

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 5 February 2019 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber - Town Hall

MINUTES

- Present:** Councillor Robert Ward (Chair);
Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Sue Bennett, Jerry Fitzpatrick and Helen Redfern
- Also Present:** Councillor Patsy Cummings
Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning
Robert Henderson, Executive Director Children Families and Education
Shelley Davies, Head of Standards, Safeguarding ,Learning Access and Inclusion
Chris Roberts, Head of School Place Planning, Admissions and Learning Access.
Kate Bingham, Head of Finance
Orlagh Guarnori, Finance Manager
Kamilah McCalman, Assistant Unit Manager
Michael Perrieau- Daley, Consultant Practitioner
- Apologies:** Councillor Maddie Henson
Dave Harvey and Leo Morrell

PART A

7/19 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies received from Councillor Maddie Henson, Councillor Patsy Cummings attended in her absence.
Dave Harvey and Leo Morrel gave their apologies.

8/19 **Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting**

The minutes of the meeting on 14 January 2019 were signed as an accurate record.

9/19 **Disclosures of interest**

There were none.

10/19 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none.

11/19 **Action List Update**

Officers were reminded of the actions that were still outstanding and required a resolution. Officers agreed to look into the items outstanding and provide updates.

12/19 **Cabinet Member Question Time: Cabinet member for Children Young People and Learning**

The Cabinet Member gave a presentation on aspects of her portfolio which included the following:

- The priority and vision was for young people to feel safe
- Focus on the improvement journey which was on an increasing level of pace
- Change in leadership following the permanent recruitment of senior staff.
- Improvement in Key Performance Indicators (KPI) in supervision
- Implementation of the Early Help and Gateway Strategy
- Completion of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Strategy with final papers to be presented to Cabinet
- Increased representation of the voice of child through the work of the Young Mayor and the Child in Care Council
- Ongoing challenges remained in the recruitment and retention of staff and the rising number of children in care proceedings.

In response to a Member challenge on the evidence of occurrence of actions as directed by the Line of Sight document, officers stated that actions were being carried out as directed and that a schedule of the activities carried out was being produced. The Chair requested that this information be circulated to the Sub-Committee after the meeting. Additionally the Chair asked for the monthly performance data that was gathered and reviewed by the Improvement Board be shared with the Sub-Committee.

A Member commented on the lack of progress made on recruitment and retention of staff and queried what further work was being done to address the challenges. Officers responded that this was a complex issue with high vacancy rates experienced in a competitive market. Human Resources (HR) was working to produce an attractive remuneration and welcome package. Additionally there had been a reduction in caseloads across the service and which would also help to attract staff. Strong leadership and guidance was important and there had been an emphasis on improving supervision due to ongoing inconsistencies of practice.

The conversion rate of locums was compared to other local authorities and when improvements would be seen was questioned. Officers replied that locum numbers in Croydon were high but that was to be expected given the Ofsted rating, the rate was currently 30% and improvement of 20% by 2020 was possible.

A Member challenged the likelihood of achieving a 20% conversion rate and highlighted that previous directors had attended scrutiny over a number of years giving reassurance that improvements would be made. Due to past experience the Sub-Committee was not reassured of the likelihood of the realisation of this promise and requested data which proved this task was possible. The Executive Director of Children Families and Education advised that an action plan on recruitment and retention of staff had been produced and was confident that 20% was achievable in 12 months.

The Chair said that it should be noted that good and outstanding local authorities also had high numbers of agency staff and this was not just specific to Croydon. What was important was whether there were safeguards in place to ensure that we had good quality locum staff. Officers responded that the quality of the locum's in Croydon was good and that the plan was to encourage them to convert. While this was possible by ensuring a good offer was made, a careful balance must be struck to ensure minimal conflict between locum and permanent staff as a result of the conversion package.

A staff workforce representative informed the committee that retention of staff was not just about the financial reward but about changing people's perception of Croydon. Croydon had developed a reputation that it lacked vision and was not a good place to work but this was changing. The message being spread by social workers at network events was that Croydon was changing, and was a good place to start, progress and develop careers.

Officers also informed the Sub-Committee that the agencies that managed locum contracts had been providing feedback that Croydon's reputation was improving. Assisted Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)'s had also reported that they felt confident in recommending Croydon as a place to start their careers due to the level of support received.

A Member referenced the three additional teams that had been brought into assist with the management of caseloads. Officers responded that they were commissioned as whole teams on an agreed time scale with the possibility of an extension as necessary. While they had been brought in on a short term basis to reduce the caseload in assessments, they were being kept on to assist with cases in other teams.

It was challenged that there was an implication that caseloads for remaining staff may increase at the end of the contract of these teams, to which officers responded that they had made a commitment to staff and were confident that this would not happen. Caseloads would remain as they were and the strong Early Help offer in place would help to support this.

A Member highlighted that members of the autism community has voiced concern about the lack of awareness and knowledge of their condition in mainstream schools and stressed the importance of training being a significant action point in the strategy. Officers responded that all feedback from the consultation was taken seriously and officers were committed to

ensuring that schools were clear on their expectations in order to produce strong outcomes for young people.

If was further stressed that early years mental health was and should be a priority but additionally the needs of children on the autistic spectrum must be prioritised with consideration given in terms of enhanced provision. Officers replied that a survey for schools was being conducted to gather intelligence on services that were being commissioned to enable gaps in knowledge and expertise to be identified. Resources were being invested in early intervention to ensure an effective partnership between schools and the Council.

The timescale for assessment following referral to the Child Adolescence Mental Health Service was questioned and officers responded that there were different timescales for different parts of the service. It was acknowledged that there were difficulties with response times and the flexibility of the service. Funds were being invested on improvements as the vision was for a preventative service. Ongoing conversations were taking place with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) on how to improve waiting times and outcomes for young people.

It was additionally questioned whether there was strategy being developed for young people in transition, officers responded that there were ongoing developments in this area of the service and it may be useful for the Chair of the Sub-Committee to discuss this further with the Executive Director of Health Wellbeing and Adults.

Representatives from the staff workforce advised that multiagency working was vital and key to delivering successful outcomes for young people and stressed the importance of improved partnerships. They voiced concern that relationships were often challenging which often led to frustration and welcomed any support or influence from Councillors to strengthen these relationships.

A Member asked what officers felt the role of Scrutiny was in terms of strategies and asked if Scrutiny should be informed of emerging strategies in order for pre-decision Scrutiny to take place. The Cabinet Member responded that following the Ofsted judgement, conversations had taken place about Scrutiny holding Children's Services to account and that it was important for pre-decision scrutiny to take place where appropriate.

The Member further stated that it was vital for professionals as well as the community to be consulted and it was of utmost importance that Scrutiny had sight of forward plans on emerging strategies in order for pre decision scrutiny to take place.

The Cabinet Member and Officers were thanked for their responses to questions.

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- Line of Sight – Schedule of activities and intelligence gathered to be shared with the sub- committee.
- Monthly performance data that was presented to the Improvement Board
- Forward Plan on emerging Strategies

The Sub-Committee Came to the Following **Conclusions**:

- The attendance of representatives from the staff workforce at the meeting provided a positive element to discussion.
- There was concern regarding the pace and progress of improvements in the recruitment and retention of staff.
- There was lack of evidence of plans being in place to improve the conversion rate of locum staff to permanent roles.
- It was concerning that emerging strategies were not being shared with the Sub-Committee.
- It would be beneficial for the Chair to discuss development of a Transition service with relevant officers with the possibility of a future joint meeting with Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee to be considered.

13/19 **Education Quality and Standards**

The Head of Standards, Safeguarding, Learning Access and Inclusion introduced the report and pointed out the key aspects of the report which included the following:

- Early Year Foundation Stage (EYFS) outcomes had been above the national average for a number of years and were in line with the London average.
- Vocational outcomes at Level 3 remain high
- Ofsted outcomes had been positive with a school moving to good status and one from good to outstanding.
- The improvement programme and partnerships with schools were robust
- Working on recognised key areas of development
- Key Stage 5(KS5) outcomes remain a challenge with gaps to be closed between the highest and lowest achieving schools.
- Challenge to close the gaps in outcomes by gender and ethnicity.
- The Looked After Children (LAC) cohort improvement had risen but more work still to be done
- Continued progress to be made to increase the number of personal education plans for LAC which is linked to outcomes

The report also included the next steps which were the following:

- Inclusion funding

- Maintaining of resources
- Maintaining places in mainstream education for SEN children.
- Funding a curriculum conference to take place to ensure good practice and steps being taken to closing gaps for boys and ethnic group through all key stages.
- Continued improvement to personal plans for LAC

A Member asked what was being done to address instances of persistent absence in schools. Officers responded that in the last year a team around a school approach had been developed. Officers had been allocated to schools where instances of persistent absence and high rates of fixed term exclusions had been identified. Officers had been looking at data and working with a number of schools and this work would continue to be rolled out to more schools. Through work with independent officers and visits to schools they were raising the profile that this was an issue which was a priority and measures had to be taken to achieve improvement.

It was further commented by a Member that some Boroughs were investing in breakfast and after school provision to tackle issues of persistent absence. Officers responded that there were some schools in the Borough that offered this service. What was important was for schools to look at the barriers to getting children into school and putting measures in place to combat the barriers. The development of the Early Help Strategy would be key to achieving these improvements.

A Member questioned what the identifying factor was and what work was being carried out in the three schools that were reported to have a high number of exclusions. Officers advised that in all of the schools there were individual factors that led to the numbers reported. One of the schools did not have an historic high rate of exclusion and the figure was high as a result of one serious incident that resulted in a number of pupils being excluded. Intervention work with the police was taking place. In another of the schools a factor was leadership and there was now new leadership in place and officers were working closely with the school, with discussions held on strategies to be adopted to tackle prevalent issues.

A Member raised concern that in key stage 5, there was a return to a model that included large providers and it was fundamental to avoid a situation that would result in a curriculum in schools that was not broad enough or a risk of larger classes sizes in some subjects and not others. Officers responded that conversations were being held with schools on their curriculum offer and for them to ensure that their offer was viable. Schools also needed to engage in a dialogue with pupils, supporting them in making the right choices and ensure that they were following the right pathways. Officers in the 14-19 team were working with colleges to improve figures, focusing on encouraging young people to get the right advice and guidance before they reach post 16.

Further concerns were raised by a Member that the competitive element, that was brought in a number of years ago, which allowed schools to extend their provision beyond age 16 through the viability of subjects had diminished, with

a closure of Sixth Form provision in one school experienced. Concerns had been flagged up by officers themselves in recent years about the unviability of Sixth Forms. The Member was under the impression that schools had been working in partnership to ensure the viability of subjects was taking place and it was disappointing that this may not be happening.

Officers took on board Members' comments and acknowledged that conversations needed reigniting on the viability of Sixth Forms. What was clear was that the local authorities wanted to ensure that there was provision for children to have the opportunity for further study in their area of choice.

The Head of Standards, Safeguarding, Learning Access and Inclusion agreed to take away the comments raised and to reflect on this matter with the officer responsible for post 16 provision. Additionally a briefing would be provided for the Chair on this matter to enable discussions to be held on how this item would fit into a future work programme of the Sub-Committee.

A Member observed that Octavo and their service had been mentioned in the report and asked how the progress of schools that did not buy into the service was monitored. Officers responded that it was important for schools to ensure that they bought into a service to ensure that they were receiving support and this could be from any provider of their choice. Two link advice sessions took place each year on school improvement and outcomes. They looked at the impact of support with questions asked of schools such as how they were ensuring the quality of the support provided from the services they bought into. The same questions on areas of development were asked of all schools in the borough regardless of their Ofsted ranking.

In response to a Member question about Statistical Neighbour Averages and what learning could be derived from the data, its usage as a comparative tool and if actions of other boroughs were used as a provision of quality insight, officers said that conversations were taking place about its usage. Officers further responded that a head of service meeting took place with colleagues across London to share practice but that these meetings needed to be further developed.

A Member further commented that this comparative information would be beneficial for schools in terms of benchmarking and for them to track their progress against similar types of school. Officers said that some of the information has been shared with Chairs of Governors to better enable them to further support and challenge practices as appropriate.

A Member questioned how the Council managed engagement with schools in academy chains and were there performance concerns with any of the chains. Officers responded that they dealt with instances of non-engagement on an individual basis and there were some schools that engaged and other that did not. The approach for all schools was that if there was a lack of compliance from a head teacher, dialogue would take place with the CEO of the trust as focus was on outcomes and challenge would be presented to schools.

regardless of the type of school they were, Further concerns were shared with the Regional Schools Commissioner where necessary.

Officers were thanked for their attendance and responses to questions

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- Briefing note on viability of Sixth Form provision to be provided to the Chair by May 2019

The Sub-Committee came to the following **Conclusions:**

- i. The report was thorough and informative.
- ii. There were concerns regarding the viability of Sixth Form provision and further information was required in order for the Sub-Committee to plan its inclusion in the future work programme.

14/19 **Education Budget 2019/20**

The Head of Finance introduced the report which detailed the components of the budget for the coming year. The total allocation for Croydon which is regulated by the Department for Education (DfE) was £342mil for the four blocks for 2019/2020. The DfE announced that the implementation of the National Funding formula would be introduced as a soft formula for schools for next year.

It was further explained that the DfE had introduced a requirement for each authority to produce a three year recovery plan in the event that a 1% or more deficit was incurred in the year. Officers informed the Sub-Committee that Croydon as well as other local authorities would definitely have a deficit of more than 1% especially due to the high needs block. There were concerns at the lack of detail and guidance on this as yet and during consultation strongly expressed that three years was too short for a recovery period. They would continue to highlight that the suggested three years was more of a medium term programme of recovery.

It was explained to the Sub-Committee following comment by a Member that when the DSG was introduced it was based on deprivation as well as other factors, and in 2005 the amount that local authorities received was frozen with additional spend plus adjustments made to the per pupil funding. This meant that the amounts received were locked in irrespective of changes to demographics and deprivation levels. This has been to some local authorities advantage but not to Croydon's. However the New National Funding formula would mean that more recent demographic factors will be taken to account going forward.

It was expressed that it would be beneficial for the table that showed comparisons with other Local Authorities to include all of the London boroughs. Officers agreed to circulate this after the meeting.

It was noted that the report alluded to the funding differential between Croydon and other boroughs and question if there was any further documented evidence that would enable the Council to make a case to central government on the low funding allocation for the borough. Officers agreed to research this and report back to the Sub-Committee.

A Member expressed that the implications of the deficit that the DfE required local authorities to produce a recovery plan for was not quite clear and further clarify of this would be beneficial. Officers responded that there were concerns due to the lack of guidance from the DfE to date but that steps were already been taken such as early intervention on SEN to mitigate the high costs associated with the High Needs block. The LA will have to consider many factors in development of the recovery plan such as good commissioning, clear pathways, and financial implication to areas of service. Health, Education and Social care will have to work together on the plan.

It was further commented by a Member that a communication strategy with the residents of Croydon would have to be considered in the event that the Council finds itself in a situation of recovery.

It was questioned how capacity on schools affect the budget and the schools financial position. Officers replied that some schools in the borough were in deficit positions and they worked extensively with these school that have capacity on exploring ways to address issues such as reducing their PANs, combining classes, teacher ratio as well as learning and good practice form other schools.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the schools forum made a decision to increase the funding allocation that was awarded through the DfE funding formula from £110k to £114k for 2019/20.

Officers were thanked for their responses to questions.

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- A table that reflected all the 32 London Borough's DSG 2019/20 Schools block allocations per pupil
- School block funding – documented evident of low funding and its effects.

In reaching its recommendations the Sub-Committee came to the following **Conclusions**:

1. The Sub-Committee were concerned about the risks arising from the lack of government guidance on the requirement for local authorities to have a recovery plan in the event that their Designated Schools Grant budget falling below a 1% deficit.

2. It was clear that Croydon's Designated Schools Grant funding allocation was insufficient for the borough's need and that the funding differential to other local authorities was evident.
3. The Sub-Committee were pleased to note that information was being gathered to evidence Croydon's low funding allocation, enabling the Council to present a case for fairer funding to the Department for Education.

The Sub-Committee resolved to recommend that:

1. Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning that the Council and its partners should be meeting in preparation for the eventuality of the Council finding itself in the position of having to utilise its recovery plan.

15/19 **What Difference has this meeting made to Croydon's Children**

Members expressed that there have been various outcomes from this meeting which included the following:

- Actions that's needed to be completed were reinforced, in particular long standing items.
- The additional challenge throughout the meeting reinforces the expectations of officers by Members.
- The effects of change in leadership was evident in the loss of collective knowledge on service area and in instances where further information has been requested but not produced.
- The social workers attendance and contribution to the meeting was beneficial and their experienced enabled members to form a picture of the service from frontline point of view/reference.
- The Collaborative work of the Education department was good and the reports and response to questions were encouraging

16/19 **Work Programme 2018/19**

The Sub-Committee **Noted** the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

Signed:

Date:

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