

For general release

REPORT TO:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 14 September 2021
SUBJECT:	Update on Children's Social Care, Families and Education Services
LEAD OFFICER:	Debbie Jones, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Cllr Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

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

The plans and recommendations in this report focus on ensuring that all Croydon's children live a happy, healthy life, free from harm and that they have every opportunity to thrive and become fulfilled adults.

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This item forms part of the sub-committee's work programme.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	An overview of <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service updates from Education and Early Help & children's social care• Budget updates• Feedback from Ofsted focused visit in June 2021• Children's Continuous Improvement Plan 2021-2024

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, along with the accompanying attachments provides feedback from Ofsted focused visit, service updates from Children, Families and Education and budget updates.

2. Updates from Early Help and Children's Social Care

- 2.1 Children benefitted from the increased access to school prior to the summer holidays enabling them to return to a level of routine that supports positive social and educational relationships. Schools continued to be impressive in their support for all Croydon children and especially those with whom Early Help and Children's Social Care are actively involved.
- 2.2 Referral rates have increased since the latter end of April, a pattern replicated across London related to lockdown easing and increased school attendance. The highest number of requests was in the week of 11th June with 1399; the highest number of individual child requests was in the week of 2nd July when 589 contacts were recorded.
- 2.3 It follows that the volume of assessments by CSC and investigations into safeguarding concerns has increased leading to pressure on capacity within Croydon Supporting Families Service. Assertive recruitment activity has maintained sufficient capacity to respond effectively to presenting concerns for Croydon children and families.
- 2.4 Ofsted HMI were on site for a two day Focused Visit on 15th & 16th June and the letter published on 26th July. The letter notes that despite the unprecedented challenges of the past 18 months, inspectors have found that when children and families are referred to us for help, in most cases we are taking swift and appropriate action to keep them safe. You can read the report in [full here](#).
- 2.5 Our social care teams have been on the frontline throughout the pandemic, ensuring that our most vulnerable families continue to receive face-to-face visits and support even in the most difficult of circumstances. Inspectors were impressed with the staff that they met noting their 'commitment, professionalism and determination' to do the right thing for children, staff feel supported, leaders are visible and effective, morale is good. Ofsted has identified some areas for improvement and we will be working with our partners to address these as a priority.
- 2.6 Whole service learning took place in the week of 26th July through a 'Practice Week' focusing on the impact of our practice for children who live with or who have experienced domestic abuse in their families.
- 2.7 A comprehensive programme of summer activities was provided to our children in care through Empire.

3. Updates from Education

- 3.1 The services delivered by the Education Directorate have remained stable at present and have generally not been impacted by the budget savings. The savings within the Directorate are in relation to Children's Centres, Croydon Music and Arts and some additional staffing savings.
- 3.2 Cabinet have approved the model of delivery for the Children's Centres and this will be out to Tender end of August 2021. The impact in relation to the savings in this area will be measurable when the new delivery model has been implemented
- 3.3 Children's Centre Consultation
We received a high volume of responses to the consultation. The consultation response highlighted the value of our Best Start Children's Centres so the new model will include continuing to run services at all our existing Children's Centre sites, including Shirley and Purley Oaks, as part of a new hub and spoke model. The new proposals will reduce management costs so we can continue to deliver children's centre services from 11 sites across the borough with a further five sites offering services specifically for two year olds. While there will be changes to how often sessions run, our Children's Centres will continue to sit at the heart of our communities bringing together a range of services to help our children to thrive.
- 3.4 SEND
At the end of the academic year we have seen a positive impact of the SEND Inclusion Funding approach. School Forum have approved the funding for this to be extended to a further two locality areas. The Special Schools funding review has been completed and further work and discussions are taking place to agree the final model.

4. Children's Continuous Improvement Plan

- 4.1 The final version of the Children's Continuous Improvement Plan 2021-2024 was updated following review at the last Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in June 2021 and is included as at Appendix 1 of this report.
- 4.2 Quarterly reports on progress and risk against the actions in both sections of the plan will be reported to and challenged by the Scrutiny Children and Young People sub-Committee to provide robust oversight.
- 4.3 Work will continue to ensure the forward plans and work programmes of the two formal meetings are co-ordinated and aligned to provide whole-system assurance on the progress and impact. It is proposed that the Children's Continuous Improvement Plan is reviewed annually by the CCIB.

5. Budget update

5.1 Dedicated School Grant (DSG) Deficit Management

5.1.1 The table below summarises the position of the DSG deficit as at 31st March 2021. The deficit balance increased by £5.281m in 2020/21 to an end of year position of £19.839m. The main reason for the adverse movement is the High Needs block which was overspend by £5.744m due to increase in pupil numbers with severe and complex needs hence extra funding to meet their educational needs.

5.1.2 The local Authority (LA) has therefore implemented various SEND work streams as part of the DSG deficit recovery strategy to mitigate this trend. This is in line with the latest Department for Education (DfE) guidance for all local authorities with DSG deficit above a particular threshold to prepare a 5-year Deficit Recovery Plan with the aim to bring the spending level down as well as recover previous accumulated deficits.

Croydon DSG Balances

DSG Block	2019/20	2020/21	2020/21
	Balance	Movement	Final Balance
	£,000	£,000	£,000
Schools Block	-2,932	1,509	-1,423
Early Years Block	-988	-1,972	-2,960
High Needs Block	18,478	5,744	24,222
Total	14,558	5,281	19,839

5.1.3 The LA has been working closely with the DfE in reviewing the management plan and will continue to seek relevant advice to bring the High Needs Block expenditure within the High Needs funding allocation by Year 5 as reported in the Recovery Plan.

5.1.4 The current DSG Management Plan was agreed by School Forum in April 2021, signed off by the Executive Director (CFE) and the Chief Finance Officer and submitted to the DfE in May. The LA continues to engage and receive support from the DfE in the management of the deficit and regular monitoring reports will be presented to both GPAC and School Forum throughout the financial year.

5.2 2021/22 Budget

The department developed a delivery plan to meet the financial challenge as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) over 2021-24, which includes growth in the first year alongside significant savings over the MTFS. The key deliverables for this plan are:

- Re-base placement budgets to address demographic and historic pressures in 2020-21, with no further growth required;
- Reduce the numbers of local children in care to a target of 430 from 463 on the 30 June 2021 and improve value for money to reduce spend to the London

average or below by 2024;

- Increase the number of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) educated in the borough; 1608 in borough and 544 out of borough;
- 5% budget savings each year on placement and care package costs for children with disabilities over 2021-24, challenged against benchmarking to London or national average;
- Improve the efficiency of the practice system whilst sustaining the effectiveness.

5. 2 For Children, Families and Education, as at 30 June 2021, it is assumed that net expenditure for the department will be within or below the £115.669m budget approved by Council for 2021/22. This includes an assumption that the current negotiations with central government, seeking additional funding for Asylum Seekers, will either be successful or the Council will move to reduce the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children entering into our care. There are a number of general and specific risks already emerging across the department to this assumption, all of which are outlined below and where those risks can be quantified that is also included.

5. 3 **Savings Programme**

The final reorganisation outcomes in many areas have not resulted in the full extent of the savings initially proposed and agreed by Council in February 2021. The majority of this under delivery will be as a result of timing differences, where staff have not left the service as at 1 April 2021 and whilst the full year effect of such savings will be felt in 2022/23, one-off substitute savings will need to be identified in year. In addition, as a consequence of pre-election restrictions, necessary public consultations required before some final saving proposals are implemented have been delayed resulting in further risks for non-delivery in 2021/22. Critical to the successful delivery of those savings projects that are due to mobilise in the current quarter is the urgent approval of transformation bids submitted in mid- April.

MTFS Savings Ref	MTFS Savings Description	Savings at risk
		(£,000's)
CFE Sav 07	Improve Practice System Efficiency	1,065
CFE Sav 09	Review Children's Centres Delivery Model	237
CFE Sav 10	Additional Education Savings	15
CFE Total		1,317

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APPENDICES: Appendix 1 Children's Continuous Improvement Plan 2021-2024
Appendix 2 Ofsted Focused visit letter