

## Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 16 July 2024 at 6.30 pm in Room 1.01 and 1.02 - Bernard Weatherill House, Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillor Andrew Price (Chair), Councillor Maddie Henson (Vice-Chair), Councillors Tamar Barrett, Adele Benson, Mark Johnson, Manju Shahul-Hameed, and Catherine Wilson.

#### Co-optee Members

Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)

#### Also

**Present:** Councillor Maria Gatland (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)  
Councillor Ola Kolade (Cabinet Member for Community Safety)

**Apologies:** Councillors Holly Ramsey and Danielle Denton  
Nicole Williams (Non-voting Teacher representative), Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese))

### PART A

#### 19/24 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Holly Ramsey, for who Councillor Adele Benson was in attendance as substitute, and Councillor Danielle Denton.

Apologies were received from Nicole Williams (Non-voting Teacher representative) and Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese)).

#### 20/24 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 19 March 2024 were approved as an accurate record with the following amendments:

Item 14/24 Health Visiting, first paragraph, page 4; change:

*'The Director of Education explained that the first Family Hub had been launched at Woodlands Children's Centre, with conversations ongoing about where the remaining three would be located' to '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.'*

Item 15/24 Education Standards 2023, page 10; add conclusion:

*'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.'*

#### **21/24 Disclosures of Interest**

Councillor Shahul-Hameed declared an interest in relation to Item 6, Youth Justice Plan 2024/25, and stated that their charity worked closely with the Council to provide volunteering opportunities for young people in the borough.

Councillor Henson declared an interest in relation to Item 6, Youth Justice Plan 2024/25, and stated that one of the members of the charity they worked for was Croydon Drop-In.

#### **22/24 Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### **23/24 Cabinet Paper - Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Decision Finding of Fault Causing Injustice and Action Plan to Prevent Reoccurrence**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 17 to 42 of the agenda, which provided the March 2024 Cabinet Report and relevant action plan in response to the recommendations of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. The Children & Young People was asked to review the Cabinet Paper on the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Decision Finding of Fault Causing Injustice to monitor the Action Plan and to ensure lessons learned were embedded. The Director of Education introduced and summarised the paper, and the SEN Tribunal Manager took the Sub-Committee through the action plan at Appendix 2. The Director of Education highlighted that the Council had apologised to the parent and also highlighted that processes around the responsibilities of schools had been strengthened through regular ongoing conversations with head teachers, and distribution of the 'children not being able to attend school due to medical needs or otherwise' policy to all schools in the borough. The Chair enquired what else had been done and was informed that the Council was now also liaising with schools and that it was receiving some letters directly from parents applying under Section 19 of the Education Act.

The Vice-Chair asked how schools had been made aware of the policy and the Director of Education explained that it had been a topic during conversations with head teachers, and that the policy would be highlighted to all new head teachers during their induction. The SEN Tribunal Manager explained that the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Senior Leadership Team was working with most schools on a locality basis through Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo), where conversations highlighting the policy were also taking place.

Members asked about follow up and ongoing support for the family in question, and were advised that the child was now attending school. The Sub-Committee asked how many other current requests under Section 19 of the Education Act there were and whether there were a sufficient number of staff to manage these. The Director of Education responded that there were sufficient staff, with the Access to Education team following up on all requests, and that she did not have the exact numbers to provide but the number of Section 19 cases directly applied to the Council were in the single to double digit range. The Sub-Committee were informed that, where there was a request under Section 19 of the Education Act, this was referred to 'Springboard' (an education service that provides educational support to children and young people of school age whose education has been interrupted for a period of time). Individual schools can and should refer to Springboard directly.

The Sub-Committee asked about the training provided to head teachers and queried whether there were a number of new or inexperienced head teachers in the borough who may not have experience with the Council's 'children not being able to attend school due to medical needs or otherwise' policy. The Director of Education responded that there was not a high number of new head teachers annually, but that the Council was doubling in its efforts to spread awareness of the relevant policies and procedures.

Members highlighted anecdotal reports that there were a number of children 'falling through the cracks' due to the length of time required for a diagnosis who were being penalised by schools for non-attendance. The Director for Education responded that, for children with an Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), attendance would be a focus for the school where the child was on roll and during the annual review process. The Sub-Committee heard that the Council has an Early Intervention locality SEN support model (CLSS), with three members of staff working with clusters of schools, to provide early intervention and support for children. Members queried what was being done for children awaiting a diagnosis or EHCP who were not able to attend school in this period, and the SEN Tribunal Manager highlighted that a diagnosis was not required for an EHCP. The Sub-Committee raised concerns that this was not what some parents were being told, and the SEN Tribunal Manager asked that Members inform the Council of these cases where they were aware of them. The Corporate Director of Children Young, People & Education (CYPE) suggested that a separate briefing be provided to the Sub-Committee around the locality SEN support offer.

The Sub-Committee asked for reassurance that the action plan was being effectively implemented in schools and highlighted anecdotal evidence suggesting there were areas where the issues raised in the report were ongoing. The Director of Education stated that they could look to provide evidence of the implementation of the specific points, but that the action plan was clear on which actions had already been delivered and which were ongoing. Members acknowledged this but raised concerns that the action plan did not show the impact for children and families where actions had been completed. The Director of Education responded that the Council's response to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Decision acknowledged that a mistake had been made and that the Council was following up on this; the evidence would be that there would not be a repetition of this mistake and that the Council had clear oversight of Section 19 requests. Members heard that school leaders were now familiar with the 'children not being able to attend school due to medical needs or otherwise' policy and that discussions on this were ongoing through the Locality SEN Support team and in a number of other forums.

Members highlighted the importance of incorporating the voice of the child and parents into the Council's processes and the implementation of the action plan, and discussed the possibility of looking at how the lived experiences of children and parents had been incorporated into the Special educational needs and disability (SEND) Strategy at a later meeting. The Director for Education explained that there had been close work with Croydon Active Voices during the development of the SEND Strategy, and that the five priority areas of the strategy had been agreed in collaboration with parents. The Sub-Committee heard that the Council was looking at establishing a 'Shadow Board', comprised of children and young people, to provide a clear way to incorporate the voice of the child into governance processes alongside existing feedback from schools. Members heard that this work was being progressed by the Transformation Manager, and that a young people's panel had been used in the recruitment process for the new Head of SEND as an additional way to embed the voice of the child. The Director of Education explained that they were trying to seek the voice of the child wherever possible, and that the Council was open to any other suggestions of how this could be achieved. The Vice-Chair responded that the 'Shadow Board' was a positive idea and that they would be keen to see an update on this at a later date as the Sub-Committee monitored the implementation of the action plan.

Members raised some concerns that the actions in the plan were not sufficient remedy to ensure another child did not end up in a similar situation. The Chair highlighted that Child B had been outside of school for over a year and asked what timeframes were like for other children to be out of school where a Section 19 request had been received. The Director for Education explained that there was a difference between children who fell under Section 19 of the Education Act, where children could not access education, and a child not attending school. Where a child was not attending school, the school would take responsibility for attendance through an attendance officer; there were also a team of attendance officers within the Council who worked with families

where children were significantly absent from school and additional support was needed. The Chair requested clarity on the timeframes for follow-up and support being put in place for children who were subject to a Section 19 request, and Members heard that referrals were put in to Springboard who then worked with the family to agree a bespoke plan to support the child as quickly as possible. The SEN Tribunal Manager added that Department for Education guidance stated that support under Section 19 of the Education Act should be considered after three weeks of consecutive absence from education.

The Vice-Chair asked about cases of school refusal as a result of mental health concern, and why this did not necessarily fall under Section 19 of the Education Act. The Director of Education explained that some of the responsibility for ensuring children attended school lay with the schools, with an expectation that additional support was provided where this was the case; after three weeks of a child not attending school, the parent could specify that they were unable to attend school for specific reasons and therefore they were making a request under Section 19 for alternative provision to be put in place. Members heard that it was dependent on individual circumstances and there was an expectation, that if a child is not attending school, that the school would follow up on that and look at ways of putting in alternative provision; there would be schools that would have their own ways of supporting children's mental health and well-being. The Director of Education stated that a number of Croydon schools were part of the 'Trailblazer', which provided universal support for children with mental health and well-being concerns. The Vice-Chair asked whose responsibility it was to ensure that the support offer was communicated to parents, and was informed that this was available on the Local Offer website which was promoted in the SEN newsletter, through Croydon Active Voices and Croydon's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS). The Director of Education acknowledged that some families may not be aware of the Local Offer and explained that the Council worked with schools and members of the SEND Board to ensure that they had this information and could share it with parents and families. The Sub-Committee heard that the SEND Board was constituted of officers from across Council departments, as well as parents and external partners, which helped to spread this information as widely as possible.

Members asked how schools were monitored given that they all operated differently. The Director of Education responded that every school had a Link advisor who provided support and challenge, but highlighted that many schools were academies, free schools and religious schools who may operate under their own policies and procedures. The Council would follow-up where concerns were raised by parents directly or through the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) and the Croydon Education Partnership has developed priorities in the borough to promote support for all children. The Director of Education stated that the Council had good working relationships with the borough's schools, but acknowledged that mistakes had been made in this case and processes have since been strengthened. The Director of Education encouraged any Members who were

hearing concerns from parents about SEN provision or access to education to share these with the Council.

The Sub-Committee raised concerns that some parents were not as informed as others about how to navigate systems around education and referrals, and that not enough support was in place to support these families. Members highlighted that mandatory attendance reporting would be in place from September 2024 and asked what checks and balances would be in place to ensure this data reflected the lived experiences of parents. The Director of Education explained that parents were interacting with schools on a daily basis and that schools passed on this information. Currently, not all schools were sharing attendance information and that the Council was focused on following up, using its limited statutory powers and resources, with the schools and parents of the highest concern. The Sub-Committee heard that attendance was also something considered by the Link advisors and it was highlighted that schools had overall authority for ensuring that children were attending school but that Council oversight was in place where appropriate and where there were concerns.

The Chair highlighted the bullet point 'ensure that any parent/carer whose child is not attending school due to medical reasons or other otherwise knows the provision contact and has a named council contact to check in with monthly' from 4.16 in the report and action plan, and asked whether monthly was a sufficient frequency and for the definition of 'check in with'. The Director of Education responded that the Council would be reaching out to families, but it was hoped that parents would also be in contact with the Council if this was not taking place. Once a referral had been sent to Springboard, Springboard would then be in regular contact with families to ensure that provision was in place; where there were any issues, it was expected that either the family or Springboard would contact the Council. The exact frequency of the contact with Springboard would depend on the bespoke offer put in place for each family and child. The Director of Education stated she could provide an update at a future committee meeting.

The Vice-Chair asked how often policies and processes around Section 19 requests would be reviewed to ensure these were fit for purpose, and heard that this would usually be annually unless there were changes to legislation or in response to a Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman decision.

The Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education acknowledged that this was an area of significant interest to the Sub-Committee and nationally, and assured Members that where parents were raising concerns these were being addressed, with the Council seeking to be as responsive as it could be given the current demands and pressures on services.

Members highlighted that schools could give incorrect information to parents and that some parents often did not realise that they could seek support elsewhere. The Director of Education explained that schools had a responsibility to publish their complaints policies on the school website, and

that parents did often speak to the Council on such matters. The Sub-Committee highlighted evidence that schools had strong working relationships with the Council, and noted that OFSTED did also review school websites. Some concerns were raised about the funding available for SENCos both in-borough and nationally.

The Chair thanked officers for attending the Sub-Committee and for their open responses to Member's questions. The Director of Education offered to provide a briefing to the Sub-Committee on the SEND Strategy and SEN Locality offer.

### **Recommendations**

1. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Attendance Data in the Education Standards 2024 report, scheduled for March 2025 meeting, should include information on 'managed moves' in the borough reported through the 'Inclusion Network'.

### **Conclusions**

1. The Sub-Committee thanked officers for their attendance and noted the report and Action Plan, and agreed to add an item to update the Sub-Committee on the implementation of the action plan to the Work Programme for 2024/25 to include the number of Section 19 requests.
2. The Sub-Committee acknowledged that it required some additional training on the SEND Strategy and Locality SEN Support offer in order to provide more effective scrutiny on these topics, and thanked the Director for Education for offering to provide this.
3. The Sub-Committee concluded that SEND provision in the borough needed to be a greater area of focus in its work over 24/25.

### **24/24 Youth Justice Plan 2024/25**

The Sub-Committee considered a paper set out on pages 43 to 220 of the agenda, which provided a draft of the Youth Justice Plan 2024/25. The Youth Justice Plan 2024/25 forms a part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework, and as such it is required that Scrutiny have not less than four weeks to respond to the initial proposals. The Children & Young People Sub-Committee was asked to review the Youth Justice Plan 24/25 with a view to considering whether there are any concerns that should be raised or recommendations that should be made. The Director for Children's Social Care introduced the item and the Children's Youth Justice Service Manager summarised the report.

The Sub-Committee asked for the learnings from the Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 and the key risks and mitigations to the delivery of the 24/25 Plan. The Youth Justice Service Manager explained that the Youth Justice Service was always looking to improve and had had undertaken training around Domestic Abuse, which included Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) processes, as well as safeguarding principles, and sexually harmful behaviour. There had been a considerable learning around serious youth violence and 'child first work' to focus on the needs of children as a means to encouraging behavioural change, alongside work with partners to become better at the identification of those children much earlier on, as well as improvements in what interventions looked like for those children. There had been work looking at localities and closer relationships with schools, understanding the changing cohort of young people, contextual safeguarding, and adopting learnings from the thematic review on serious youth violence, particularly on keeping children in education. A sophisticated health offer had been progressed (with a physical health nurse, sexual health clinic, speech and language therapist, and mental health practitioner) to provide a holistic package for children entering into the criminal justice system. The prevention offer was making use of partnership working with the Custody Suite Team and Turnaround Project, as well as data to improve prevention outcomes.

The Sub-Committee heard that the risks to the delivery of the plan included resourcing and staff retention, but consistency was stated as a strength of the service. The level of serious youth violence was highlighted as an ongoing challenge, as well as competing priorities around protecting the public and safeguarding vulnerable young people.

There had been progress made with the 16+ youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) cohort, by providing help with life skilling and interview preparation, but Members heard that there could be challenges matching provision with the needs of some young people, especially during the transition from year 11 to 12 or to mainstream colleges due to disrupted education histories or special educational needs. Members heard that there was a dedicated 'Entry to Employment' officer who focussed on working with young people on transitioning from year 11 to 12, but that there were challenges where young people had not been in full time education for some time. The Youth Justice Service were working closely with the 16+ team to share available resources in and outside of the borough for that cohort.

The Vice-Chair raised the topic of disproportionality and queried whether there had been progress in tackling this since the Sub-Committee reviewed the 23/24 Plan. The Youth Justice Service Manager explained that this had been discussed at the Youth Crime Board, but that the service sat within a larger system with systemic issues. The Youth Justice Service looked to challenge and address disproportionality wherever it could and to keep young people out of the criminal justice system. There was a disproportionality action plan and the service tried to ensure that interventions met the needs the cohort and their characteristics, with a male group and a female group that focussed on specifics around identity. It was acknowledged that disproportionality was an ongoing challenge.



The Chair asked whether the demographics of the cohort were reflected in the Youth Justice Service and whether this was considered during recruitment to the team. The Youth Justice Service Manager explained that applicants to vacancies in the team were disproportionately female. The service was making use of male staff from the Youth Engagement Team to reflect the demographics of the male cohort, as well as representation from the Community and Voluntary sector. The Chair highlighted the 2017 Lammy Review, and quoted that *'over half of Black boys have grown up in lone parent households and would benefit from male mentors in their lives. For many, these mentors will have credibility only if they understand the communities they live in'* and asked what the Council could do to improve black male representation within the Youth Justice Team. The Director of Children's Social Services explained that the Council undertook blind recruitment and the Chair asked what was being done to ensure that those applying for roles reflected the cohort the team was working with, to ensure the service was effective and relatable to the young people it worked with. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that decisions around recruitment, such as specifically encouraging males to apply for a role, would be a larger decision for the Council and not one they would be able to make unilaterally. Members heard that other characteristics, such as staff being local residents could be just as important in relating to young people as other characteristics. The Youth Justice Service Manager highlighted the high satisfaction and feeling of safety the cohort had fed back to the team and stated that community and partner relationships were used as effectively as possible.

The Sub-Committee asked why it was thought that men were not applying for these roles, and the Youth Justice Service Manager explained that this reflected the national picture for care roles and explained that additional work had been put in to the recruitment of male volunteers, including through canvassing barbershops and other local businesses. The Chair acknowledged that these roles required a qualification and that this was likely gender imbalanced, but that the Council needed to do as much as possible to hire staff that reflected the demographics of the cohort.

Members highlighted the importance of role models and mentors that had similar life experiences to the cohort, including those who had experience of the criminal justice system. The Youth Justice Service Manager confirmed that the Council could employ staff with a criminal record, and this was the case within the Youth Justice Service. The Director of Children's Social Services explained that the Council had to consider the effect of the criminal record on the present through a risk assessment, and that it was not necessarily a barrier to employment. The Sub-Committee asked whether people with this experience, but who did not necessarily have relevant qualifications, could be employed into the service, and the social work apprenticeship scheme was highlighted as was the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) offer. The Director of Children's Social Care highlighted that local social workers working in their own communities often delivered better outcomes for young people. The Youth Justice Service Manager highlighted the comprehensive workforce development plan and the

training it offered to inform others about the Youth Justice Service and its multiagency partners, which also promoted the service as a career opportunity.

Members asked about the overall number of interventions on page 66 of the agenda pack, and the Youth Justice Service Manager stated that they could come back with this information. The Sub-Committee commented that more support for children with SEN could be an effective prevention measure. The Youth Justice Service Manager agreed and praised the work of the speech and language therapist and explained that, whilst some young people already had an EHCP, the whole cohort were screened to ensure nothing had been missed. The Sub-Committee heard about the development of 'communication passports' to assist in working with young people. Members were informed that external assessors had awarded the Council a Lead Award for its joint work on SEN.

The Sub-Committee referred back to disproportionality and highlighted the importance of black male representation in the leadership of the service. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that the Council had launched a leadership programme, 'Black on Board', and Children's Social Care had commissioned an organisation called 'Solve' to do some work around identify within youth justice and exploitation. Members heard that partnerships with community leaders were important in addressing disproportionality in the balance between gender and race in the leadership in the system. Members asked if there were positions available specifically to black men and the Director of Children's Social Care responded that it was a question of how to encourage black men to apply for positions and removing barriers to entry, with it also being important to consider intersectionality, accessibility and neurodiversity. It was acknowledged that this was an area of constant learning and the importance of all to be open to challenge was highlighted.

Members asked how the Plan could reduce stigma for younger black boys in having their needs met to access early education. The Youth Justice Service Manager explained that the Plan did pick up on prevention and diversion and identifying children at the earliest possible opportunity. Members heard that the service were providing information on universal services and local resource from children's first contact with the police (such as in 'community resolutions') as well as asking children and families what they felt would be most helpful. Social Care, Early Help and schools were proactively engaged with the Youth Justice Team, with Youth Justice taking responsibility for directly contacting young people to see what help could be offered. The Youth Justice Manager explained that efforts were being made to listen to what it was that children and families felt they needed, and this had been facilitated through a 'parents evening' to discuss the needs that parents felt were not being met. The Youth Engagement Team, as well as a number of Voluntary and Community sector projects, delivered workshops to talk about the challenges facing young people in Croydon. The Youth Justice Team had been attending strategy meetings across the Council to provide advice, expertise, and knowledge on local resources. The Sub-Committee heard that the service was well embedded in the community.

The Sub-Committee asked about the increase in Asian children entering the service, and the Youth Justice Service Manager responded that there did not seem to be a pattern to explain this, although it was only a moderate increase. Members asked about encouraging more young people to participate in the service and the Youth Justice Service Manager explained that this fit with the emphasis on a 'child first' principle, to ensure the service could meet the needs of the young people and to provide an offer that young people wanted (e.g. sports, mentoring, work with animals).

Members asked how the service was collaborating with other local authorities and the Youth Justice Service Manager explained that they met with peers from neighbouring boroughs every six weeks, and that they attended the Youth Justice Board Heads of Service Regional Meeting, South London Group, National Conference, and were involved in informal group chats with peers. The Sub-Committee heard that these were all useful forums to share expertise and best practise.

The Sub-Committee asked about plans to increase counselling provision and closer work with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The Youth Justice Service Manager explained that they worked closely with a clinical team with a mental health practitioner, and the service had a consulting relationship with Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (FCAMHS) for high-risk children, as well as spaces with Off the Record (with a dedicated resource for the Youth Justice Team) and Be Inspired's box therapy. Members highlighted that these services were oversubscribed and heard that there were reserved spaces for the Youth Justice Service through a grant linked to the custody suite and Engage Programme. The Sub-Committee queried whether the team was finding that the oversubscription to these programmes was meaning that young people engaged with the Youth Justice Service were not able to participate, and heard that this was not the case with counselling due to the reserved spaces and co-location. The Youth Justice Service Manager explained that the mental health practitioner helped young people with containment work whilst young people were on CAMHS waiting lists, as well as a crisis team available through the custody suite where escalation was required. The Youth Justice Service Manager explained that there was a low number of the cohort with acute mental health needs, but that there were higher than average counselling needs, especially around bereavement. The Sub-Committee raised concerns that young people needed to be involved with the Youth Justice Team to get these slots and suggested that, were the services not oversubscribed, access would be an effective prevention measure to involvement with the criminal justice system. The Youth Justice Service Manager agreed and commented that many schools were now embedding counselling services and mental health practitioners to this end. Members asked if there was scope to helping children who were not part of the Youth Justice cohort and heard that referrals could be made through the prevention offer for those with a 'community resolution', arrest with no charge, or some other minor contact with the criminal justice system. The Director of Children's Social Care acknowledged that the thematic review on serious youth violence

had stated that the Youth Justice services available were high quality but should be implemented earlier. The Vice-Chair commented that the lack of access to early help and pre-intervention work had been a theme over the last few meetings of the Sub-Committee.

The Chair asked what the Director of Children's Social Care thought the Council should do to try to identify young people at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system. Members heard that children were being picked up earlier through Social Care and consideration was being given to how the i-THRIVE Programme could be rolled out in schools. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that the Council should be doing everything within its reach at the earliest point at which it came in contact with families, using the limited resources available to deliver and maximising resources in the community and voluntary sector. The Corporate Director for CYPE stated that prevention and diversion work in Croydon was better and more integrated than in many other places, but acknowledged that mental health and early intervention services outside of the youth justice service were oversubscribed. Members heard that the focus had to be on statutory provision, but that signposting and prevention work happened wherever possible.

The Chair asked about the low number of volunteers for Community Panels and heard that a recruitment campaign on this would be launched very soon and that children would be involved. Members highlighted the difficulty of making people aware that these positions were available.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety praised the work of the Youth Justice team and their collaboration on the Youth Safety Plan and Safer Croydon Partnership. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety highlighted the borough-wide approach of the Safer Croydon Partnership, looking at how the Council could influence broader themes, such as disproportionality. The Sub-Committee heard that the police were looking at a 'race action plan' and Members were encouraged to engage with this. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety highlighted the importance of partnership working with statutory organisations as well as Voluntary and Community Sector Groups. Members heard that the tackling violence against women and girls plan would be heard at Cabinet in July 2024.

## **Conclusions**

1. The Sub-Committee noted the report and thanked officers and the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People and the Cabinet Member for Community Safety for their open discussions with the Sub-Committee.
2. The Sub-Committee concluded that the Youth Justice Plan 2025/26 include additional evaluation of the Youth Justice Service through hypothetical case studies and tracking of where service users are in their lives.

## Recommendations

1. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Youth Justice Plan 2025/26 include hypothetical case studies, which included community and intervention work, to make the information in the report more accessible.
2. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Youth Justice Plan 2025/26 include some information on high-risk young people have been tracked through to where they have ended up now, including information on higher education and employment, by collaborating with the Probation Service where necessary.

### **25/24 Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard (April 2024)**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 221 to 226 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 M37, the Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that this was a persistent 'Red' which was monitored closely at both the Director of Children's Services monthly performance meetings and Children's Social Care Leadership performance meetings. The Sub-Committee heard that there was consideration of whether the target of 22% was set at the correct value with ongoing challenge from the Performance Analyst. The Chair queried the timeline and actions for improvement and heard that a firm prediction was difficult as it was predicated on individual children and the risks in each instance determined when a case could be closed. The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that they would be looking for the indicator to improve over the next year as work progressed with Islington Partners in Practice and as cases took time to close.

The Vice-Chair asked how a new target would be determined and the Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that current data indicated that performance was at 23% but that they would like to see this sustained before any conclusions could be drawn as individual children on child protection plans sat behind this number. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were not considered when decisions were made about whether a child needed to be on a child protection plan, and that safeguarding was always the first priority.

The Director of Children's Social Care explained that benchmarking data could take a long time to produce and that statistical neighbours used for comparison could have different demographics and funding to Croydon. The Sub-Committee heard that ideally children should not be on a child protection plan for over a year, but that this did happen, and the actions being taken during the plan was the most important thing to consider. The Director of

Children's Social Care stated that where children were on a second plan, it needed to be considered whether this was as a result of a recurrence of previous concerns, or whether things had changed significantly (if the previous plan had been years previous). The Safeguarding Quality Assurance Team looked at each of these cases monthly and wrote a detailed report to Children's Social Care to provide insights and to help practitioners consider whether initial plans had been sufficient in their actions and length.

The Chair asked about the risks of longer child protection plans, and the Director of Children's Social Care responded that the quality of challenge in reviews was vital, as was multi-agency work and challenge from the Safeguarding Quality Assurance Team. The Chair asked, for children who were on a child protection plan for a second time, if reviews of the initial plan were showing the correct work had been done in the first instance. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that there had been a cohort of children where the work during the initial plan had not been done as effectively as it could have been, but that this was not the case for children who were made subject to a child protection plan more recently. Members heard that there were currently over 600 children on child protection plans, and that this was higher than neighbouring boroughs; children on a child protection plan required a visit every 10 days, and children on a child in need plan required a visit every 20 days. The Chair asked if the frequency of visits was being met, and the Sub-Committee heard that work was underway to improve performance on child in need plans.

The Chair queried indicator W1a, and the Director of Children's Social Care explained that higher caseloads were a result of increased demand, even against the provision of additional capacity. Members heard that demand had increased as a result of housing insecurity, post-COVID impact on family functioning, and economic downturn; these factors negatively affected parent and child mental health and exacerbated cases of domestic violence. In Croydon there was a high proportion of temporary housing, with other boroughs placing families into Croydon, which had led to greater demand in Croydon than in other boroughs for child in need services.

The Corporate Director of CYPE explained that these were complex issues but assured the Sub-Committee that all of the figures were monitored rigorously through a number of performance meetings, but that the numbers were also informed by various national issues and the availability of funding. The Chair acknowledged this, but raised concerns at the number of caseloads given the complexities involved for every child. The Director of Children's Social Care responded that overall average caseloads for June 2024 had reduced to 22.7 following a provision of additional resource. This area is closely monitored

The Sub-Committee asked if it would be feasible to include persistent absence data to the Dashboard and the Director of Education stated that this would be possible.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Sub-Committee recommended that persistent absences from education be added as an indicator to the Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard.

## **Conclusions**

1. The Sub-Committee agreed that work on M37 to consider whether the target was set at the right value was helpful and noted the information provided to Members on how the value for statistical neighbours was set.
2. The Sub-Committee concluded that they would like to review the inclusion of M37 in future Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboards to determine whether this was helpful and reflected useful information about what was happening in Children's Social Care.

## **26/24 Scrutiny Work Programme 2024-25**

The Sub-Committee noted the report and discussed adding the following to the Work Programme:

- An update report on the implementation of the action plan resulting from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Decision Finding of Fault Causing Injustice.
- A review of the indicators on the Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard, and specifically M37.
- The possibility of adding the SEND Strategy to the Work Programme following a briefing provided by the Director of Education.

The Sub-Committee also discussed:

- Arranging a previously offered tour of a Family Hub from the Director of Education in the first week of September 2024.
- That the briefing on the SEND Strategy and Locality SEN Support offer from the Director of Education should be arranged for the end of September 2024.
- That the Sub-Committee was keen for the police to attend the September 2024 meeting of the Sub-Committee to speak to the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report, and for the Clerk to ascertain which officer would be in attendance.
- The need for scrutiny to be outward looking and to consider which of the Council's partners could be invited for other items on the Work Programme.

The Chair commented that there might need to be better auditing of what the available offer was for young people in different localities in the borough and for different types of young people with varying needs.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

**Signed:**

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**Date:**

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