

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 12 March 2019 at 6.30 pm in Town Hall

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Robert Ward (Chair);
Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Sue Bennett, Mary Croos, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maddie Henson and Helen Redfern

Co-optee Members

Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)

Also Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning
Councillor Patsy Cummings
Robert Henderson, Executive Director of Children Families and Education
Kerry Crichlow, Programme Director Children's Improvement Journey
Clare Davies, Complaints Manager.
Shelley Davies, Interim Director of Education.
Alison Farmer, Head of Special Needs 0-25.
Chris Roberts, Head of School Place Planning, Admissions and Learning Access.
Paul Funnell, Disability Youth Service Team Leader
George Knight
Phillip White
Natasha Cox
Zak Morley
Jamie Gilbey
Daniel Clark
Jane Speller, Parents in Partnership
Roxie Kishore-Bigord, Parents in Partnership

Apologies: Elaine Jones, Leo Morrell and Dave Harvey gave their apologies.

PART A

17/19 Apologies for absence

Apologies received from Elaine Jones, Dave Harvey and Leo Morrell.

18/19 Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

19/19 Action List Update

The Chair thanked officers for resolving some of the actions identified at 5 February 2019 meeting that required attention.

20/19 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

21/19 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

22/19 Special Education Needs and Strategy

The Head of Special Needs 0-25 presented the report which outlined the outcome on the Council's consultation on the SEND Strategy and proposed approach to implementation.

The consultation on the Draft SEND strategy took place between 3 December 2018 till 31 January 2019 and the outcomes included the following:

- There were 99 responses to the online survey and feedback provided at face to face meetings by 120 members of the public.
- Findings of the consultation informed the revision on the Strategy.
- Those consulted agreed on the four key areas identified for development.
- A fifth key area for development was identified and added to the Strategy

It was agreed by the Chair and officers that it was important that the voice of young people and parents were captured at this meeting and as a result representatives from Parents in Partnership as well as young people with SEN were in attendance.

The young people in attendance provided information on their experiences which included the following:

- It was important to be recognised as a person 1st and to not be judged on the basis on their special need.
- They were capable of achieving the same outcomes as someone without a disability and want to be given a chance to do so.
- They had to work harder to prove to people who made the assumption that they would not be successful
- It was important for them to feel safe when travelling on their own on public transport.
- Many attend Waddon Youth Club where they were able to interact with younger people with special needs, provide support and give valuable advice.
- Some of the young people present were at college and were also volunteering.

- A young person voiced that whilst at school they wished teachers had been more patient and supportive.
- It was important that young people with SEN and their families were supported emotionally.
- There was limited services available once they reached the age of 25

It was noted that there was a requirement for good, localised and accessible provision within the borough and that there was a concern regarding the local offer and provision during transition to adulthood. It was also important that the Council support in-borough services.

The Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning informed the Sub-Committee that there was currently work taking place on the Local offer and that Parents in Partnership was working with the Council on further development.

A guest was asked if there was any evidence of best practice and what they would expect from the 3rd Sector. In response, Members were informed that it was important for the Council to incentivise businesses to work more with young people by providing opportunities for them to join their workforce. More work was needed with the 3rd sector to promote the sense of belonging. The youth groups work hard with young people to enable them to have a sense of who they are, which promotes resilience. It was also important that progress be made on improved multiagency and joint partnerships as without this the intended outcomes of the Strategy would not be realised.

It was noted that what the young people had shared was what many young people with SEN experienced. The Strategy revealed that there was a gap in services for post 16 and that clearer pathways would promote improved outcomes and increased fulfilment in personal lives.

Officers agreed that the two areas that received the most feedback during the consultation were post 16 and transitions and that these would be areas of focus for the department. Joint working between services including health, education, families and young people would be key to improving outcomes.

The short breaks policy was a priority of the Strategy and would be reviewed in the course of the 3 years, additionally the transitions policy was also in the process of being drawn up.

In response to a Member question on what was being done to address issues identified in workforce development, officers said that this was an area of priority. Parents in partnership would work with the Council to develop training programmes on improving effectiveness in working with young people and their families.

The short break policy was part of the Strategy and would be reviewed in the course of the 3 years, additionally the transitions policy was also in the process of being drawn up.

In response to a Member question on what was being done to promote inclusivity and diversity across services, officers stated that this was one of the priorities of the Strategy to ensure that the right support was being provided for children and families in the borough. There was ongoing working with the CCG, providers, Public Health and Schools on their responses and promotion of inclusivity as it was recognised that this was an area of weakness.

It was agreed by the members and Council that it was important to utilise council contracts to secure commitments from businesses in the community to leverage employment for young people.

The Chair and Members thanked all in attendance for their contribution to the meeting.

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- Timeline on further consultation/developments of Transitions and Short Breaks Policy.

The Sub-Committee came to the following **Conclusion**:

1. The update report following the consultation period was detailed and informative.
2. The involvement of parents, young people, families and the wider community in the consultation was encouraging
3. The decision and actions to be implemented to deliver on outcomes was clear
4. The work that was being done to further develop the Local Offer was encouraging and the sub-committee looked forward to receiving updates on progress in the future.
5. It was encouraging and enlightening to hear first-hand the experiences of young people, what was important to them and what further could be done to improve outcomes.
6. The Sub-Committee would welcome the return of parents and young people to a scrutiny meeting in a year to challenge the Council on whether the strategy was fulfilling its intentions.
7. It was encouraging that the Council uses its contracts to leverage employment for young people and should try to do so with businesses in the community.

23/19 Statutory Children's Complaints Report: Quarter 3

The Complaints Manager presented the report which included the following:

- The department was focused on utilising learning to drive improvements.

- Communication and delays were highlighted as the most common reason for complaints across Council services. In addition complaints for Children's Social Care were also centred on content of assessments and social worker availability.
- In order to respond to concerns, regular updates and discussions were held regarding areas of the service that presented problems in order to devise different strategies to improve practice.
- A Single point of contact was to be designated for all Children's Social Care complaints. This would mirror the process in Adult's service who have a designated co-ordinator to manage complaints. Update of this would be provided to the sub-committee at a future meeting.
- A key priority was to ensure that complaints were resolved before progressing to stages 2/3

The Chair commented that whilst there had been some improvement, it was disappointing that the organisation did not have infrastructure in place to respond to issues. Communication remained a problematic and was a major factor in complaints and a change in culture, prioritisation of complaints as well as promotion on early resolution to complaints received would be necessary to improve on the level of complaints received.

It was further challenged that in this municipal year the reports that had been received by the Sub-Committee on a quarterly basis had shown a distinct lack of pace and progress.

Officers acknowledged that complaints had not been an area of focus in the past and that this was now being addressed. Performance clinics were now taking place every four weeks to track and monitor issues. A cultural message was been promoted that this was now an area of priority.

It was observed that a high level of complaints were received in LAC service and it was questioned if particular problems were the cause for the high occurrence of complaints. Officers responded that there were approximately 800 LAC children including unaccompanied minors in the borough. This higher number meant most complaints would be generated in that area of the service. It was acknowledged that complaints were centred on a number of issues and significant improvement needed to be made.

A Member commented that the figures in the comparison complaints table were not consistent and it would appear that different rules had been applied in the calculation. Officer agreed that an error had been made and the revised table would be circulated after the meeting

The Chair thanked officers for their responses to questions

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- The revised Children's Statutory Complaints comparison table be circulated after the meeting

In reaching its recommendations the Sub-Committee came to the following **Conclusions:**

1. There was a distinct lack of progress and improvement made in resolving complaints.
2. Addressing root causes of complaints must be a priority
3. Clear principles and challenge must be adopted in order to improve outcomes
4. It was disappointing that there were inconsistencies in the figures In the comparison table Q3 2016-18 presented to the sub-committee
5. Information presented was subjective and there was a lack of key indicators and trends in the report.

The Sub-Committee resolved to **Recommend:**

That the annual 1. That the annual complaint include data and trend in complaints received

24/19 Update on the Early Help and Children's Social Care Improvement Programme

The Programme Director for the Children's Improvement Plan presented the update report which included:

- Progress on the Children's Improvement Plan
- Feedback from the monitoring visit of 19 and 20 February 2019
- Areas for improvement and planned actions
- Staffing and Vacancy rates
- Workforce development update
- Leadership and Management Transformation Programme

Officers were thanked for the breakdown of staff and vacancy rates provided in the report and were asked if they were startled at the figures. Officers responded that there was no surprise at the staffing levels as this was to be expected but there were concerns at the number of staff leaving the organisation. As a result exit interviews had been conducted on a systematic basis to identify underlying reasons for this and the department was responding to feedback and comments received.

A Member further commented that whilst the Sub-Committee was continually concerned about recruitment and retention of staff, it was reassuring to learn that exit interviews had been taking place on a regular basis. It was important that feedback and comments received from those interviews were being translated into practice for existing staff.

It was requested that officers demonstrate at the next meeting, the situation with the workforce and provide details on the churn of staff from 2017 to date in order that members can have a clear picture of what had occurred in the past and what was happening now.

The Executive Director for Children Families and Education informed Members that the Ofsted letter following the last monitoring visit was due to be published later that week. Ofsted was very positive about the changes that

has been made though the improvement journey and commented that line of visibility of leadership had improved. It was hoped that the letter would improve staff morale, provide reassurance and a much needed boost that the service was moving in the right direction.

A Member commented that out of all the monitoring visits conducted since the Ofsted judgement, this was the most positive. Officers agreed that although the reports of all five visits that had taken place included positive elements, this visit had the most positive balance. The report from this visit was very good and staff morale would be boosted as a result.

It was noted that the decision to bring in a dedicated brief intervention team to work on child in need cases was good and it was questioned how many people would be in the proposed team and caseloads. Officers stated that this was currently being explored. It was envisaged that caseloads would be on average of 15. Members were further informed that caseloads for the Care Planning team was also being reviewed with the hope of reduction from 15 to 12 due to complexity of cases.

A Member challenged that it appeared that focus had been on quantitative issues and that qualitative issues such as good practice required more focus. Sharing of good practice was key to the service and must be evident in all areas. Officers were asked to provide reassurance that this was being shared across the organisation.

Officers responded that Ofsted had alluded to the good practice in the social work teams and commended the high quality of work seen as well as the work of the early help teams which had received commendations from family court judges. It had been identified that some of the workforce did not feel competent and confident with some practice and this had been responded to through the new learning and development programme of a whole system approach, launched in October 2018. The service was also working with parents and young people on how to improve their experience. It was acknowledged that there were still inconsistencies but with the right infrastructure in place, further improvements would be made.

It was asked what support the service had received amidst the current overhaul of the Councils digital strategy. Officers responded that a workshop was taking place over the next four weeks to look at the system, how it operated, identify difficulties and work with the digital team on resourcing and improvements. The service was also working with the digital team on improving processes for the Case Recording Systems to make navigation easier for social workers and improve delivery of training for new starters. A new recording form had been developed for the Early Help Service which was also working well. The support received to date had been positive and the teams would continue to work together.

Officers and the Cabinet Member were thanked for their response to questions.

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- Explanation on the progression of vacancies/churn in workforce to be provided by mid-April 2019

The Sub-Committee came to the following **Conclusions:**

1. The Sub-Committee was encouraged by Ofsted's comments on increased pace and improvements that had been made following the recent monitoring visit.
2. Recruitment and retention was still an area of concern and acknowledged that this would be an area of ongoing development.
3. It was important that pace increases as we approach an inspection later this year.

25/19 Task and Finish Group: Exclusions and Off Rolling of Pupils

The report was introduced by Councillor Fitzpatrick, Chair of the Task and Finish group.

Attention was drawn to the six themes of further exploration, the Sub-Committee was in agreeance that clarity was needed on the themes that would be looked at and presented in the final report and that the six themes selected for further exploration was appropriate.

The Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning also agreed that it would be useful to receive information and feedback from Scrutiny on the different streams selected which may be able to inform the commissioning work that was due to take place later in the year for Key Stage 4 children.

The Sub-Committee came to the following **Conclusions:**

1. The Sub-Committee noted the report
2. The Sub-Committee agreed to extend the work of the Task and Finish group to September 2019.
3. It was agreed that Councillor Callton Young would become a member of the Task and Finish group.
4. Subject to further discussions, the Sub-Committee authorised the addition of one further member in addition to Councillor Young to join the task and finish group.
5. The Sub-Committee agreed on the six themes for further exploration as identified in the report.

26/19 What Difference has this meeting made to Croydon's Children

- Members expressed that there has been various outcomes from this meeting which included the following:

- This meeting had been the most proactive meeting of the municipal year. There had been a notable improvement in the structure of meetings and responses to questions.
- The voice of the child was evident in the reports presented and it was important that this continued
- The attendance of the young people's well as parents at the meeting was important to obtain their perspective of services that were in place to serve them and added value to meetings
- More interface with young people and families would add value to future meetings.

27/19 Work Programme 2018/19

It was noted that an informal meeting would take place on 23 April 2019 where Members would have an opportunity to discuss in detail possible themes and items for the 2019/20 work programme

The meeting ended at 9.24 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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