

For general release

REPORT TO:	Scrutiny & Overview Committee 30 April 2019
SUBJECT:	Report of the Chair of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee
LEAD OFFICER:	N/A
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Councillor Robert Ward, Chair of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

The work of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee directly feeds into the following priority:-

‘Our children and young people thrive and reach their full potential’.

[Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022](#)

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	When the Children & Young People Sub-Committee assumed responsibility for the lead role in scrutinising the Children’s Improvement Plan, it was agreed that the Chair of the Sub-Committee would present a high-level report to the Scrutiny & Overview Committee
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	The Scrutiny & Overview Committee is asked to note the report from the Chair of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Children’s Services Improvement Plan put in place after the OFSTED report in 2017 is overseen by the Children’s Services Improvement Board. The Board has the responsibility of delivering all requirements outlined in the Ofsted inspection report.
- 1.2 Following the annual council in May 2018 the Children and Young People Sub-Committee (CYP Sub-Committee) assumed delegated responsibility for scrutiny of the Improvement Plan. This report to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee summarises the work of the CYP Sub-Committee since that time and gives indications of the scrutiny approach going forward.
- 1.3 The Children’s Services Improvement Plan still has some way to run, with the major milestone of a full OFSTED inspection expected in quarter four of this year. This will strongly influence the work of the committee in the short term. Longer term there will be a need to maintain a focus on continuous improvement, particularly once the Improvement Plan has been completed.

2. CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SUB-COMMITTEE

Context

- 2.1 At its 13th March 2018 meeting the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee agreed that, with effect from May 2018, it would assume responsibility for scrutinising the Improvement Plan for Children's Social Services. It was felt that following the assessment of the Council's Children's Services by OFSTED which resulted in an 'Inadequate' rating, the CYP Sub-Committee was best placed to scrutinise the Children's Improvement Plan which had been approved by the Cabinet on the 20th November 2017.
- 2.2 The rationale for this was that the CYP Sub-Committee was better placed than the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to dedicate sufficient time and focus to delivering in depth scrutiny of and robust challenge around progress of the Children's Improvement Plan. Until its delegation to the CYP Sub-Committee, progress against the plan was reported to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Children's Improvement Board on a monthly basis.
- 2.3 Following the local authority elections, a new CYP Sub-Committee was appointed at the Council meeting on 23rd May 2018. The Committee members are listed in Appendix A.
- 2.4 In accordance with the Constitution of Croydon Council the broad work programme is delegated to the CYP Sub-Committee. Subjects related to the Children's Improvement Plan were selected based on the following principles:
1. Addressing the areas of failure identified by OFSTED listed in Appendix B
 2. Minimising duplication of effort, in particular not scrutinising aspects which are being adequately scrutinised by others.
 3. Adding as little stress as possible to an organisation already under considerable pressure, consistent with performing the Scrutiny function.
- 2.5 The work related to the Children's Improvement Plan was in addition to other responsibilities of the Committee. This breadth of activities necessitated increasing the number of meetings beyond those originally planned. The meetings of the Committee along with conclusions and recommendations are listed in Appendix C.

Work Programme overview

- 2.6 In broad terms a change programme needs to deliver a sustainable organisation that ensures the right people are following the right processes to deliver quality services at the right pace. These objectives were aggregated in the Children's Improvement Plan under three strategic themes, the three 'P's - People, Practice and Performance.
- 2.7 Additionally, the OFSTED report identified specific areas to be addressed, including the need to ensure the "Voice of the Child" is heard and demonstrating a clear line of sight from elected members and senior managers to frontline practice.
- 2.8 Following the Inadequate judgement, experienced managers and practitioners were brought in to lead the necessary changes to achieve the aims set out in the Improvement Plan. They were presented with the challenge of turning around a failing organisation, a long-term task, whilst at the same time making short term changes to protect children who were not receiving the support they deserved.
- 2.9 An additional concern were the changes necessitated by the issue of the new

guidelines in July 2018 “Working Together to Safeguard Children”, due for implementation later this year. This impacts the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board, already undergoing significant change.

- 2.10 Recognising the challenging situation for the organisation and their own recent appointment the new CYP Committee adopted a flexible approach to its work programme, choosing to learn where to scrutinise based on knowledge gained from each meeting and from consultation with both service providers and service users.
- 2.11 In addition to receiving reports and committee meetings, the Committee visited educational establishments and spoke to social workers in their work locations to improve understanding of the service delivered by front line staff.

3. FINDINGS OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SUB-COMMITTEE

- 3.1 Reporting of performance indicators to the Children’s Improvement Board as well as feedback from OFSTED monitoring visits are key sources of information not only for Scrutiny, but also for all authorities with an interest in turning around the Council’s provision of Children’s Services. The September 2018 meeting, the first full meeting of the new committee, found that whilst there had been some notable improvements, there was still much to be done.
- 3.2 It was also found that the requirement from central government to change the organisation of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board was a matter of concern. An additional meeting of the committee was organised for January 2019 to evaluate how the changes might impact effectiveness.

Section 20

- 3.3 Children accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act for an extended period was a concern expressed both nationally and locally. This situation was addressed. Cases were reviewed and policies and procedures changed. Verifying that these changes have been effective for the long term is a potential subject for future scrutiny.

Recruitment and retention

- 3.4 Both the Improvement Board and the CYP Scrutiny committee were clear that recruitment and retention of high-quality staff is a cornerstone of providing a sustainable and quality service. At the September 2018 meeting the committee recognised that this is a difficult problem and supported the approach being taken.
- 3.5 More recent reviews of progress show that despite extensive efforts to recruit permanent staff, this continues to be an issue. Although recruitment consistently outpaces losses, some of which are the result of management action, we still lose too many staff. It is hoped that management action to improve the service and therefore more positive reporting by OFSTED will begin to change external perceptions of Croydon’s Children’s Social Services. This, and improved packages will hopefully attract more applications and reduce ongoing loss of good staff.
- 3.2 It is also recognised that although there is a preference for permanent staff, agency staff are an important and valued part of the work force. Some have been attracted to permanent status and we hope more will transfer but delivering a quality service whilst we have a high rate of agency staff needs ongoing, active management.

Complaints

- 3.4 The September 2018 meeting reviewed statistics on complaints. Complaints are an important barometer of how service is being delivered and is a direct line to service

users and their carers. It can also be a valuable source of ideas for improving the service. It was evident that the process was not working well as a result of which the CYP Committee now reviews the aggregate of complaints on a quarterly basis.

- 3.5 Subsequent reviews, whilst showing small signs of positive change, also showed considerable room for improvement in the efficiency of the complaints process and in the actions taken to remedy issues identified by complainants. Action has been taken and it is hoped that we will see positive change at the next quarter's figures. Quarterly reviews will continue until sustained improvement is evident.

Quality Assurance

- 3.6 The November 2018 meeting reviewed progress on the Improvement Plan, addressing the effectiveness of supervision and quality assurance, including the results of the Social Care Practice Week. This falls under the heading of "Creating a culture of shared ownership and social work values".
- 3.7 Practice Week feedback was encouraging. Shortcomings were identified, but there were also positive indications. Practice Week is a positive step in implementing the Quality Assurance programme and in connecting senior managers to front line staff.

Safeguarding

- 3.8 As previously noted, central government has mandated a change in Safeguarding arrangements. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 replaces local Safeguarding Children Boards with new arrangements to be led by the three named statutory safeguarding partners: local authority, clinical commissioning group and the police. The three safeguarding partners will assume the responsibilities previously held by Croydon's Safeguarding Children Board. The January 2019 meeting was specifically convened to review the changes and the plan for implementation in Croydon.
- 3.9 The Committee supported the new approach and Croydon's implementation. Minimising change to an organisation that had recently seen radical change, and which was beginning to show improved effectiveness was supported as was continuing with an independent chair and the performance management approach.
- 3.10 Challenges for the new arrangement were effective data sharing, already identified by the thematic review, which had received national attention, and the subsequent analysis which must lead to identifying children at risk. This is a possible area for review by the CYP Scrutiny committee once the new organisation beds in.
- 3.11 More broadly, Safeguarding is illustrative of the challenges posed by multi-agency working across social services. Providing an efficient and effective service through multiple agencies with sometimes differing priorities, funding sources and management accountabilities requires a high degree of collaborative working and coordination. This will likely be a theme for future scrutiny.

Line of Sight to the front line

- 3.11 Whilst OFSTED felt communication lines were clear, there was criticism that meetings were often informal. A line of sight document was prepared but we did not see evidence of consistent application. A second version has now been produced. Further evidence of these meetings being effective, including appropriate record keeping, has been sought.

Provision of SEND services

- 3.12 The Council has agreed a new strategy for provision of SEND services to children and young people which was examined at the March 2019 meeting. The document

is most welcome, setting out aspirations and direction, with the need for local provision and the addition of workforce development as a theme particularly so. We look forward to the implementation plan which will turn the strategy into actions to improve the lives of children, which is how success will ultimately be judged.

- 3.13 A positive aspect of the review of the strategy was the contribution made by young people, children and their carers at the committee meeting. The committee found that hearing first hand of their life experience and aspirations was very positive. The first hand views of those affected by policies should wherever possible be included in future meetings and be influential in the work of the committee.

Early Help

- 3.14 Early Help and step down were part of the focus of the most recent visit by the OFSTED inspectors. Their formal report was yet to be published at the time of the March Scrutiny committee meeting, however a summary was available. The feedback on the reconfigured service launched in November 2018, although still in its infancy, was positive. Ensuring that this improvement continues and is built on, as with other areas of the service will be the ongoing challenge as we go forward.

4. WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2019-2020

- 4.1 Croydon Children's Social Services still has some way to go before we can feel that Croydon's children are being well served. The crucial milestone in the short/medium term is the full inspection by OFSTED, expected in the fourth quarter of this year..
- 4.2 The CYP Committee must play its part in ensuring that we maximise the chance of a successful outcome. To that end we are holding a meeting on 23rd April 2019 to review where we are on scrutinising Children's Social Services, specifically to learn lessons from the past year and set ourselves themes and objectives for the year ahead, particularly the period between now and the OFSTED inspection.
- 4.13 As regards preparation for the OFSTED review, the committee's attention is likely in the short term to turn towards examining whether the new organisation is delivering services at the pace required. Performance indicators such as the timeliness of assessments and reviews will be areas of focus prior to the anticipated inspection.
- 4.14 Beyond the OFSTED inspection we need to have the ambition to be a leading provider of children's services. That is an objective that we all share in which the CYP Sub-Committee looks forward to playing its part.

Acknowledgements

In the year since the new Sub-Committee convened, much has been achieved. This has been in large part due to the efforts of Committee members and the officers who have supported us, for which I am as chair, very grateful. We are also grateful to those, officers and others, who have appeared before our Sub-Committee for their work and cooperation.

Appendices

Appendix A: Members of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Appendix B: Key areas for improvement identified by Ofsted

Appendix C: Conclusions & Recommendations of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee

CONTACT OFFICER: Simon Trevaskis: Senior Democratic Service & Governance
Officer - Scrutiny

Appendix A

Members of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee



Councillor Robert Ward (Chair)



Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chair)



Councillor Sue Bennett



Councillor Mary Croos



Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick



Councillor Maddie Henson



Councillor Maggie Mansell

(a member of the Sub-Committee until she unfortunately passed away in December 2019)



Councillor Helen Redfern



Councillor Callton Young OBE

(appointed February 2019)

Appendix B

Key areas for improvement identified by OFSTED

1. Widespread and serious failures in providing services for children and families that leave some children at risk of significant harm.
2. Too many children are left too long for a decision to become looked after and our responses are not timely or robust enough to ensure risk was reduced.
3. The quality of our plans and weak managerial oversight are not driving practice and outcomes for children and young people sufficiently.
4. We are not creating conditions for social work to thrive across the whole service, with some social work caseloads being too high in parts of the service.
5. Children and families experience too many changes in social worker.
6. Corporate parenting needs strengthening to ensure improvement takes place across all practice areas for looked after children.
7. Early help is not fully established or understood enough across the partnership (council and Croydon Safeguarding Children Board).
8. There is insufficient line of sight to the front line.
9. The Croydon Safeguarding Children Board does not understand the experiences of children and young people and has failed to sufficiently monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of front-line practice.

The Croydon Safeguarding Children Board lacks direction and purpose and does not provide effective challenge to poor practice and risks to vulnerable children in Croydon.

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 18 September 2019

Item: Children's Services Improvement Arrangements

Conclusions:

1. Whilst there had been some notable improvements there was still a lot of work to be done to deliver the Children's Improvement Plan and in some specific areas there remained an acute cause for concern.
2. In-depth evidence of partner's commitment to improvement of safeguarding arrangements was needed.
3. Further information was required on the figures for children accommodated under Section 20, with high level cases remaining a national issue.

Recommendation:

1. That Officers circulate figures on the amount of cases of Section 20 accommodated children to the Committee after the meeting.

Item: Recruitment & Retention

Conclusions:

1. Recruitment and retention of good quality experienced staff remained a challenge
2. The Council had been responding appropriately by looking at various methods to raise its profile in order to attract social workers to Croydon.
3. It was concerning that there had been no prior transparent line between Children's Social Care and Human Resources to communicate the need for staff but the new strategies adopted through the collections of actions in place were encouraging.

Item: Children's Statutory Complaints Report 2017-2018

Conclusions:

1. That many of the complaints received were relating to poor communication and clear context of how we communicate as a Council was not evident in the report.
2. There was a lack of data in the report on how the Council's performance compared against other Local Authorities.
3. There was little information on the Council's course of action for those that had received a poor service but did not complain.
4. That performance against SLA was poor

Recommendations:

1. An update report was required on progress and improvements to be brought to the Sub-Committee on a quarterly basis as well as an overview report to be brought before the Sub-Committee at its 27 November 2018 meeting.
2. Future reports to include data on the Councils performance against neighbouring Local Authorities.

Meeting Date: 27 November 2018

Item: Children's Complaints Overview Report

Conclusions:

1. The Sub-Committee noted the content of the report
2. That this was the first quarterly report following the Annual Report that had been considered at the Sub-Committee meeting on 18 September and reassurance could be taken that the report demonstrated that the issues relating to the volume of complaints had been clearly recognised. Officers were clearly working on compliance and the Sub-Committee looked forward to seeing further progress made on improvements in future reports.
3. That comparison figures against other boroughs needed to be made evident in future reports.
4. That the Sub-Committee was encouraged by the plans in place to collate thematic analysis of complaints received and would welcome the receipt at future meetings of applied learning from the information gathered.

Item: Children's Improvement Plan Update

Conclusions:

1. There were concerns regarding the handover from interim staff to permanent staff at senior levels and whether this was being carried out appropriately, due to the complexity of the borough and in light of the journey of the service following the Ofsted inspection.
2. That the hard work and commitment of assisting to transform the service by Phillip Segurola, the Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care, who was departing be commended.
3. It was important to understand how the improvements of priority 7 of the improvement plan 'Creating a culture of shared ownership and social work values' would be monitored in order to assess if intended outcomes were being realised.

Recommendations:

1. That a staff representative be invited to attend a future meeting to provide insight into and their view on the progression of developments for the workforce as described in the Improvement Plan.
2. Evidence be provided to the Sub-Committee on the progress of Priority 7 in the Improvement Plan through timescales of implemented actions.

Meeting Date: 14 January 2019

Item: Update on the development of Croydon's proposed new safeguarding arrangements

Conclusions:

1. The meeting was helpful as it enabled the Sub-Committee the opportunity to be informed and ask questions about the proposed Multi-agency Safeguarding Children Arrangements.
2. That it was important that the suggested format of the arrangements is acknowledged and endorsed
3. The format agreed evidenced the importance of the Executive Board to retain focus on challenges and drive safeguarding arrangements.
4. That the points raised on effectiveness of learning and co-ownership be acknowledged.
5. It may be beneficial to scrutinise some of the themes of the priorities once the safeguarding arrangements had been implemented.

Meeting Date: 5 February 2019

Item: Cabinet Member Question Time: Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning

Conclusions:

1. The attendance of representatives from the staff workforce at the meeting provided a positive element to discussion.
2. There was concern regarding the pace and progress of improvements in the recruitment and retention of staff.
3. There was lack of evidence of plans being in place to improve the conversion rate of locum staff to permanent roles.
4. It was concerning that emerging strategies were not being shared with the Sub-Committee.
5. 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.

12 March 2019**Statutory Children's Complaints Report: Quarter 3****Update on the Early Help and Children's Social Care Improvements**