

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 27 September 2022 at 6.30 pm in The Council Chamber,
Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Councillor Richard Chatterjee (Chair), Councillor Maddie Henson (Vice-Chair), Sue Bennett, Gayle Gander, Eunice O'Dame, Helen Redfern, Manju Shahul-Hameed and Catherine Wilson

Co-optee Members

Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)

Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese))

Also

Present: Councillor Maria Gatland (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Councillor Samir Dwesar

Apologies: Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative)

PART A

1/22 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absences were received from Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative).

2/22 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 21st June 2022 were approved as an accurate record with the amendment that Councillor Mike Bonello was in attendance.

3/22 Disclosures of Interest

Councillor Henson stated that they had previously held the role of Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and would refrain from asking questions on the Children's Centre Contract - Insourcing of the South Locality Children's Centre Delivery paper.

4/22 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

Croydon Safeguarding Children Board - Annual Report 2021-22

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 13 to 40 of the agenda, which provided the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report for 2021-22. The Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education introduced the item and the Independent Scrutineer, Eleanor Brazil, to the Sub-Committee. It was noted that the Independent Scrutineer would be leaving the role soon and had served Croydon in many roles over a number of years; officers and Members thanked her for her hard work.

The Independent Scrutineer explained their role in the Partnership as an external person to the key organisations delivering services to children and young people in the borough; the Independent Scrutineer's role was to support and challenge key members of the Partnership organisations to help ensure safeguarding arrangements were effective. It was highlighted that safeguarding children was challenging as it was not always possible to ensure all children were safe from harm, although this was always the aim. Safeguarding Practice Reviews were undertaken by the Partnership when children died or were seriously hurt and thankfully these cases were not high in number.

The Independent Scrutineer went through the key points of the report and explained that the Partnership tried to capture the voice of children and young people in the borough. The work of the Partnership was guided by the Executive Group made up of key members from the statutory bodies – the Council, Croydon CCG and the Police. There were a number of multi-agency groups set up by the Partnership, with specific areas of focus, which reported to the Executive Group.

The Partnership had identified a number of themes throughout the year, and these were: the importance of Fathers/Male Carers; Professional Curiosity; Information Sharing; Safeguarding Supervision; Extra-Familial Harm. These themes had been used to influence the training offer for the following year. The Sub-Committee heard that an independent review of the Partnership had been commissioned to identify any areas of learning to inform the work and priorities of the Partnership in the coming year. The following had already been identified: Safeguarding Asylum Seekers; Early Help Transformation; Partnership Communication Strategy; Domestic Abuse; Sexual Abuse (inter and extra familial abuse).

The Chair noted the absence of a police representative and expressed the disappointment of the Sub-Committee. The Independent Scrutineer and Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education explained the commitment of the Police to the work of the Partnership and suggested the necessary change of dates may have led to their non-attendance. The Sub-Committee queried the disparity of proactivity and funding from some partners and the Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education responded that there had been huge pressures for all partners and there had been significant work over the last 12 years to improve frontline availability and engagement on children's' safeguarding from the Police. The Police were also

responsible for chairing the Priority Vulnerable Adolescents Group and Members heard that the independent review would help to gauge the effectiveness of the Partnership; feedback so far had suggested that engagement and the willingness to act on learning was in place. On the discrepancy between the Police budget contribution and the local authorities' contribution, the Sub-Committee heard that this was historic and London-wide.

The Independent Scrutineer explained that an Extra-Familial Abuse Safeguarding Practice Review was underway, in the wake of a number of stabbings, and was looking at the circumstances of both victims and perpetrators to see what interventions had taken place and how effective these had been. The Review was being jointly chaired by Children's Social Services and the Police; the Police generally had good attendance at other Partnership groups.

Members asked how recommendations were implemented and tracked across the partners. The CSCP Quality Assurance & Development Officer explained that this responsibility sat within the Safeguarding Practice Review Group, which tracked key partners involvement and regularly looked at key themes across the reviews that came in. Key people involved in reviews often attended the Safeguarding Practice Review Group to monitor how actions were being implemented and how effective they had been. Whilst sometimes reports could take time to publish, learning from these was implemented and shared between the partners to ensure this was not delayed.

The Sub-Committee asked about the current situation in Croydon with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and any work the Partnership was carrying out in this area. The Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education responded that this was a clear priority for this Partnership and the Community Safety Partnership who collaborated and shared information on this issue; often the children at risk were often also at risk for involvement with county lines and serious youth violence which meant that a multi-agency response was vital. The learning from Serious Practice Reviews and training fed into this area but there was significantly more work that needed to be done through a multi-agency approach on the ground. The Chief Nurse Croydon CCG/CHS added that there needed to be increased awareness from frontline staff and a better understanding of the risks and challenges involved with better information sharing between partners. The CSCP Quality Assurance & Development Officer explained that there was a good training offer provided to staff on child criminal and sexual exploitation; specific training had been commissioned on the disproportionality to young black men and their families to extra familial risk. The Partnership had been instrumental in developing the Violence Against Woman and Girls (VAWG) strategy and ensuring that this did not sit alone and contained strong referencing to CSE.

The Head of Social Work with Families & Children with Disabilities 0-17 Services explained the Complex Adolescent Panel, which was multi-agency, and looked at children at risk of exploitation; a risk assessment was developed between partners using the expert knowledge of practitioners and

an action plan was agreed and followed. Children would remain on the Panel's list until the members were certain that the risks were managed, and some safety was achieved for the young person. Mapping was also undertaken to identify links between cases the Panel was considering. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People commented that the complex issues faced by the Council since 2017 could lead to challenges in this sensitive area of work but that there were a team of social workers who conducted intensive work with children at risk of CSE in collaboration with the Police and the Youth Offending Team. Members heard that a close eye was being kept on this area and it was a priority for the Cabinet Member. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained their key concerns were around missing and looked after children.

On the level of CSE in Croydon, the Sub-Committee heard that Croydon had a similar profile to other London boroughs; the Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education highlighted the importance of early intervention for young people and that any figures that they could provide would likely be misleading. The Sub-Committee asked how well the Partnership worked with other organisations and how often these relationships were reviewed. The Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education explained that there was very joined up working with other partners and partnerships but that there was always more work that could be done to supplement frequent on the ground communication. The independent review of the Partnership would specifically look at the links with other organisations and partnerships.

Members asked how much face-to-face working continued during COVID and the Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education explained that this was crucial. Throughout the pandemic, face-to-face contact had continued, and this had been supplemented by other means where necessary. The Head of Social Work with Families & Children with Disabilities 0-17 Services explained that there had been a point in lockdown when children had been prioritised due to need and those of highest priority had continued to receive full face-to-face contact with reduced levels for lower risk children in safer placements; some meetings of professionals had taken place virtually where practical.

The Sub-Committee asked about the challenges of Safeguarding Education Standards and the Director of Education responded that schools shared safeguarding audits which were reviewed to identify best practice and gaps. Where gaps were identified, or audits were not completed, schools were helped to find how to close these gaps and, where significant safeguarding concerns were identified, visits would take place and an action plan would be developed. Audits would be shared with and signed off by Governors to ensure safeguarding was a key focus for school leaderships. Serious concerns were not often identified in education provision, but should they be, they would be discussed within the Partnership and with OFSTED where necessary. Members asked how the challenge differed for the Police and Health Safeguarding Standards and the Chief Nurse Croydon CCG/CHS explained that the auditing and reviewing was similar. The Independent

Scrutineer explained that reports on auditing came to the Quality Improvement Group who provided further challenge.

Members asked about the Child Death Overview Panel, and it was explained that the report on this had not yet concluded. A report with the full details on this would be published at a later date, but the number of cases reviewed by the Panel had been falling over the last four years.

In response to questions about the effectiveness of training, the Independent Scrutineer explained that this could be hard to gauge but that learning was identified continually by the Partnership. Events were organised where all frontline practitioners from cases were invited to discuss and share their learning which was then shared with other practitioners. Members heard that the confidence of staff was often a good measurement of how effective training had been.

The Sub-Committee asked how the experience of children and young people was used to inform the practices of the Partnership. The Head of Social Work with Families & Children with Disabilities 0-17 Services explained that this information was captured through direct work with children, multi-agency meetings, family surveys, complaints and direct interactions with frontline workers and managers. Often feedback was good, and it was recognised that positive outcomes could sometimes not be as visible. There were a number of avenues used to collate this information, but it was recognised that more work needed to be done in this area and this was a part of all improvement plans across the Partnership. There would be a Practice Week in early October 2022 which would involve practitioners spending time talking to young people, children and carers to hear what they would like to see improved. Carers often attended social service meetings to discuss what was being done well and what could be done differently to allow social workers to reflect on their work.

Members asked how long after cases were closed that post case reviews were undertaken and whether there was any long term follow up to see how well interventions had worked. The Director Quality, Commissioning & Performance responded that the refresh of the Quality Assurance Framework looked to pick this up and to see how well things had worked for children and families and to review the longitudinal impact of interventions.

The Sub-Committee asked how effective information sharing was and how well early intervention approaches were embedded. The Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education explained that a lot of work had been done to improve information sharing in the Partnership both on the ground and at a strategic level. Work was done to review systems to ensure this was robust through training and identifying areas of additional learning. Members heard that Early Intervention services were not statutory and were often identified as areas for savings, however, these were vital to managing pressures in a time of increased demand. Early Help and Early Years services were working closely together, and this would feed into the development of Family Hubs.

The Director of Education explained that Croydon had received funding to develop the Family Hub model which would be implemented alongside an Early Years Strategy to make sure early help was available at a 'one stop shop' for families, carers and children. Family Hub development was still in the early stages and would be with input from the views of stakeholders and families. Schools are often the first port of call for the Early Help Service due to their relationships with families and children and this needed to be incorporated into the Family Hub model alongside Children's Centres. Members asked if the Council could bid for funding on Family Hubs or whether this needed to come from external organisations and partners. The Director for Education explained that the funding was received by the Council who would work closely with partners to deliver services.

The Chair thanked officers and the Independent Scrutineer for all of their work with the Partnership and in delivering the Annual Report.

Conclusions:

The Sub-Committee were disappointed that the Police were not able to attend and hoped that they would be able to attend in future.

The Sub-Committee commended the commitment of the Partnership and the Council to Early Intervention services.

The Sub-Committee were keen to see the conclusions of the Independent Review of the partnership included as part of the Annual Report for 2022-23.

6/22 Children's Centre Contract - Insourcing of the South Locality Children's Centre Delivery

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 41 to 52 of the agenda, which provided an update on the Children's Centre Contract award for North and Central, and the insourcing of the South Locality Children's Centre Delivery. The Director of Education introduced and summarised the report.

The Sub-Committee asked why the Council was not able to find a provider for the South Locality but were able to for the North and Central Localities. The Director of Education explained that this was largely due to the funding envelope available, concern around Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE), a lack of clarity around building costs and issues with the internal capacity of the bidders. After the first round of commissioning, bidders had been asked to provide the reasons for not bidding and a warming exercise has been conducted. The provider for the North and Central Localities had not been able to take on the South Locality due to a lack of capacity.

Members asked if there were any lessons that could be learnt as a result of the failure to commission for the South Locality. The Director for Education

explained that learning had been taken into account after the first round and had led to conducting a warming exercise, but this had not been enough to result in a successful bid. Members heard that unfortunately some things could not be changed, such as the funding envelope and the services the Council needed to be provided, TUPE and lack of clarity around the maintenance costs of buildings. Members heard that there was always an attempt to develop learning after any commissioning exercise. The Director Quality, Commissioning & Performance added that these were small providers, and the unknown costs were bigger risks for them than a larger business.

The Sub-Committee queried the £97k budget pressure due to redundancies and asked why only families in the South Locality would experience reduced services as a result. The Director of Education responded that the risks to service delivery in the South were low, and that ways to mitigate removing this amount from the budget would be looked at to ensure that impacts would be minimal; an example of this was encouraging staff at risk of redundancy to apply for vacant posts within the Parenting Team.

Members asked about the Purley Oaks Centre and the importance for parents in building relationships with staff before they were likely to ask for help; currently the Centre was only open for two and a half hours a week and it was asked why this was so limited. The Director of Education explained that, as part of the Hub and Spoke Model, most activity would be carried out in the Hubs with reduced activities in the Spokes; because staff had just transferred in on current terms and conditions, the model was still being developed and this had been more complicated at Purley Oaks due to staffing issues. Staff at the Purley Oaks Centre were available one day a week and would be signposting where families could go for additional services at other Children's Centres.

Members asked how existing services users were being supported into the new model, with some families having to travel further which would affect families without cars. The Director of Education explained this had been looked at during the consultation and that bus routes had also been considered and made available to families. It was acknowledged that the service had been reduced but that services would be signposted to families. There had been a long consultation on this strategy, but ultimately services had needed to be reduced in line with budget reduction. The Hub and Spoke Model was not just about Children's Centres and also focuses on delivering health services and more with partners.

The Family Hub model being adopted is in a transitional phase and a delivery plan for the Early Years Strategy will look at what else was available to families with young children and making this as accessible as possible. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People praised the Early Years Strategy and explained that this would feed into Family Hubs going forward.

On the risks of the £97k budget pressure, the Director of Education explained that the biggest risk was staffing, and that staff could leave due to anxiety

about job security. Mitigations to this were staff from the education department who were spending time in the Children's Centres.

The Sub-Committee asked how performance would be measured between the North and Central Localities and the South Locality and heard that the Key Performance Indicators would be exactly the same, and that delivery in the South would receive challenge from the Improvement Board.

Members asked about families being signposted to other Centres who could not get into the Purley Oaks Centre and how this would happen if the Centre was at capacity or closed. The Director for Education explained that the Model could not account for every family in the borough, but that signposting would take place through GPs, Health Visitors and other partners. It was important to ensure communication with partners was happening effectively and that that they were aware of what services were available. The Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education explained that the implementation plan of the Early Years strategy would be important in joining services up.

Members asked how the Children's Centres would interact with the Family Hubs and it was explained that these had not yet been implemented, but that Children's Centres would be incorporated into Family Hubs, but this was still at a very early stage. Children who would normally attend Children's Centres would receive services through Family Hubs, but further work on this was still required. Partners are still delivering services in Children's Centres through the Hub and Spoke model, and the Early Years Strategy was developed with partners.

The Chair asked if having Health Visitors in hubs would put additional pressure on these services and heard that this was unlikely as it would not require additional resource. On why the service had been insourced, the Sub-Committee heard that this had been the only option as a commissioning a provider had not been possible.

Conclusions:

The Sub-Committee were pleased to see that the Council had ensured Children's Centres were still available in the South Locality by insourcing the delivery of the Centres.

The Sub-Committee were concerned about the limited opening hours of the Purley Oaks Centre and how effectively families who would usually rely on this service would be signposted to alternative resources.

The Sub-Committee were concerned about the £97K budget pressure from insourcing the South Locality but were reassured that this would be looked at holistically to avoid a reduction in service for the South of the borough. That the Sub-Committee receive an update on Children's Centres once the Family Hub model had been fully implemented to see how this was performing.

Recommendations:

1. That the Sub-Committee be invited to visit the Children's Centres with the Cabinet Member in the North or Central areas, with a visit to a Children's Centre in the South once this has had a chance to bed in.

7/22 Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 53 to 56 of the agenda, which provided the Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard.

The Sub-Committee commended the performance under indicators CYPE 20 and 21, noting the difficult environment of the last two years in which these had been delivered.

The Sub-Committee asked about CYPE 27 & 29 and heard the Director of Education responded that as CYPE 27 had increased, this had a knock-on effect to CYPE 29. The resource was being looked at as a whole to work across the whole age group as there were usually more assessments for younger children; an annual reviewing team had been brought in to look at the backlog. It was acknowledged that this indicator was stubbornly red on the RAG rating, but that more Education Health & Care Plans were issued within 20 weeks and there was month on month improvement.

The Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education explained that indicators that were static were being reviewed regularly and CYPE 27 & 29 had recently been reviewed by the internal control board. Improvements in these areas had been reflected in a 2021 inspection, but demand and work in this area were huge. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People commended the work that had been done so far but acknowledged the work still to be done; the Cabinet Member explained that their LGA mentor had complimented the work of Croydon's SEN Service.

On CYPE 24, Members asked why this was increasing. The Director of Education explained that this was looked at in conjunction with CYPE 23; the NEET team was relatively small which meant that work needed to be focussed and was often on and with individuals, but figures had improved. It was noted that CYPE 24 was high due to the time of year with many young people transitioning between different education and employment settings. There was now a strategic lead for NEET who would maintain focus in this area.

On CYPE 04 and 06, it was asked when the missing data would be available. The Director Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that this had now been completed and would be included on the next report. Members requested that on any Red or Amber ratings commentary was always provided as it was missing for some indicators.

The Chair requested information on the transfers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) to other local authority areas, and the amount of time that UASC spent in the borough before they were transferred. The Director Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that the new requirement for a mandatory National Transfer Scheme (NTS) came into place in November 2021, and the target period for transfers to take place had previously been 10 working days and was now reduced to 5 working days. This was designed to limit the impact on the child of staying too long in the area and becoming connected to the local community, starting school, etc. The Council referred to the NTS as soon as young people arrived. S April 2022, 16 children had been transferred through the NTS scheme and 73 before April 2022. It was noted that the NTS had only been made mandatory in November 2021.

Recommendations:

1. That an updated version of the report including the missing information was circulated to the Sub-Committee.
2. That all future versions of the report provide commentary for any indicators with a RAG rating of red or amber.

8/22 Work Programme 2022/23

The Sub-Committee agreed with the Corporate Director Children, Young People & Education that the Educations Strategy and Standards report be added to the Work Programme for the January 2023 meeting.

The Sub-Committee discussed supplementary visits and activities to enhance the Work Programme. It was suggested that there be a meeting with Health Visitors and Antenatal workers in advance of the next Sub-Committee. Some other suggestions noted were meetings with frontline social workers and visiting the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

The Sub-Committee highlighted the importance of the Police attending the next meeting in November 2022.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Signed:

Date:

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