

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 14 November 2023 at 6.30 pm in The Council Chamber,
Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Richard Chatterjee (Chair), Councillor Maddie Henson (Vice-Chair),
Councillors Mark Johnson, Holly Ramsey, Helen Redfern, Manju Shahul-
Hameed and Catherine Wilson.

Co-optee Members

Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative)

Also

Present: Councillor Joseph Lee (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young
People)

Apologies: Councillor Maria Gatland (Cabinet Member for Children & Young People),
Councillor Mike Bonello, Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor
Representative) and Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic
Diocese))

PART A

46/23 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Maria Gatland (Cabinet Member for
Children & Young People) and Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative
(Catholic Diocese)).

47/23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 10 October 2023 were
approved as an accurate record.

48/23 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

49/23 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

The Sub-Committee considered a paper set out on pages 13 to 72 of the agenda, which provided the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022/23. This report is an annual standing item and was included for the Sub-Committee to consider whether there was sufficient reassurance on the performance and effectiveness of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership. Members were also asked to provide any comments or suggestions on the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2023-2024 ahead of its development in the following year. It was noted that the report incorrectly listed Sally Innis's role as the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding; the correct title should have read Associate Director of Safeguarding. The Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education (CYPE) and Independent Scrutineer introduced the report.

Members questioned the funding of the Partnership, highlighting that the Council currently covered 72% of the expenditure; it was asked if this was reflective of the arrangements in other boroughs. The Corporate Director of CYPE explained that it was not unusual for councils to contribute the largest share of funding, but that this amount varied and was often not to such a high level as in Croydon. The Sub-Committee heard that there was ongoing work with the Partnership to secure a more equitable funding arrangement, and that both the Executive Mayor and Chief Executive were supportive of this. The Independent Scrutineer commented that Croydon's funding arrangement was reflective of other London boroughs.

The Sub-Committee asked how the annual budget of the Partnership was set, and whether the Council topped up the budget to meet spending. The Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) Development Manager explained that the Partnership came in on budget, and stated that Croydon's funding split was reflective of other London boroughs, with the Police paying a standard share. The Corporate Director of CYPE highlighted the importance of safeguarding children and young people coming first, and the investment needed to ensure Croydon continued to deliver this to a good standard.

Members queried why councils in London funded partnerships at a larger share than those in the rest of the country. The Independent Scrutineer explained that the biggest factor was lower contributions from the Police in London, but that there were also disproportionate funding arrangements for partnerships outside of London. The Detective Superintendent for Public Protection added that the Police contributed the same amount of funding to all 32 borough partnerships, and that this was set centrally; the Police looked to contribute to the Partnership in other ways, such as through offering training.

The Sub-Committee highlighted the Independent Review and knife crime in Croydon, and asked what actions the Partnership were taking in this area. The Detective Superintendent for Public Protection explained that knife crime was a priority for the Police in Croydon, but that the Annual Report was retrospective, and did not account for events in the current year. The Police were currently considering new ways of working with the community around

proactive measures to prevent and reduce knife crime. The CSCP Development Manager stated that the Independent Review would soon be completed and was expected to be published in December 2023. There had been a recent community event, which had been well attended by the community and community organisations, to ensure these views would be included in the final report. The Corporate Director of CYPE explained that the Community Safety Partnership and Youth Safety Plan complemented the work of the Partnership, and that there was close joined up working ongoing with Voluntary and Community organisations to address knife crime and safeguarding issues in the borough. The Sub-Committee highlighted specific local issues with knife crime, and asked that more detail on actions that would be taken by the Partnership be included in the next Annual Report. The Detective Superintendent for Public Protection explained that work in this area was moving forward, and highlighted that there had been no deaths from serious youth violence in 2022. The CSCP Development Manager stated that there had been a number of workshops and learning events resulting from the early findings of the Independent Review, and these had been delivered to multi-agency audiences, including schools. There was also separate work taking place in schools around knife crime, in addition to work with normal frontline partners. Once the Review had been published, there would be additional learning events to promote the findings of the report and to ensure its recommendations were implemented.

Members highlighted the Partnership's aspiration to improve its consideration of the 'voice of the child' and asked what evidence there was that this was improving. The CSCP Development Manager explained that there was a considerable amount of work happening with children in the borough, but this happened in strategic ways, and the Partnership had not yet developed ways to evidence this in the Annual Report. The Sub-Committee asked about the feedback at the end of the report, and asked what the total volume received had been, and how much had been positive or negative. The CSCP Development Manager responded that this was a limited sample from one session, which had received 13 responses, all of which had been positive. Members heard that, in future, training attendees would need to fill out feedback in order to receive certification, which it was hoped would increase response rates.

The Sub-Committee asked about the Partnership's relationship with 'E.M.P.I.R.E', and the CSCP Development Manager explained that this group sat within Children's Services, and that E.M.P.I.R.E representatives regularly attended CSCP meetings to share their work. The Partnership were working with the E.M.P.I.R.E lead for new participation work in the service, to look at how their skills could be utilised to bring more of the 'voice of the child' into the work of the CSCP. It was recognised that E.M.P.I.R.E related to a specific cohort of children, but it was hoped that this would provide a template for the Partnership to engage in further work on capturing the 'voice of the child'. The Corporate Director of CYPE commended the development of the Participation Service, and explained that this would be highlighted in next year's report.

The Sub-Committee highlighted the reference to Croydon's response to Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools & Section 11 Audits, and asked what the figure for 22/23 was, and what forms this abuse took. The Director of Education explained that there were 406 incidents of sexual harassment and violence within Croydon schools for 2022-23; future reports would break this data down into different categories, following analysis, and could identify if incidents were occurring in hotspots or if it was broadly the same across the borough's schools. Data breaking down the forms this abuse had taken for previous years was not available, as this information had not been requested in past Section 11 Audits. The importance of training and identification were highlighted as important tools in reducing the number of incidents, and it was explained that analysis of Section 11 Audit data would help to inform where more training and support was needed, and where this was working well. Members asked if Audits would contain information on the gender of those being harassed, and where incidents were taking place. The Director of Education explained that the Audit would not collect information on each individual incident; this information would be held by the individual schools, who would be expected to analyse it further, and use it to hone their safeguarding and curriculum focuses.

Members asked who the target audience for the Annual Report was, and the CSCP Development Manager explained that this was a public facing report for anyone in the borough with an interest in safeguarding arrangements. The report was circulated to all of the Partners, who were expected to filter it throughout their organisations. There was an aspiration for 2023/24 that the Annual Report would be more young person friendly, with a piece of work planned to see how young people would like to see the report formatted and presented.

The Sub-Committee noted the Safeguarding Practice Review 'Trend Map' on page 37 of the pack, and asked if this was the most accessible way of presenting this data, and further queried how trends were being identified in Rapid Reviews, when there have only been four in the period. The CSCP Development Manager explained that this data had been extracted not just from Rapid Reviews, but also Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Cases of Concern.

Members asked if the Partnership had any insight on how well mental health services were working in the borough and the long waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The Associate Director of Safeguarding explained that there were national concerns around young people's mental health, and that there had been increases of young people presenting with socialisation and mental health issues over the COVID period. The Sub-Committee heard that the Partnership were aware of the significant challenges in this area, and the Associate Director of Safeguarding highlighted transformation work taking place in CAMHS to try to address this; the important work of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations was highlighted in relation to the offer they provided to young people experiencing mental health needs. Members heard that consideration also needed to be given to complex cases where young people needed access to specialist

beds, and that there was a shortage of these beds nationally. The South West London Integrated Care Board were looking at this across the whole area, to assess levels of need and what needed to be done to improve services and access to services; there was also ongoing work to identify available specialist beds nationally. The Associate Director of Safeguarding stated that there needed to be more creative thought about what could be provided to young people outside of appointments with CAMHS, such as drop in sessions in youth centres, and resources in schools. It was acknowledged that this was a complex area, and that often when resources were increased, demand also increased or outpaced capacity. The Sub-Committee heard that this was an ongoing area of work, and that transformation in this area needed to look at how best to meet the needs of young people in new ways. Members welcomed this approach and asked that future Annual Reports addressed transformation and the work being done to improve access to these services. The Associate Director of Safeguarding added that work on Early Years and development would also form the basis of reducing demands on services in the future, and Members welcomed a focus on perinatal and postnatal mental health.

In response to questions from the Chair on 'wicked' issues referenced in the report, it was explained that this related to particularly difficult or complex issues that could not be easily resolved. The Sub-Committee asked what was being done to address the 'lack of professional curiosity' and difficulties with 'identifying and engaging with fathers/male carers' highlighted in the report. The Director for Children's Social Care explained that reflective conversations needed to be encouraged and facilitated so that practitioners could identify what could be done differently or what could be done better. Members heard that a lot of transformation work in this area was around trying different approaches, and that regular peer challenge meetings with other local authorities encouraged professional curiosity and discussion of 'wicked' issues. On engaging with fathers and male carers, the Sub-Committee heard that there needed to be straightforward conversations on what was preventing this and challenging preconceived ideas. The Director for Children's Social Care highlighted the Systemic Practice Framework, and explained that systemic thinking gave permission to practitioners to reflect on their ideas about fathers, as they related to a number of specific contexts, and how this was affecting conversations with fathers and male carers. It was highlighted that social care was a female dominated field, and that it was important for practitioners to have conversations with fathers and male carers about their ideas and thoughts around fatherhood. The Director for Children's Social Care highlighted that there were programmes, such as 'Caring Dads' and forums in Community and Voluntary organisations, that could be utilised to improve in this area, and that there needed to be a multi-agency approach to thinking about what services could do differently to recognise the position of fathers and male carers. The Associate Director of Safeguarding added that Health practitioners were encouraged to be actively interested in fathers and father's roles, and that professional curiosity was encouraged in a number of ways, including through support and supervisions.

Members asked how complaints were managed, and how learning from complaints was embedded into the Partnership. The CSCP Development Manager explained that the Partnership did not hold cases, but did have a complaints and escalation policy. The Sub-Committee heard that it had been a significant period since a complaint had been received by the CSCP.

The Chair highlighted that the report stated that there was disproportionality for young black boys in exclusions, and asked what was being done to address this. The Director for Education highlighted that exclusions were reducing in Croydon year on year, but that disproportionality and exclusions were, and would always be, an important focus. The Sub-Committee heard that the Council always sought to understand the particular issues that had led to each exclusion and that schools were working to understand how trauma could impact on student's behaviours. The Director for Education explained that work was being done with the 'team around the school' to encourage children staying in schools with support and guidance, and for exclusions not be used as a way of dealing with a problem.

Conclusions

The Sub-Committee were grateful for the attendance of the Executive Partners and Independent Scrutineer at the Sub-Committee, and for thorough and honest responses to Members' questions.

The Sub-Committee were reassured by the performance and effectiveness of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The Sub-Committee were reassured that the Section 11 Audits for 2022/23 and 2023/24 would look to gather more detail on the forms of sexual abuse in Croydon schools, and were supportive of this data being included in the next Annual Report.

The Sub-Committee highlighted the specific local issues with knife crime, and suggested that more detail on actions taken by the Partnership be included in the next Annual Report.

The Sub-Committee welcomed responses to questions about transformation in mental health services and asked that updates on the progress of this work was included in the next Annual Report.

The Sub-Committee welcomed the aspirations of the 2023/24 Annual Report to include more evidence of the 'voice of the child', and looked forward to seeing the results of the work towards presenting a version of the report in a format more friendly to young people.

The Sub-Committee were of the view that the Safeguarding Practice Review 'Trend Map' could be presented in a more accessible way, and suggested that future Annual Reports consider how data could be shown in clearer and simpler formats.

51/23 Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 73 to 78 of the agenda, which provided the Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard, Health Visiting Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Data and additional 'Red' indicators as requested at the meeting of the Sub-Committee on 27 June 2023.

The Director Quality, Commissioning & Performance introduced the item and stated that there had not been a significant improvement against the Health Visiting KPIs. Members heard that there had been considerable change in the configuration of the Health Visiting services, and that an interim Head of Service had been in post since September 2023. The responsibilities of the service have now been split into two roles with oversight of public health nursing (which includes Health Visiting, School Nursing and the Family Health Partnership) and Community Health Provision (which covered Asylum Seekers, Refugees and unhoused people). The Director Quality, Commissioning & Performance stated that there had been some early signs of improvement since September 2023 against KPIs and in recruitment. It was noted that a full item on Health Visiting was on the Work Programme for March 2024, when it was hoped that there would be more concrete signs of improvement in the service. The Sub-Committee heard that there had been a decision to reconfigure the way in which Health Visitors engage with Child Protection Conferences, to recognise the challenges arising from vacancy rates in the short term and that these changes are being discussed and agreed with the Safeguarding Service.

On Appendix B, Members asked why the target for W1a had been set at 20. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that this target was set at a number of children it was felt was reasonable for any individual social worker to 'hold in mind' and maintain professional curiosity for each case. It was acknowledged that caseloads in the Family Assessment Service were too high, and a deep dive to analyse the duration of high caseloads was underway, to help in developing proposals identifying other resources or other actions that could reduce caseloads. Demand levels in Croydon had increased for a sustained period and options to manage this were being considered, with some short-term pilots likely to be trialled. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that, if demand continued to increase, then there would need to be an increase in capacity to ensure service levels did not fall. In response to questions about what other things could be done to reduce caseloads, the Director of Children's Social Care explained that Service Managers would review cases to see where these could be held in other services, or to help social workers close cases where they needed some assistance. In some cases, Early Help could be asked to provide interventions while assessments were happening.

The Sub-Committee commended the commitment to keeping caseloads at manageable levels. Members asked if W1a indicated individual children or families, and heard it represented individual children. On W1a, the Chair

asked if April 2023 had been an outlier, and heard that this had been the beginning of a period of increased demand.

Members asked how services planned for the August and December holiday periods and heard that there was forward planning, including through duty rotas, to account for this, and that agency staff remained in post over Christmas. Where children were not visited, they featured on exception reports that were reviewed monthly to understand why this was the case. The Director of Children's Social Services explained that Christmas put a large amount of pressure on some families; the Council had relationships with charities and other organisations that could provide gifts or vouchers to parents and carers for their children to try to alleviate this.

The Sub-Committee reflected that they would like to repeat the process of reviewing wider CYPE 'Reds' at a future meeting.

52/23 Work Programme 2023/24

The Chair commented on the Budget Scrutiny item planned for January 2024, and highlighted the cost of care packages as something that the Sub-Committee should scrutinise.

Members highlighted the 'Future Options for Maintained Nursery Schools – Consultation outcomes report' planned for decision at Cabinet on the 6th December 2024 and listed on the Sub-Committee Work Programme. The Sub-Committee commented that they would like to consider the paper before Cabinet and agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair would discuss this with the Chair of Scrutiny to decide the best way forward.

The Sub-Committee suggested the inclusion of the following two items on its Work Programme:

- Use of the private education system for Children in Care to deliver savings.
- Including consideration of the Holiday Activities & Food Programme alongside the Free School Meals programme item.

53/23 What Difference has this Meeting made to Croydon's Children

The Chair commented that they hoped the Sub-Committee had been helpful in the process of refining the content for the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2023/24 and in encouraging the Partners to continue to develop the 'voice of the child' in their work. The Chair thanked all of those involved in delivering good safeguarding to children and young people in Croydon.

The meeting ended at 8.17 p.m.

Signed:

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Date:

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