

## Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 17 September 2019 at 7.30 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, Bernadette Khan, Gareth Streeter and  
Callton Young

#### **Co-optee Members**

Mr Leo Morrell (Voting Diocesan Representative), Ms Elaine Jones (Voting  
Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese)), Geoff Hopper (Voting Parent  
Governor Representative) and Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor  
Representative)

**Also Present:** Shelley Davies, Interim Director of Education  
Robert Henderson, Executive Director Children Families and Education  
Di Smith, Independent Chair, Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board

**Apologies:** Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick  
Dave Harvey

### PART A

#### **37/19 Apologies for absence**

Apologies received from Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick, Councillor Mary Croos  
was in attendance in his absence.  
Apologies received from Dave Harvey.

#### **38/19 Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held pm 18 June 2019 was agreed and signed as  
an accurate record.

#### **39/19 Disclosures of interest**

Councillor Callton Young declared that he was Chair of Governors at St Giles  
school.

#### **40/19 Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none

#### **41/19 Actions List Update**

The Chair confirmed that there were no outstanding items on the Action List to be discussed.

#### **42/19 Children's Improvement Plan Update**

The Executive Director of Children, Families and Education introduced the report and the following was noted:

- The department successfully negotiated a further monitoring visit for 16 October 2019 instead of the final inspection. This was agreed by Ofsted due to the changes made to the leadership of the department.
- Substantive progress had been made since January 2019 and the last monitoring visit noted an improvement in overall quality of practice.
- There were still some inconsistencies in practice in some areas of the service.
- Private fostering arrangements practice was highlighted as poor by Ofsted. Resourcing and further work was being done to address the inconsistencies presented.
- Child Protection cases had reduced from 600 a year ago to 100. This is a vast improvement.
- The quality and regularity of supervision of staff had improved although it was recognised there was still a lot of progress to be made.
- Caseloads in some services were still above target.
- The strategic vision of the service is clear, the department was focused on being a solutions led and not reactionary service.
- Increased investment was being made in Early Help to identify children and families that need help much earlier.

In response to a question for clarification on the assessment team vacancy rate of 80% and whether there were interim posts, officers responded that this was interim/agency rates. There had been some issues with senior management in the service which had been resolved. The team currently had excess number of staff which would be reduced gradually over the next few years.

It was questioned how confident the service was on the figures presented regarding the number of private fostering cases. Officers responded that whilst they were not confident that the figures were accurate, Croydon was doing well in trying to identify private fostering arrangements. In order to identify further cases, all partners needed to be vigilant and proactive in identification and reporting of concerns.

A Member commented that the report showed that 59% of children's immunisations were not up to date and questioned how this would be addressed. Officers responded that this was an area of priority and work was being done by Early Help through a joint workshop to look at current processes. Additionally exploring alternative ways of working together more effectively to address the numbers of children not immunised.

A question was raised on what the sustainability of the service would involve and officers responded that the transformation and sustainability of the service would be based on early intervention. Currently, as a result of the Ofsted judgement, Croydon was conducting more assessment and S47 than any other borough and using up a lot of resources. This was attributed to social workers are being over cautious. It was envisaged that this would improve in time through social workers and senior managements increased confidence in their judgements.

It was commented that the reduction of child protection cases was evidence that the service was moving in the right direction with its preventative work.

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

- It was evident that improvements were being made and pace was improving
- It was encouraging that Ofsted had agreed for another monitoring visit before the final visit as this allowed a further opportunity for the service to make necessary improvement in areas of inconsistent practice.
- There was an improvement on the quality of information that was being presented to the sub-committee.
- Going forward it was important that the sub-committee form an understanding of what a sustainable future for the service would look like in terms of how the service would function when the extra teams that were brought in to stabilise the service were no longer in place.
- The sub-committee to start to think about their effectiveness in scrutinising the service in the years to come.

#### **43/19 Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report**

The Chair of the Children Safeguarding Children Board presented the annual report and the following was noted:

- This was the final report ahead of the new safeguarding arrangement and it was extended to include information on activities over the summer months of 2019.
- The report outlined how the new arrangements would work, it has been published.
- Three multiagency priority groups had been established.
- In order for the partnership to be effective, they would need to challenge each other where appropriate.
- There had been substantial learning from the vulnerable adolescence review conducted and the review was influencing the work of other departments.
- The voice of the child was an underdeveloped area in Croydon and more had to be done.
- The formal launch of the new arrangements would be 25 November 2019, this coincides with Practice week and would be an opportunity for the partners to engage with staff.

It was asked what the Board's definition of a child 'off roll' was, officers responded that this was a child/children not in school for a number of reasons. The most vulnerable were those that had come off the school roll, stopped attending for various reasons and were not in another setting with the LA unable to track their whereabouts.

A Member highlighted concerns for children at risk of exclusions and suggested that a case be made for schools to be more accessible for children after 4pm through various therapeutic services. Officers said that issues of mental health were a strong theme highlighted by the review. Evidence did show that some schools handled exclusions very well and put in support over and beyond what was statutorily required.

It was further commented that training for exclusion boards was inconsistent with some very good and others not so. Officers said that it was important that the quality of the exclusions board be consistent. The Vulnerable Adolescence review drew a compelling correlation between children that had been excluded and those that went on to receive a criminal record.

The Chair asked for suggestions on topics that the sub-committee should be looking into and was not. Officers replied that they were unsure how clear the sub-committee was on exploitation and county lines and that this may be an area for the sub-committee to delve into further.

A Member asked what advice could be given to the sub-committee in order to fulfil its role to hold the partnership to account. Officers responded that the executive group was fundamental to the success of the partnership and they would meet every month. In its questioning, Members should be checking what the partnerships had done individually but also collectively. Members should ask the partnership to evidence that their meetings are solutions focused and impact positively on safeguarding. Additionally what they were doing to address long standing issues such as quality and quantity of health assessments of looked after children.

It was commented that the voice of the child examples were powerful in the report and going forward all reports should follow the same approach.

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

- It was important that the finding of the Vulnerable Adolescence Review inform the ongoing work that was to be undertaken in children's services
- It was encouraging that the Chair of the Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board would remain to support the partners in their new arrangements.
- It was important that Members meet to discuss the suggestion made on the topic for further exploration.

The Interim director of education presented the Draft report which was due to be presented at Cabinet and detailed the following:

- The mainstream pupil projection of available places vs school capacity and approve the proposed three year school supply strategy.
- The temporary expansion of Smitham Primary by one form of entry from September 2019.
- The delegated decision taken by the Executive Director of Children Families and Education , in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning to close St Andrew's CofE High school from August 2020.
- The updated SEND supply strategy for the next three academic years.
- Completion of the refurbishment of Cotelands PRU building at John Ruskin College.
- Croydon commissioned by the EFSA to lead on the delivery of Addington Valley Academy.
- An update on the partnership with Croydon College on the establishment of local post 16 places.
- The continued expansion of secondary autism enhanced learning provision at Oasis Arena.
- The proposed feasibility option regarding Red Gates, St Giles and Priory Special Schools.
- Update on fire safety works at Croydon community schools
- The updated Schools' Maintenance Plan for 2019/20.
- The updated Capital Programme Spend.
- The number of children who received their first or top three preference schools for 2018/19 admissions to primary and secondary school.

It was noted that there was limited capacity in the south of borough whilst the north has excess capacity and it was questioned if the LA had the ability to do anything regarding this. Officers said that whilst there were north and south planning of spaces, families could exercise their right to send their children to any school of their choice irrespective of location. This did make school place planning complicated and schools have to make decisions based on forecasts and seek advice on reduction of their PAN but the LA was clear on ensuring provision of enough school places for children in the borough.

A further question was asked on the record of a child's school journey and it was requested that officers provide a map of excess places. Officers responded that primary school places have to be allocated for children within a certain mileage of their home, this was not always the case with secondary allocation. Children were admitted based on admissions criteria and not catchment. It was agreed that Map of excess school places would be provided to Members.

It was commented that it was important that primary school children were allocated a local school place to enable them to walk to school and if unable to attend a local school, travel provisions to be made. Officers responded that there was enough school places for children to retain a local place but parents

were able to make decisions to send their children to schools out of the borough. Children are able to travel for free on buses and trams.

A Member questioned what was being done regarding schools that wanted to admit over their agreed PAN's due to them being their own admissions authority. Officers responded that relationships with schools were positive and they worked closely with them. The LA were confident in challenging decisions made by schools due to their strong partnership working and whilst they may not always have the impact or desired outcomes, the opportunity was there to challenge and question decision makers.

It was asked what percentage of pupils secured their first preference schools, officers responded that 64% of pupils secured their first and second preference school and this percentage was higher than many London boroughs. The aspiration was to improve on this percentage each year.

A Member asked if the current Housing Local Plan programme had affected pupil place planning. Officers said that pupil place planning was not compiled on the projections of children that may move into the borough. There was information and intelligence gathered that was taken into consideration in surplus planning of pupil places.

There were concerns raised that if predicted population failed to occur, it would affect the ability of new schools to recruit pupils. Officers acknowledged that there was a percentage of surplus places in the borough. The two new schools in the borough had opening through the free school route. The LA would have to work closely with them to provide support on the ability to recruit pupils.

It was further asked how confident that Addington Valley Academy would be open in line with its proposed timeline. Officers said that whilst it was a free school, they had been working closely with them to identify and provide support on issues, also taking into consideration every eventuality to minimise the effect of any delays on children.

It was highlighted that many children were still travelling to school by car and it was questioned whether alternative school travel could be built into future admissions policies. Officers responded that many schools were their own admissions authority and the Council did not own responsibility for their admissions policy. The LA was however able to encourage and support schools with their school travel plans, with some schools trialing pedestrian only zones and school walking buses schemes which had been successful. The Council was committed to continuing to encourage alternative travel to school.

The Chair commented that the strategy was robust but that in future, information be provided to the sub-committee in a simpler form due to the quantity of information contained in the report. Officers acknowledged that work would be undertaken on future presentation of the report to the sub-committee.

A vote of thanks was extended to the officers in the Education Department and that they were to be commended for their openness and transparency as well as the hard work they do and decisions made in often very difficult circumstances.

**Information Request by the Sub-Committee**

1. Pictorial map of excess school places in the borough.
2. Data on the number of primary age children that attend schools outside of the borough.

**45/19 What difference has this meeting made to Croydon's Children**

Members noted the following from the meeting:

- The Sub-Committee would like the opportunity to influence the 2019/2020 Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board Annual report in terms of what is presented and to ensure that the voice of the child was captured throughout the report.
- The discussions that took place and recommendations made on the Call-In meeting of the proposed closure of St Andrews school that took place at the Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting on 17 September 2019 was robust and sought accountability as intended from the decision makers.
- There has been notable improvements on Members' style of questioning, holding officers to account and asking them to demonstrate the effects on the community and children of their decisions.
- Officers can make improvements on how information and data is presented.
- The attendance of all members of the Sub-Committee at all meetings was important.

**46/19 Work Programme 2019/20**

The items on the agenda for 5 November 2019 meeting were confirmed.

It was also confirmed that the Sub-Committee would receive an interim not a final report from the Task and Finish group at the 5 November 2019 meeting.

**47/19 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm

**Signed:**

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**Date:**

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