

# Public Document Pack

## Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 23 January 2024 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), Amy Foster, Mark Johnson, Helen Redfern, Manju Shahul-Hameed and Catherine Wilson

#### Co-optee Members

Paul O'Donnell (Voting Parent Governor Representative)

#### Also

**Present:** Councillor Maria Gatland (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)  
Councillor Joseph Lee (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)  
Elaine Jones (Voting Diocesan Representative (Catholic Diocese)) (Virtual)

**Apologies:** Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative) and Councillors Henson and Ramsey.

### PART A

#### 1/24 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Josephine Copeland (Non-voting Teacher representative) and for lateness from Councillor Ramsey.

Apologies were received from Councillor Henson, for who Councillor Foster attended as their substitute.

Apologies were given for former Councillor Mike Bonello, who had resigned from the Council on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024.

#### 2/24 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 14 November 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

#### 3/24 **Disclosures of Interest**

There were no disclosures of interest.

#### **4/24 Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### **5/24 Budget Scrutiny Challenge**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out in the supplementary agenda, which provided information on the identified budget proposals for 2024/25. The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance and the Director of Children's Social Care introduced the item and went through the report. The Sub-Committee considered the reports and looked to satisfy the following questions:

1. Are the savings deliverable, sustainable and not an unacceptable risk?
2. Is the impact on service users and the wider community understood?
3. Have all reasonable alternative options been explored and do no better options exist?

#### 2024-28 SAV CYPE 001 – Children's Social Care staffing budget realignment

The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that, in light of this saving no longer being included in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Finance Officers were preparing an updated MTFS that would look to achieve the savings in other areas of the Council's budget. The updated MTFS would take into account the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, feedback from the budget engagement process, and updated Council Tax and business rate income forecasts.

Members asked about flexible working in Children's Social Care, and the Director of Children's Social Care explained that the general approach in the department meant that social care staff were in office three days a week, and worked two days a week from home. The Sub-Committee heard that in office work was important for staff support, wellbeing and supervision, with team meetings taking place in person, as well as other service, team and learning events. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that working in person was important to ensure that the service held risk collectively.

The Sub-Committee asked about current vacancy rates in Children's Social Care and heard that vacancies were filled by agency workers; there were some uncovered vacancies, but work was ongoing with the agency provider to address this. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that using locum social workers was vital to ensure that caseloads remained manageable; there would always be some vacancies, due to gaps between staff leaving and starting, but it was important that these were closed where possible. Members queried whether achieving savings through more intensive work in the family home would require a more labour-intensive approach and cause additional burden for social workers. The Director of Children's Social

Care responded that the aim of filling these vacancies was to ensure that social workers had as much capacity as possible to be more involved in family life and to work closely with early help partners and schools. The importance of partnership working with the new Family Hubs model was also highlighted. Members heard that the aims of bringing on board a CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner would be to understand which forms of intervention led to the best and most expedient results; how the Council might work better with Community Sector providers; and how systems could be streamlined to unlock more staff resource.

Members asked how officers expected to maintain the quality of interventions and meet rising demands without additional staff. The Director of Children's Social Care stated that the support was being provided to frontline managers to improve the quality of supervision and group supervision that, it was explained, was vital to ensure social workers felt supported, and remained resilient, motivated, and upbeat. There was ongoing work to ensure social workers knew what was available in the community, and that this was easily accessible, through the Family Services Directory. The Sub-Committee heard that the management of caseloads and workloads was vital, particularly by looking at how systems could be changed to be less burdensome on social workers. The Director of Children's Social Care highlighted that Croydon used a systemic model to ensure social workers learnt from each other, as well as making sure there was good access to training to ensure their work could be as effective as possible.

The Sub-Committee asked how the wellbeing of social workers was upheld and heard that self-care services were promoted alongside honest and open discussions on the importance of the work, valuing the self and activities outside of work. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that there were also ongoing conversations about issues for women in the profession; discrimination; oppression; the role of men and fathers in families and how to have difficult conversations. Members heard that many in Children's Social Care lived in Croydon and were proud to work in their community; as a result; staff often found it difficult when the Council was criticised in the media. To address this and staff wellbeing, there was a celebrating success meeting once a month to recognise where good work was taking place, and to allow colleagues to appreciate each other's work.

Members asked about recruitment, and the Director of Children's Social Care explained that forthcoming regulation of the agency market following the Social Care Review would hopefully make permanent positions at Local Authorities more attractive, as well as requiring better referencing and longer notice periods for agency workers. It was highlighted that long-term agency workers and permanent social workers played important roles for children by providing continuity.

The Sub-Committee asked about the CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner and the Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that the department had access to transformation funding through the CYPE Transformation Programme. This would be used to address both the financial

and improvement challenges in the directorate, by bringing in expert capacity to look at risk sharing, outcomes for children and families, cost reductions, performance improvements and procurement processes. The CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner would help the Directorate find sustainable changes and to help continue the trend of safely reducing the number of children in care. The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance stated that a number of local authorities were also currently helping the Council review services and challenge areas of practice, but that a CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner would be a consultancy or other organisation with a proven background track record of working with Children's Services. The Council would have a market warming session later this month to inform the scope and pricing of a CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that Greenwich Council had undertaken a peer review of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), and Islington Council were working with the Young People 16+ Service under the Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP) funded by the Department for Education (DfE) to look at practice outcomes with Team Managers.

The Sub-Committee asked if social workers had access to key worker housing, and whether there was a way of working with the Planning Committee to ensure that there were sufficient levels of key worker housing in the borough. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that there were a small number of key worker housing units available, but these were only available to CYPE staff on certain income bands; Members heard that this was a good scheme that was not run by all local authorities. The Director of Children's Social Care stated that, in terms of recruitment, they were in favour of local people working in their community; this was supported by the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) scheme and social work apprenticeships. Members heard that the Council had put in a bid to the DfE for additional social work apprenticeship funding to enable Family Support workers, or key workers in early help, to train as social workers on their existing salaries.

The Sub-Committee asked about the delivery of Family Hubs in Croydon. The Director of Education explained that this was at very early stages, but that some services had begun operating out of the Woodlands Centre. The next steps would involve identifying new sites and launching a digital offer. The services in Family Hubs would follow the DfE model but would also reflect the local needs of Croydon as well as the voices of families and young people. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained that lots of children, partners and voluntary organisations had attended the launch of Family Hubs, and that it had been a very positive event and a good step forward. The Family Hub transformation funding would run over three years to ensure a sustainable model could be established in Croydon through working with partners.

## **Conclusions**

1. The Sub-Committee were grateful for the information and responses provided by officers and the Cabinet Member at the meeting.

2. The Sub-Committee were reassured that officers and the Cabinet Member had recognised that holding a 7% vacancy would present an unacceptable risk in Children's Social Care, and that this saving would not be included in the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
3. The Sub-Committee were confident that removing this saving from the MTFS was the correct decision to protect children and ensure that caseloads for social workers did not become unmanageable.
4. The Sub-Committee understood that the £1.1 million saving would need to be achieved and that the updated MTFS would set out how this saving would be made while also considering the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, feedback from the budget engagement process and updated Council Tax and business rate income forecasts.
5. The Sub-Committee were unable to comment on whether the £1.1 million saving in the budget would be achievable as the information on where this saving was to be achieved was not yet available. As such, the Sub-Committee would recommend the Scrutiny & Overview Committee reassure itself on the deliverability of any new savings proposals at its meeting on 12 February 2024, when considering the wider Budget.
6. The Sub-Committee were reassured by the peer challenge work being undertaken with other local authorities to look at different areas of Children's Services, and by the Council's engagement with the Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP) to improve practice outcomes.

#### 2024-28 SAV CYPE 003 – Review of Children Looked After Placements

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained that they had met with the two placements teams responsible for searching the market to make sure that there was the right support in place for each child. Members heard that referrals to placements had become competitive, with many local authorities seeking limited spaces. In the view of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People this was wrong, and they expressed their frustrations with the placements market. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained that a new Children's Home would be brought into Croydon next year, which would accommodate for a few young people with complex needs at a time, for short periods, and the development of the home would be funded by the DfE.

The Sub-Committee queried whether the Council had considered creating an in-house semi-independent placement provision. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that there were a number of providers in Croydon, and it needed to be understood whether the Council would benefit most from just improving relationships with these organisations, or through developing its own provision; Members heard that there were benefits and drawbacks to both private and in-house provision, but that any in-house offer would have significant up-front costs. The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance highlighted that all local authorities had to have a 'sufficiency

strategy' for placements; in developing this, it had been found that some providers would be in favour of 'preferred provider' arrangements, and that this could provide the opportunity to ensure the desired quality and standards were met, as well as integrating expertise from the Council into provider placements.

Members asked if there had been consideration of using Private Boarding Schools as care placements. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that this had been investigated, but that children in Boarding Schools also needed homes, and that this kind of placement presented challenges with providing institutional and other specialised care that children may need. The Council did work with independent schools in the borough, including through the virtual school, and specifically through Trinity School's summer school.

The Sub-Committee commented on the target to increase the use of in-house provision, and asked who was responsible for ensuring this took place. It was explained that decisions for Children not to stay at home needed to be made by Heads of Service or the Director of Children's Social Care and underpinned by compelling evidence. Once this referral was written, the first port of call was the Council's in-house fostering service, followed by independent foster care in Croydon. The Director of Children's Social Care highlighted the importance of making sure children could stay in their own schools and in contact with their friends. If a child's placement needed to change then this was decided at Care Panel, chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care, where there was always a consideration of in-house provision. The quality of service the Council provided to Foster Carers was highlighted as important to ensure that Croydon had a good reputation in the fostering community, but it was also emphasised that matching children to the correct placement was crucial. The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance responded to questions on the age profile of foster carers, explaining that often these individuals were older, and so it was important to ensure more foster carers were being recruited to grow the in-house provision, and to account for foster carers retiring. It was clarified that the aim to increase the use of in-house provision would not prejudice risk and needs assessments carried out by social workers, and that decisions would not be taken that were purely finance led.

Members highlighted the challenges to achieving these savings listed in the report, and asked what plans were in place to address these. The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance recognised that the target was ambitious and explained that addressing some of these challenges was specifically in the scope for the CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner. Members heard that, with the directorates' transformation focus and robust performance monitoring, these challenges could be closely tracked to allow the Council to react and minimise obstacles to achieving the desired savings whilst delivering the desired outcomes for children.

The Sub-Committee asked about risks from families opting out of early intervention practices. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that there were risks in this area, and that addressing this relied on the skills of

social workers and their ability to negotiate, to listen to children and families, and to advocate for families on issues to build trust and confidence. It was also important that the offer provided by Croydon reflected what families needed.

Members asked about how the Council was working to engage and build trust with providers. The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance explained that the placement team built appropriate relationships with providers working within framework agreements, and by working in partnership with the commissioning alliance. The importance of making the Council's processes as simple and efficient as possible was highlighted as an important aspect of building good relationships with suppliers.

### **Conclusions**

1. The Sub-Committee shared their gratitude to social workers and foster carers who were working to meet the needs of children in the borough.
2. The Sub-Committee wanted to monitor the efforts of the Council to increase the in-house foster provision in the borough and agreed that this should be added to the Work Programme for 2024/25.
3. Members were optimistic that the savings targeted from the review of children looked after placements would be deliverable, in light of the work already undertaken in this area during 2023/24.
4. The Sub-Committee were reassured that both the officers and the Cabinet Member understood the potential impact upon service users and the wider community of delivering this saving, and that no decisions would be taken for financial reasons, if they would be harmful to children and young people.
5. The Sub-Committee were supportive of the planned increase of in-house provision through the opening of a new Children's Home supported by Department for Education funding.
6. Members were optimistic about plans to continue to improve the Council's relationship with placement providers through the continued development of processes, and through possible 'preferred provider' agreements.
7. The Sub-Committee were confident that the scope for the procurement of a proposed CYPE Strategic Transformation Partner seemed well targeted but understood that the process was still in the early stages of development and that a market warming exercise had yet to take place.

**6/24**

### **Cabinet Report - Education Estates Strategy**

The Sub-Committee considered a paper set out in the supplementary agenda, which provided a report due for consideration at Cabinet on 31 January 2024 on the Education Estates Strategy for Pre-Decision Scrutiny. The Director of Education and the Head of Service for Early Years, School Place Planning and Admissions who introduced the report. The Chair thanked officers for providing written answers to a number of the Sub-Committee's questions on the paper in advance of the meeting.

Members asked about in-year admissions and what support was available to assist families moving into the borough with finding school places. The Director of Education explained that there had been a significant number of in-year admissions over the last couple of months. The Sub-Committee heard that the local authority received in-year admissions, but that schools, were their own admissions authority; because of this, the Council process the applications and pass these applications directly on to the schools named in the application. The Council did chase schools to respond to in-year admissions where these were outstanding and it was acknowledged that sometimes responses could take a significant period. Where Members submitted casework regarding in-year admissions, the Education department did respond directly to families and highlighted when applications were being submitted to schools with no available places. Additional support was provided to these families in identifying where there were available school places in the borough.

It was acknowledged that admissions for year 11 were more challenging, especially where students had not accessed the GCSE curriculum previously. The Director of Education explained that in response to this, the Fair Access Protocol had been looked at to separate out the 'managed moves' element, which had now been retitled as the 'inclusion' element; this had begun to yield positive results for in-year admissions. The Council was looking at what else could be done differently for year 10 and 11 in-year admissions to best work with schools, and had established a working group with head teachers to look at how best to support families moving into the borough.

The Sub-Committee asked whether the Council funded tuition or other support whilst school placements were being sought. The Director of Education explained that the Council had limited powers in this area, but could write to the Secretary of State to ensure a child was admitted to a school. There was a focus on partnership working with schools and conversations with head teachers on the in-year admissions process..

The Sub-Committee asked about modifications to schools to ensure they lost less heat, and asked if similar work was being considered to make sure schools remained cool during heatwaves. The Head of Service for Early Years, School Place Planning and Admission explained that the Education department worked closely with Capital Delivery colleagues to conduct risk assessments and ensure health and safety was paramount in all schools, with all regulations being correctly followed. Whilst ensuring schools could be properly heated was the responsibility of the local authority, overheating in schools was regulated by the DfE and was the responsibility of the schools themselves.

The Chair commented on the conversion of Saffron Valley Collegiate, and thanked officers for their response that this would not delay provision as the Service level agreement between the Council and the Management Committee of Saffron Valley Collegiate would remain in place; this would ensure that the Council continued to meet its statutory duty to provide



education for young people excluded from school who are unable to access a school place. The Director of Education clarified that Saffron Valley Collegiate was Croydon's Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and that this was split over four different locations, divided by Key Stage 3 and 4.

The Sub-Committee noted that additional spaces for the PRUs were commissioned, and asked how the demand and costs for these spaces had changed over the last year. The Director of Education explained that Saffron Valley Collegiate is a local authority school, which meant that the commissioning was based on the needs of the individual child using top-up funding, in the same way as special educational needs and disability (SEND) provision. It was acknowledged that there was increased demand from Year 1 children following the pandemic; it was inappropriate to place such young children into Saffron Valley Collegiate and alternative provision would be considered for these cases. The Director of Education explained that the Council was considering putting additional support into schools ahead of children being excluded or put on fixed term suspensions.

Members asked if it would be possible to have a list of the schools that fell under each area in Appendix 4, and for a case study or example of what prolonged surplus places could mean for a school. The Director of Education stated that this could be provided, and suggested that an example could be provided of a past situation where the Council had concerns about falling roles and the impact of this on the school.

### **Request for Information**

The Sub-Committee requested additional information on Appendix 4 (Available Primary School Places vs SCAP 2023 Pupil Projections) explaining which schools fell under each Planning Area, and for some information on a past situation where the Council had concerns about falling roles and the impact of this on the school.

### **Conclusions**

The Sub-Committee thanked officers and Cabinet Member for their responses and for providing written answers to their questions in advance of the meeting.

The Sub-Committee were encouraged that the Council was considering the impact of the pandemic on increased demand for alternative provision for younger children, and on PRU spaces.

## **7/24 Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 17 to 22 of the agenda, which provided the Early Help, Children's Social Care and Education Dashboard, and updated additional 'Red' indicators reviewed at the previous meeting.

On M37, the Sub-Committee asked what actions were being taken to address this indicator and the Chair queried the timetable for improvement. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that there was rigorous multi-agency oversight where children were subject to a subsequent Child Protection Plan, especially when this was within a short space of time. A Panel met every month to look at all of these children, and it was more likely that the 'Pre-Proceedings Process' may accompany subsequent CPPs and that these would work to shorter timescales. CPPs usually took between 6 and 18 months to have an effect, and it was highlighted that CPPs were always instated when needed. The Director of Children's Social Care stated that M37 had reduced and plateaued, with most of the children on a subsequent plan having last been on a CPP over 3 years ago. The Director of Quality, Commissioning & Performance agreed that this indicator was a concern for the Council but explained that it was predicted that this indicator would start to improve over the latter half of 2024.

On Appendix B, the Director of Children's Social Care explained that these indicators related to earlier conversations in the meeting about rising demands and caseloads, and their impacts on social workers. It was acknowledged that these indicators were not where they should be, but that the service was focussed on completing supervisions and visits. The Director of Children's Social Care reassured the Sub-Committee that the service reported every month on each child that had not been seen in timescale; Heads of Service required Team Managers to put management oversight record on these files and explain to these children why they had not been seen. Where there were vacancies and illness, teams triaged cases for visits and worked closely with schools to provide some limited safeguarding oversight. Some families were persistent in refusing visitation and, in these cases, the application of a CPP became a stronger consideration. There were Family Support Workers in the Family Assessment Service who could undertake welfare visits, although it was recognised that this was not in place of a statutory social work visit.

The Chair and Sub-Committee thanked officers for their detailed and candid responses and reassurance.

#### **8/24 Cabinet Response to Scrutiny Recommendations**

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

#### **9/24 Scrutiny Work Programme 2023-24**

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

The Sub-Committee requested some information at a future meeting on the impact in Croydon of new London-Wide Early Years funding at a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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## Cabinet Report - Education Estates Strategy (Supplement)

### School Admissions

- 1. The council is deciding to not propose changing admissions arrangements (4.1.2 & 8.1) – what alternatives/options have been considered? When was the last consultation on admissions arrangements?**

#### **Response**

#### **The council is deciding to not propose changing admissions arrangements (4.1.2 & 8.1)**

All admission authorities must formally agree their admission arrangements every year, even if the arrangements have not changed from the previous year.

Where an admission authority decides to propose changes to their school admission arrangements, it must be compliant with the School Admissions Code, and there is a requirement for the admission authority to consult stakeholders, including parents/carers, on the proposed change/s. Consultation must last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year.

Admission authorities are required to consult on their school's admission arrangements every 7 years, even if there have not been any changes.

**The proposed admissions arrangements in the cabinet report relate to community (LA maintained) schools. The LA is the admission authority for community schools.**

Governing Bodies of Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools, free schools and academies are the admission authority for their school and are required to consult on any changes to their admission arrangements. Statutory consultation is required if a school wants to reduce their Published Admissions Number (PAN). The PAN is the maximum number of pupils that the admission authority will admit to each year group.

Some non-maintained schools have consulted on changes to their school's PAN due to high level of surplus places. The proposals for reductions in PAN are designed to improve schools' ability to efficiently plan their staffing and educational provision by offering a more accurate number of places. . In common with many other London authorities, Croydon has experienced a significant fall in the demand for school places, particularly in the primary

education phase. This brings budget pressures that could affect the sustainability of schools and their ability to maintain high standards. If the school is not oversubscribed, all applicants must be offered a place. The oversubscription criteria are applicable if the admission authority receives more applications than there are places in the school.

Schools / Academies that are proposing to reduce their Published Admission Number are required to consult on the change to their admission arrangements.

### **What alternatives/options have been considered?**

We are not proposing a change to the oversubscription criteria for our community schools for 2025/26. Whilst there are other ways admission arrangements can influence the allocation of school places set out in the Code (e.g., giving priority in our oversubscription criteria to children eligible for the early years premium/ pupil premium) no alternative option is being considered at the time of writing this report.

#### Reduction of Published Admission Number

Some of our Schools - Voluntary Aided and Academies - have consulted on reducing their school's Published Admission Number (PAN) to address the surplus capacity.

For LA maintained / community schools, the main route for managing high level of surplus place has been via in-year variation of the school's PAN.

#### In-Year variation of admission number

Once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular academic year, they cannot be revised by the admission authority. However, admission authorities may propose in-year variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. For community, voluntary-aided and foundation schools, such proposals must be referred to the Office of School Adjudicator for approval.

Academy schools proposing to vary admission arrangements are required to contact the Regional Schools Commissioner.

#### School closure

School closure is an option that could be considered to manage high level of surplus school places, especially in the primary education phase. However, **Croydon currently have no plans to close any schools**. Our starting point is to work with schools to avoid the need for school closures in the future. We

are working with relevant schools to manage high levels of surplus places through variation PAN reduction and in-year variation of admission number.

### **When was the last consultation on admissions arrangements?**

The last consultation on admissions arrangements for community schools took place in 2016/17 (January 2017 cabinet report) for the 2018/19 academic year.

The next consultation will take place next year for the 2026/27 academic year (to meet the 7 year requirement).

If there are any changes by government policy e.g. via the School Admissions Code, consultation would have taken place by central government and the admission authority would be required to implement the changes.

### **2. There has been increased demand due to increased housing (4.3.5 & 4.3.8) – is there currently sufficient capacity and does this correlate to where new housing is being built?**

#### **Response**

Our pupil projections indicated that currently there is sufficient capacity in our primary and secondary schools to meet demand. Likely pupil yield from new housing developments has been taken into account in pupil projections. Planning for school places also take into account in-year growth as a result of new housing. The demand for school places will vary depending on the number of school-age children living in the new homes. Larger homes such as family-sized dwellings typically accommodate more school-age children than smaller homes, such as flats. We have been working closely with our spatial planning colleagues regarding planned new housing developments and this is kept under close review where demand is expected to increase as new housing becomes occupied.

### **3. Last year we heard that schools with budget deficits were associated with surplus places – is this still the case? How well is the School Organisation Advisory Board proceeding in addressing this?**

#### **Response**

The majority of school revenue funding is allocated on a per pupil basis. If schools don't have enough pupils attending or suffer from fluctuating numbers, they may not be able to operate in a financially efficient way and risk entering a budget deficit. Therefore, any decrease in pupil numbers will

reduce the funding a school receives. Some primary schools are struggling to balance budgets, due to a combination of factors including inflationary price increases, a shortage of teaching and support staff leading to increased spend on expensive agency staff.

How well is the School Organisation Advisory Board proceeding in addressing this?

Council Officers have been working with individual schools with high levels of surplus school places rather than through an Advisory Board. This has also been done via the Croydon Head Teachers Association meetings.

4. **4.1.12 - the last sentence states that 'Croydon also administer the application process on behalf of the majority of secondary schools, however the admission authority of the secondary schools manages the decisions on who can be offered'; the sentence states that Croydon administers the in year application process for the majority of primary schools including Academy, VA and Foundation schools. This suggests that these primary schools do not manage the decisions on who can be offered - is that correct?**

#### **Response**

No. Croydon Admissions administer or manage the in-year applications for these schools, and send the application details onto the schools. The school/Governing Body/Board is the decision maker, based on their admission arrangements.

Each school has a published admission policy, which is used to allocate places where there are more applicants than places available.

The application process depends on the school parents/carers are applying to, as some schools manage their own admissions.

Some schools require the completion of a supplementary information form (SIF) as well as an application form.

#### **Applications to Voluntary Aided Schools and Academies where Croydon Admissions co-ordinate the application form**

Parents/carers are required to complete a supplementary information form (SIF) and submit to the school directly in order for their application to be considered.



## **Receiving an outcome for the application**

For applications made to these schools, the outcome of application will be sent directly to the applicant by the school.

## **Applications to Academies who manage their own in-year Admissions**

Applications must be made directly to the school. The outcome of the application will be sent to the parent/carer by the school.

### **5. Are there any risks associated with an increase in In-year applications?**

#### **Response**

Yes.

In-year admission applications have increased significantly in Croydon, and across other London boroughs. This is due to several factors, including families moving to different boroughs due to changes in working patterns, while others move into London from other parts of the UK and abroad. Croydon also to receive a high number of refugee and asylum-seeking children and families due to the location of the Home Office in Croydon. In-year admissions can also be challenging for schools as no immediate funding is made available by the Department for Education when these children join. Current funding is on a per-pupil basis, and for children who join the school after the census in October, the school will not receive any funding until the next October.

In-year admissions in years 10 and 11 pose particular challenges as schools have less time to prepare these pupils for exams, leading to some schools refusing to take children in these year groups. This can lead to an increase in the number of children out of school.

### **6. When an in year admission comes into Croydon, how does the team capture if a family is of a particular faith and check that they know which faith schools have vacancies - should they wish to access them?**

#### **Response**

Admissions do not capture this information, however we have a schools' prospectus on the Council's website that details faith schools in Croydon, which applicants can access to assist them in deciding which schools to apply for.

### **7. 4.4.4 - How many schools have reduced their admission number via an in year variation of PAN and are they spread evenly across the borough**

**or do they reflect local area issues? How do you ensure that all schools with a surplus of places have the opportunity to seek an in year variation? At what time of the year would the variation be sought?**

### **Response**

**How many schools have reduced their admission number via an in year variation of PAN and are they spread evenly across the borough or do they reflect local area issues?**

Since September 2023, one primary school (CofE) has had an in-year variation approved by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) and one junior school (maintained) is awaiting approval. Both schools were supported through this process by Croydon. Both schools are in the North planning area and reflect individual school positions as well as local issues with high surplus school places.

**How do you ensure that all schools with a surplus of places have the opportunity to seek an in-year variation?**

This has been discussed as an option in meetings with all Head Teachers, Trusts, Diocese, and individual schools. Council Officers support own admission authority with the process – application to the Office of Schools Adjudicator or the Regional Schools Commissioner.

**At what time of the year would the variation be sought?**

There is no specific time of year for this. However, the LA would normally suggest that the school waits until at least the end of September, when actual numbers are clearer and a more informed decisions can be made.

In all cases, admissions will try and work with the school and agree a cap in year of entry numbers where the local picture supports this.

### School Maintenance

- 1. 4.2.10 - should 'an Academy School Buildings' read 'any Academy School Buildings'? Are there any schools in Croydon with RAAC? What are the risks associated with the use of CLT and Wood Wool? Are the 13 schools with CLT and Wood Wool being all Community Schools? Does a finding like this promote a building to D1 status?**

### **Response**

Yes, should be read 'any Academy School Buildings'.

**Are there any schools in Croydon with RAAC?**

None in Croydon maintained schools and reports received from academies confirmed no presence of RAAC.

**What are the risks associated with the use of CLT and Wood Wool?**

Wood wool and CLT are alternative light weight construction materials used instead of RAAC. They are known not to fail suddenly (unlike RAAC) and are safe providing regular safety checks are conducted and after any water damaged areas need to be re-assessed for Structural integrity.

**Are the 13 schools with CLT and Wood Wool being all Community Schools?**

Yes.

**Does a finding like this promote a building to D1 status?**

No, as the intention is to monitor the schools regularly. The regular monitoring is about to be programmed in and will be monitored each Spring with a confirmed 4 week for completion.

Childcare Sufficiency

- 1. Page 72 - Childcare sufficiency - Would you talk us through the graph with respect to the take up of eligible 2 Year Olds - why does it vary in Croydon more than National and what are the consequences of this at provider level in Croydon?**

**Response**

There has been some anecdotal evidence from providers that 2 year old places were less financially lucrative due to the higher staffing ratios, the need for more space and the higher needs of the children eligible for the entitlement and their families.

In addition, it is very likely that the pandemic has affected take up. However, we expect the take up to increase as the council has changed its communication / approach to ensure greater awareness – rather than sending information regarding the entitlement via post, this is being done via direct email to parents/carers.

The impact of the government's children reform is likely to increase take up. From April 2024, eligible working parents of 2-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours childcare support. From September 2024, 15 hours childcare

support will be extended to eligible working parents of children from the age of 9 months to 3-year-olds.

- 2. Page 74 - Would you talk us through the differences in column 2 and column 4, as well as telling us how the additional places will be sourced?**

**Response (5.1 - Places required from April 2024)**

This is a typographical error – table 4 should be headed as ‘April 2025’, not ‘April 2024’.

The additional places required for April 2025 will be sourced by expansion of existing early years providers and/or new provision. We are currently mapping out wards with the need for places is likely to be the greatest and assessing the capacity of existing providers to expand their numbers. We are also investigating sites where providers may be able to open new settings (e.g. school buildings, church/community halls, etc.).

The DfE is providing local authorities with childcare expansion capital grant funding in 2023/24 to support the provision of new places to support the expansion in delivering the expansion of the 30-hours early years entitlement for working families and of wraparound provision in primary schools.

- 3. Page 77 – Is it correct that if a setting is judged RI in an Ofsted Inspection then it cannot receive funding for 2YO places? If so, how long would it be before the inspectors returned? For 2YOs currently at the provision, does funding stop immediately or is time given for the family to find an alternative provider?**

**Response**

Yes, if a setting is judged RI then they cannot take any further funded 2 year olds. They can, however, keep the children they already have on roll. Ofsted usually return with 12 months period to the school judged as RI.

- 4. Free Early Education and Childcare for 15 hours a week for children of 2 years of eligible working parents – is this covered under the ESS or would that be elsewhere?**

**Response**

Yes, this is mentioned in Appendix 6 – Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

## SEND Provision

- 1. SEND demand at NY 0 (5.1.) - Will these numbers expand over time to NCY-1 & NCY-2?**

### **Response**

There is always the potential for expansion within the SEND population and forecasting can be a challenge. We have data that we can review further on this if required.

- 2. What percentage of children with SEND are being assessed within the target timeframes (last year it was 80%)?**

### **Response**

This has been an area for improvement in SEND and is monitored monthly across the year. It has been as high as 100% this year and is consistently above 80%. – although we did dip in December due to short month and staff absence/leave. Average for October / November and December = 78%.

- 3. The 10 SEND pupils who are currently receiving alternative packages (5.1.6) - Is the non-attendance of school provision a choice in their interests or is this simply an observation?**

### **Response**

The pupils on home packages are related to parental choice and access to placements.

## Alternative Provision

- 1. The proposed conversion of Saffron Valley Collegiate to 1st April 2024 (2.13 & 7.2) - does this delay have any knock-on effects?**

### **Response**

No, the service level agreement between the Council and the Management Committee of Saffron Valley Collegiate will remain in place to ensure the Council continues to meet its statutory duty to provide education for young people excluded from school who are unable to access a school place.

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