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Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 10 October 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Councillor Richard Chatterjee (Chair), Councillor Maddie Henson (Vice-Chair), Mike Bonello, Mark Johnson, Holly Ramsey, Helen Redfern and Catherine Wilson

Also Present: Cllr Rowenna Davis (Present Virtually)
Cllr Maria Gatland (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Cllr Ola Kolade (Cabinet Member for Community Safety)
Cllr Joseph Lee (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

Apologies: Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative), Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese)) and Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative)

PART A

Before the start of the meeting, those in attendance observed a minute's silence in memory of Elianne Andam.

39/23 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative), Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative) and Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese)).

40/23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 27 June 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

41/23 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

42/23 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

43/23 Verbal update on RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) in the Borough

The Director of Education introduced the item and explained that all Local Authority Maintained school buildings in the borough had been RAAC surveyed, and no issues related to RAAC had been identified. The Council were in contact with all Academies and none had reported issues. The Chair thanked the Director of Education for their update and for keeping the Sub-Committee informed.

44/23 Youth Justice Plan 23/24 & Youth Safety Delivery Plan

The Sub-Committee considered a paper set out on pages 17 to 146 of the agenda, which provided the Youth Justice Plan 23/24, which forms a part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework, and the Youth Safety Delivery Plan, which was approved at Cabinet in September 2023. Both reports were provided to the Sub-Committee under a single item as they had been developed in close collaboration. The Director of Children's Social Care and the Head of the Violence Reduction Network introduced the item and summarised the reports.

Youth Justice Plan 23/24

The Sub-Committee asked what learning from previous the Youth Justice Plan had been incorporated into the development of this iteration. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that the report outlined the previous Plan, and included a column explaining the progress made on a number of defined areas, as well as where there were areas of continuing work.

Members noted that the female cohort was low, but increasing, and asked why this was, what the reference to 'unique vulnerabilities' meant in the report, and what was being done to address these. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that the unique vulnerabilities were around sexual exploitation, and the carrying of weapons and drugs. It was explained that there had been some bespoke work undertaken with girls, where the service had intelligence, and bids had been submitted for additional funding to ensure programmes were fit for purpose and multifaceted to meet needs around these risks. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team stated that there was good joint working with Children's Social Care to ensure that discussions around the female cohort were taking place at the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Complex Adolescents Panel (CAP).

The Sub-Committee heard that it was hard to identify why this cohort was increasing, as individuals entered the service from the police and the Court system, but potential factors were better intelligence and increased exposure to the police from more targeted operations. The Sub-Committee clarified with the Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team that there was potentially an increase in detection for the female cohort as a result of new ways of working being undertaken by the police against historic underreporting for this group. The Corporate Director of Children, Young People & Education (CYPE) explained that partners had done substantial collaborative work around the vulnerabilities of young women, and agreed that it was likely multiagency responses to this cohort had improved which had resulted in better detection rates.

Members asked for some examples of the kind of work the service was doing to engage with these young women. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that, once an individual had been identified, a partnership panel would discuss their presenting needs, where they frequented in the borough, and their education and home life. The service tried to deliver a programme based around activities, future aspirations, self-esteem and healthy relationships; this was combined with one to one work, and visits to the individual's home or school. The model tried to engage the female cohort with a large variety of different approaches and had received a positive response. In response to questions about group work, it was explained that group sessions were weekly and typically were delivered to groups of around nine to fourteen girls.

Members asked why Croydon was in the current situation concerning violence between young people, and the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team stated that a number of factors had been identified in the cohort; these included education, home life, poverty, boredom, lack of accessibility to opportunity, exposure to domestic violence and educational needs. It was acknowledged that a number of boroughs were facing similar issues, and that often a lot had already happened by the time young people were engaged with the Youth Justice Service. The importance of early detection and prevention work was highlighted in reducing violence between young people. Members queried what factor was seen most commonly in contributing to violence between young people, and the Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team stated that often this was a difficult home life.

The Sub-Committee raised 'the voice of the parent and carers' and asked how families were being engaged as partners in prevention and intervention. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that prevention work was much wider than Youth Justice, and included Early Help and other initiatives; a number of the service's projects worked directly with families to deliver a systemic intervention. Parents were engaged as early as possible and current assessment tools specifically looked at families, although it was acknowledged that this was an area of work that could be expanded. Members were informed that parents had been engaged in specific pieces of work, and that each individual was assigned a

Youth Justice worker who would have regular contact with both the individual and their family to ensure they were involved in every aspect of the work. Members asked how schools were engaging parents, and the Director for Children's Social Care explained that, in many cases, children were already engaged in Early Help before they were involved with the Youth Justice Service, and that schools would have been engaged at this point. Where children were on Child in Need or Child Protection Plans, schools were always engaged as part of a multiagency team. There had also been work with specific schools to deliver prevention and diversion work alongside neighbourhood police.

Members asked about work with other boroughs who had similar issues around County Lines. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that they met regularly with their counterparts in other South London boroughs to share information, and to discuss specific cases; boroughs outside of London were also engaged where there was knowledge of specific links and issues.

The Sub-Committee highlighted the 'voice of the child' and asked how this had been incorporated into the development of the Plan. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that a survey had been undertaken, as well as a number of engagement forums; children had also been involved in decision making and had been engaged in the redesigning of logos and reception areas to make these more child friendly. There was ongoing work to make sure that children were involved in the development of policies and processes in the Youth Justice Service.

Members highlighted that the report stated that disproportionality was a priority for the Service, and asked how this was being embedded into the work being delivered. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that, whilst the team did not choose the cohort, they did look at the effects of disproportionality, and liaised with the other aspects of the criminal justice system to understand how certain decisions were made and to provide challenge, as well as delivering training for judges and magistrates at Croydon Youth Court. The Service held pre-court meetings to try to divert children away from the court system, and wrote pre-sentence reports in a specific way to highlight disproportionality. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that there was careful thought behind the interventions being delivered for young black males to ensure that these were appropriate and culturally sensitive. A 'Positive Male' group had been established, led by successful black male role models, to deliver talks to young people, as well as a variety of other activities and trips. There was a Disproportionality Action Plan that reflected on disproportionality in the work of the Youth Justice Service, and ways in which this could be addressed.

Members asked about the buy in to the Plan from the Council's partners, and how actively they had contributed to its development. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team explained that all

partners had been individually consulted in the development of the plan, and had contributed towards different aspects. There were a number of important partnerships across the Plan, including social care, education, the police and community safety. The Voluntary and Community Sector organisations had also been robustly engaged with in the Plan's development and were seen as vital partners in its delivery, especially around prevention. The Sub-Committee asked how parents had been engaged and communicated with during the Plan's development. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team acknowledged that, whilst there had been some discussions with parents, there had been a gap in engaging parents in developing the Plan, and that this needed to be developed further.

Members asked about the Youth Justice Board and heard that this was attached to the Ministry of Justice, and that Croydon had to feed back KPI data over 14 areas quarterly to the Board. The Youth Justice Board reviewed this data and would discuss emerging trends or concerns with the Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team, in addition to regular meetings. Croydon had an assigned regional representative from the Board who sometimes attended the Youth Crime Board to see how this was functioning; the Board had to be informed where a serious incident occurred so that a report could be written for relevant ministers. The Board was comprised of professionals appointed by the Ministry of Justice.

The Sub-Committee asked how often issues of disproportionality were raised with the police or the courts. The Service Manager for the Youth Justice Service & Youth Engagement Team responded that this was not often, but also that it was not rare. Members heard that when these representations were made, they were often successful with the police who were open to suggested mitigations due to a good working relationship; there were processes to escalate cases where Youth Justice and the police did not agree. Where there was disproportionality in sentencing, this could be more difficult to identify due to complexity, but working relationships here were also strong and representations made by the Youth Justice Service were mostly acknowledged; however, it was noted that often decisions could not be reversed post sentencing.

Youth Safety Delivery Plan

Members asked how schools were being supported in delivering intervention and prevention work, and how well the Schools Forum was supporting this. The Director of Education explained that the Schools Forum was responsible for ensuring the Dedicated Schools Grant was allocated appropriately, and so would not be responsible for this. Secondary School Head teachers were engaged directly and regularly as a group, had been consulted on the Youth Safety Delivery Plan. All received a weekly newsletter which included information on Youth Safety. In addition to this, there were discussions with individual schools on local issues. The Head of the Violence Reduction Network had directly engaged primary schools during the development of the Youth Safety Delivery Plan. The Director of Education highlighted the

importance of schools approaching the Council to discuss any issues of concern.

The Head of the Violence Reduction Network explained that learning from the Community Safety Strategy, Vulnerable Adults Thematic Review, and the Serious Practice Review had been embedded in the Youth Safety Delivery Plan. It was explained that it had identified that there needed to be improvement in communication between all agencies involved in Youth Safety, as well as greater input and collaboration from the resident community.

The Sub-Committee asked what success would look like, and what outcomes the Plan intended to achieve by 2026. The Head of the Violence Reduction Network explained that they hoped outcomes should include fewer young people injured or entering the criminal justice system, residents feeling safer, and improved collaboration across the partnership and with the community and residents of Croydon. Members heard that this would be monitored through both hard data, and qualitative data collected through surveys.

Members asked about the role being played by Children's Social Care in prevention and intervention work. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that the Youth Safety Delivery Plan was primarily around outward facing early intervention, and engaging the community and partners in thinking about youth safety and their own responsibilities in delivering it. Children's services would be involved where there were increasing concerns about safety and there were multiagency conversations taking place to look at what the harms, needs and risks were; this included the relaunch of the ['Threshold of Need'](#) document. Children's services were involved across the piece in early intervention work, and non-violent resistance training was being delivered to show how situations could be de-escalated. The Sub-Committee heard that there had been substantial joint working in the development of Youth Safety Plan, including with Children's' Social Care, Education and SEND, and with residents and parents across localities to gather their views on how to make communities safer. The Corporate Director of CYPE explained that the partnership approach was important to ensure that the joint responsibility for safeguarding and youth safety was felt and prioritised by all partners.

The Chair asked where and when interventions were happening, and how it was being identified that interventions needed to happen. The Head of the Violence Reduction Network explained that interventions were taking place all of the time, whether this be via statutory partners, community groups or members of the public. Interventions were taking place in schools, homes, GPs, community groups, community centres and public spaces; it was stated that interventions could and were taking place anywhere that there was an opportunity for engagement with a young person. These areas were identified by the partnership and those delivering services, alongside anti-social behaviour and police data, to recognise areas of need and to deploy appropriate resources.

Members asked about the reliance on partnership working, and how confident officers were that this would remain strong for the duration of the Plan. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety explained that they had been encouraged by the collaboration, communication and co-creation that had gone into the development of the Plan. The Sub-Committee heard the example of the Church Street hotspot, with it explained how partners had all engaged young people in a collaborative response to change the dynamic and reduce anti-social behaviour in this area. Members asked if hotspots had returned after targeted interventions, had moved, or if the impact had been more sustained. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety explained that partnership working with police and local knowledge were important in making sure hotspots did not simply return or relocate. The Head of the Violence Reduction Network agreed and explained that there were daily meetings with the police, as well as Community and Voluntary Sector organisations on standby to deploy in certain areas, in addition to the contributions of the Youth Engagement Service. The importance of using both data and lived experience were highlighted as significant tools for the partners in delivering effective interventions and responses. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety responded to questions about displacement and explained that Ward Panels were important ways for residents to feedback local knowledge to the police, which in turn would feed back into the partnership to inform targeted responses.

Members highlighted the reducing resources of all partners. The Head of the Violence Reduction Network acknowledged this and highlighted the importance of strong communication between partners to allocate limited resources in the places that they could have the biggest impact

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People emphasised the importance of Children's Social Care, Community Safety and the Violence Reduction Network conducting strong joined up partnership working in delivering better youth safety in the borough. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety echoed this and recognised the important contributions of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations toward delivering youth safety.

Conclusions

The Sub-Committee thanked the officers and Cabinet Members for attending and sharing open and honest responses to Member's questions.

The Sub-Committee concluded that it would like to revisit the Youth Justice Plan early in its Work Programme for 24/25, with a particular focus on how parents and carers would be involved in the development of the Plan.

Recommendations

The Sub-Committee commended the inclusion of parents and carers in delivering prevention and intervention work in the Youth Justice Service, but

recommended that there should be greater involvement of parents and carers in the development of the next Youth Justice Plan for 24/25.

45/23 Scrutiny Work Programme 2023-24

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

It was highlighted that the dates in Appendix A from January onwards needed to be amended from '2023' to '2024'.

As discussed in the previous item, the Sub-Committee concluded that it would include the Youth Justice Plan 24/25 on its Work Programme for consideration early in the next financial year.

The meeting ended at 7.38 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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