

# Public Document Pack

## Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 17 January 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillors Councillor Richard Chatterjee (Chair), Sue Bennett, Mike Bonello, Gayle Gander, Eunice O'Dame, Helen Redfern, Manju Shahul-Hameed and Catherine Wilson

#### Co-optee Members

Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)  
Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese))

#### Also

**Present:** Councillor Maria Gatland (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)  
Councillor Samir Dwesar

**Apologies:** Councillor Maddie Henson and Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative).

### PART A

#### 1/23 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absences were received from Councillor Maddie Henson and Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative).

#### 2/23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 1 November 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

#### 3/23 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest at the meeting.

#### 4/23 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

#### 5/23 Budget Scrutiny Challenge

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 13 to 30 of the agenda, which provided identified budget proposals for 2023/24. The Director Quality, Commissioning & Performance introduced the item and went through

the additional slides appended to these minutes and the presentation included in the agenda with detailed input from the Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention and the Head of Service, Social Work with Families and Children with Disabilities.

### Review of Front Door Services

The Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention responded to questions about whether the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team were co-located and informed Members that this was the case, with police officers, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA) and Education officers also sitting with MASH colleagues in Bernard Weatherill House. There was ongoing work to ensure there were increased presences from the Health and Housing departments, possibly through a hybrid solution. The Sub-Committee asked whether there was staff capacity to meet current demand, and the Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention explained that the service had been designed to meet current demand and needs and thought had gone into who the best teams were to respond to any given query. There was a significant number of staff in the MASH team with increased capacity through the Early Help triage team.

Members asked about the limited funding for the Social Workers in Schools (SWIS) programme and the future of the programme. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that schools participating in the programme saw significant benefits, and that SWIS was 80% funded by the Department for Education and 20% by the local authority and schools. Members heard that in an ideal world with no funding restrictions early help schemes designed to work with families where they were often were the most effective; schemes such as SWIS added significant costs due to having to operate from multiple locations. The Sub-Committee heard that in response to the financial challenges of Croydon and the challenge in recruiting qualified social workers, there had been a shift in approach to ensure that non-social worker roles could deal with cases, where appropriate, to free up qualified social worker capacity. This approach was supported by the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership, and had not been decided in isolation.

The Sub-Committee asked how demand on the Front Door compared with neighbouring boroughs. The Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention explained that meetings with neighbouring boroughs and police colleagues were regular but, as they were smaller than Croydon, demand was significantly less. Not all enquiries to the Front Door led to referrals into the Children's Social Care system and partnership working was important to ensure that other interventions and services in the Croydon community were tried first; this approach was embedded in current MASH transformation activity. Members asked if data was compared with statistical neighbours, and were informed that this was the case and was done on a regular basis through a monthly dashboard.

The Sub-Committee asked how the effectiveness of the new structure would be measured. The Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention

explained that practise would be considered within a quality assurance framework to look at the outcomes that were being achieved for children and an evidence based performance framework would be used to look at and scrutinise data across the different service areas. Members heard that a live dashboard was currently in development to support MASH activity, and would show data on the number of contacts coming in to the Front Door and the number of open cases. Soft data from service user feedback would continue to be collected throughout interventions as part of the quality assurance framework.

Members asked about efficiencies that had been identified from process improvements, and the Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention provided the example of consistent management oversight for cases for their duration, which allowed for decisions to be made in a more efficient and effective way that was safer for children. In response to questions about whether efficiencies were about service improvement or saving money, the Director of Children's Social Care explained that it was both but that safeguarding children and responding to urgent referrals was always the priority. The introduction of contact and referral officers meant that qualified social workers had additional capacity, as they would not need to focus on administrative tasks, such as requests for information from the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). The Early Help Triage was led by social workers who were experts in this area, and this meant that families were offered solutions quicker, which led to greater take up and reduced demand on social work services.

Members asked whether the Sub-Committee would have access to the dashboard. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that the dashboard was incredibly detailed and was not public, although the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People would have access to the dashboard. Information in the dashboard would be RAG rated against national standards.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People informed Members that they had spent time with the MASH team and had seen significant improvements and flexibility in the service. The Sub-Committee heard that officers were enthusiastic about this new way of working.

#### The impact of the reduction in spend on the adolescent service

The Sub-Committee asked about the Integrated Care Board funded roles and it was explained that these officers would work collaboratively with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) to decide the best plans for immediate follow-up intervention for children.

Members asked about disproportionality in safeguarding and whether officers were confident that early intervention was effective in reducing the number of young people in crisis. The Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention explained that there was a positive offer in Croydon across Young Croydon and Youth Justice Services with a wide variety of targeted early interventions

across the continuum of need. Work was ongoing with Community Safety colleagues on identifying contextualised risk and to identify hotspot areas and provide youth interventions to tackle risk factors in the community. In response to questions on how the effectiveness of this would be measured, the Sub-Committee heard that the quality assurance framework went across Children's Services and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for individual services were scrutinised on a regular basis.

The Sub-Committee commended the thought that had gone into the transformation of the service. Members asked how the voice of the service user had been incorporated into transformation and whether complaints had increased. The Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention responded that complaints were used to assess how well services were working, but that none had been received on the reconfiguration of the services specifically; relations with children and parents were overall good, with complaints managed largely at the stage one and two level. Service user engagement was more developed in the Youth Justice Service, and Young Croydon were working with the service to further develop this.

#### The review of care packages for children with disabilities aged 0-17

The Sub-Committee asked how many children were catered for by Calleydown Residential Home, and heard that currently there were 55 children who received overnight respite, and 10-15 children who received daytime respite. There were two children who were on the waiting list, but these children would begin receiving care later in the month. The capacity was seven children a night, but this fluctuated based on the needs of the individual children. Members heard that there were always at least four members of staff on site at any given time, but this also varied based on the needs of the individual children.

Members asked if domiciliary and respite agency carers received the London Living Wage and heard that this was the case. The Sub-Committee asked about joint funding arrangements and were informed that a monthly Joint Funding Panel, chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care, reviewed and challenged joint funding arrangements with Health. The Director Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that this was challenging and required a culture shift, but that partners were being engaged on multiple levels. Horizon scanning for opportunities through the South West London Integrated Care Board and Partnership were ongoing. The Sub-Committee asked, whether when service users were transferring between Children and Adults services, if it was seen that service users were eligible under the Adults framework when they had not been under the Children's framework. The Head of Service, Social Work with Families and Children with Disabilities responded that this was not something that had been noticed, but would be looked into outside of the meeting.

The Sub-Committee considered the case studies in the report and asked what happened when care packages were reduced. Members heard that officers had been unable to find an example of this happening in the last four months.

It was thought that there may have been some reductions in care packages at the beginning of the review in 2021, but now as circumstances changed this needed to be looked at in the context of what else was available to the service user; for example, there may have been a decrease in domiciliary care, but this could have been supplemented by an increase in respite care. The Head of Service, Social Work with Families and Children with Disabilities explained that the impact on the individuals and families was always considered, explained and mitigated.

Members asked about the increased level of savings that needed to be delivered in 2023/24, and the Head of Service, Social Work with Families and Children with Disabilities explained that the increased level of savings was based on the new Care Provider Register, introduced in July 2022, that it was thought would produce significant savings as long as demand for services remained stable.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained that a number of transformation projects were being looked into, with one of these being an expansion of the offer at Calleydown Residential Home. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that transformation funding would be used to fund an expert in house development to look at possible alterations or extensions that could provide additional bedrooms or the possibility of a self-contained flat on the grounds through the conversion of a garage. It was highlighted that these changes would require a number of approvals and capital expenditure.

Members asked about the use of data in the transformation of services and what this would mean for service users with the inherent risks of trying to maintain service levels with reduced resource. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that transformation of practise sat alongside data driven monitoring but that there was a difference between transformation of services and transformation funding. Transformation funding was limited, and looked to enable changes to a system or service to provide better outcomes in the long term. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that the biggest risk to the Council was the possibility of increased demand, which was not within the control of services and could lead to higher levels of risk held in families as a bottom line was reached. Members heard that this could lead to overspending as interventions that are more expensive are required.

The Sub-Committee asked about trends in demand and demand forecasting. The Head of Service, Access Support and Intervention explained that demand often spiked at points that coincided with the school calendar, and that COVID recovery was still ongoing and impacting trend figures, but it was thought that demand on services was increasing nationally. Members heard that there had been increases in the number of young people presenting with mental health needs, which was being monitored against the figures of statistical neighbours.

## **Conclusions**

The Sub-Committee were reassured by the answers provided by officers in the course of the meeting.

The Sub-Committee welcomed the possibility of a transformation project looking at expanding the offer at Calleydown Residential Home.

The Sub-Committee acknowledged the demand led nature of the services provided by the Children, Young People and Education Directorate and were reassured that officers were managing this well with the information that was available.

The Sub-Committee were encouraged by the work being done in the three areas that had been presented, but acknowledged that services were in new territory as recovery from COVID continued.

The Sub-Committee were hopeful that the departments succeeded in delivering the budget and intended savings for 2022/23 and 2023/24, and were encouraged that this was on track from the discussion in the meeting.

## **6/23 Cabinet Report - Education Estates Strategy**

The Sub-Committee considered a paper set out on pages 31 to 134 of the agenda, which provided a report due for consideration at Cabinet on 25 January 2023 on the Education Estates Strategy for Pre-Decision Scrutiny. The Director of Education introduced the Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admission, who summarised the report.

Members asked about the increase in children in Elective Home Education during COVID and whether these children would likely return to schools and, if so, whether there would be capacity to readmit these children. The Director of Education explained that there had been a capacity increase to monitor and support children in Elective Home Education at the Council, and that some parents / carers decide to apply for their child to attend mainstream schooling during the transition from primary to secondary school. These numbers are difficult to predict, and as such additional capacity was maintained at schools, but this needed to be carefully planned so as to not impact on schools' budgets.

The Sub-Committee asked about plans to deal with surplus school places and what powers the Council had to deal with this with a large number of academy schools in the borough. The Director of Education explained that the local authority was responsible for school place planning; the Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admission explained that the Council was working with all schools through meetings with schools with the highest surpluses, and through locality clusters, to discuss and plan work on school place planning. A School Organisation Advisory Board is being set up and

would be representative of all partners; this would look at the criteria of how the Council would need to work with schools to reduce places. Work had already been done with a number of schools to manage their surplus spaces, with the main route being a reduction in the Published Admission Number (PAN). Members heard from the Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admissions that the Council was still mindful of schools' overheads in terms of maintaining necessary surplus and were exploring ways to harness this spare capacity through provision of enhanced learning units, early years provision or community based activities. There were a number of other options that would be considered such as federation mergers, reductions in class sizes or reorganisation of schools.

The Head of Education Services explained that they worked with Local Authority (LA) Maintained Schools who were in or at risk of budget deficit; surplus places was a common issue for these schools. All LA Maintained Schools submitted a yearly budget forecast, and those predicting a deficit submitted monthly returns that were scrutinised. Members heard that termly meetings were held with the leadership teams of these schools to explore solutions. Additional support was also offered including using a Department for Education financial advisor, looking at class sizes and other possible efficiencies. Common issues with school finances were managing surplus places, rising energy costs, rising staff costs and managing staff absences. There was an escalating model of support that was used to ensure schools received the help they needed. The Director of Education explained that the picture in Croydon on surplus places largely reflected the national situation and that London authorities were in dialogue on this issue.

Members asked about the work with school clusters to look at surplus spaces and heard that these discussions were taking place on a locality basis and schools were looking to come up with additional solutions. Schools had come up with lists of things that could be done which took into account their own individual circumstances and collective solutions with other schools. The Sub-Committee asked about the methodology of working out surplus spaces, and noted predictions from last year had increased a large amount. The Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admission explained that these numbers were kept under review, and the Greater London Authority (GLA) had been commissioned to produce the predictions used in the report; these numbers were likely to change again next year as new data was made available. Members heard that surplus places were highest in the North of the borough and much lower in the South.

The Sub-Committee asked what support was provided to schools to decide whether, or when, to reduce their PAN. The Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admission explained that the Council helped schools to look at this by examining the trend of actual admissions against the PAN to ensure an informed decision was taken at the right time to ensure children were not disadvantaged and that the school remains in good financial health.

Members asked about the participation of schools in the cluster groups and how schools could be encouraged to take part. The Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admissions explained that attendance had been good, but where schools had not participated, individual discussions with these schools had been undertaken to ensure a better turnout.

The Sub-Committee asked about children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and issues with delayed assessments as well as the number of available SEND school places. The Director of Education explained that assessments were now 80% taking place within target timeframes, which had been a huge improvement; Members heard that support was also available to children awaiting assessments. Special school places had increased in a number of schools within the borough across all age ranges. The SEND Strategy priority is to educate children with special needs within borough, and where possible and appropriate, in mainstream schools. Data quality had improved which had allowed special school place planning to be much more effective, but parental choice is key in deciding provision and in, for some children and young people, suitable provision is out of borough.

Members asked about school maintenance, the need to vary where money was directed as a result of the current financial climate, and the lack of a slippage figure for 2024/25. The Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admission explained that these were indicative costs that could change, but that money for maintenance was received from the Department for Education, which was prioritised based on condition surveys. A number of projects had been delayed during the pandemic, and these would likely need to be re-procured due to increases in construction costs. The Director of Education explained that the slippage figure for 2024/25 would not be zero, but that was dependent on what happened in 2023/24.

Members asked about a timescale for when additional Enhanced Learning Provision would be provided. The Director of Education explained that this was still being investigated by looking at additional capacity created by surplus places and how this could be used to increase provision.

## **Conclusions**

The Sub-Committee were grateful for the helpful responses to Members questions on the paper and were overall reassured about the content of the Education Estates Strategy.

The Sub-Committee acknowledged the difficulties that the acadamisation of schools created in school place planning, and the likelihood that this would become more complex as more schools became academies.



The Sub-Committee considered a paper set out on pages 135 to 166 of the agenda, which provided a report due for consideration at Cabinet on 25 January 2023 on Education Standards 2022 for Pre-Decision Scrutiny. The Head of Education Services introduced and summarised the report. Members heard that there were limitations to what the Council could do to produce improvements, and the national context was that this responsibility was now largely focussed on the schools enacting improvements themselves and via school to school support. The Sub-Committee heard that an Education Partnership Board had first been proposed to schools in 2020 to a positive reception. The Board would be made up of schools and key partners who would work to agree what local priorities were and enable greater school-to-school support and collaborative working. A draft terms of reference had been drawn up with a working group made up from representatives from a number of different schools and school types. Soft engagement with key partners had begun with those schools which were thought would be most difficult to reach and engage with the work of the Board, and the response had been encouraging. The Board would be launched in spring 2023, ready for being operational from the commencement of the new academic year.

Members commended plans for the Council to encourage schools to work together through the Education Partnership Board, and asked how schools had been engaged, noting the heavy workloads of Head Teachers. The Head of Education Services explained that Head Teachers had been engaged, but this had been alongside Business Managers, HR leads and governors. The Sub-Committee heard that engagement with schools had improved over the pandemic as the Council had been offering additional support. The Director of Education explained that a weekly newsletter to schools had been started during the pandemic, and the appetite had been for this to continue; this included information on lots of areas and helped to maintain an open conversation with Head Teachers.

Members asked how many schools would be needed to buy into the work of the Education Partnership Board for it to be effective, and the Director of Education explained that it was important that all schools felt represented on the Board. The Education Partnership Board set up costs would be initially Council funded, and possibly, the Council could continue to contribute funding for the first year or two years; this was contrary to other areas where schools were required to pay into the model from its inception.

The Sub-Committee asked about young people who were not making expected progress from some specific groups. Members heard that some of these cohorts were very small, while others were very school and setting specific. The Head of Education Services explained that work was done with schools to identify cohorts of children who were underperforming to develop improvement action plans, to pair schools for peer support and to encourage collaborative solutions.

Members asked about 'Virtual Schools' support available for looked after children up to 18 and care leavers after 18. The Director of Education explained that this data could be provided through the [Annual Report of the Virtual School 2021-2022](#), which would be shared with members.

The Sub-Committee asked about high numbers of persistent absences from education, and asked who was responsible for reducing this, any available targets that could be shared, and how it was known that these children were safe. Members heard that this was a historic national issue, and that Croydon performed better than the national average. Central Government had identified this as an issue and a cross party national committee would be looking at this, but ultimately it was the schools responsibility to monitor this through welfare officers or commissioned services. The Director of Education explained that every school had a designated safeguarding lead and that the Education department worked closely with social services on children missing from education. The Director of Education explained that attendance proposals in the withdrawn White Paper were likely to return in new legislation at some point in the future. A monthly virtual attendance surgery would be rolled out in the coming year to assist schools with improving attendance.

Members asked whether there were lists of those who were persistently absent, and the Director of Education explained that the individual schools would have these lists, and the Education department maintained a list of those deemed a 'missing from education'. If children were missing school, the school would investigate this by performing a visit, and this could be escalated to the Council through referrals to the Front Door, which would be assessed through MASH.

The Sub-Committee asked how exclusions and suspensions numbers had been reduced. The Director of Education explained that conversations were happening with schools at a much earlier stage to see what additional support could be provided before a permanent exclusion took place. Members raised anecdotal reports of 'in house suspensions' and asked whether these had affected the numbers of exclusions and suspensions, and whether there were guidelines for schools on how this should be conducted. The Director of Education responded that there were positives around how schools provided additional support to children at risk of exclusion, and it was highlighted that the current focus was around inclusion of the most vulnerable students.

## **Conclusions**

The Sub-Committee welcomed the plans to introduce an Education Partnership Board.

The Sub-Committee were reassured by explanations provided on persistent absences from education.

The Sub-Committee were encouraged by the collaborative work-taking place between the Education and Children's departments and schools.

The Sub-Committee welcomed the results in the paper and the hard work of officers and schools in achieving these.

**8/23 Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 167 to 172 of the agenda, which provided the Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard.

On CYPE 24, Members heard that there was a responsibility to track and report on all 16 and 17 year olds in the borough; this included both 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)' and 'Not Known'. NEET levels had increased, but 'Not Known' levels had fallen which indicated data quality had improved. Of this cohort, around a third were not available to participate in Education, Employment or Training due to long-term illness, care duties or travel abroad. A large cohort were in this group due to mental health and anxiety, which was driving complexity in these groups, caused in part by education disruption during the pandemic. The largest cohort of NEETs were white males, but this did not strongly correlate with those missing attendance from schools.

On CYPE 01, the Sub-Committee heard that this was increased due to the quality of initial assessments; it was hoped that changes in processes in September 2022 to the Family Assessment Service would improve these figures over the long term, but it was acknowledged that recruitment for this area was difficult. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that partnership working was strong and a number of these re-referrals were often as a result of education non-attendance, which needed additional work through changes in practise.

On CYPE 05, the Chair explained that they would like to see an explanation of this figure in the report to the next Sub-Committee.

**9/23 Work Programme 2022/23**

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

The meeting ended at 9.31pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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# CYPE savings over 2022-25

The Medium Term Financial Strategy commits the directorate to making savings of £14.176m over 2022-25 as follows:

<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>
9,474	3,072	1,630	<b>14,176</b>

The details published in the cabinet budget reports in March 2022 is shown in the next slide

Saving Proposal Name	22/23	23/24	24/25	Total
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Reconfiguration Of Early Help Services	185	-	-	185
Review Of Children With Disabilities Care Packages	384	384	-	768
Reduction In Spend on Children In Care	1,654	1,385	-	3,039
Review Support For Young People Where Appeal Rights Exhausted	560	142	-	702
Improve Practice System Efficiency	1,450	385	-	1,835
Review Children's Centres Delivery Model	240	-	-	240
Reduce Non-Statutory Education Functions	221	-	-	221
Fees And Charges	1	-	-	1
Increase the Education Traded Offer	65	65	-	130
Youth Service review	-	392	-	392
Additional Grant Income - Staying Put	400	-	-	400
Implementation of new senior structures	91	-	-	91
Contract Savings	71	-	-	71
Previously Applied Growth reduction	3,000	330	330	3,660
NHS Funding	790	-	-	790
Refocusing Public Health funding - New Youth & Wellbeing Offer	300	-	-	300
Refocusing Public Health funding - Parenting Programmes	100	-	-	100
Increase in fees and charges	6	-	-	6
Refocusing Public Health funding - Parenting Programmes	-	465	-	465
Develop Family Support Centres and introduce external funding	-	-	1,300	1,300
<b>Children, Young People &amp; Education Savings 2022-25</b>	<b>9,474</b>	<b>3,072</b>	<b>1,630</b>	<b>14,176</b>