

## MEETING OF THE

### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 15 March 2016 at 6.30pm

#### WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

**Present:** Councillor Sara Bashford (Chairman)  
Councillors Jamie Audsley, Margaret Bird, Simon Brew,  
Bernadette Khan, Matthew Kyeremeh, Andrew Pelling and David Wood

Co-optees:  
Vinoos John and Leo Morrell

**Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning
- Councillor Shafi Khan, Deputee Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning
- Councillor Maria Gatland, Shadow Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning

**A11/16 Welcome and Apologies for absence (agenda item 1)**

Apologies were received from Councillor Sean Fitzsimons, Elaine Jones, Dave Harvey and James Collins, and for lateness from Councillor Margaret Bird.

Councillor David Wood stood in for Cllr Fitzsimons.

**A12/16 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2016 (Agenda item 2)**

The minutes were agreed.

**RESOLVED THAT:** the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2016 be signed as a correct record.

**A13/16 Disclosures of interest (agenda item 3)**

There were none.

**A14/16 Urgent business (agenda item 4)**

There was none.

**A15/16 Exempt items (agenda item 5)**

There were none.

**A16/16 The Education Budget (Agenda Item 6)**

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Lisa Taylor, Head of Finance, School Place Planning and Admissions
- Jenny Duxbury, Head of Service, School Place Planning and Admissions

The Chair conveyed the concerns expressed by co-optee James Collins concerning council borrowing to build academies, which sub-committee members had understood should be funded by central government. She asked why the council was borrowing £6.5m to build a new school to be run by the Harris Foundation. Officers explained that the rationale was set out in the report which was presented to Cabinet on 18 January 2016 and that the council had successfully secured "Targetted Basic Needs" funding, although the Harris Federation would have to top up this sum. Officers explained that the Federation did not have the resources to fund the Harris Purley Way school in full.

Officers confirmed that all brand-new schools were to be free schools, not academies, and would be fully funded by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). Members asked whether school admissions to free schools were based on different regulations from those to academies. Officers explained that all were bound by the School Admissions Code, and that the Local Education Authority had a role in ensuring compliance to it. Members asked to be provided with a copy of the document setting out the school admission criteria.

Officers were thanked for attending the meeting.

**A17/16 Children's Social Care and Early Help (Agenda item 7)**

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Ian Lewis, Director of Children and Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care
- Moira Keen, Head of Children in Need
- Paul Chadwick, Head of Looked After Children and Resources
- Gavin Swann, Head of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Quality Assurance
- Dwynwen Stepien, Head of Early Intervention and Family Support

The Director of Children and Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care introduced this agenda item by emphasizing the importance of early intervention in providing effective children's social care. He also highlighted the service's systemic approach based on the Munro report, which empowered social care staff to work through relationships.

The Head of Early Intervention and Family Support explained how support was escalated in the early stages according to need from universal services to early

help advisors and on to the Family Resilience Service. She highlighted the Best Start initiative, to be launched on 1 April 2016 to provide pro-active support to young families. Members were advised Officers that there were 500-600 births in the borough every month, that 29,500 of the population were aged 0-5 years old and that their level of need was on the rise.

Members questioned officers regarding measures to tackle local schools' low take-up of early help assessments. They replied that the Education sub-group in the Children Safeguarding Board had challenged schools which had not made use of Early Help Assessments and that council officers had formally asked schools to provide information on the number of Early Help Assessments they had sought. As a result of these measures, 80% of schools in the borough are now engaging with this process. In addition, members were advised that 100 schools had signed up to use the services of a Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence co-ordinator in response to the rise in the numbers of children and young people affected by such abuse.

Members asked *why* a number of schools had not taken up early help assessments, and were informed that some found the workload they involved challenging. It was stressed that schools had sufficient resources to use such assessments, through their Pupil Premium funding. Officers stated that the voluntary sector could also be used to carry out some of this work to keep expenses down. They stated that the Education sub-group of Safeguarding Children Board would be carrying out a study of the use of Early Help Assessments by schools.

Asked how the council was going about keeping children within their families, officers explained that the Systemic Approach had enabled them to reduce the number of local children in care from 450 in 2015 to 385 this year, thus bucking the national trend. However, they admitted that the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children being looked after by Croydon Council remained high.

Members questioned officers about the work of Systemic Psychotherapists and were advised that their role was to develop the skills of social workers, being a role model to them, and transforming social care theory into practice. This officer also supports group supervision in parts of the service where there is no allocated Consultant Practitioner.

Members scrutinized current recruitment trends and staffing levels. Officers explained that there had been a positive response to the latest recruitment drive, which aimed to secure a good number of qualified permanent staff. As a result, vacancies fell from 28% to 25% in September 2015. The highest number of vacancies is in the assessment service as the work is very demanding. The director expressed the hope that success in the Best Start initiative would reduce the need for social care assessments and the pressure on staff conducting these.

Members questioned officers on the risk of service users becoming dependent on the support they receive. Officers explained that efforts were being made to develop self-sufficiency and mutual help among service users. For instance, children's centres now encourage families to get together to help each other, and parenting programmes increasingly encourage parents to become

facilitators with supervision and safeguarding training.

Members asked officers how the children's social care service was improving as a whole. The Director explained that expectations were rising as a result of the National Social Care Reform and that about 75% of inspections countrywide were judged to be "inadequate" or to "require improvement". He added that Croydon had been judged "adequate" and was improving, albeit at a slow rate. Some areas of the service are good, but consistency of provision is still an issue, partly as services rely on partners which are struggling with resourcing issues. Close joint work is being carried out with the council's Gateway project to maximize the resources of the families receiving social care.

Asked for information regarding the characteristics of unaccompanied asylum seeking children being looked after by the council, officers explained that there were over 750 and that there were five boys for every girl. Over 85 of these are at university. The group struggling most to thrive are the Albanian boys, who arrive in the UK with low educational and skills levels.

Asked how the ethnic background of staff compares with that of looked after children, the Director stated that there was a high percentage of black Caribbean staff.

Officers were questioned regarding missing children, and stated that an average of 34 children went missing every week. Many of these are children looked after by other authorities such as Lambeth, but housed in Croydon. Members asked which council paid for the care of such children and were advised that this was done by their corporate parents, although some services e.g. police were paid for by Croydon. Members asked to be sent a copy of the report produced by the Head of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Quality Assurance setting out current issues relating to missing children.

Members discussed information management in children's social care. Officers stated that data was entered into the Children's Recording System (CRS) by hundreds of staff with high case loads and that they were aware that its quality was variable. Members commented that guidance should be produced and used to help improve the consistency and quality of input, particularly with regard to the data to be entered in free fields. Members were also informed that weekly and monthly dashboards of performance data were provided to managers and the system could also produce bespoke reports according to need.

Officers reported that their 80 page self-assessment against the latest Ofsted criteria was that the services "Requires Improvement". They shared that they had drawn up an improvement plan to tackle weaknesses, with various sub-plans to address specific issues.

Members noted that 95.3% of looked after children were up to date with dental checks and 92.5% were up to date with immunisations, in stark contrast with the low percentage (76.9%) who were up to date with their health assessments. Officers explained that this was due to organizational problems due in part to the fact that not all assessments were carried out by the same agency. A project manager had been appointed to investigate the reasons behind the low

number of health assessments and the Corporate Parenting Panel is to receive a report on the health of looked after children and progress on addressing the causes of low numbers of health assessments.

Officers were questioned regarding their contribution to work on preventing radicalization. They acknowledged the need for reassurance and stated that a great deal of inspection work was being done to thwart radicalization jointly with police, education, and other services. Joint work is also being done with other boroughs for greater effectiveness.

Officers were thanked for their fulsome responses to members' questions.

**AR18/16 Cabinet responses to the recommendations of the Local Action Mini-Review on Youth Employability (Agenda item 8)**

Members discussed the briefing received. They felt that action should be taken to maximize work experience and apprenticeships for young people in the borough regardless of the outcome of the application to the European Social Fund as young people's employment needs had not disappeared. Members also noted difficulties experienced by contractors in their efforts to implement the social value clauses in their contracts: while they were willing to offer work experience or apprenticeship to young people in the borough, these opportunities were not being taken up. It was felt that a review should be carried out of all contracts with a social value clause and that hurdles to implementation should be addressed. Members also felt that there should be better cooperation between staff in the "People" and "Place" department to identify employment opportunities and sign-post this information to young people, particularly those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), who are in particular need of support.

**AR19/16 Scrutiny work programme (Agenda item 9)**

The sub-committee approved the suggested work programme for 2016-2017.

The meeting ended at 9pm

