

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 21 January 2020 at 6.30 pm in The Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Robert Ward (Chair);
Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Sue Bennett, Mary Croos, Jerry Fitzpatrick and Callton Young

Co-optee Members

Ms Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese)), Mr Dave Harvey (Non-voting Teacher representative), Geoff Hopper (Voting Parent Governor Representative) and Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)

Also Present: Councillor Patricia Hay Justice
Robert Henderson, Executive Director, Children Families and Education
Shelley Davies, Interim Director of Education
Kate Bingham, Interim Head of Finance, Children Families and Education
Michael McKeaveney, Interim Head of Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion

Apologies: Councillor Gareth Streeter, Councillor Bernadette Khan

PART A

1/20 Apologies for absence

Councillor Bernadette Khan sent her apologies and Councillor Patricia Hay-Justice was in attendance in her absence.
Councillor Gareth Streeter sent his apologies.

2/20 Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2019 was signed and agreed as an accurate record subject to the following amendment:

That the minutes reflect the presence of the following officers who were in attendance:

*Rachel Carse, Interim Head of Employment and Skills Delivery
Kerry Crichlow, Programme Director, Children's Improvement Journey
Robert Henderson, Executive Director Children Families and Education*

3/20 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

4/20 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

5/20 Actions List Update

It was acknowledged that the items that did not have completion dates or comments had now been updated.

Following attendance of some members of the committee at the 'Respect' training that took place ahead of the meeting, the Chair fed back to the sub-committee that the training provided key insight on how to better hear and include the voice of the child in its work

It was commented that the Children's complaints report had not been presented to the sub-committee and the Chair informed Members that a decision had been made for this to be taken at the Scrutiny and Overview committee to look into in depth.

6/20 Education Budget

The Head of Finance introduced the report which detailed the components of the 2020/21 Budget. The total allocation for Croydon which is regulated by the Department for Education (DfE) was £364.306 million for the four blocks for 2020/2021.

Following the 2020/21 Spending review the Chancellor delivered a statement which was followed in more detail by the Minister for School Standards which confirmed the Governments' commitment to a £7.1 billion increase in funding for schools by 2022/23. This included £700mil more in 2020/21 to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs, increased Early Years spending by £66mil and £400mil for Further Education.

In 2020/21 Croydon would see an increase of £21.3mil in the level of DSG funding compared to the previous year.

The DfE made a commitment that the introduction of the national funding formula, which has been delayed since 2017, would come into place in 2021/22.

As required, Croydon submitted its five year DSG Recovery Plan. The DfE's letter of response informed the Council of an increase to the High Needs Block allocation for 2020/21, and that allocations for 2021/22 and 2022/23 were under review. As a result the Council conducted a detailed revision of its previously submitted recovery plan which would be submitted to the High Needs Working Group as well as the Schools Forum later this month.

It was asked what the new funding formula would mean for Croydon. Officers said that it meant that nationally every pupil would receive the same basic

funding. The effects of this formula would be different in every Local Authority (LA), and the Council was doing all it could to mitigate any adverse impact of the new formula.

It was commented that whilst the Government's commitments for £7 billion increase in funding for schools was welcomed, there was still a concern over the large deficit that has been accumulated by many schools in previous years. In particular, concerns were raised for Primary Schools who it was felt would not receive real term increases.

It was questioned if the Council would request reinstatement of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (USAC) costs from government, officers responded that the education provision of UASC was covered by the DSG but the budget did not cover social care costs.

It was questioned if the government should be lobbied for reinstatement of the PFI costs of a particular Croydon school and how much of a burden this was on the Council's Budget. Officers said a benchmarking exercise took place every five years which was due to be revisited in 2021 and costs associated with this particular PFI would be reviewed. Part of the funding from the DSG covered this cost and the council covered some of the affordability gap.

In response to a Member question on how confident the Council was that place planning for pupils was accurate, officers said that places at schools were allocated on criteria for schools and parental choice. There were often instances of surplus places in schools, pictorial maps of this data was only valid on a day by day basis and data constantly changed. Planning for school places was completed based on figures supplied by the GLA and intelligence gathered on areas of the borough. In the event of identification of lack of places, a contingency plan would be deployed to manage the issue.

It was questioned whether a school could decide not to admit Croydon children. Officers said that a school could not legally make such a decision without changing their admissions criteria and for such changes to be made, a legal process including consultation would need to take place.

At the conclusion of this item the Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance at the meeting and their engagement with the Committee and questions.

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

1. The announcement of the commitment of additional school funding by government was welcomed, there were however concerns as to how this would assist to decrease the deficit of some schools.
2. Although there has been an increase in Croydon's funding allocation, there remained a significant gap of per pupil funding in comparison to

inner city boroughs some of whose problems are similar to those we see in Croydon.

3. It was important that the Council maintain clear line of sight of any adverse impact of the national funding formula once it was implemented on the Education Budget.
4. It was vital that the Council conducted a comprehensive review in 2021 of the PFI costs associated with the Croydon School.

7/20 Education Standards

The Interim Head of Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion presented the report and the following was noted:

- Croydon's performance in Early Years and Key Stage one was higher than the national average for the fourth consecutive year.
- NEET figures were better than the national average but youth engagement remained a challenge.
- Instances of permanent exclusion were lower than the national average but figures were not low enough, as such, improvements were needed in this area.
- Croydon still experienced high rates of exclusions for Black Afro-Caribbean boys and White British boys receiving the Pupil Premium. The inclusion team was working on intervention and discussions were taking place with head teachers on identified trends.
- Two school advisers had been appointed to support schools.
- There was a renewed focus on provision of Post 16 technical skills provision.

Following presentation of the report, the Sub-Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions on the content of the report.

In response to a Member question on what was being done to improve sixth form provision in order to increase life chances and best outcomes for young people in Croydon, officers responded that a review of sixth form provision was being conducted to look into issues in detail and how best to tackle identified problems. It was acknowledged that there were many sixth form providers in Croydon and some had reduced their curriculum in order to be competitive whilst many experienced funding pressures.

It was further commented that the situation was affecting children in current Post 16 provision and the review must be conducted urgently as they required improvement to be made to quality of offer now in order to meet their needs, with a need for sufficient class sizes and access to pool of effective teachers. Officers said that the Council was encouraging more collaborative ways of working between the providers, having open dialogue and expressing concerns. There had been increased capacity within the Not in Education

Employment or Training (NEET) team to support, undertake preventative work and develop engagement.

Questions were raised on the number of schools that had recently been inspected by Ofsted and what support had been given to schools, day nurseries and childminders who had received qualify deficit Ofsted ratings. Officers agreed to circulate data on all Croydon schools last inspection dates and Ofsted ratings.

The Committee learned that Schools and the small number of maintained nurseries that the Council held responsibility for liaised with a senior member of the school effectiveness team at fortnightly support meetings. The officer supported providers by working with them on governance issues, leadership and management. Areas of concern were outlined and if needed, course of action that the council would take if improvements were not made.

It was further challenged that the same support would not be available for Academy schools and officers said that a positive relationship with Academies was maintained. The Council was confident in its ability to raise concerns and Academy schools were willing to work with the Council as needed. The Local Authority held responsibility for attendance and safeguarding of all pupils, were able to conduct unannounced visits and request action plans in instances of suspected potential unlawful off rolling of pupils. They could also refer to Ofsted in instances of significant safeguarding concerns.

An additional question was asked on support for Looked After Children, officers said that there was increased focus on 16 year old NEET for which there was a dedicated team to provide support. They had been working in partnership with social work and youth engagement teams to develop a programme for children leaving care.

It was highlighted that increased focus was needed to cultivate a programme for high performing children in the borough. Officers said there had been exploration of methods develop the curriculum in ways that would meet their needs.

A Member asked what was being done to address persistence absence in schools. Officers said that there was now increased capacity in the Virtual Schools department to ensure that all LAC had a personal advisor with attendance tracking procedures in place.

The impact and management of Octavo partnership was questioned to which officers responded that there would be no disruption to the support provided to schools.

In response to questions on the role of the two advisors that had been appointed, Officers said that they both brought with them a wealth of knowledge and experience. They would look at consistency of teaching, any assessments that had taken place, provide pastoral support to head teachers

and review action plans. Additionally they would speak to pupils to get their perspective of their school.

Further concerns were highlighted about the percentages of fixed exclusions by ethnicity and it was questioned what the priority for the two advisors would be to address these issues and mitigate these occurrences. Officers said that it was very important that the Council examine data and pick up on any trends. They would explore the strategies the schools had in place to address problems and reduce instances of exclusions. Additionally through the implementation of the Council's Trauma Informed Programme and approach to its corporate parenting responsibilities, the focus would be on increased multiagency working. The priority and focus was ensuring that all pupils in the borough had an opportunity to reach their full potential.

At the conclusion of this item the Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance at the meeting and their engagement with the Committee and questions

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- Briefing on review of 6th Form provision in Croydon
- Data on all Croydon schools Ofsted inspections – date of last inspection and rating
- Data on absence and persistent absence in post 16 provision

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

1. The introduction of the Trauma Informed programme was innovative, welcomed and the sub-committee looked forward to further examination of the outcomes of this programme in the coming months
2. It was important that the Council took active real steps to working with providers to improving the offer of post 16 provision for its young people.
3. It was evident that priority must be given addressing the needs of and supporting 16 year old NEET young people.
4. The increase of personal advisors in the Virtual Schools department was welcomed.
5. It was hoped that the comments made regarding the high occurrences of exclusions of young black Afro-Caribbean boys and white boys receiving pupil premium funding were taken seriously and that the two advisors would be active in their roles in holding to account the actions of schools.

The Executive Director of Children Families and Education provided an update on the Children's Improvement journey which included the following:

- The service has experienced a decrease in the number of audits that had been conducted that were inadequate and Camden agreed that they had been progressing in a positive way.
- Caseloads in social care and early help had reduced below target which had impacted on social workers ability to deliver high quality work.
- Targets in Assessments had improved with 24% reduction of children on child protection plan.
- There has been significant reduction on cases in care proceedings. 12 months ago Croydon had 108 cases which was above the London average. There had since been a 55% reduction as practitioners were focused on working with families instead of removal of children.
- The service had experienced a 44% improvement in initial health assessments, 91% of CIN reviews completed on time and 85% of plans up to date.
- There were still areas in need of significant improvement. Care and pathway plans remained below target. Leaving Care and LAC teams were also further behind on their improvement journeys whilst supervision across the service remained inconsistent and was an area of priority.

A Member commented on the positive steps taken to improve core areas and that this was a reflection of better management driving superior practice. The teams and Cabinet Members' efforts to improve the service was recognised and praised.

It was asked what further challenges was experienced in the retention of staff. The officer responded that Croydon still had a long way to go in delivering outcomes. An international recruitment campaign was due to be launched in a bid to widen efforts to recruit staff to reduce the percentage of locum vacancies which although had improved from 44% to 38% still required significant reduction.

A Question was raised on what was being done to support middle management and address any issues with performance. The Officer said that there were still improvements to be made by a small number of management staff and a robust support programme was in place to assist them.

It was asked when it was envisaged that children in CIN would be seen within 10 days and how would the target be achieved. The officer responded that it was hoped that this would be achieved within the next three months. Children on CP plans were treated a priority and take up most of social workers time, this was the main reason the target had yet to be met.

It was questioned what the improvement plan would look like in the next three months. The officer responded that it was anticipated that the full Ofsted

inspection would have taken place and the plan moving forward would be shaped from the outcome of the inspection.

At the conclusion of this item the Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance at the meeting and their engagement with the Committee and questions.

9/20 Children Young People and Families Plan

The Executive Director of Children Families and Education delivered the presentation and the following points were noted:

- Croydon had a Children Young People and Families Plan which ended in 2018 and whilst as of 2010 there was no longer a statutory responsibility for local authorities to have a Plan, it was decided following discussions that it would be beneficial for Croydon to continue to have one in place.
- It was recognised that Croydon had multiple multiagencies that had different priorities and it was important to bring those priorities of partnership together in one place to promote collective ownership under one agreement as was proposed by the Plan.
- The multiagencies that operated in the Borough were all critical in improving outcomes and this partnership would reinforce that duty in a way that demands that services work together. The priorities selected for areas of focus would be priorities that had a partnership implication.
- A Consultation would be launched for six weeks around the objectives of the plan and intelligence gathered would feed into the draft plan which would be presented to Cabinet in March 2020.

A Member asked if Head teachers would be consulted, the officer responded that head teachers would be consulted as they had engaged in initial consultations regarding the plan. It was envisaged that all service providers for young people would engage and provide their feedback. The draft plan would be presented at the head teachers' conference in March 2020.

It was suggested that school governors be contacted and involved in the consultation. Arrangements should be made for communication regarding the consultation to be circulated in school bulletins.

There was challenge regarding the timeline of presentation of the item at scrutiny and it was highlighted that there was no opportunity for the draft plan to be presented to Scrutiny after the consultation process if it was to be tabled at March Cabinet meeting. As a result it was reinforced that early notification of proposed plans be brought to the attention of scrutiny in order to inform work programming and timetabling.

Officers were thanked for their attendance and contributions to the meeting

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- Details of Consultation to be circulated

10/20 What Difference has this meeting made to Croydon's Children

At the conclusion of discussions, the following points were made:

Detailed thought and discussion had to take place to determine how to capture the voice of the child in meetings as this was currently not occurring.

It was imperative that the Sub-Committee look at ways of engagement with young people and encourage them to attend meetings. Suggestions made included the use of technology, approaching schools and their schools councils.

It was important to focus on understanding of roles as corporate parents, in particular celebrating life events of young people as there was a risk that not enough effort was being put into supporting all the other aspects of children's lives and too much emphasis had been on execution of statutory functions.

11/20 Work Programme 2019/20

The Chair informed the Sub-Committee that he would be having a meeting with the Executive Director of Children Families and Education to discuss in detail the items proposed for the remainder of the meetings for this municipal year

The meeting ended at 9.18 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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