

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 15 October 2013 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chairman)
Councillors Eddy Arram, Graham Bass, Jan Buttinger, Richard Chatterjee,
Justin Cromie, Jason Cummings, Steve Hollands, Bernadette Khan, Michael
Neal and Manju Shahul-Hameed

Co-opted members:

Parent Governor Representatives: Mr James Collins
Mrs Vinoo John

Diocesan Representative: Mrs Elaine Jones

A21/13 MINUTES OF 9 JULY MEETING (Agenda item 1)

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meetings held on 9 July 2012
be signed as a correct record.

A22/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillors Terry Lenton (reserve: Cllr
Jan Buttinger), Clare George-Hilley and Donna Gray, and Mike Dawson
(teacher representative).

A23/13 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST (Agenda item 3)

Cllr Jason Cummings disclosed that he was Chair of Governors at
Woodlands CC and that his wife was employed by Jubilee Parenting
who deliver courses commissioned by the Council.

A24/13 URGENT BUSINESS (Agenda item 4)

There was none.

A25/13 EXEMPT ITEMS (Agenda item 5)

There were none.

The Chair explained that agenda items 6 and 7 would be taken together.

The following officers and stakeholders were in attendance and gave a brief introduction to their work:

- Sylvia McNamara, Director of Learning and Inclusion
- Kate Ambrosi, Improvement Advisor 14-19
- Julie Ralphs, Improvement Adviser Commissioning Standards and Quality Assurance
- Lisa McCance, Head of Economic Development
- Alan Wood, Skills and Employment officer
- Karen Ruby, Croydon Employer Engagement and Partnership Manager, JobCentre Plus
- David Byford, Apprenticeship and Employer Engagement Manager, John Ruskin College
- Maria Denton, Apprenticeship Hub, Croydon College
- Michael Manning Prior (Business and Education London South, which supports disadvantaged 14 to 24 year-olds and prepares them for adult and working life).

Members expressed their disappointment at the fact that no local businesses were represented at the meeting.

Two members of Croydon's Youth Council, Javell, a student at Lambeth College, and Lisa, a student at Croydon College, gave an overview of their experiences of seeking work.

Javell and Lisa were asked to describe their experience of exploring career options and looking for a job. Members heard that their greatest challenges were the struggle to find a job that fitted their interests and the complexity of the processes involved in applying for jobs. Concerns were also expressed about the quality of guidance provided by careers advisors. Young people felt strongly that processes needed to be simplified and early intervention provided to support young people.

Members asked what currently constituted an apprenticeship. They were advised that these were employer and industry-led and included the following elements:

- working side by side with an experienced member of staff and learning on the job
- following a training programme
- acquiring a qualification in English and numeracy if not already obtained
- developing their interpersonal skills

Members heard that level 2 "intermediate" apprenticeships lasted a minimum of 12 months and an average of 18 months and level 3 "advanced" apprenticeships took 18 months to 2 years to complete. The government is also introducing foundation degree level apprenticeships, mainly in scientific fields.

Members were advised that there had been 1758 completions or “achievements” in 2012-2013:

- 1000 at intermediate level
- 743 at advanced level
- 14 at higher level

However, the total participation levels are much higher: a total of 3919 young people are currently undergoing an apprenticeship in the borough. Members were advised that approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of apprenticeships end in a successful completion or “achievement”.

Members stated that many young people did not enjoy studying functional skills and failed this element of their apprenticeship. They asked what schools were doing to prepare young people to succeed in a level 2 apprenticeship. Officers stated that businesses taking on apprentices were being encouraged to become part of the solution. It was also emphasised that young people who took on work which they found interesting were less likely to drop out. However, perhaps the most significant development was the growing emphasis on pre-employment training to ensure that young people had adopted the skills and approach needed to succeed in their first job. Members were advised that pre-employment training was particularly critical to the success of individuals who were “NEET” (not in employment, education or training). However, while there was no shortage of pre-employment training provision, it was observed that not all relevant stakeholders knew of its existence.

Members enquired how parents of pupils were kept involved in the careers advice process. The importance of their involvement was acknowledged, not just in terms of providing guidance but also in terms of helping them to become work-ready (e.g. getting to work on time). Young people in attendance explained that the role of their parents was important, but that not all young people could count on such support. For instance, some parents worked long hours and were not able to support or monitor their children as well as they wished. In such cases, the young people felt that the role of schools became particularly important. However, the young people felt that schools were not always aware of the support needs of their pupils and occasionally failed to provide the necessary advice and guidance.

Young people commented that they were not always ready to use the training and work opportunities open to them, regardless of the encouragement of their parents. In addition, they observed that any breakdown in communications between children and their parents might make it difficult to appreciate and accept the advice and guidance offered.

Officers were asked how the education system helped young people to become work-ready at the end of their school studies. They stated that the National Curriculum was more knowledge-based than focused on soft skills such as work-readiness. They added that pupils who achieved good or excellent grades usually made a smooth transition to the work environment but that a lot of pupils at the other end of the spectrum were not work-ready. Members asserted that schools had to do more than simply help young people achieve good grades, and that they had to start early to develop young people’s “soft skills”. They agreed that schools needed to take careers advice and employability seriously, and that they needed to guide young people to

subjects that would help young people to get a job and to realistic career choices. “Going in the right direction?”, the report of the Ofsted survey on the provision of independent and impartial careers guidance published in September 2013, stated that the provision of careers guidance by secondary schools was currently of insufficient quality.

Members noted that governors of Croydon schools felt that they had no role in developing careers guidance in their establishments. Officers informed members that future Ofsted inspections would include discussions with governors on the quality of careers advice at their schools.

Members heard that John Ruskin College had organised CV writing and interview practice to its pupils. Critical feedback on CVs and interview practice had been provided by local employers. Following the success of this initiative, the programme was being extended to more young people.

The representative of John Ruskin College stated that some of the key requirements of local employers were for young people to turn up on time to work, wear appropriate clothing and contribute appropriately to the work of the team they were in.

Members heard that there was more and more joint work between colleges on employability and careers advice, in order to make the best possible use of limited resources and officer time. They asked whether there existed a traded service to improve young people’s employability, and were advised that the Council did not offer any, although such services were offered by a wide range of companies such as CFBT.

Members discussed the careers advice given to young people by secondary schools. Officers explained that school exam results were the driver for schools, and that these establishments tended to advise pupils to stay on to take further qualifications and gain good grades. It was emphasised that this was not necessarily the most appropriate choice for all pupils. Members felt that academic attainment was only a first step on the road to a career and that pupils needed to understand what happened next, what the opportunities were and how to engage with them. They added that one could start “at the shop floor” and work one’s way up through one’s own efforts.

Members discussed work experience and acknowledged its role in giving a young people the opportunity to experience a working environment and the discipline required of staff. Officers highlighted work experience opportunities in retail, particularly during seasonal highs.

Members asked the representative of JobCentre Plus whether it advertised weekend jobs for young people and were advised that much fewer such opportunities were advertised these days. Officers providing support to the Youth Council stated that many of its young members gained work experience through such work as regular paper rounds and working in MacDonald’s.

Officers also highlighted the usefulness of volunteering work in helping young people gain work experience. However, it was stressed that involving young people in volunteering work could carry safeguarding risks, and that their duties and working conditions had to be carefully managed and monitored.

Officers were questioned regarding statistics on disabled NEET pupils as members felt that agencies were losing track of them. Officers explained that from the age of 16, it was national policy for young people to have to “self-declare” any disabilities and that any statistics relating to disabled young people may therefore be very unreliable. Members felt that it was somewhat demanding to require a young disabled person, with perhaps unclear special needs, to self-declare to various agencies. However, Members were informed that disabled young people were very likely to receive targeted guidance through a number of relevant service providers and networks to which they had previously been known.

Members expressed concerns about young people who started a college course but were unaccustomed to the freedom and need for self-discipline in this adult environment. Many dropped out of their courses and ended up “NEET”. The representative of John Ruskin College stated that colleges needed to take responsibility for such students and needed to improve their support to them. Members were advised by officers that partnership working between schools and colleges in this respect was improving all the time.

Members asked what could be done to improve young people’s enthusiasm for a career. The reply from young people and the JobCentre Plus representative was that employers needed to work with schools to give young people an opportunity to get a flavour of the various careers available to them. Council officers added that young people needed to become more aware of career pathways and progression routes. For instance, starting as a sales assistant might be the very first step in a successful career in retail, which will involve a wide range of knowledge and skills.

Officers highlighted the employment opportunities coming to Croydon with the Westfield Hammerson development. It was emphasised that preparations for schools and colleges to equip local pupils with the appropriate qualifications and training packages needed to be made in good time, well ahead of the start of works in the centre of Croydon and relevant job recruitment.

Employment opportunities with local small and medium enterprises (SME) were discussed. It was observed that many young people failed to obtain work with such firms because they did not understand or access their communication networks. Members asked whether there was a model for helping SMEs to take on young people. However, it was pointed out that while major companies were embracing apprenticeships, this was not the case with SMEs which were concerned with the high risk of employing a young person who might not have the right work ethic and might not pull his/her weight.

Members enquired whether colleges should take responsibility for directing young people to lucrative fields of work rather than allow them to select a career path with very limited vacancies and chances of prosperity. Officers observed that colleges were under significant pressure to maintain a high student retention rate and might put themselves at risk if they sought to divert students from their chosen course of study. However, there were signs that Ofsted was beginning to value efforts to direct young people to training that was likely to secure a job and a good income. It was also noted that the range of 6th form courses was currently driven by student numbers, and that there

was a disconnect between the interests of schools and those of local businesses and Ofsted.

Members stated that they felt schools did not understand the nature of various career paths in the borough. However, the representative of John Ruskin College stated that his establishment offered apprenticeships in a number of fields relevant to the building industry, facilities management and other areas related to the needs of the Westfield and Hammerson development.

Officers were questioned regarding the tracking of students' destinations after the end of their school studies, which is a statutory local authority responsibility. They explained that the reduction in funding allocated to Youth Support and School Improvement would impact substantially on the Council's ability to collect the data effectively. However, officers were working to get a better inflow of data from organisations which were known to have it.

Officers and stakeholders were thanked for attending the meeting.

This agenda item ended with the following observations:

- Members acknowledged the good practice demonstrated by officers, and particularly the excellent training and support provided at John Ruskin College. They hoped that other schools might adopt their good practice through the partnership of which the college was a member
- Both parents and schools need to be involved in providing good support to young people to help them choose a career path that will bring them prosperity
- Schools have to raise the aspirations of young people in Croydon and improve their understanding of the various work-streams available to them
- Schools and businesses need to work closer together to ensure that students choose and obtain appropriate and useful qualifications and gain a better understanding of the various career paths available to them
- Head teachers need to acquire a greater awareness of the career opportunities and pathways available in areas such as retail
- The forthcoming Westfield and Hammerson development present a range of employment opportunities, and colleges need to offer the appropriate courses and apprenticeships to young people in Croydon to enable them to obtain employment in this major project
- Governor services need to improve the knowledge and understanding of local governors with regard to good practice in providing good quality, independent and impartial careers advice
- The council, as an employer, procurer and partner in capital projects, needs to be involved in securing employment for young people in the borough
- The 14+ Schools and Colleges Partnership and the Skills and Employment Strategy Group need to work closely together to maximise effective joint work and information sharing between schools, vocational training establishments and local businesses (including SMEs), to ensure that all parties maintain a good awareness of the needs of the economy as well as the training and employment opportunities available to school and college leavers

Members agreed to add a follow-up agenda item on youth employability to the list of suggestions for the 2014-2015 Scrutiny work programme, with an emphasis on the needs of local employers. They asked for managers from Veolia, Interserve and the health services to be invited to the relevant meeting.

They also asked for an update on job recruitment as part of big local development projects to be included in this item.

Members also requested that the following information be sent to them:

- data on the destinations of school leavers *residing in Croydon*
- a breakdown on apprenticeship statistics by apprenticeship *level*

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) A follow-up agenda item on youth employability be added to the list of suggestions for the 2014-2015 Scrutiny work programme, with an emphasis on the needs of local employers and that managers from Veolia, Interserve and the health services be invited to the relevant meeting
- 2) An update on job recruitment as part of big local development projects be included in the above item
- 3) Information on the destinations of school leavers residing in Croydon and a breakdown of apprenticeship statistics by apprenticeship level be provided to members of the sub-committee

A27/13 SUB-COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013-2014 (Agenda item 8)

The work programme for the following meeting was agreed.

A request was also made for the 2012-2013 school exam results to be provided to the 11 February meeting of the sub-committee. The Chair undertook to consider this request.

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm