

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 3 November 2020 at 6.30 pm. This meeting was held remotely; to view the meeting, please click [here](#).

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Robert Ward (Chair);
Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Sue Bennett, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Bernadette Khan and
Gareth Streeter

Co-optee Members

Ms Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese) and Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)

Also Present: Josephine Copeland (Headteacher All Saints School)
Debbie Jones (Executive Director Children Families and Education, Children Families and Education)
Di Smith (Croydon Safeguarding Children partnership (CSCP) Independent Chair & Scrutineer)
Elaine Clancy (Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon Clinical Commissioning Group)
Shaun Hanks (Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, Early Help and Childrens Social Care)
Kerry Crichlow (Programme Director Children's Improvement Journey)
Michael McKeaveney (Interim Head Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion)

Apologies: Councillor Jamie Audsley and Neil Cochlin (Detective Superintendent & Business Change Manager at Metropolitan Police- Head of Safeguarding, Croydon Bromley and Sutton)

PART A

41/19 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Jamie Audsley, Geoff Hopper and Neil Cochlin.

42/19 Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting

The minutes of meetings held on 23 June 2020 and 15 September 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

43/19 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of pecuniary interest that were not already registered.

44/19 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

45/19 Action list update

The Chair told the Sub-Committee the following updates:

- The representation of the Sub-Committee had changed since the last meeting, following changes to the Cabinet appointments, which would be formalised and appointed at the next Scrutiny and Overview Committee.
- The consultation period and process to close Virgo Fidelis had begun and an official decision would be made in January 2021, which the Sub-Committee to had an opportunity to review.
- The financial situation of the council was under review and would become clearer in the coming weeks.
- The Children's Improvement Board was reinstated including the performance dashboard which would be included in future Sub-Committee agendas.
- During Practice Week, Councillor Ward and Nick Pendry took part in the visit programme and they spoke to young people from the Empire group. The young people were impressive, showed initiative and responsibility. Once Covid restrictions were reduced, they would continue the visit programme and speak to social workers. Going forward it was important to bring representation and voice of the children and young people into the Sub-Committee.

The Chair updated the Sub-Committee on the action list:

- Due to Covid restrictions there were many visits which were postponed.
- The free school transport would be extended to the end of the year and had not yet been withdrawn.
- The letter of thanks to staff in Children's service for their dedication and hard work would be sent by the end of the week.
- KPIs were reflected in the dashboard.

Councillor Alisa Flemming joined the meeting at 7.41pm

46/19 Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report

The Croydon Safeguarding Children partnership (CSCP) Independent Chair & Scrutineer introduced and outlined the report in a [Presentation](#).

The Chair thanked the CSCP for their annual report and presentation. Members expressed disappointment that there was no representative from the police, one third of the partnership, whose nonattendance was a historical pattern.

Vulnerable Adolescents Priority Group

In response to a Member asking what the quantifiable measures of successful outcomes there were for the Vulnerable Adolescent priority group, where a Public Health approach would usually be taken linking into violence reduction, the Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding stated that the need for qualitative and quantitative measures had been discussed at that priority group meeting. There were some measurable outcomes, such as missing children, however the Group needed to develop more areas and be clear in what they wanted to achieve in those.

In reference to Recommendation 9 of the Vulnerable Adults Review published in 2019, a Member stated that a Fair Access Panel was significant in the journey for many vulnerable adolescents and asked when the multi-agency response would be extended.

Recommendation 9: *The model of an integrated holistic multi-agency response should be extended to include consideration of the risk management panels. Consideration to be given to how schools, including the Fair Access Panel, can be included (Page 59, Vulnerable Adolescents Thematic Review).*

The Interim Head Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion replied that they were actively considering this initiative and were now in a place where they could operate. They had experienced a number of staff changes in the admin team for Fair Access Panel but were now able to continue that work. The Interim Head Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion told Members that he would be happy to meet to discuss with Members the model going forward outside of the Sub-Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning told the Sub-Committee that there was work being carried out by the Curriculum for Change Board to change and improve the representation of the curriculum, which was run by teachers in the borough. The focus of the Board emerged from the Black Lines Matters agenda and has now extended to look at the issues around exclusions. The Chair of the Board would be joining the Children's Race and Equality Review Panel, which sat in care and directly linked to the CSCP.

A Member asked what the Terms of Reference were for the Task and Finish group in response to schools needing to be at the heart of multi-agency prevention. The CSCP Independent Chair & Scrutineer replied that it was the Chair of the Vulnerable Adolescent Priority Group, Detective Superintendent & Business Change Manager at Metropolitan Police- Head of Safeguarding who was not in attendance, who lead that priority group and could respond to that question. They would take notes on points raised today for the Vulnerable Adolescent Priority Group to review.

The Executive Director Children Families and Education stated there was work for Children's services following the Review to ensure a more integrated

approached was developed and measures discussed today were built on which will be addressed by the CSCP.

Neglect Priority Group

A Member questioned why the targets for neglected children had only been partially achieved. The Interim Head Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion replied that they would find out what that meant in more detail, particularly in reference to the outcomes of the 'Seen' category being 'Partly achieved' and the 'Helped' category 'Not yet achieved'.

Members asked how the partnership itself was functioning and the effectiveness of their arrangements; what challenges the whole partnership and specific partners experienced on the subject of neglect; where the partnership lacked traction; and what had the partnership learned from the last year which had influenced any change in approach.

The Interim Head Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion responded that firstly, neglect could be difficult term to navigate, and sometimes hear and accept by its very nature. There had been a shift from to positive parenting messages, and there needed to be focus on the tools which professionals and families could use to identify themselves. The biggest challenge for partners was the capacity to train enough staff and they had reached a position where they had a number of staff that were trainers, where training could now cascade down to agencies.

In response to a Member asking how the partnership responded to feedback and if there was their an aim to react and change to challenges from partners at the meetings, the Interim Head Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion said that the partners had grasped a better understanding and responsibility of neglect to take improvements forward. This was in terms of culture changes, away from responses to specific incidences. In response to a Member asking how changes were brought into a partnership meeting in light of different partners facing different challenges, the officer said that an executive of each of the priority groups headed a branch of the priory group meetings which effectively escalated issues across agencies. This was more strategic than previous arrangements. The Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon CCG stated that governance was now more streamlined since the priority group meetings were established, which enabled real time conversations, and they were on the right track.

The CSCP Independent Chair & Scrutineer stated that it was important to view the appraisal within the report in relation to measuring the progress made. Before the 'Good' Ofsted rating, there was a major lack of awareness of neglect, where since significant progress had been made, namely a common language for partners to refer and build upon.

The Chair commended the child wellbeing screening tool, although added that the it was an opportunity to collate more information from the tool in order to monitor results and progress. He asked data was being collected to capture

those aspects. The CSCP Independent Chair & Scrutineer replied that the audit activity which was undertaken measured the frequency of when the graded care profile was used by agencies. They also recorded how many people were training and leading the cascade down of training using the graded care profile, which they could provide details. The Chair replied that he was more interested in the outcome rather than the inputs.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning raised that in the findings of the Vulnerable Adolescent Review, it was young people with ethnic backgrounds, particularly young black people, who were disproportionately represented. There should be consideration into why they were more vulnerable and an investigation into how that pattern linked to county lines activity.

Disabilities

In response to a Member asking what examples there were of ensuring children with disabilities were communicated with and listened to in the interest of outcomes and aspirations since the partnership was established, the Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon CCG stated that the priority group aimed to increase awareness and engagement. Disabled children were particularly at risk of low engagement with stakeholders and they were increasing data collections, training and a development tool for agencies to utilise. It was agreed that a more granular response of what activities would be pursued and examples of good practice would be taken to the Sub-Committee in twelve months.

A Member asked firstly if all young people with autism were treated as disabled and secondly if they understood the autism experience well enough and if there was enough data held to hear the voice of young people who had communication and social barriers. This was important in the context of autistic young people having difficulties speaking to neuro typical adult whom they had not relation with and could not read typical signals. The Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon CCG replied that the Member was asking for operational data which could not be currently provided and highlighted that the role of the priority groups of multi-profession colleagues across the partnership was to raise awareness amongst practitioners. It was agreed that Councillor Fitzpatrick would meet with the Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon CCG to discuss how to record autistic experiences to address the needs of autistic young people using evidence based knowledge.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning told the Panel that it was flagged over the lockdown period that young people with autism were negatively affected by the major changes to their routines.

In response to the Chair asking what information there was available on assessments and interventions in the framework, the Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon CCG said that this was

collated across the strategies and work was being underdone to link the data together.

Health Visitors

In relation to health visitor developmental checks, Elaine Jones highlighted that the report stated the service had never fully being recruited to and asked how Croydon was affected by this problem in comparison to other boroughs. The Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon CCG responded that this issue was not exclusive to Croydon and suffered from complexities related to pay and conditions, where some junior colleagues choose to work in other areas of the service. The health visits which were carried out were prioritised in terms of need and vulnerability.

In respect to the early identification of SEND, Elaine Jones asked what role did the health visit play, what were the risks in missing those visits and what would be the effect of staff shortages. The Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon CCG replied there were a number of metrics to identify SEND alongside health visitor services, including GPs and Early Years.

A Member asked how early were vulnerable mothers identified during the ante-natal period, what structures were place to support those visits and lastly what were the provisions for non-English speaking mothers. The Joint Chief Nurse for Croydon Health Service NHS Trust and NHS Croydon CCG replied that when a woman presented they were seen and assessed by midwives and there was a clear clinical path into identifying vulnerability. Additionally, she said that there were robust systems for non-English speaking users across the care sector. The Chair stated that the numbers of ante-natal visits in Croydon scored notably very low on the Health Survey Visitor Metrics for Q1 2019/20 compared to other London boroughs and asked what was being done to increase the number of visits and improve the service.

Evidence of collaboration

The Chair stated that the bulk of partnership funding was provided by Croydon Council and questioned the funding balance, in light of the council's current financial situation.

The CSCP Independent Chair & Scrutineer stated that each partner provided a sustained level of service support for the partnership, but the lower financial contribution to the partnership from the police was historically noticed and regularly challenged. The police funding was a MET decision and was viewed in a pan-London context. The Executive Director Children Families and Education stated that unequal funding from partners occurred nationally, which should though was not appropriate when accountability was even. The contributions needed to be addressed in Croydon and the council's financial challenges will give a focus to change.

Taking into account the partnership was relatively new, a Member asked if there was anyone to challenge the quality of work of the Quality Improvement Group (QIG) and had oversight on what evidence the QIG were looking at from each agency. The CSCP Independent Chair & Scrutineer stated that there were QIG representatives from each partner undergoing multiagency casework audit activity to monitor how partners were working together with families. She noted it was difficult to quantify better working together of the partnership, but they did collect partnership data including attendance at conferences and timeliness of health assessments. The Executive Group focussed on particular elements where data had raised concern, which a data set usually attributed to a particular agency, so trends attributed to the partnership as a whole were less visible. A multiagency audit was required to measure how well partners were working together.

The Chair stated that when the CSCP was established, it was decided that a review would be taken one year on to test the set-up and to scrutinise its work. The Sub-Committee would play a role in that process, and the Children's Improvement Board, however there must not be any duplication of work so dialogue was required to harmonise the reviewing process going forward. It was agreed that the Chair would meet with the CSCP Independent Chair & Scrutineer to discuss how scrutiny of the children's safeguarding functions would interact going forward and the next steps of how the improvement journey would be managed.

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

1. There was lack of assurance on the following points, that:
 - a. As there was not a police representative at the meeting and no informed deputy was sent as a substitute, no judgement could be made on their involvement with the partnership.
 - b. The targets were not quantifiable so tracking progress and results achieved was difficult to measure
 - c. There was a lack of evidence to show how children in disability groups were being meaningfully communicated with and how their experiences were understood.
 - d. There was insufficient evidence to indicate whether children at risk had any influence on how the outcomes were measured.
2. The antenatal visits in Croydon were significantly lower than the majority of London boroughs and felt that there was neither recognition of this or detail on how performance would be improved.
3. There were unequal portions of funding between the partnership despite a model of equal accountability
4. The Children & Young People Sub-Committee and the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership needed to find a synergy in their work, as there was a risk of duplicating their scrutiny functions.
5. As the targets for neglected children had only been partially achieved, there was insufficient context in the report to explain the reasons for this.

6. As there thought to be an increase in child poverty in borough, it was concluded that further work was required to understand the scale of the issue and how it would increase demand for safeguarding services.

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

1. That the Partnership is invited to 19 January meeting of the Children and Young People Sub-Committee to provide further assurance that the significantly low number of antenatal visits in the borough was being recognised, understood and that action was being taken.
2. The Chair of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee meets with representatives for safeguarding arrangements and the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning to discuss a forward course of action to ensure the bodies work productively alongside each other in fulfilling their functions.
3. That a written briefing be prepared for the Children & Young People Sub-Committee providing further information and assurance on what the partly achieved and not achieved outcomes meant for the children and how they were being addressed.

When the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership returns to the Children & Young People Sub-Committee in 12 months additional information is provided on how the objectives for the children in the disability priority group were being put into practice and achieved.

47/19 Blended Learning Overview

This Item would be would be taken at the meeting of the Sub-Committee on 19 January 2021.

48/19 Service Impact and Response to Budget Reductions

The Programme Director Children's Improvement Journey introduced the Item. The Report highlighted staffing changes in early help and children's social care following the council staffing review to address the financial challenge and how services might be affected.

The Chair told the Sub-Committee that the programme for staff reduction pre-dated the recently escalated seriousness of the council's financial difficulties, which was then part of the in-year budget savings plan. Currently, it was not appropriate to ask questions for the longer term approach as they were waiting for more clarity of the situation, however it was right to ask about the principles of how savings would be made in future.

In response to Jo Copeland asking if the staff reduction would effect schools and education, the Executive Director Children Families and Education said that the financial position for Croydon was highly serious and they would be working closely with schools and statutory services which would remain a priority. There could be no guarantees that there would be no changes or budget rightsizing, and any changes in funding arrangements would have

unintended consequences. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning added that partnership with schools and colleges was of paramount importance to the Children's services, the Ofsted journey to name an example, and that close working would continue through this time of uncertainty.

In response to Elaine Jones asking whether the staff reductions would affect the current dashboard targets, the Programme Director Children's Improvement Journey said that heads of services and the Director were confident that the reductions would not impact on service performance as set out on the dashboard, which were mostly statutory or nationally set targets. This had been achieved by a mixture of restructuring, transformation work of reducing demand and there having been many agency staff and vacancies prior to the reductions.

A Member stated that the council had a significantly large budgetary gap to close and Children's services was a major portion of the overall expenditure of the council, therefore savings in these services would be required. At this time they did not know the proposals, scale or timeline of further reductions required so the discussion of the next steps had to wait until there was further clarity. The Chair agreed and said that it was the Sub-Committee's role to assist in delivering the next steps.

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

1. The Council has a large budgetary gap and Children's services is a significant portion of the council's overall expenditure.
2. Given that savings proposals were still being developed, at this stage the Sub-Committee was unable to reach any conclusions on the sustainability of the staff reductions proposed or what the impact would be on performance.
3. That the Committee needed to be actively involved in the next phase of budgetary reductions and that flexibility would be needed to schedule another meeting, once the financial situation became clearer.

49/19 Children's Social Care and Education Dashboards

The Chair praised the dashboard, thanking officers for their work, and stated this would be a useful monitoring tool for the Sub-Committee going forward.

Elaine Jones raised that there were inaccuracies in the data on a number of the pages and asked if they could be revised. The Interim Head Standards Safeguarding and Inclusion replied he would correct and reissue the dashboard.

The Chair stated that additional work was being generated for officers from having to create separate style dashboards with similar data for different purposes. This was not productive in a time of lower capacity and the Sub-

Committee was willing to compromise on some requests if that supported more coordination and efficiency. It was agreed that the Programme Director Children's Improvement Journey design the dashboard more strategically and streamlined for her team to produce.

..... **50/19** **What difference has this meeting made to Croydon's children**

The Chair asked Members how they felt the meeting went, whether they achieved what they aimed to do and if they challenged appropriately in their scrutiny role. The following was discussed by the Sub-Committee:

- The annual safeguarding report was one of the most important oversights of the Sub-Committee had and there had clearly been progress made by the partnership without complacency, but whether they had made a difference to young people was still to be judged. It was when there were multiple agencies or scrutinisers attempting to task similar activities when gaps would appear. Actions proposed during the meeting would work to mitigate those concerns.
- It was noted that the Sub-Committee itself had a shifting membership and for new Members there was a learning curve.
- It was disappointing that many answers to the important question Members had on the safeguarding report were unknown, which meant Members did not have the tools to understand what was happening to the level they needed. This was a historical problem for scrutiny raised in the Report of Public Interest.
- The lack of metrics and police representation was noted. It was agreed the Chair would write to the police seeking a formal written response on their experience of partnership working.
- There needed to be more of a difference specified in the report between operational and strategic results. If there were graphs presented in the report, there must be some capacity to speak on them. If any answers were more operational, there needed to be more language in the report to referring to the impacts and evaluation.

51/19 **Work Programme 2020/21**

There would be another meeting of the Sub-Committee organised when there was more clarity and information on the council's financial situation in order to respond to events accordingly.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Signed:

Date: