spent time reviewing all its working groups. The Board was satisfied with its governance, following amendments to the membership to include the appropriate voluntary sector representation, and a democratically elected member's process.

Members wanted increased clarity on what impact the merging of police forces would have on the borough. The Committee was informed policing was changing and as such we were venturing into unknown territory. The changes to the organisation were from a borough command unit structure to a basic command unit with Croydon joined with Bromley and Sutton. The decision was not made by Croydon but the Police would continue to be supported as partners.

Members queried the Fairness Commission and in particular what specific outcomes had transpired as a result of the recommendations made by the Commission. The Committee was informed that the Council had been focused on encouraging businesses to sign up to the Croydon Good Employment Charter and pay employees the London living wage. A recent pilot had been completed by the Council to ensure residents were utilising their spare bedrooms.

In response to a Member query on the monitoring of voluntary sector funding, officers stated that there were currently 37 contracts held with 35 organisations which offered support around sustainability and achieving outcomes. All contracts were monitored closely with regular performance meetings held with each organisation to track progress.

In response to a Member question about what had been done to acquire physical assets for community use, officers responded that community space remained a challenge for the borough. Further work was planned on growth zone investments and the utilisation of council assets in order to establish effective use of the infrastructure to support the community.

A Member questioned how the Council could support a growing organisation, officers responded that Croydon had a large voluntary sector community and it was important that the Council continued to work with those that wanted to make a contribution to the local community. There were challenges to be faced in managing resources and more could be achieved through better co-ordination and utilisation of groups.

A Member questioned how funds in the Community Ward budgets were being used to promote positive growth. The Committee were advised that there were over 400 community groups supported. The key was to maintain consistency on how to maintain ward budgets at the same level and the discharge of funding. The ward budget was designed for Councillors to ensure that the money was used in each specific area. There were records confirming what and where it had been spent, in order to ensure that funds had been used appropriately.

The Chair questioned the effectiveness of the Council's IT systems and whose portfolio this sat within. The Cabinet Member responded that there was a level of collective responsibility amongst all the Cabinet Members as different aspects fell under each of their portfolios.

The Chair further commented that the website and interface was not up to the expected standard that it should be. Officers acknowledged that further investment was required in the areas mentioned and there was ongoing work on identified issues. There were a number of IT systems used in the organisations and departments were working on improving the interface across the systems.

There had however been vast promotion on digital shift to self-service using 'my account'. This has had an effect on the volume of calls to the contact centre by reducing the numbers of face to face and telephone contacts while continuing to maintain customer satisfaction.

The Director of Strategy and Partnership stated that they had been exploring wider strategy issues relating to resolving IT problems and as part of this had been exploring possible engagement with the over 1500 tech companies in the borough.

The Chair commented that there were ongoing concerns regarding the scrutiny of the work carried out by partners such as the Police who had failed

to attend meetings. Support was required in this area to ensure that we get a thorough presentation on the effectiveness of the Council's partnerships. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that Scrutiny had requested the Borough Commander to attend its December meeting, but this had not happened and she would be working to understand the barriers.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet Member as well as officers for attending to answer questions and for their contribution to all the meetings throughout the year.

### **Conclusions**

- i. It is positive that we are looking at the effectiveness of joint working and would welcome a representative from the LSP board to provide a presentation to the Committee
- ii. It was difficult to determine the effectiveness of proposals on measuring targets to address youth violence and crime

14/18 **Work Programme**

The Members agreed for the meeting on 17 April to be cancelled.

15/18 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not required

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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