

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 14 September 2021 at 6.30 pm. This meeting was held remotely via Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Robert Ward (Chair);
Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Sue Bennett, Bernadette Khan, Ola Kolade and Louisa Woodley

Co-optee Members

Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative) and Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)

Also Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning.
Shelley Davies, Interim Director of Education
Kerry Crichlow, Programme Director Children's Improvement Journey
Roisin Madden, Director of Children's Social Care

Apologies: Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick, Elaine Jones and Leo Morrell

PART A

43/21 Apologies for absence

Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick gave his apologies, Councillor Mike Bonello was in attendance in his absence.
Elaine Jones and Leo Morrell gave their apologies

44/21 Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting

The minutes of 22 June 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

45/21 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

46/21 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

47/21 Action list update

The Chair introduced the item and officers and the Chair provided the following updates:

The Closure date for Virgo Fidelis School was 31 August 2021. The collaborative work between Council officers and the Dioceses had ensured a smooth process for the families affected. There were a very small number of children awaiting school places and this has been in instances where Croydon was not the LA that the child resided in and also with children and families that had been out of the country during the summer holidays.

There would be a final Task and Finish group to discuss lessons learnt, what went well and needed to be done better.

The Chair and Vice- Chair had discussions with the Director for Public Health on the Antenatal Visits item that should have been taken at this meeting but was deferred. Strong concerns were expressed on behalf of the sub-committee with views expressed that the service being delivered was not where it should be. A letter of concern was to be written to the Leadership of the NHS and the Health Scrutiny Committee would undertake a formal review once a response was received from the NHS. A commitment was needed from the health service in order for improved outcomes for children to be realised.

A restart of the visits programme was proposed and agreed, with the Chair to hold further discussions with officers and external partners.

A reminder for Members to attend the Mental Health First Aid Course that was running till December 2021

The Chair and Interim Director of Education to discuss outstanding information requests.

48/21 Early Help CSC and Education DashBoard

The Director of Children's Social Care introduced the Early Help and Children's Social Care Dashboard and the following was noted:

- It was encouraging that children were able to return to school at the beginning of term. There has been a notable and expected rise in referrals as schools were the main referrers to social care. As a result, there had been a rise in the volume of assessments.
- The recent Ofsted visit was positive as the remained impressed with staff. Morale remained good despite challenges.
- Practice week had taken place at the end of July despite challenges presented by Covid. It was important that staff had the opportunity to showcase their work.

- The Children in Care Council 'Empire' had provide a successful programme of summer activities for young people in the Borough and their hard work and effort was commendable.

The Interim Director of Education introduced the Education Dashboard and the following was noted:

- It was important to note that the dashboard showed zero across the data for August due to children not being in school during that time.
- Children with Education health and Care Plans remained an areas of priority with focus on provision of education in borough. The data for August appears to show that there were less children in schools in the Borough, this was mainly as a result of late reporting.
- Further conversations needed to take place on how data will be presented going forward

A question was raised on the data presented in the social work team which showed to be in Green in terms of cases per social worker but there was little improvement in performance. It was asked if the correct formula was being used for the data set. Officers said that the formula used was correct as it differentiated between new and qualified social workers. The issues with meeting performance targets on visits was around organisation as in some instances visits could not take place due to difficulties making contact with families. Referral numbers had increased in Croydon as well as nationally. Every re referral case in the month of September was being reviewed to understand what the nature of new requests were and to check appropriateness of the re referral, the similarities or differences to the initial referral, the time frame and what was offered to the parents/families initially.

Officers added that assessment completion figures were below target and some of this was attributed to long term vacancies in the department, with issues around CIN visits being an organisational as well as capacity issue. Percentage of Early Help cases had stepped up and was quite high, as the early help intervention which would be the first intervention deployed may not be enough and social work intervention may be more appropriate due to the risks presented.

Children subject to CP for a second time, the context behind this was non effectiveness of early help intervention and others may be due to concerns being different than the initial CP plan.

The Chair added that it was important to get an overview of the reasoning behind the numbers and it provided insight and context.

A Member asked what was being done on the low numbers of referrals to MARAC, in particular as DV was a presenting issue in some on the cases that was presented and monitoring of referrals to departments for adults and children's services was important and beneficial to see if there was improvement overtime. Officers said that the same issues was being picked

up and the FJC was part of the recent Practice week to explore how referrals were being made as it was evident that there was under referring to the service. A commitment was made to look at how referrals could be measured and relate them to requests to children's social care and explore what could be reportable.

It was asked if a departmental breakdown to identify if the timeliness of assessments was across all areas or if specific to certain areas of the service. Officers advised that this could be provided as there was a weekly dashboard that was provided to the Executive Leadership Team.

It was further asked why Croydon measured its CP cases in 20 days whilst other Local Authorities measured theirs in 10 Days. Officers said that the national reporting was 28 days and Croydon did in fact complete its visits within 10days.

In response to questions on frequency of visits for Children with Disabilities and if all cases allocated to a qualified social workers, officers said that most cases were allocated to a qualified social worker with cases reviewed annually. Some case had visits at lower frequency than others depending on the case and were visited within a minimum of 12 weeks, with family support workers visiting in between the social workers visits.

A Member asked what led to the rescinding of exclusions as referenced in the report and officers responded that it was vital that challenge to permanent exclusions that were not deemed to be appropriate take place. It was acknowledged that rescinding of exclusions was not best protocol but it was appropriate for the Local Authority to challenge a decision if the school notified the LA late or failed to engage at an earlier stage which would have enabled exploration of all possible pathways prior to exclusion. The Local Authority was committed to working with all partners on preventative methods to minimise the distress the process would cause for the families affected.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and engagement with the Sub-Committee.

Request for Information

1. Data on the average length of time for open CIN cases and figures for on open cases that are 12 months or longer

The Sub-Committee came to the following conclusions:

2. The positive outcome of the Ofsted meeting was welcomed
3. The dashboards now contained the right level of information required and should be kept as it is with a view to review in future to decide if any further parameters were required to be included.
4. There was some concern regarding the assessment completion and visits and it was vital that senior officers kept a firm handle on capacity issues.

5. Whilst it was important that the LA challenge where appropriate, thought be given to preventative measures of rescinding of exclusions to minimise disruption for families and well as schools.

49/21 Service Impact and Budget Update

The Programme Director for Children's Improvement and Interim Director of Education introduced the report/ Members were asked to note Children's Centre Consultation and the model adopted had been signed off by Cabinet. It was envisaged that the model would be deliverable by December 2021, subject to the tendering process.

The report also thanked the Sub-Committee for their comments in relations to the draft continuous children's improvement plan that fed into the final plan.

In response to a question on what the new model for children's centres meant for the service users, officers said that whilst the budget had remained the main focus, it was understood through the consultation process the importance of children's centres spread appropriately geographically across the borough. This new model enabled that to happen and if the centres were to continue operating as they were, there would be less services delivered at each centre.

Whoever was successful in the Tender would have to work closely with the Spokes across the borough to ensure services ran across the borough appropriately.

It was further asked what would be done to minimise the impact due to the reduced opening days and times. Officers said it was important to understand that there would be some disruption due to the budget and the centre and spokes model. As a Council clear performance indicators would be set detailing the expectations and this would be conveyed to whoever was successful in the tender and would be used to monitor performance and impact of the new model and what needs to be delivered statutorily.

An expansion of the areas of improvement as directed by the Ofsted feedback was requested. Officers said that this was a focused visit and the department was aware of which areas Ofsted would concentrate on, in this instance it was the 'front door' of the service. A mini inspection took place with the full ILACs inspection. The headline findings despite the challenges was encouraging. The three areas of social work practice identified for improvement, had been identified by senior leadership improvement were reflected in the continuous children's improvement plan.

Discussions took place on the cost of UASC which remained an area of concern for the LA. A letter was sent to central government highlighting the LA's position and concern. Following this, a response was received that an exceptional one off £2.35 million forecast budget gap payment would be provided and there would be an expectation for the Council to continue to manage within its means.

In response to a question on what Croydon's stance on the potential increase of unaccompanied asylum seeking children as a result of the current situation in Afghanistan, officers said this was a fast moving situation. There was a London wide response in place. Croydon already had a number of unaccompanied children under 18 and care leavers in its care system already. There is no position of any children coming into Croydon's care.

A Member asked what was being done to ensure that direct payments care packages were cost effective and move as many over where appropriate. Officers said that weekly meetings took place to reviews care packages and it was important that families were able to exercise control as much as possible on decision making on their needs. There had been a recent overhaul of the financial systems in place and also developing of a dynamic purchasing system was in place to ensure that families get the best value for money from provision. Every care package for every child had been reviewed to ensure the best service for all the children and broadening the reach of services that families were able to utilise their direct payments for.

In response to a question on what was being done to manage the dedicated schools grant deficit, officers said that this was always an area of priority. The management plan has been brought before all relevant parties and there was clear direction of travel to manage spending in high needs. Through the management plan different models were being worked on, in particular through the SEN plan and focus which would lead to a reduction on overspend by ensuring meeting needs appropriately.

The Chair thanked officers for their responses to questions

50/21 Cabinet Response to Recommendations

The Chair introduced the item and stated that the responses to recommendations was positive as they had all been accepted.

Resolved: To note the content of the report.

51/21 What difference has this meeting made to Croydon's children

Following discussions the sub-committee agreed that:

- The update provided on the national situation of the Afghanistan crisis and the implication for Croydon was welcomed and future information as the situation developed would be beneficial.
- It would be useful to engage the Afghan community to meet the needs of young people that may need support where possible.

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- It was felt that the report formats of the dashboard was now right following a series of meetings between the Chair and officers. This would however continue to be monitored to ensure that the level of information continued to be captured and reported.

52/21 Work Programme 2021-22

The work programme for the remainder of the municipal year was noted. It was confirmed that an informal meeting would take place on Tuesday 5 October to discuss the draft Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board Annual report.

The agenda for 2 November 2021 meeting would be:

1. Early Help CSC and Education Dashboard
2. Service and Budget Update
3. Antenatal Visits Update
4. Quarterly Report - Progress on Continuous Improvement Plan
5. Final Report of Task and Finish Group- Exclusions and OffRolling in Croydon Schools

The meeting ended at 8.21 pm

Signed:

Date: