

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 18 September 2018 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber - Town Hall

MINUTES

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

Paul O'Donnell

Also Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Cabinet Member, Children Young People and Learning)

Apologies: Elaine Jones, Dave Harvey

PART A

17/17 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies received from Dave Harvey and Elaine Jones

18/17 **Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2018 were approved and signed as an accurate record.

The Chair commented on the following excerpt from the meeting

A15/18 Members commented that more focus was needed on ensuring appropriate training for staff at mainstream schools to enable provision to be made available for children with Autism. A request for data on children with EHCP plans was made by the Sub-Committee Members

Not having received this information, the Chair asked for this to be circulated as soon as possible.

It was agreed for Action Lists to be drawn up and circulated prior to each meeting.

19/17 **Disclosures of interest**

Councillors Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maddie Henson and Helen Redfern disclosed a non-pecuniary interest in Item 6 as they were Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

20/17 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none.

21/17 **Children's Statutory Complaints Report 2017/18**

The Complaints Manager presented the Annual Report which gave an overview of the Council's performance in dealing with statutory children's complaints.

The Sub-Committee learned that stage one complaints had increased by 16% from the previous year whilst stage 2 had decreased by 33% and stage 3 panels by 50%. There were a number of cases that had been referred to the Ombudsman, but none were upheld.

The Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care informed the Sub-Committee that a common theme arising from the complaints concerned a perceived lack of communication or miscommunication. In response to this the Service would concentrate its efforts on training and best practice in order to improve future communication. The Head of the Quality Assurance team would liaise with the complaints team on a quarterly bases to identify themes and look at lessons to be learnt which will feed into a Learning and Development programme to improve services.

A Member queried what actions had been taken to improve engagement with foster carers as the report indicated that complaints received were relatively low in comparison to the size of the Service. Officers advised that there had been a survey of foster carers to capture their experience of the Service, as the development and support provided to them was crucial to the retention of carers. Officers agreed to circulate the percentage of uptake of the survey to Members after the meeting.

A Member commented that it was important that complaints relating to poor communication were dealt with at stage one. Any possible delays may exacerbate a situation that could be easily resolved.

In response to a Member question on lessons learnt and what would be done differently, officers stated that opportunities for training on how to improve internal processes were being explored. Engagement and the relationship between the complaints team and Children's Services had improved due to better communication. Training and support had also been given to officers in order to improve the quality of responses given to complainants.

The Sub-Committee requested that the Quarter 2 complaints report to be brought to their next meeting for review. The three Chairs of Scrutiny would discuss after the meeting how best to proceed with the monitoring of complaints, which was felt to lack information on comparative data and ordinary communication activities, which would allow Members to appropriately scrutinise the performance data presented.

In reaching its recommendations, the Sub-Committee reached the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

1. That many of the complaints received were relating to poor communication and clear context of how we communicate as a council was not evident in the report.
2. There was a lack of data in the report on how the Council's performance compared against other Local Authorities.
3. There was little information on the Councils course of action for those that had received a poor service but did not complain.
4. That performance against SLA was poor

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend that:

1. An update report was required on progress and improvements to be brought to the Sub-Committee on a quarterly basis as well as an overview report to be brought before the Sub-Committee at its 27 November 2018 meeting.
2. Future reports to include data on the Councils performance against neighbouring Local Authorities.

22/17 **Minutes from Corporate Parenting Panel**

The Sub-Committee was asked to note the minutes of the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 19 July 2018.

The Chair commented that it was evident that good work was taking place and that further discussion exploring this in detail would take place at the Sub Committee meeting on 12 March 2019 with the Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning question time.

Members were reminded of their roles and duties as Corporate Parents and encouraged to further educate themselves on how best to serve the young people in their communities through participation in events and other learning opportunities.

The Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning informed the Sub-Committee that they were in the process of organising Member training sessions on Safeguarding. In addition, arrangements were being made for visits to the various Children's teams as an opportunity for Members for explore the journey of the child and ask in-depth questions. The Sub-Committee was informed that dates would be circulated once the details had been finalised.

In reaching its recommendations, the Sub-Committee reached the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

1. That it would be beneficial for new Members as well as returning Members to attend the sessions that were held in 2017 which enabled Members to experience the journey of the child through visits with Children's Services departments.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend that:

1. The Member sessions resume quickly and the timetable for the sessions be distributed as soon as the dates have been agreed.

23/17 **Children's Services Improvement Arrangements**

The Director of the Children's Improvement Programme introduced the report which detailed the findings and actions arising from the third Ofsted monitoring visit which took place in July 2018. The report also included the published outcome letter which evidenced improving practice but alluded that pace of improvement was too slow, with children left in unacceptable situations.

The report highlighted areas of focus for the fourth Ofsted visit which was due to take place in October 2018. Feedback on the quarterly stock take and the progress of the relationship with Camden was included in the report.

The Sub-Committee was informed that following the monitoring visit, a number of actions had been taken to address some of the areas of concern highlighted which included the following:

- Reaffirmation of Management standards
- Management and Practice groups had been refreshed and refocused on actions points within the improvement plan.
- Focus on recruitment to address key issues of capacity and the retention of quality staff.
- There was a drive to address high caseloads which continued to cause concern

The Sub-Committee was informed that out of the 21 recommendations made by Ofsted, the approach was to draw out a number of priorities to focus on at any given time in order to ensure that achievements could be met as required.

The Sub-Committee was also reminded that the support received from London Borough of Camden Children's Services was on a partnership basis and that they worked together on addressing identified need.

In response to a concern raised by a Member regarding issues surrounding the progression of cases of Section 20 accommodated children, which was felt to be a national issue, officers stated that the focus for the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel was to look at extra support for this area of work and for all cases to be reviewed by the end of the year.

Officers pointed out that the last Ofsted monitoring visit had also raised this as an area of concern and stated that planning should occur at an earlier stage. Further resources were being put into this area to ensure that planning, reports and cases presented were timely and effective. Following a request by a Member, officers agreed to provide figures relating to Section 20 accommodated children.

It was noted that the quality of Care Planning for children was inconsistent, in particular the application of thresholds, with delays in certain processes. Officers acknowledged that on inspection it was identified that Croydon's performance was poor and although there was improved understanding of processes, the challenge and progression of decision was not quick enough. This was a management issue and some of the support received from the London Borough of Camden was on how to maintain consistent practice and focus on the application of thresholds in a timely and proactive manner.

Following on from the July 2018 inspection, one of the actions carried out was the commissioning of a provider for three temporary social work teams to focus on incoming duty work, which would allow the other five Assessment teams to complete tasks related to existing cases. At the end of July there were 1800 cases in the Assessment Service, which had now been reduced to 1300. The Service commissioned had achieved the intended impact and had allowed for a steady flow and business as usual.

A Member queried how the impact of the Case Transfer policy would be measured and what a positive impact would look like at both a senior management level and to the 'cases' themselves. Officers responded that one of the challenges identified by Ofsted was the potential for unallocated cases in the Service and as a result they asked for a clear line of sight and policy on how these cases were dealt with. This information had been gathered for Ofsted. Weekly updates providing information on any case that had outstanding actions or was in between services was being gathered in order to maintain visibility and to improve performance. Data on capacity and volume was also being gathered on a regular basis in order to maintain an overarching overview of the Service.

The Vice-Chair queried the overall progression made on the plan and how the Council was progressing against the Ofsted inspection time frame. Officers stated that the Ofsted time frame had previously been based on there being 8 monitoring visits and then an inspection, this had now been reduced to 6 Monitoring visits. Croydon has had 3 visits to date with the next due to take place at the beginning of October. Ofsted had acknowledged that progress was being made but not quickly enough.

The Chair stated that pace increase was vital as per the monitoring visit and asked how confident officers were of progress. Officers answered that that whilst they remained confident, Members' should keep in mind that the Council was still in the first year of the three year plan. Croydon was a large borough with many complexities and would require multi-agency working with partners and relentless hard work in order to drive improved outcomes for many years to come.

The Chair thanked officers for their answers.

In reaching its recommendations, the Sub-Committee reached the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

1. Whilst there had been some notable improvements there was still a lot of work to be done and in some specific areas there remained an acute cause for concern.
2. In-depth evidence of partner's commitment to improvement of safeguarding arrangements was needed.
3. Further information was required on the figures for children accommodated under Section 20, with high level cases remaining a national issue.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend that:

1. Officers circulate figures on the amount of cases of Section 20 accommodated children to the Committee after the meeting.

24/17 **Recruitment and Retention**

The Interim Executive Director of People and the Head of Human Resources were in attendance at the meeting to provide a summary on the position of recruitment and retention of staff in Children's Services and answer questions arising.

The Service had been under immense pressure with all staff facing large caseloads and as a result having to work weekends and evenings, which was not sustainable. In order to alleviate this pressure, extra capacity was brought in on a short-term basis over the summer holidays to assist in clearing backlogs.

Longer term solutions being put in place included a strong support offer of training to build the expertise of newly qualified social workers, who were not as difficult to recruit. The offer of apprenticeships and bursaries for those looking to return to social work had also been explored as part of a recruitment drive. Benchmarking of salaries across London and against neighbouring boroughs had taken place and there had been an increase in key worker retention payments

It was agreed across the Service that further work was needed with various agencies to improve the quality of referrals received. Referrers also needed to develop their understanding of what was an appropriate referral and what information was expected to reinforce the importance of the quality of referrals.

The Human Resources team now had a clear line of sight of the needs of the Service with monthly staff monitoring reports collated to analyse where vacancies existed and to understand how social workers could be sources for each team. A five point strategy had been developed to focus on advertising, recruitment and retention. As a result, a number of new starters had been recruited into various areas of the Service

The use of agency staff remained high in the Service but it was acknowledged that they were key to the workforce. Many had been with Croydon for a long time, were valued and were being encouraged to sign permanent contracts.

It was highlighted that the department had been proactive in finding resourceful ways to attract and retain good quality social workers, but it was questioned whether the offer of housing and school places had been explored as a means to attracting staff to the borough. Officers agreed that affordability of housing remained an issue. The Leader had given a commitment that key worker housing would be explored when introduced to the borough in 2019.

Members agreed that there was an acute shortage of good social workers in Croydon and a high caseload exacerbated the problem, with more work needed to address the present difficulties in order to be able to effectively compete for staff and raise the profile of the borough.

The Chair thanked officers for their responses to questions.

The Sub-Committee reached the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

1. Recruitment and retention of good quality experienced staff remained a challenge
2. The Council had been responding appropriately by looking at various methods to raise its profile in order to attract social workers to Croydon.
3. It was concerning that there had been no prior transparent line between Children's Social Care and Human Resources to communicate the need for staff but the new strategies adopted through the collections of actions in place were encouraging.

25/17 **Performance Summary Data**

The Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care indicated that the summary was being presented to Scrutiny to trigger a discussion on what information Members would like to be presented with going forward.

The Sub-Committee were informed that a large amount of data was measured with 26 key tracking indicators which highlighted areas for improvement.

Members agreed that the information presented was overwhelming at first glance and that further discussion was needed

It was also agreed that range was important in order to fully understand the complex data presented. Officers agreed to cluster indicators and circulate to Members to enable them to decide the specific areas to explore in depth.

In reaching its recommendations, the Sub-Committee reached the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

1. That the format of the data presented was overwhelming.
2. Future reports brought before the Committee would need to be more focused on specific areas at each individual meeting.
3. Concise information on range was important and should be included in reporting in order to obtain a clear understanding of average figures.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to that:

1. Officers to produce and circulate to members following the meeting, a cluster of performance indicators by the 1st of November 2018
2. The Committee work with officers to establish which indicators they would like to explore in further detail

26/17 **Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report 2017-18**

The Interim Independent Chair of Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB) presented the draft Annual Report 2017/18.

The report outlined the progress of the CSCB Improvement Plan which was set as part of the Children's Improvement Plan and the CSCB business plan 2017/2018.

The CSCB Plan centres around the following:

- Strengthening and Partnership
- Neglect
- Early Help
- Vulnerable Adolescence
- Children with Disabilities

The report focused on current safeguarding arrangements and priorities of the Board and looked to address criticism arising from the 2017 Ofsted inspection that the Board lacked focus and was trying to cover too many areas. The Board was now committed to concentrating on specific priority areas in order to ensure the effectiveness of its reviews.

The report highlighted that good progress had been made in relation to the work around neglect and vulnerable adolescence and that more work was needed with Children with Disabilities as well as Early Help. It was noted that an Early Help Strategy would be presented to Cabinet at its December meeting.

The report was an example of an improving Board and the work it was doing, but also highlighted that in response to the revised statutory guidance in 'Working Together 2018', new safeguarding proposals would have to be developed. There would no longer be a CSCB as the three partners, the Council, Police and the Clinical Commissioning Group were required under revised guidelines to develop new safeguarding proposals which must be ready for implementation by September 2019.

It was agreed that an informal meeting would take place to allow further examination of the CSCB report in greater detail as well as provided the opportunity to discuss the transition of the partnership under the new proposed safeguarding arrangements

In response to a Member question about the effectiveness of the partnership, the independent Chair commented that it was an improving partnership. The

work around vulnerable adolescence was good, with strong engagement in this area by all of the partners.

It was commented that in order for Scrutiny not to replicate the work of the CSCB, Scrutiny must be convinced that the partnership was working effectively to improve its outcomes. Further understanding of roles, evidence of strong partnership as well as transparency was needed for reassurance.

The Chair thanked the Interim Independent Chair for attending the meeting.

In reaching its recommendations, the Sub-Committee reached the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

1. The Sub-Committee would convene an informal meeting on 10 October to look in-depth at the work of the partnership, its effectiveness and threats and issues the partnership will encounter through the transition period of implementation of the new arrangements.
2. At the Informal meeting on 10 October, the performance of the Health Visiting team which is now under the Councils responsibility would be further explored.
3. Further information was required on the new safeguarding arrangements under the revised structure of 'Working together 2018' and how the partners will manage arrangements
4. It was difficult to get a sense of strong partnership between the partners and further understanding of each role would be beneficial to the Committee.
5. Reassurance was required on how the new structure would manage demands.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Croydon Council that:

1. The partners (Croydon Council, CCG and Police) to attend a future Scrutiny meeting to answer questions on how they will transition to complying with the new guidance "Working together to Safeguard Children" published in July 2018 to ensure that the children of Croydon are kept safe through the transition and into the future.
2. The partners to provide evidence to the Sub-Committee on how they are supporting each other, the effectiveness of their multiagency working and the impact on the lives of the children of Croydon.
3. The Partners to attend a meeting of the Sub-Committee in January 2019 to present their proposals

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Metropolitan Police that:

1. The partners (Croydon Council, CCG and Police) to attend a future Scrutiny meeting to answer questions on how they will transition to complying with the new guidance "Working together to Safeguard Children" published in July 2018 to ensure that the children of Croydon are kept safe through the transition and into the future.
2. The partners to provide evidence to the Sub-Committee on how they are supporting each other, the effectiveness of their multi-agency working and the impact on the lives of the children of Croydon.

3. The Partners to attend a meeting of the Sub-Committee in January 2019 to present their proposals

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Clinical Commissioning Group:

1. The partners (Croydon Council, CCG and Police) to attend a future Scrutiny meeting to answer questions on how they will transition to complying with the new guidance “Working together to Safeguard Children” published in July 2018 to ensure that the children of Croydon are kept safe through the transition and into the future.

2. The partners to provide evidence to the Sub-Committee on how they are supporting each other, the effectiveness of their multiagency working and the impact on the lives of the children of Croydon.

3. The Partners to attend a meeting of the Sub-Committee in January 2019 to present their proposals

The Sub-Committee also resolved that these conclusions and recommendations be copied to Di Smith, the Independent Chair of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board.

27/17 **What Difference has this meeting made to Croydon's Children**

On reflection of the meeting, Members expressed that they felt more comfortable with progress that has been made by the Service in comparison to the immediate months following the Ofsted inspection and findings.

The Sub-Committee agreed that understanding the voice of the staff was very important and there needed to be a focus on staff involvement in Scrutiny.

The Sub-Committee also agreed to explore how the voice of the child could be captured through avenues such as schools, the Young Mayor and voluntary organisations and for Councillors to understand what was happening in their own Wards.

The Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning agreed to circulate an invite for the next Youth Congress meeting to Members of the Sub-Committee.

28/17 **Work Programme 2018/2019**

The Sub-Committee noted the items on the agenda for the meeting on 27 November 2018.

Members' requested that the SEN item include data on exclusion and an update following implementation of the SEN strategy.

An interest in an item coming to a future meeting on Children and Young Peoples Mental Health was raised for consideration.

Members agreed to draw up a list of possible items to scrutinise and discuss this in detail at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee. Additionally it was agreed to draw up a list of possible organisations or establishments to visit.

The work programme was **NOTED** for the remainder of the 2018/19 municipal year

The meeting ended at 9.24 pm

Signed:

Date:

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