

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 18 June 2019 at 6.30 pm in The Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

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

Co-optee Members

Also Present: Robert Henderson, Executive Director of Children Families and Education
Shelley Davies, Interim Director of Education
Alison Farmer, Head of Special Needs 0-25
Kathy Roberts, SEN Consultant
Kerry Crichlow, Programme Director Children's Improvement

Apologies: Elaine Jones, Dave Harvey and Paul O'Donnell

PART A

28/19 Apologies for absence

Apologies received from Dave Harvey, Elaine Jones and Paul O'Donnell.

29/19 Minutes of the previous sub-committee meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the meeting held on 12 March 2019 were agreed as an accurate record

30/19 Disclosures of interest

Councillor Callton Young declared that he was the Chair of Governors at St Giles School.

Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick declared that he was the Council's Champion for Autism.

31/19 Urgent Business (if any)

There were none.

32/19 Actions List Update

The Chair updated the Sub-Committee Members on the status of the actions list which showed that many of the actions had been resolved. It was observed that there were a number that remained open due to being under review or ongoing.

33/19 Dedicated School Grant Recovery Plan

The Head of 0-25 SEN presented the report which outlined the Department for Education (DfE) guidance requirements as well as the Councils recovery plan which was underpinned by the Council's SEND Strategy.

In formulating the plan, consideration was given to various aspects which included the following:

- Reflection on future direction of travel of the SEND Strategy
- How needs of pupils would be met
- Challenges experienced in mainstream provision with consideration given to the upcoming changes in framework and inclusion
- Risks associated with aspects of the plan
- The need for increased and effective local provision

A Member queried the level of involvement of the Schools Forum in the plans, officers responded that the papers were presented for comment and present at the meeting were Link Advisors that were representatives of Special Schools on the panel. The Forum agreed and approve the pathway presented.

A Member said that a policy driver for the SEND Strategy was increased delivery of education for children to occur within the borough and this was a positive approach. It was however noted that there was an increasing number of children with Special Education Needs (SEN) in schools with limited resources in place to support and meet their needs. Officers recognised that there was an issue with resourcing and that this was an issue that was faced nationally. The SEND strategy was developed to create a system of change through the key principles of putting in place provision for more children to be educated in mainstream schools by increasing capacity and capabilities of schools to meet needs. The challenge was for all partners to work together to improve outcomes, families to be clear on the local offer and for the council to deliver on those offers.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the aspiration was for mainstream schools to be able to meet the needs of children with SEN, some schools were at present able to do this better than others. Work was being done with three schools to explore how effective this could be and Inclusion funding was being used in this pilot.

Officers further explained that the success of the Strategy would lie in partners, schools and families working together. SENCO's had been

considering ways that different schools could work together by exploring different pathways and solutions where that might be cost effective.

A Member commented that it would have been beneficial for the report to include the data on population growth and the correlation of rise in children and young people with SEN as stated in the report for 2015-2019 would be included.

A Member raised a question of the amount of SEN children in mainstream education and the progress made with the integration. Officer said that the focus was on children that needed SEN support, specifically those without an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and supporting them by ensuring that the appropriate needs-based support was in place.

It was challenged that in terms of risk factors, there may be instances where the integration of a child or children into a new provision in the borough may break down and the child may need to continue in the placement outside of the borough. Officer agreed that all placements had an element of associated risk and extensive work was carried out to ensure that skilled staff were in place, support was provided at all times by Link Advisors and that schools were clear on the Council's expectations. Members' were informed that Croydon special schools were all classified as good or outstanding and that was a reflection of the Local Authority's (LA) partnership.

Officers were thanked for their responses to questions.

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- Briefing on Inclusion Funding
- Drivers and Demographics of SEND children in population growth 2015-2019.
- The recovery plan for the high needs block will go to a DfE committee. The Council will receive feedback in September. The Committee requested that they be informed as to the result.

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

- This was a challenging situation which was being addressed comprehensively by officers and the Council
- Further understanding of Inclusion funding would be beneficial

Progress of the plan would be sought with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning after submission of the Plan and feedback received from the DfE

34/19 Update on Localities work across Children, Families and Education

The Executive Director of Children Families and Education presented the report which outlined the work undertaken to date and the approach to the delivery of a localities aligned service model in different areas of the borough over the next two to three years.

In determining this approach, several factors were taken into consideration, including the following:

- Croydon was a large, diverse and complex borough and this was not currently reflected in the way services were delivered.
- Working across the borough did not always promote good working relationships with partners.
- It was fundamental to ensure that a robust localities team was in place in order to achieve outstanding outcomes for children and young people.
- Splitting delivery services into localities would build relationships with partners and increase visibility and access to services in communities.
- Localities working would ensure a team around a family approach through the pooling of resources to make positive change together.

It was questioned how easily staff would be able to liaise with each other if in different localities. Officers responded that the main hub would still be at Bernard Weatherill House (BWH) where team meetings would be held and support accessed. Staff would have to be flexible and resources would be spread as necessary. A lot of work would take place to look at resourcing, available facilities and if in the right place to ensure delivering services where needed.

It was requested that data on localities such as proposed caseloads, profiles and strategic direction be circulated to Members after the meeting.

A Member queried how software would be linked to ensure smooth running and alignment of workforce. Officers responded that extensive work was currently being undertaken as part of the new digital strategy to ensure that all the systems are as effective as possible.

It was commented that the report set out the risks associated with this model and this was welcomed. A question was posed on what consideration was taken in the decision making process. Officers responded that extensive work was carried out to establish the viability of six localities, key considerations were around effective working with multi-agencies and partnerships. Workshops with staff took place to present risks and to gain majority consensus on the way forward. Officers were clear that this was a caution model that was being trialled and would be under constant review in terms of the immediate risks identified, in particular caseloads.

It was challenged that one of the main risks would be the maintenance of line of sight as there would be several directors with local responsibilities from different organisations. Officers replied that Children's Services was clear that its most pressing priority was on its improvement journey and this would remain regardless of localities. The departments' lead would be clear on priorities and it would remain the fundamental aspect of their role.

A Member asked what planning had been put in place as part of the model to enhance relations between children's services and schools. Officers said that work was being undertaken with head teachers to work as a collective around

their communities and not just their own schools. Additionally, working to ascertain wider issues and put resources in localities to address the problems identified. Objective was to have a more preventative service than a reactionary one.

It was asked what additional data would be gathered as part of the localities model, officers said that the information currently held was good but more comparative data would be an improvement to what was available. Members were reminded that data collation was only one aspect of the departments work and that getting out into the community to gather intelligence on community needs in order to explore effective methods of response was vital to improved outcomes.

The Chair commented that the Sub-Committee was supportive of the model and the measured approach being taken but acknowledged that meeting needs would be a challenge. Members looked forward to updates on delivery and outcomes as the programme progresses.

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- Data on localities including caseload, profiles and strategic direction

35/19 Update on the Early Help and Children's Social Care Improvement Programme

The Programme Director for the Children improvement provided highlights of the report which included the following:

- Senior Leadership Team was now fully in place, some posts were interim and a plan for permanent recruitment was in progress.
- Service reviews had been commissioned
- Management Team continued to work closely to develop and communicate understanding of what good look like.
- Significant challenges remain in high vacancy rates in some areas of the service
- Inconsistencies in Practice remained a challenge.

In preparation for the next Ofsted monitoring visit the department was focusing on areas that they expected to be tested on by assuring quality of practice across the service.

In response to a Member concern at the very low number of initial assessments completed within 20 working days for children at risk against the target of 95% completion, officers agreed they were still below target. There is ongoing work being carried out including multiagency efforts to address issues such as below target health assessments and getting health needs addressed early. Additionally, there were issues with the integration of social care systems with health which was impacting recording of assessments.

It was further challenged that some of the indicators were falling back such as immunisation and more needed to be done. Officers acknowledged that

renewed focus was needed and work was to be carried out with the Health service on improvements.

A Member commented that the numbers in Missing Children was always concerning and asked what had been learned in terms of change of practice. Officers replied that missing children remained a priority as well as a challenge. A weekly multiagency panel took place to identify and address risks. Return Home Interviews were taking place to enable intelligence to be gathered with approximately 60%-70% children engaging but they can refuse.

A Member asked how sustainability in the service would be maintained once the transformation funds had been used. Officers said that the expectation is that with increased investment in Early Help and identified efficiency improvements the number of children requiring support will reduce and we will be delivering a sustainable, high quality service meeting the needs of those requiring support without the need for transformational funding.

The Chair and Members thanked officers for their responses to questions.

Information request by the Sub-Committee

- A briefing paper to be provided on Destination 21 which should include staff representation.

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

1. Whilst the report was informative, papers should be more detailed and contains as much information as possible.

The Sub-Committee made the following **Recommendations:**

1. Officers to ensure that statements made in reports are based on informational data which must be included as an appendix where appropriate.

36/19 What Difference has this meeting made to Croydon's Children

Introduction of the action list has enabled Members to keep track of actions and things requested and to hold officers to account when actions not completed.

Evidence that has been requested is now slowly being shared and this needed to continue.

There was still work to be done to improve culture of trust between officers and councillors. This was vital to enable effective scrutiny to take place

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Signed:

Date:

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