

**MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE
Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14 June 2016 at 6.30pm**

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Jan Buttinger (Chairman)
Councillors Sean Fitzsimons, Sue Bennett, Bernadette Khan, Andrew Rendle and
Andy Stranack

Co-optee:
James Collins

A20/16 Welcome and Apologies for absence (agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Mario Creatura, Dave Harvey and
Vinoos John.

Councillor Andrew Stranack stood in for Cllr Mario Creatura.

A21/16 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2016 (agenda item 2)

The minutes were agreed.

RESOLVED THAT: the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2016 be
signed as a correct record.

A22/16 Disclosures of interest (agenda item 3)

There were none.

A23/16 Urgent business (agenda item 4)

There was none.

A24/16 Exempt items (agenda item 5)

There were none.

A25/16 Committee membership and Terms of Reference (Agenda Item 6)

It was noted that Councillor Maddie Henson and not Councillor Stephen Mann, had been confirmed as the fifth majority group member of the sub-committee.

RESOLVED that: the report be noted with the above correction.

A26/16 Cabinet responses to recommendations of the Local Action Mini-Review on housing for young people (Agenda item 7)

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Mark Meehan, Director of Housing Needs
- Dave Morris, Strategy Manager (Strategy, Communities and Commissioning)
- Steve Dennington, Interim Service Head (Spatial Planning)

Members were reminded that this agenda item referred to recommendations arising from discussions at the 17 November meeting of this sub-committee, leading to formal responses which were presented at the 21 March 2016 Cabinet meeting.

The following points were made:

- The council's Affordable Housing Policy aimed to make housing available to as wide a range of households as possible
- However, it was observed that policies offered no support to young adults on a low income and with no vulnerabilities, who were struggling to find or maintain a tenancy in view of the very high housing costs in the capital
- Local Housing Allowance only covers the rent for a room in a shared household in the bottom 30% of this segment of the market
- The council is very reluctant to build what would essentially be Houses in Multiple Occupation for single adults, which could become a housing management challenge in years to come
- The "starter home" project can only be accessed by individuals on a significant income and/or with significant savings

Officers did counter that Band 2 of the council's housing allocation policy prioritized the housing needs of families in work.

Members asked whether any advice or information was provided in the last year of school on how to go about obtaining suitable housing and use relevant local support networks. Officers undertook to investigate this avenue.

Members were advised that there existed a well recognized private sector market for graduates but that "key worker housing" was no longer being built.

Most intermediate housing¹ was likely to be offered through the government's "starter home" programme.

Members enquired whether the council was sign-posting young people in need of housing to "home share schemes", where an adult lives with an individual with special needs, receiving a roof over their heads and providing support to the person with special needs, thus benefiting both parties. They were advised that people had been placed on such schemes through the council's Gateway service in the last 12 months.

Recommendation 4 focused on starter tenancies. Officers explained that fixed five-year flexible tenancies had been used since the introduction of the Localism Act 2011. Asked how many tenancies in the borough were of this type, officers explained that this was the default type, representing about 80% of new tenancies in the borough.

Officers were questioned regarding Recommendation 6 regarding publicizing housing advice through an app. They explained that this was about to be implemented, and that additional information was publicized through JC Decaux boards and the council's website.

As regards Recommendation 7, members urged officers to take a leading role as local employers, and offer housing deposits to its young staff. Officers undertook to explore this avenue.

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

AR27/16 Home schooling (Agenda item 8)

The following officers were in attendance for this item:

- Jane Doyle, Director of Universal People Services
- Tony Murphy, Head of Learning Access
- Elaine Grant, Monitoring and Support Teacher

Members were reminded that *elective home education* was the term used to describe parents' decisions to provide education for their children at home rather than at school. Parents have a duty to ensure that their child is accessing education under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 but this does not necessarily have to be done at a school. There is **no** requirement on parents who chose to home educate, to register with or seek approval from the local authority to do so. Local authorities do not have any statutory duty in relation to monitoring the quality of home education on a routine basis, but can intervene under section 437 (1) of the Education Act if it appears that parents are not providing a suitable education.

¹ *'Intermediate' housing is a term which refers to housing which falls between 'social housing' (such as traditional rented council housing) and 'open market' housing; Intermediate housing tries to bridge the gap between the two as 'more affordable', sitting below open market prices but above social housing.*

Members also heard that yearly monitoring reports on elective home education in Croydon were presented by the Monitoring and Support Teacher to the Departmental Leadership team.

Questioned on special educational needs, the Monitoring and Support Teacher stated that 3% of elective home educated children had such needs, corresponding to six children. She explained that an assessment of such needs could be provided if parents raised concerns about their children's educational progress and abilities. If parents could not meet the identified needs of their children, the officer could identify a suitable placement for them. If parents did not give authorization for such a placement, the council could take enforcement action, but the Monitoring and Support Teacher added that this had never been needed in the seven years she had been in post.

Members remarked that it was known that many children had special educational needs but did not have a statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education Health and Care Plan. It was possible that a number of home educated children had such needs, but were not receiving the support they needed, partly because parents might not have identified the specific need their child might have. Members felt that work should be done to ascertain how effectively the special educational needs of home educated children were being identified and addressed.

Officers explained that the Monitoring and Support Teacher provided guidance to any parents contacting her to discuss the possibility of home schooling their child. Such conversations offered the possibility of exploring the child's needs and discussing ways of supporting these. Members were also advised that schools were encouraged to advise the council of any parents considering elective home education for their child or children so that the Monitoring and Support Teacher might be aware of this development. Asked how the council found out whether a child was being home schooled, officers stated that parents usually informed the council of this.

Members heard that the right to elective home education was conditional, and that parents had to respond to informal enquiries from the council on their child's education. They were advised that vast majority of parents were happy to engage with the council through face to face discussions, telephone conversations, e-mail or post. If a parent refused to engage, the council had a duty to ascertain whether the child was getting a good education and lack of response to a request for evidence could be used as a trigger for enforcement action. To-date, however, no school orders relating to home schooled children had ever reached completion.

In answer to a question on safeguarding, officers acknowledged that their powers to investigate a safeguarding risk were limited, and that the quality of the Monitoring and Support Teacher's relationship with families was crucial to enabling some form of monitoring. Members were advised that a significant percentage of home schooling parents had an active relationship with this officer. In the case of families who have no relationship with the council, officers regularly monitored an "unseen children's list". If any safeguarding issues were suspected, communications were initiated with other agencies, e.g. the child's

GP. In extreme cases, officers were prepared to drive to the child's home to obtain evidence.

Officers were questioned regarding home schooled children's exam results. They explained that many parents did not inform the council regarding exams taken. The exam results shown in the report to the sub-committee were the ones the Monitoring and Support Teacher had been informed about.

Members were advised that not all parents used GCSE or A level type exams. However, most did value formal qualifications. Some pupils were put through college to obtain GCSEs in mathematics and English while doing vocational training.

Officers were questioned regarding the resources available to monitor home schooled children. They explained that Croydon was fortunate in having a permanent monitoring and support teacher, as a number of other councils did not. Members were also advised that Croydon's monitoring and support teacher was an active member of the national Elective Home Education network, from which she drew a great deal of good practice. In addition, she was involved in the Greater London forum, which had been created as a result of officers from Bromley and East Grinstead acknowledging their sense of isolation in this role. The Forum now brings together monitoring and support teachers from 42 councils.

Moreover, the Monitoring and Support Teacher's strong subject knowledge and awareness of changes in policy and practice had led her to appear before the Education Select Committee to answer MPs' questions on her work.

Members were advised that there existed a number of networks of home schooling parents, as well as a Facebook page run by the parents, to which the Monitoring and Support Teacher sign-posted parents thinking of educating their children at home.

Asked whether the council had the resources to maintain contacts with children up to the age of 18 as a result of the raising of the Participation Age, officers explained that this was currently under discussion. A lot of authorities were planning to keep these families on their books although there were no resources available for visits to these households after the age of 16.

Asked whether some ethnic minorities were more likely to educate their children at home, officers undertook to provide further information on this matter after the meeting. Asked about safeguarding risks and the dangers of radicalization, officers stated that there had been one referral to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and one relating to the Prevent initiative this year. The Monitoring and Support Teacher also sits on the missing children's panel to keep abreast of any developments that might be relevant to her work. However, she explained that there was very limited protection for children attending unregistered schools, and that legislation needed to be strengthened to protect potentially vulnerable pupils. Similar concerns had been raised by Ofsted with the Secretary of State for Education in November 2015.

Members were advised that the Springboard environment appealed to electively home educated (EHE) children and their families due to the nurturing and supportive ambience and small numbers of students. However, following the move of Springboard to a new location and the loss of the examination centre, members urged the council to support this organisation to facilitate a new examination centre for home schooled pupils, unless suitable alternative provision could be found by other means.

To conclude, members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee stated that they were impressed with the quality of service provided by the Council to home schooled children and their parents. To see further improvements in this service, they put forward a number of recommendations, which are set out below.

RESOLVED THAT the following recommendations should be formally presented to Cabinet:

1. The Council should carry out a piece of research to ascertain how many children being schooled at home have special educational needs, including needs which have not been formally diagnosed.
2. The Springboard environment appeals to electively home educated (EHE) children and their families due to the nurturing and supportive ambience and small numbers of students. It has led to a significant rise in IGCSE exam provision through Springboard for Year 10 and 11 EHE students. However, following the move of Springboard to a new location and the loss of the examination centre, the Council should support this organisation to facilitate a new examination centre for home schooled pupils, unless suitable alternative provision can be found by other means.
3. To reflect the raising of the Participation Age to 18, the Council should identify additional resources to ensure that full support can continue to be provided to home schooled children to the end of compulsory schooling.
4. Where safeguarding issues have been identified, the Council should use its enforcement powers to the full to compel parents to cooperate with its officers and secure the welfare of the child / children concerned.
5. The Council uphold the principle of elective home education and will not constrict parents' freedom to educate their own children. However, in view of the Council's duty to safeguard children in the borough, it should lobby central government and put forward the case for national legislation, in order to bring about the compulsory registration of home schooled pupils and mandatory yearly visits.

AR28/16 Scrutiny work programme (Agenda item 9)

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

The meeting ended at 9pm

