

## **Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee**

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 19 March 2024 at 6.30 pm in The Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### **MINUTES**

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

#### **Co-optee Members**

Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative), Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese)) and Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)

**Also Present:** Councillor Maria Gatland (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)  
Councillor Tamar Barrett (Virtual Attendance)  
Councillor Rowenna Davis (Virtual Attendance)

**Apologies:** Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Henson and Barrett.

### **PART A**

#### **10/24 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Henson and Barrett.

#### **11/24 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 23 January 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

#### **12/24 Disclosures of Interest**

There were no disclosures of interest.

#### **13/24 Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

## 14/24 Health Visiting

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 17 to 32 of the agenda, which provided an update on the Health Visiting service in Croydon. Deborah Kelly (Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services) and Matthew Kershaw (Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services) introduced the item to the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee asked about the challenges of implementing cultural change across Health Visiting services. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services responded that new leadership had been able to take a critical view of systems and processes that had been in need of strengthening and modernisation. There had been some initial resistance with changes, but the Sub-Committee heard that it was felt that a corner had been turned and that staff were on board. Members asked about feedback they had received from staff on difficulties with planned service improvements. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services acknowledged that a number of changes had been made, and were planned, but stated that they felt staff were being brought along with the changes and that this had been evidenced in improved performance, recruitment and retention. Members heard that there was still work to do in improving culture and aligning the service with desired values but that this was headed in the right direction.

Members asked, should they repeat a visit with frontline staff, if they would likely hear better feedback. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services explained that he thought overall, that Members would receive more positive feedback, but that the service was still on an improvement journey and so some mixed comments would be expected.

The Sub-Committee asked why targets for New Birth Visits were not 100%, and what happened for children who were not seen within the target timeframe. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services explained that 'minus exceptions' on performance data meant children still in hospital or who had left the borough; reaching 100% would be a significant challenge and it was stated that the current targets were 'improvement targets' that would likely be stretched further in future. Members heard that it was the aim of the service to visit every child in the borough. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services explained that resources were deployed following a risk-based approach and that more information could be provided following the meeting on what was done for children whose visits were missed. The Director of Public Health explained that the service was commissioned on their behalf and that the four performance areas included in the report were for mandated checks.

Members asked for more detail on the school nursing service and the Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services responded that the service did not provide one on one services to each school, as there were not resources in place to deliver this. The service was prioritised into the areas of greatest need and worked to provide a supplementary level of support in addition to other public nursing services. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services explained that school nurses were increasingly working in an integrated way

with Health Visitors and that the 0-19 Transformation programme would look to further develop this model. Members heard the effectiveness of the service would be measured by looking at developmental milestones in children's school lives.

The Sub-Committee asked about the move to providing services over four localities, instead of six, and whether this could present any additional risks to families with high or complex needs. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services explained that the intent was to create slightly bigger teams, with broader skills, to increase their robustness and ability to respond to the need in Croydon by better allocating the available resource. The 0-19 Transformation was intended to help the service effectively triage and assess need to better target resources where they were most required. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services stated that they had met with the four locality leads to draw up aspirations of what the new locality teams would look like and to discuss the change programme. Members heard that over the last few months there had been meetings with the commissioners to discuss the makeup and responsibilities of the new integrated teams. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services explained that the aim was to co-design the change programme with staff to help bring them along with the transformation process.

Members asked whether the service was prioritising New Birth Visits and 6-8 Week Checks at the expense of performance on 12 month and 2-2.5 year reviews. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services explained that the service was taking a risk-based approach to ensure that the most vital checks were prioritised. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health explained that now New Birth Visits and 6-8 Week Checks were compliant, work would begin on improving 12 month and 2-2.5 year review performance. The Sub-Committee heard that the biggest factor holding back compliance for all areas had been the national shortage of Health Visitors but that performance had overall improved from June 2023. The Director of Public Health acknowledged that the service was on an improvement journey and agreed with the importance of bringing all four checks into compliance. The Sub-Committee asked about how performance had been maintained over December 2023 and heard that this had been as a result of focussing resources on the highest risk visits and use of agency staff. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services commented that expanding access to the service through a seven-day a week provision had also helped and had made services more accessible to families.

The Sub-Committee asked about the 1200 children placed into the borough by other boroughs and how services for these children was funded. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services explained that the placing borough should pay for assessments and health checks. Members heard that Croydon had 249 children placed in other boroughs.

Members asked about integration with Family Hubs and the Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services explained that integrating public nursing with Family Hubs was the current aim and the reasoning behind moving to four locality teams. Whilst the first Family Hub had launched, a Health Visiting team had

not yet been mobilised to work from the locality and take full advantage of the integration with Education and Social Care. The Sub-Committee heard that Westminster had successfully integrated services with their Family Hubs model and that the transformation journey over the next 12 months would look to facilitate the change to four localities and to work on creating integrated 0-19 Health teams. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services explained that critical milestones would be developed to assess, at the end of the 12-month period, what a Family Hub team would look like. Members heard that building Family Hubs into the community was important to ensure they became a destination for families in need. The Director of Education explained that the first Family Hub had been launched at Woodlands Children's Centre, with one planned for Selhurst, and conversations ongoing about where the remaining two would be located. A bespoke Croydon model would be developed to ensure it met the needs of residents; it was highlighted that Family Hubs would not be located in schools.

Members asked for a definition of what a 'Family Hub' is. The Director of Education explained that the Woodlands Children's Centre Family Hub had been launched and that they would be happy to escort the Sub-Committee on a visit. Woodlands Children's Centre Family Hub had services from Education, Health and Social Care; the services available in Family Hubs were prescribed by the Department for Education. The Director of Education explained that Family Hubs would evolve with time to meet the bespoke needs in Croydon and provide Early Help or signposting through a partnership model. The Department for Education funding model was for transformation over three years, and Croydon was approaching the end of the second year.

Members asked when families who did not receive a visit in timescales were seen and whether these were the same families missed moving through the four mandated checks. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services responded that missed checks did create a risk of pushing back the following checks but that it was the aim that all families were seen, even if this was not within target timeframes. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services explained that it was unlikely that it was the same cohort not being seen in timeframes for each check, and that reasons visits were delayed varied but could include demand, capacity, sickness, availability of families, disengagement with the process, etc. The Sub-Committee asked, if families missed a visit, if they would be able to rebook it. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services responded that they would absolutely find a way to connect with these families in some form.

Members asked about subsidised housing provision for nurses and whether this was something that could increase recruitment and retention levels. The Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services responded that this was crucial for all key workers and was a national problem; the Sub-Committee heard about the importance of recruiting staff from, and keeping staff within, the borough. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services explained that the service owned some limited housing stock but were not in the process of increasing this provision. Members heard that around 70% of Croydon Health Services staff were Croydon residents, in part, due to more reasonable housing costs when

compared to Inner London Boroughs. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services acknowledged that, whilst the level of staff who were Croydon residents was high, there was always more that could be done to further increase this.

The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services acknowledged that the service was still on an improvement journey, but stated that there were signs of positive progress. The Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services thanked colleagues in Commissioning, Public Health and Education for all of their work in delivering and supporting the improvement of the service.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services, Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services and officers for attending the Sub-Committee and answering Members' questions, as well as those delivering services on the frontline.

## **Conclusions**

1. The Sub-Committee commended the priority given to service improvement by the Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services and Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services and stated that they were keen to see this trend continue.
2. Members thanked the Chief Executive of Croydon Health Services and Chief Nurse of Croydon Health Services for their open and thorough engagement with the Sub-Committee's questions.
3. The Sub-Committee thanked the Director of Education for their offer of a tour of the Woodlands Children's Centre Family Hub and stated that they would look to take this up in the near future.
4. The Sub-Committee were positive about improvements to New Birth Visits and 6-8 Week Checks and were encouraged to hear that the service was now looking at how to increase performance for 12 month and 2-2.5 year mandated checks.
5. Members requested that the next update provide information on how flexible seven day working had been implemented in a way that worked positively for staff whilst increasing the accessibility of services.

## **Recommendation**

1. The Sub-Committee requested that the Council work with Croydon Health Services to explore what possible incentives it could help to provide to aid in recruitment and retention for public nursing.

## 15/24 Education Standards 2023

The Sub-Committee considered a paper set out on pages 33 to 54 of the agenda, which provided a report on Education Standards 2023 summarising the education performance and outcomes for children and young people in Croydon schools for the academic year 2022/23. The Director of Education and Interim Head of Education Services introduced and summarised the report. The Sub-Committee heard that 4.5.5 in the report had been included in error, but that current unvalidated data did show a slight improvement in persistent absence rates.

Members asked whether unmet Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were leading to increases in persistent absence rates, and what work was being done to reach out to, and work in partnership with, parents. The Director of Education explained that the responsibility for persistent absences sat with schools; the Council did have attendance improvement advisors and regular meetings with schools focussed on attendance. The Council's Link advisers also focussed on attendance and persistent absence in their focussed visits with schools. A Department of Education attendance advisor had provided some recent positive feedback on the practice in Croydon on following up on persistent absences. The Sub-Committee heard that schools would be doing a range of different things including working directly with parents to identify the reasons behind persistent absences and developing bespoke solutions to increase attendance. From September 2024, schools would have a statutory responsibility to share attendance data with the Council; this data was currently collected through 'Studybugs', but only around 69% of schools were reporting into this system.

The Sub-Committee asked what the Council would be doing with the complete attendance data from September 2024. The Director of Education explained that there was a national push to improve attendance and that 'working together guidance' would be important in promoting this. Currently the Council was working with schools where data was provided but this support would be better targeted once all of the attendance data for Croydon was available. The importance of schools putting actions in place by working directly with families to increase attendance and decrease absence was highlighted.

The Head of SEND Transformation & Delivery responded to questions about the long-term effects of unmet SEND needs at KS1 by acknowledging that this could lead to later problems with attendance. Members heard that innovative work was being undertaken at the earliest opportunity when emerging needs were presented through funding that could be drawn down quickly. This work was being done through the Croydon Localities SEND support service, psychology services, HENRY (Health, Exercise, Nutrition for the really young), Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs), and more.

The Sub-Committee asked how the voice of the child was being reflected in work on persistent absences. The Director of Education explained that

conversations with children in schools always involved the child and that looked after children had a section covering the voice of the child in their Personal Education Plan (PEP). The voice of the child had been included in the most recent SEND Strategy to highlight the areas that children and young people thought needed the greatest focus; recent work had also included visiting the school councils in Croydon's SEND schools. The Interim Head of Education Services explained that a student panel always formed a part of quality assurance visits to schools and that, where possible, these panels were a random selection of pupils.

Members reflected that the data in the report was representative of the hard work of children and schools. The Director of Education agreed and praised teachers, children and schools in Croydon, and highlighted the importance of celebrating good news. The Sub-Committee asked what was being done to build influence with schools and drive them towards the help and services that the Council could provide. The Director of Education explained that open and honest conversations, partnership working and sharing of best practice formed the basis of the Council's 'support and challenge' role as a local education authority, and that this had also been the basis of establishing the Schools Partnership to formalise these positive relationships.

The Sub-Committee asked if there were plans to increase the provision of BTECs and T Levels in Croydon to appeal to the ambitions of young people and reduce NEET levels. The Interim Head of Education Services explained that these choices sat with schools and were made on the basis of finances and teacher recruitment. Members heard that there was ongoing work with the Head of Employment, Skills & Economic Development to look at what more could be done to promote these kinds of qualifications. The Director of Education commented that there were ongoing discussions with colleges and schools about making sure the pathways that met the needs and ambitions of young people were available.

Members asked about disproportionate exclusions for Black Caribbean pupils, and the lack of detail to address this in the action plan contained in the report. The Director of Education explained that this was a focus for the access to education team and formed the basis of conversations with individual schools. The Sub-Committee heard that it was schools who were responsible for exclusions, not the Council. Where schools excluded children, the Council intervened to review the process and highlight any issues around non-diverse exclusion panels and behaviour policies; these conversations would happen on an individual basis where an exclusion had taken place and there was an opportunity to intervene before the exclusion was enacted. The Council did have an impact in overturning exclusions before the panel stage and in working with governors on the appropriateness of decisions on exclusions and where these could or should be overturned. The Sub-Committee acknowledged the good work being done in this area and asked that the next report explicitly referenced this in the action plan. Members commented on personal experiences of finding different ways for students affected by exclusions to give their statements and the positive impact this had on reducing the numbers of exclusions.

The Sub-Committee asked about the increase in the number of suspensions in 2022/23 and the reasons behind this. The Director of Education explained that the previous years likely reflected periods of COVID where children were not in schools, but that they would check this and come back to Members.

Members asked about actions being taken by the Croydon Education Partnership to mitigate the emerging effects and impacts on children and young people from the COVID pandemic. The Director of Education explained that the pandemic had affected different children differently and at different times. The Sub-Committee asked if any specific trends could be attributed to the pandemic and the Director of Education explained that additional support was being provided where there was evidence of COVID having had a negative impact. Members heard that plans for extra support and capacity around behavioural issues for some children in KS1 had been put in place; there was also work to provide additional wellbeing support for young people to try and improve outcomes. The Director of Education explained that the Council always monitored trends and data but also looked at individual schools. The Interim Head of Education Services explained that the Croydon Health and Wellbeing Survey data would also be used to identify health and wellbeing trends for young people and the impacts on their education.

The Sub-Committee noted the disruption to structure in schools resulting from the pandemic, teacher/transport strikes and virtual teaching, and asked if this had impacted mental health for young people. The Director of Education explained that there was a focus on early intervention where SEND needs were identified, and that this was supported by the Croydon Locality SEND support service. Members heard that schools were doing a good job at focussing on children's needs and how to best to meet them; it was important for schools to look at what they could do to support cohorts of children and individual pupils; the Council looked at the ways it could put support in for children with Education, Health and Care plan (EHCPs) and SEN. Members heard that schools were undertaking trauma informed training and that there was a focus on inclusion in education.

In response to questions on elective home education, the Director of Education explained that this was the decision of individual families.

Members asked whether long wait times for EHCPs and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referrals were putting parents off of the process and leading to increased NEET (young people not in education, employment or training) levels and suspensions later in the young person's life. The Head of SEND Transformation & Delivery responded that the percentage of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (excluding exceptions) was performing to a high level, with 83% meeting this target in 2023 and 91% for March 2024. It was clarified that not all EHCP assessments required a CAMHS assessment and that this was dependent on the specific presenting needs of the individual young person; there were alternative pathways through different professional reports and assessments that could be used without the CAMHS assessment.



The Sub-Committee asked what was being done to engage with families of children who were unhappy with SEND provision, particularly where children were refusing to attend school. The Director of Education explained that the views of parents and carers were sought through 'Croydon Active Voices' (formerly the Parent Carer Forum) and the SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service) who were also embedded into the governance of the SEND Board and delivery group respectively. The Director of Education stated that should parents or families be unhappy with the services they were receiving then they should be able to feed this information back through Croydon Active Voices or SENDIASS, or by getting in touch directly. The Head of SEND Transformation & Delivery added that there were frequent check-ins with the family being supported at the early support stage and that feedback was generally positive; all children with an EHCP had Education and Health Co-ordinators who could feedback to schools and the Council should there be any issues. The Director of Education acknowledged that the Council did not always get things right and highlighted the importance of apologising and reflecting on instances where things had not gone as they should to ensure that improvements and learning could be taken forward. Members discussed some anecdotal experiences that were contrary to this and heard from the Head of SEND Transformation & Delivery that the Council sought to make itself available and to open up channels for communication by regularly attending parent forums and other meetings. The Director of Education highlighted that the Council and schools needed to be open to hearing the voices of children and parents and explained that they were aware that, for some families, provision was not where they wanted it to be.

Members asked if officers were aware of schools discouraging families from applying for an EHCP over wait times. The Director of Education responded that they were not aware of this but that they would want to advertise the Council's early intervention work to support children with engaging with school in recognition that an EHCP could be a lengthy process.

The Sub-Committee asked whether the level of NEET support in Croydon was sufficient to meet the rising demand in Croydon. The Director of Education highlighted that NEET indicators on the Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard were currently 'green' and offered to produce a briefing note for Members around NEET. The Corporate Director of Children, Young People & Education (CYPE) agreed and suggested adding NEET to the Sub-Committee's work programme for 24/25. Members asked if the current model was sufficient to support care experienced young people and heard that these young people would have a personal advisor, but that more support on this was being developed through the 'Virtual College' and Corporate Parenting Panel Education, Employment and Training Sub-Group.

Members asked if poor KS4 performance was a contributing factor to rising NEET referrals. The Interim Head of Education Services agreed that this was a contributing factor among others, such as the withdrawal of lower-level qualifications and the Council no longer being able to access Education and

Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The Sub-Committee asked if information on this could be included in the briefing note.

### **Conclusions**

1. The Sub-Committee thanked the officers and Cabinet Member for attending the meeting and answering their questions.
2. The Sub-Committee wanted to monitor the Council's actions to improve attendance following the move to mandatory attendance reporting from schools from September 2024.
3. The Sub-Committee welcomed the offer of the NEET Briefing Note from the Director of Education.
4. The Sub-Committee concluded that they would like to include EHCPs and SEND provision in the borough on the Work Programme for 24/25.
5. The Sub-Committee concluded that the Council should ensure that the voice of the child is embedded in its data collection on attendance, particularly where children were refusing to attend school as a result of dissatisfaction with SEND provision. The Council should look to engage with the lived experiences of parents and children to see how this compared with collected data on attendance.

### **16/24 Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 55 to 60 of the agenda, which provided the Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard, and updated additional 'Red' indicators reviewed at the previous meeting.

On M33, it was acknowledged that this was a seasonal dip and that performance had improved in February 2024.

On W1a, Members raised concerns about high caseloads and asked how these were trending. The Corporate Director of CYPE responded that this indicator was being monitored closely and noted that factors such as the number of agency staff and Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) social workers could impact on this number.

### **17/24 Scrutiny Work Programme 2023-24**

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

The Sub-Committee concluded that they would like to include EHCPs and SEND provision in the borough on the Work Programme for 24/25.

The Chair acknowledged that Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative) would be stepping down from the Sub-Committee for the next financial year and thanked her for her hard work and contributions during her time with Scrutiny.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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