

For general release

REPORT TO:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee 2 November 2021
SUBJECT:	Update on Children's Social Care, Families and Education Services
LEAD OFFICER:	Debbie Jones, Interim Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Councillor 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 is 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• Children's Continuous Improvement Plan 2021-2024

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, provides service updates from Children, Families and Education and budget updates.

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

- 2.1 The past two months have seen a steady increase in the volume of referrals to Children's Social Care with subsequent rise in children subject to CP plans, re referrals and some rise in local children in care. Analysis of these performance indicators show the impact of Covid placing strain on family functioning and the reduction of community services during lockdown affecting the pace of progress for some children. Lockdown easing has enabled the multi-agency partnership to recognise and respond to the hidden harm experienced by children during this period.
- 2.2 Recruitment of permanent experienced social workers continues to be a challenge for Croydon and across the London region; the move to virtual working has changed the landscape for interim recruitment reducing availability of local staff. Overall the rate of leavers from the department has reduced and the majority of posts are covered with temporary staff.
- 2.3 The Children in Care & Leaving Care restructure has been completed leading to a service area for Children in Care aged 0-16 and two Young People's Services for Children in Care and Care Experienced Adults aged 16 – 25. Practice knowledge and experience working with unaccompanied and separated asylum seeking children has been embedded within all services.
- 2.4 The use of hotels within the borough for refugees from Afghanistan has led to an increase in requests for help and age assessments at Lunar House.
- 2.5 The Young Croydon initiative continues with a specialist interim service manager appointed to develop the multi-agency response to children subjected to abuse through exploitation and the whole system response to contextual safeguarding risks.
- 2.6 In depth training in systemic practice for social care practitioners and managers has commenced with new cohorts for the 21/22 academic year. All ASYE's have successfully completed their year and moved to fully qualified status and a new group of newly qualified staff commenced their ASYE programme this month. Permanent appointments have been made to a service manager role in Children with Disabilities 0-18 Service and the Head of Service for Access; Support and Intervention.

3. Updates from Education

- 3.1 The services and staffing structures within the Education Directorate have remained stable. A few schools have had a Section 5 Ofsted Inspection, the first few since inspections were reinstated post lockdown. The reports will be published according to timescales.

3.2 The Children's Centres tender process has been undertaken and we are in the process of evaluation and decision making. There have been some delays to the process and the aim is for the new model to be in place by 1st Jan 2022

3.3 SEND

The Local Area SEND Inspection took place on 4th October for a week. The inspection was led by an HMI who was joined by an inspector from the CQC. The inspection focused on the local area's effectiveness across three areas:

1. Identification of children and young people with SEND
2. Assessment and meeting needs
3. Improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND

3.4 The inspection team spoke to front line practitioners, leaders, young people, parents / carers and staff in schools. The partnership across education, children's social care and health was evident throughout the inspection. The inspection letter will be published in December and we will provide a more detailed update at the CYP Scrutiny meeting following publication.

3.5 There remains positive impacts of the SEND Inclusion Funding approach and 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 Quarterly reporting on progress and risk against the actions in the plan will begin in January 2022, reported to and challenged by the Children and Young People Scrutiny sub-Committee to provide robust oversight.

4.3 The terms of reference for the Children's Continuous Improvement Board (CCIB) are currently being refreshed. The chairs of the CCIB and Children and Young People Scrutiny are meeting to ensure their work continues to be closely aligned.

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 the end of period 5. The reported forecast deficit balance by the end of 2021/22 financial year is now £23.351m. This represents an overall adverse movement of £3.512m.

5.1.2 The main reason for the adverse movement is the High Needs Block with an in year forecast overspend by £3.512m due to increase in pupil numbers with severe and complex needs within our special schools as well as the FE Colleges.

5.1.3 The local Authority (LA) has in place various 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 Position at Period 5

DSG Block	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2021/22
	Balance	Balance	In -year overspend	Forecast Balance
	£,000	£,000	£,000	£,000
Schools Block	-2,932	-1,423	0	-1,423
Early Years Block	-988	-2,960	0	-2,960
High Needs Block	18,478	24,222	3,512	27,734
Total	14,558	19,839	3,512	23,351

- 5.1.4 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 Deficit Recovery Plan.
- 5.1.5 Detailed analysis and the robustness of the SEND strategy was recently reported to the SEND board as well the relevant audit committee in a separate paper. That paper highlights some accomplishments, risk and all underlying assumptions embedded in the plan. An extract from that complex formula driven ESFA forecast template was presented to the School Forum on 4th October 2021.
- 5.1.6 The ‘do nothing’ option about the deficit would have left the LA with an in-year High Needs overspend of £5.430m instead of the reported position of £3.512m.

5.2 2021/22 Budget

- 5.2.1 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 471 on the 31 August 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.

5.2.2 For Children, Families and Education, as at 31 August 2021, it is assumed that net expenditure for the department will be below the £106.263m current budget. The forecast at Period 5 showed a net underspend of £408k. The negotiations with central government seeking additional funding for Asylum Seekers has been successful. The council has been awarded one-off grant funding of £2.35m in 2021/22. This has reduced the previously reported potential risk to the council to £2.2m.

5.3 Savings Programme

5.3.1 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 are being identified in year.

5.3.2 Transformation funding of £1.107m was approved by Cabinet in July 2021. This has been critical to the successful delivery of a number of savings projects.

MTFS Savings Ref	MTFS Savings Description	Savings at risk
		(£,000's)
CFE Sav 07	Improve Practice System Efficiency	534
CFE Total		534

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

APPENDICES: None