

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

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

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Jan Buttinger (Chair);
Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Patsy Cummings, Patricia Hay-Justice, Bernadette Khan, Andrew Rendle and Andy Stranack.
Dave Harvey and Leo Morrell

Also Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming

Apologies: Councillor Maddie Henson and Maria Gatland

PART A

1/18 **Apologies for absence**

Councillor Maddie Henson gave her apologies. Councillor Patricia Cummings attended in her absence.
Councillor Maria Gatland gave her apologies. Councillor Andy Stranack attended in her absence.
Elaine Jones gave her apologies

2/18 **Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2017 were approved and signed as an accurate record.

3/18 **Disclosures of interest**

There was none

4/18 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none.

5/18 **The Children's Improvement Plan**

The Executive Director of People was in attendance to provide an oral update on the Children's Improvement plan, following the detailed update provided to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on 30 January 2018.

The Sub-Committee was informed that a change control process was agreed with the Chair of the Children's Improvement Board in order to prioritise or bring forward certain improvement activities to allow fluidity in how the plan was to be delivered over the two year programme.

The Sub-Committee learned that since January 2018 there had been a lot of progress made with 24 improvement actions completed including six high risk actions. Completed including the following:

- In-depth understanding of and work completed on Return Home Interviews (RHI)
- Adoption of clear and succinct social work practice model (principle social worker will be invited to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee).
- Principle social worker leading on staff training
- Integrated work with Unit Managers
- Member learning and development sessions being delivered.
- Additional £700k allocation for business support
- Backlog amnesty of scanning completed
- CSC and missing children's group working together
- 30% rise in work received in referral and assessment team
- Rise in number children subject to Child Protection plans.
- Currently over 100 cases in care proceedings
- Restructuring of assessment team had taken place
- Supervision and recording mechanisms have been overhauled to ensure the system is robust and trackable
- Preparations for the March Ofsted monitoring visit were underway.
- Practice week completed with 50 cases audited in preparation of Ofsted, vulnerable and highest risk cases had been monitored.

The Sub-Committee was provided with an update on the assessment team and informed that there had been a substantial increase in demand. The last quarter of 2017 saw a 30% increase in referrals compared to 2016. There had been an increase from 368 to 500 children subject to child protection plans. The number of families requiring an assessment each week had increased from 40 to 70 during November and December 2017.

In order to manage the increase in demand to the referral and assessment team, there has been a reconfiguration of the teams from six teams of six social workers to five teams of nine social workers in an attempt to balance case allocations. There was however still concerns regarding caseload and this would be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

The Sub-Committee learned that Croydon had adopted the Strengthening Families Model to focus on safeguarding practices and promote collaborative work between families and professionals in order to achieve safeguarding aims.

Members queried the relationship between front line staff and senior management to which officers responded that senior management had been more proactive in building relationships and improving line of visibility. The observation from the December 2017 Ofsted visit was that there had been an improvement in staff morale.

In response to a Member question on the role of Camden in working with Croydon, officers stated that Camden's role was to support and inform Croydon's children's department on best practice. They would act as mentors and the support they provided added capacity to drive change at a faster pace.

The Sub- Committee learned that the four key areas in the first phase of the support they provided included the following:

- Support with Quality Assurance (QA) and Audit, by adding an extra perspective as key areas that informed Ofsted grading, additionally to assist to embed the new QA framework.
- Reconfiguration of frontline service which had resulted in combining the early help hub with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding hub (MASH)
- Prioritising of high risk adolescence and child sexual exploitation (CSE)

The Sub-Committee was further informed that Ofsted would send inspectors every 12 weeks to audit cases and Croydon would be advised of the areas that would be audited before each visit. Ofsted monitoring would continue over approximately two years.

The Executive Director of People agreed to circulate information on the six risk items in the Children's Improvement Plan report to the Children's Improvement Board to the Sub-Committee after the meeting as requested by Members.

The Sub-Committee was informed that Croydon was a complex and fast growing borough and external factors had contributed to the increase in referrals. Senior management had been proactive in constant monitoring and support of staff during this process. It had also been acknowledged that this would be a long term journey and employees should expected to be fully supported through this period of cultural change.

The Chair thanked officers for the update provided

RESOLVED: That

- The information regarding the six at risk items in Children's Improvement Plan be circulated to Members of the Sub-Committee.

6/18

Update on Missing Children Statistics and Return Home Interviews

The Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care was in attendance for this item accompanied by the Information and Intelligence officer and the Service Leader.

The Sub-Committee was provided with the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) data for December 2017 and January 2018 but stressed that the data was provisional and still to be verified.

The Service Manager provided Members with details of the composition of team and the process of conducting Return Home Interviews (RHI).

The Sub-Committee learned that there were 3 members of staff that conducted RHI's, 1 RHI co-ordinator, 3 members of staff that managed child sexual exploitation (CSE) cases and 1 service manager to oversee activities and intelligence analysis.

The Sub-Committee learned that once a missing child had been located, the interviewer made an appointment and aimed to complete the interview within 72 hours. The interview took place in a comfortable space away from the home of the young persons, usually at the school during break so as not to disrupt lesson time and a teaching assistance sat in the meeting. The aim of the interview was to ascertain where the young person had been, identify concerns of risks and harm and further services of support that may be required. The team used the information gathered to identify commonalities and themes of where young people had been going when missing, what they had done and with whom. As a result, a high risk panel that meet weekly had been developed to track high risk missing children. This panel membership consisted of professionals in the education sector as well as the police and data analysis team.

Members questioned whether young people were asked where they felt comfortable for the interviews to take place and what feedback had been received as to how the system could be improved. Officers responded that in determining where and when the interviews took place, the young person would be consulted. The interviews took place during break time in order to maintain discretion. The feedback received from young people is that they welcomed the interview being conducted by someone that is independent of the social work system.

Members questioned the number of asylum seeking children that had frequently featured on the missing data and commented that the placement of those children away from their families and community may be a factor in recurrent missing episodes.

Officers acknowledged that asylum seeking children had featured frequently on the missing list. One of the issues identified was the distance of placements and, where a young person was placed outside of their community, the council would seek to ensure that RHI is part of future commissioned services in such cases. They would also seek to regularise existing commitments.

In response to a Member query on the data for RHI for unaccompanied minors, Officers stated that the most recent figure was 55% offered and

accepted. This was an improvement on the April 2017 figure of 15% accepted rates.

In response to a Member question as to how often the interviewers received supervision, officers responded that supervision was conducted on a 4 weekly basis by the co-ordinator. The co-ordinator was also supervised and all information was documented. The quality of supervision was also reviewed on a regular basis.

Members questioned the effectiveness of RHI and what improvements could be made. Officers responded that this was a new service that had been operational for 8 weeks. The team was consistently conducting analysis of data gathered and was working closely with the police on criminality patterns and risk factors such as CSE. The team was currently in a learning period of mapping out patterns associated with missing young peoples and information sharing with multi-disciplinary teams around the child.

The case load of the 3 interviewers and the data presented had shown that there had been 203 found episodes in January 2018 (data yet to be verified). Officers stated that that the NSPCC also conducted interviews as needed. Each interview lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours.

Members commented that language and understanding of culture was important in formulating and also informs action plans. It was queried as to what steps were taken to safeguard young people within their own community when information was shared or disclosed to the authorities. Officers stated that risks and safeguarding was managed on a case by case basis with measures of safeguarding factored into the individual's care plan and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Members questioned the data for young people that had gone missing more than once and sought clarification of the criteria of 'missing'. Officers responded that 63% of young people has been recurrent missing persons, some had been missing for short periods where they had missed curfew by a few hours. The team was still working on the classification and definition of unauthorised absences as under the current procedure children missing for only short periods had to be reported as missing and impacted the data collected.

Members asked what action had been taken regarding the 45% of young people who had refused the RHI, Officers stated that persistence is maintained in offering RHI's and working with those young people to gain their trust. Members commented that 3rd sector groups could be utilised in building trust. Officers stated that the team was aware of the importance of community groups and the need to rebuild relationships in order to utilise their expertise to realise the aims of the service.

In response to a Member query as to whether the service would look to external providers or organisations to conduct RHIs. Officers stated that the

option of a fully commissioned service was considered, but due to the urgency of the Ofsted recommendations, it was decided to continue with the in-house service in the first instance. The advantage of the in-house service was the fixed stream of reporting and information which allowed for intelligence to be collated at a faster pace. Longer term options would be considered as the service evolved.

Members question the effectiveness of the IT services systems in capturing, recording, extracting and analysing data and the views of frontline users on the functionality of the systems. Officers responded that frontline staff had stated that the system is fit for purpose. The CRS teams was always working to identify improvements. Dataset and reporting functions were consistently developed in order to maintain quality assurance of extracted figures. The team also had access to the GIS mapping system which was being developed to map out geographical patterns.

The Officers were thanked for answering questions, their commitment and the improving level of service that was provided.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update report be noted.
2. That an update on outcomes following RHI interviews be provided to the future meetings of the Sub- Committee.

7/18 **The Education Budget 2018/19**

The Head of Finance and the Senior Management Accountant were in attendance to present the report and answer Members' questions on this item.

An overview of the three areas that the Education Budget was split into was provided and consisted of:

- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)
- Capital Expenditure
- Council Services Provision

The Sub-Committee was informed that the DSG allocation funding was split into separate rates for primary and secondary schools and the detailed schools budget would be issued to schools in March 2018 once agreed and finalised by the Department for Education (DFE)

The Sub-Committee was further informed that the DSG allocation for the forthcoming year 2018/19 was £337.82m, a £10.3m increase from the 2017/18 funding. This included additional funding for Early Years, High Needs and Schools Block due to an increase in number of pupils.

The Schools Forum had agreed an hourly rate increase for 3/4 year old funding, with continuous work in that area. There was also ongoing work to address issues of overspend on high needs where there had been significant overspend over the years by many local authorities due to ongoing increase in demand.

To manage overspend in Special Education Needs (SEN), the Council had explored actions to be taken to address issues relating to cost which included the following:

- Early provision of vital resources
- Post 16 provision within the borough, and
- In borough provision of Autistic Spectrum services.

Members expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the low funding allocated to Croydon, which although an outer London borough, shared many of the characteristics of an inner London borough. Officers responded that the raking and allocations were based on historical formula of outer and inner London rates. This was an important issue and lobbying had taken place over a number of years in an attempt to get the government to address the issues and deliver a fairer funding settlement.

In response to Member concerns regarding the impact of exclusions of pupils on the budget and in particular exclusion of pupils attending Academy schools, officers advised that exclusions were being monitored very closely and that both the Council and schools worked hard to avoid permanent exclusions, with negotiations between schools to ensure that pupils at risk retained a place in full time education.

There had however been an increase in exclusions, mainly for children without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), concerns had been raised with the Schools Commissioner where it had been identified that particular schools had excluded a high number of pupils with SEN to ensure that there were no underlying issues of disparity and unfairness.

Members sought detail on the support being afforded to pupils with SEN by colleges. Officers responded that work was being undertaken with colleges to ensure good provision for pupils, there were however challenges with provision for pupils with significant disabilities and high needs.

Members commented that more needed to be done to promote the specialist schools in the Borough which were providing outstanding services. Officers informed the Sub-Committee that the specialist schools were oversubscribed and this was testament to high level of quality of provision of the establishments.

Officers were thanked for their responses to Members' questions.

CONCLUSION:

1. That the Sub-Committee noted the impact of pupil exclusions on the budget;

2. The continued disparity between allocation of funding for inner and outer London boroughs be noted; and
3. The Sub-Committee held concerns on the lack of per pupil funding allocation increase to the High Needs block despite the continuous increase in demand faced.

8/18

The Education Standards Cabinet Report

The report was presented by the Director of Education and Youth Engagement, and the Head of Standards, safeguarding and Learning Access.

The Sub-Committee was advised that this was a pre Cabinet report, was asked to review the academic outcomes of 2016/2017 and note the contents of the report.

Members were provided with some of the key headlines of the report such as an overview of standards, with standards in early years above the national average. Key Stage (KS) 4 progress was also above national average and improvements were seen in KS5. Croydon secondary schools judged by Ofsted as good were 90% and 47% were outstanding. Almost 50% of Croydon pupils attend an outstanding school and 86% attended a good school. The percentage of primary schools rated as good was 86.8%.

The Sub-Committee learned that A level attainment was just below the national average of grade C, with Croydon pupil's achieving C minus on average.

In addressing issues on attainment for Looked After Children (LAC) who were performing below national average at KS2 and KS3, the Council had concentrated on restructuring of virtual schools and EPEC systems to monitor Personal Education Plans (PEP). There were planned visits to virtual schools in other areas to gain better understanding of best practice. There was a workshop due to take place for professionals to explore barriers for LAC attainment. The restructuring of the virtual school will allow a greater focus on monitoring and improving progress, ensuring that children's needs are being met.

The Sub-Committee was informed that in relation to attendance, there had been general improvement from 2015/16 figures. Croydon primary schools had remained static against the national average and secondary school figures were just below the national average but had improved compared to the previous year.

In relation to exclusions, there had been 33 permanent exclusions for 2016/17 compared to 2 for 2015/16. The increase in primary schools exclusion contributed to the rise in this figure. The data for Croydon was still favourable compared to statistical neighbours and London as a whole. There were 346 fewer fixed period exclusions compared to 2015/2016 figures. Officers stated that Croydon was one of the few boroughs that had an exclusions and fair

access panel. The Council was looking at what further could be done prior to pupils being referred to the panel.

In response to a Member's request for clarification on attainment for LAC children, officers stated that the attainment were lower than the national average and this was attributed to the type of LAC, they stressed that there were many LAC children who had good outcomes.

The Sub-Committee commented that there were a number of schools in appendix three of the report that did not have any figures listed. Officers responded that this was because the schools had not excluded any pupils, although these figures would be checked and any amendments added to the final report to Cabinet.

In response to a Member question on strategies in place to prevent exclusion of primary school pupils, officers stated that they were currently developing a managed move protocol as offered in secondary schools. This had been trialled with success and was being shared with colleagues in other schools.

Members questioned what had been done to address the high number of BME pupil exclusions. Officers responded that Croydon was looking at other approaches which had been successful to implement in schools in the borough.

The Committee was advised that a family centred approach was needed to tackle issues. Early identification, trust building and engaging of early support was vital. The monitoring of attendance and exclusions figures provided an opportunity to spot issues in schools. The virtual schools were working with foster carers of BME LAC children to gain a holistic view of issues and provide support through PEP.

The Chair requested that:

- The report to Cabinet should detail all schools that have high fixed exclusion figures;
- Future reports include figures of absence compared to exclusions data for each school; and
- To further explore how schools that that have high exclusion and absence rates utilise their Pupil Premium Grants.

In order to understand A-level attainment results, Members questioned if the issues were attributed to pupils not choosing the right establishment for their studies. Officers stated that extensive work had been carried out in the last three years by 6th form providers to consolidate their offer of subjects and specialise in the area they were best at in order to offer a good range and also be economically viable.

The Sub-Committee thanked officers for the responses to their questions

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The Sub- Committee noted the report
2. The summary box at the beginning of each paragraph of the report would be more balanced if it contained the challenges as well as the positives in all key stages.

9/18 **Work Programme 2017/2018**

The Sub-Committee agreed to note the work programme for the remainder of the 2017/18 municipal year.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm

Signed:

Date:

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