

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3 February 2015 at 6.30pm**

### **WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A**

**Present:** Councillor Sara Bashford (Chairman)  
Councillors Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chairman), Margaret Bird, Simon Brew,  
Bernadette Khan, Matthew Kyeremeh and Stephen Mann

Co-opted members:

Parent Governor Representative	James Collins
Parent Governor representative	Vinoo John
Teacher Representative	Dave Harvey

**Also in attendance:** Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children,  
Families and Learning, and Councillor Joy Prince

#### **A01/15 MINUTES**

##### **RESOLVED THAT:**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2014 be signed as a correct record.

#### **A02/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were sent by Elaine Jones (Diocesan Representative) and by Vinoo John for early departure.

#### **A03/15 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **A04/15 URGENT BUSINESS**

There was none.

#### **A05/15 EXEMPT ITEMS**

There were none.

#### **A06/15 QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING (agenda item 6)**

The following members and officers were in attendance:

- Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member, Children Families and Learning
- Paul Greenhalgh, Acting Executive Director - People
- David Butler, Strategic Lead, Teaching and Learning, CFL
- Tony Murphy, Head of Learning Access
- Lisa Taylor, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer

Councillor Alisa Flemming gave a presentation regarding her priorities for

2015 / 2016. She outlined the opportunities and challenges emerging in 2015, which included the following:

- DCLG funding for “Best Start”
- The provision of school places for new entrants
- Education quality
- The development and promotion of CALAT, Croydon’s adult learning and training service.

Councillor Alisa Flemming highlighted progress on manifesto commitments, which included the following:

- raising the percentage of children getting a place in a school of choice from 64% (in summer 2012) to 85%
- implementing the Playstreets initiative
- launching the “Octavo partnership ” in April 2015
- improving employment opportunities in the borough through training provision by CALAT
- Securing national government funding to build new schools
- improving the youth offer in the borough

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that work was required with regard to the youth offer as traditional youth clubs were being phased out, and emphasised that she wanted local young people’s views to be heard on any new models of youth provision to be chosen. Asked what type of youth provision was being considered, the Cabinet Member stated that the council was exploring a community asset based approach and that it was keen to ensure that all young people had *good access* to such services. In addition, Cllr Flemming stressed that the key priority for service development was to ensure that it was sustainable in the long term.

The Cabinet Member highlighted youth unemployment as a key issue for the borough and stressed that it was important to understand what type of employment, training and work experience was appropriate for them.

The Cabinet Member held up the Youth Parliament as an example of excellent practice, but stated that youth engagement also needed to seek to involve the “hard to reach”. Asked what work was being carried out to engage them, Cllr Flemming praised the work of the council’s outreach team, which operate in various areas where they know young people in need are to be found. Members heard that the outreach team also carried out joint work with the Youth Offending Service.

Members questioned the Cabinet Member on the incidence of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and asked how the situation in Croydon was being assessed. They were advised that the recently appointed CSE coordinator would liaise with a wide range of agencies, faith groups, etc. to build an accurate picture of the risks to children in the borough. Much child sexual exploitation in Croydon tends to be peer on peer exploitation in gangs, so the coordinator would need to work closely with the Youth Offending Service.

Members turned their focus to the Children’s and Adolescents’ Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The Cabinet Members stressed that there was a need to remove the curtain of stigma that a referral to this service

represented for many parents. It was also acknowledged that the funding of this service needed to be improved.

Concerns were expressed about the risks inherent to giving autonomy to academies without retaining the counterbalance of oversight, as reportedly stated at the 30 January 2015 meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. Cllr Flemming remarked, however, that autonomy was not a case of “one size fits all” and that autonomy could be beneficial in enabling academies to develop their own good practice. She added that academies were now working better with the local authority and engaging better with parents.

The Cabinet Member was questioned on school admissions. A member of the committee enquired what percentage of offers of school places were refused, and officers undertook to seek this information after the meeting. Officers explained that, as stated in the reported presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2015 Cabinet meeting, demand would continue to grow over the following two or three years and then lessen, and that appropriate provision had been planned to meet it.

The Cabinet Member was thanked for her presentation and invited to attend the rest of the meeting.

#### **A07/15 EDUCATION QUALITY AND STANDARDS (agenda item 7)**

Attendance was the same as for the previous agenda item.

Members scrutinised pupils’ achievement at the Early Years Foundation Stage and schools’ efforts to achieve an overall improvement as well as to narrow the gap between low and high achievers. Officers stated that performance had improved during the previous year but needed to make further progress. The east of the borough was showing the highest percentage improvements in all areas of learning thanks in part to the Early Learning Development Programme, which has focused in particular on encouraging the development of children’s speech and understanding. Members heard that the council was capturing lessons from this learning community, while gradually stepping back and letting school staff take over this work.

Members questioned officers regarding educational achievement in the north of the borough and asked how effective schools were at raising children’s aspirations. Officers replied that the north of the borough had more schools that had been judged by Ofsted as “good” and “outstanding” than the south of the borough, but acknowledged a resource issue at Key Stage 2. They advised Members that “London Challenge” had channelled significant resources to improve the performance of *inner London* schools and stated that increased funding was now being directed to Croydon’s schools in recognition of the fact that its population had increasing levels of social deprivation. In 2015-2016, the borough was due to receive an additional £13.25m in Dedicated Schools Grant to address this.

Members asked whether the good practice established by the borough’s Virtual School could be used to tackle under-achievement in some

schools. The Cabinet Member concurred and praised the good mentoring and practical support the Virtual School provided. She stressed that maintained schools in the borough needed to challenge and support high achieving children and young people, or their parents would opt to send their children to an independent school or a high achieving establishment outside the borough.

It was highlighted that approximately half of Croydon's children and young people left maintained schools in Croydon at Key Stage 2 for an establishment outside the borough or in the independent sector. Members asked why parents chose to send their pupils to schools outside the borough. Officers explained that their choices were based on perception, which was coloured in part by the reading of negative reporting in the local press rather than by performance, which had improved significantly in recent years. Members heard that officers had been working with the press office to redress the balance and report on the successes of schools in the borough.

Members commented on the provision of school performance statistics by "statistical neighbours" such as Enfield, Ealing or Birmingham and commented that parents would be more interested in obtaining statistics from geographical neighbours as this might influence their choice of school. Officers explained that "statistical neighbours" helped establish a context that took in factors such as the level of local social deprivation and weighed up educational performance against these.

Officers observed that Ofsted was developing an increased focus on the needs of special groups such as talented pupils and that schools had to demonstrate the provision of adequate support for them. They added that it was important for schools to inspire their pupils to have the highest possible aspirations and highlighted the collaboration between schools such as Trinity with Edenham and Shirley Park Oasis to prepare pupils for the Oxbridge entrance examination.

Members also heard that the School Council had allocated funding for special needs and training opportunities for young people. It was suggested that training on writing "code" should be prioritised to improve the employability of the borough's children in the field of information technology.

Officers were asked what key criteria made a real difference to the performance of schools and replied that these were good leadership and good quality of teaching. They acknowledged that a number of schools had been "coasting" in previous years, but were now being supported to make significant improvements through "School Progress Review Meetings". The list of these schools had been provided to Members prior to the meeting. Members questioned officers on the role of parents in promoting good educational performance and were told that a positive partnership between parents and schools were an important aspect of good leadership.

Members examined school exclusions over the last year and observed that they had fallen significantly, especially among statemented pupils. Officers explained that this fall was due mainly to the positive work

being carried by the Fair Access Panel, which brings together schools from around the borough, to negotiate and manage suitable moves and other measures for pupils with behavioural issues.

#### **A08/15 EDUCATION BUDGET 2015-2016 (agenda item 7)**

Attendance was the same as for the previous agenda item.

Members noted that the High Needs draft budget of £51.9m had been agreed at the Schools Forum in December 2014 and that the draft allocation indicated that there would be an increase in funding of £500,000. They were given assurances that this budget would be ring-fenced.

Members remarked that the commitment by central government to a five year freeze in funding actually represented a 10% cut in real terms. Officers commented that this actually represented a loss in the link to inflation and that work on the impact of these cuts to local budgets would commence later in 2015.

Members asked why the council had to spend so much in a capital programme on building academies. Officers explained that, whatever the mechanism or sponsor, the council's responsibility was to provide *school places*.

Members discussed differences in funding school interventions, where performance had been unsatisfactory, and school improvement services, to drive up standards. They were advised that the former were a statutory council duty and were resourced through the Council's General Fund and that the latter were optional and provided through a traded service ("Octavo").

Members enquired about procedures available to tackle under-achieving academies. They were advised that the first steps would be taken informally by the council's link advisor, who maintains relationships between the council and schools and has a good understanding of their issues. Under-performance and other significant issues would then be tackled through a formal letter from the council to the school in question. Members were reminded that the newly appointed Regional Commissioner for London would have ultimate responsibility for dealing with academies with performance issues.

The Cabinet Member and officers were thanked for attending the meeting.

#### **A09/15 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING (agenda item 9)**

Members agreed the recommendations with the following amendment to recommendation 6 and the addition of a further recommendation:

*'Ask senior officers to provide assurances to Scrutiny that **staff front-line workers** are able to appropriately escalate concerns where this may be necessary'*

*'(that the council should) provide Scrutiny with up-to-date research findings regarding children's safeguarding issues'*

**RESOLVED:** that the following recommendations be made to the Cabinet and Croydon Safeguarding Children Board:

The Council should:

1. Run a greater range of learning and development events to help Members improve their understanding of the specific issues involved in child protection, including child sexual exploitation and missing children, and ensure that opportunities are provided to non-executive Members to carry out visits to gain a deeper understanding of child protection and safeguarding work
2. Provide Members with written guidance to clarify their role in safeguarding, covering the safeguarding of children and adults, and procedures to follow to raise and track concerns
3. Consider the appointment of a safeguarding champion to work alongside the portfolio holder and deputy to work across children's and adults' safeguarding issues and to champion the needs of children, young people and adults who are in need of protection
4. Provide Members, and in particular the Cabinet Member and deputy, with more opportunities to directly hear the voice of the child or young person on child protection issues while recognising the sensitivity of engaging with children and young people at risk
5. Strengthen the link between Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee and the Corporate Parenting Panel by sharing Part A papers to the constituents of both groups
6. Ask senior officers to provide assurances to Scrutiny that front-line workers are able to appropriately escalate concerns where this may be necessary
7. Provide Scrutiny with up-to-date research findings regarding children's safeguarding issues

The Croydon Safeguarding Children Board should be asked to consider the following:

1. To provide more explicit regular reporting to Members on child sexual exploitation, for example, through additional reports to Cabinet or Scrutiny for discussion rather than for noting, and through fuller reporting of this issue in the annual report of the Local Safeguarding Children Board
2. To provide assurance to Scrutiny Members that procedures are in place which enable effective communication channels between meetings so that urgent action can be taken where necessary
3. To conduct an annual survey of non-statutory organisations about any concerns or trends that need to be voiced, to represent the voice of the child

**A10 /15 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (agenda item 10)**

Members confirmed the work programme for the 18 March meeting.

They agreed that the item on youth employment be deferred to a future meeting to give more time to the presentation of the findings of the mini-review and the council's children's social services.

The following topics were also suggested for future scrutiny:

- Children's and Adolescents' Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- The transition from children's social care to adult social care
- Children who are victims of Domestic Abuse
- The Youth offer
- The impact of parenting on educational achievement

**RESOLVED:** that the work programme be updated in line with the change set out above and that the suggestions for future scrutiny be added to the draft work programme for 2015-2016.

**PART B**

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None  
7

The meeting ended at 9.35pm