

For general release

REPORT TO:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 3 March 2020
SUBJECT:	Update on Children's Social Care, Families and Education Services
LEAD OFFICER:	Rob Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Rob Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON: Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022 The plans and recommendations in this report focus on ensuring that all Croydon's children live a happy, healthy life, free from harm and that they have every opportunity to thrive and become fulfilled adults.
--

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This item is contained in the Sub-Committee's work programme.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	An overview of progress, challenges and future plans across the Cabinet Member portfolio over 2018/19.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the successes, challenges and future plans for early help and children's social care and education. Over this year there has been significant and substantial activity to address the issues identified in the 2017 Ofsted inspection for early help and children's social care. Decisive action has been taken to build sustainable, good services that meet the needs of children, families and communities. This report will detail the progress which has been made, the ongoing challenges and the ambitions for the future.

The report also sets out the progress made in education services, where there have been some significant achievements over the past year. Underpinning both of these areas the report outlines the budget context that is providing the necessary financial support to deliver improvement at pace, supporting schools to manage in an increasingly challenging financial context as well as support the long term sustainable delivery of high quality children's and education services.

2. Update on Early Help and Children's Social Care

- 2.1 Permanent senior leadership at strategic and service level has driven improvement at a sustained, accelerated pace. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of service strengths and weaknesses, drawing on robust performance management information and regular performance and practice focused meetings led by the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care and the Executive Director, to provide check and challenge to Heads of Service on progress.
- 2.2 Consistent political support, including the investment of over £6m in the Destination 2021 transformation proposals has seen a reduction in caseloads to below service targets, fewer statutory interventions and better quality work by front line staff, supported by their managers.
- 2.3 Quality assurance activity and feedback from Ofsted tells us that work with children and families is increasingly positive and purposeful, with evidence of good practice across early help, the single point of contact, assessment service and social work with families. Across the whole service there are fewer examples of poorer work.
- 2.4 The expanded early help service is providing a broad range of targeted and universal services, with high quality, sensitive work being carried out with families. The interface with the statutory service is well-embedded and there are clearly defined step up and step down pathways.
- 2.5 Thresholds at the front door are well understood and applied, meaning that most children get the right support at the right time, with proportionate responses to risk. Additional capacity and effective management oversight is resulting in better quality child-focused assessments.
- 2.6 Child protection services have also benefited significantly from the transformation in management oversight. Child protection plans are mostly high quality and specific, and managers track progress through regular supervision alongside performance information, preventing drift and delay in casework.
- 2.7 Vulnerable young people including those on the edge of care are increasingly supported through well-embedded services, drawing on a skilled multi-disciplinary team that benefits from effective multi-agency information sharing. Risk and safety plans have been introduced to focus sharply on risks children experience outside the home, including when they are missing from home or care.

- 2.8 Children with disabilities are supported by knowledgeable and passionate staff who are champions for their children and families. Additional risks are well-identified and swiftly acted upon with the aim of keeping families together. Caseloads for some staff are at the higher end, and are complex so need close monitoring.
- 2.9 Services for children looked after have strengthened, but there is more to do to ensure children and young people receive consistently good services. The majority of staff know their children well and visit them regularly, however care plans and case recording needs further improvement to be more centred on individual children's needs and their aspirations. The turnover of social workers has had an impact on building trusting relationship between staff and children and young people.
- 2.10 The virtual school has rapidly improved under strong leadership and management, and children and young people make progress despite the challenges they face. The school works extremely well with partners and has gained credibility with schools to ensure that children's personal education plans, until recently an area of underperformance, are now completed in a timely way, and to a high standard. The targeted support for pupils in year 11 is starting to have an impact on outcomes, and good support is provided for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to ensure they are ready for school.
- 2.11 Young people leaving care are supported by committed social workers and personal advisers. However, pathway plans are not always of good enough quality or address vulnerabilities and risk. Caseloads are also at the higher end for staff in this service.
- 2.12 There has been a focus on strong support and appropriate challenge for staff at all levels, setting the bar high for professional standards to ensure children and families in Croydon receive the best possible services. A sustained and on-going focus on recruitment through a centralised recruitment process has seen the overall percentage of agency staff slowly reduce month on month. A permanent cohort of middle and front line managers is now in place across almost all of the services, with a regular programme of recruitment activity ensuring a steady supply of applicants.
- 2.13 The systemic practice framework was launched in September 2019 led by the Systemic Practice Service Lead. 174 staff including the Executive Director have completed or are currently completing accredited systemic training. The training has been procured from the Institute of Family Therapy and The Centre for Systemic Social Work. The latter will train 30 staff at practice level in May 2020. Recent inspection and quality assurance activity shows that the impact of this training, the systemic consultations offered and the reflective peer group supervision sessions is starting to be seen in casework with children and families.
- 2.14 Performance monitoring show significant improvement against core practice indicators the 'Croydon Five' including staff receiving regular supervision, case summaries and chronologies up to date, visits to children recorded and up to date plans

2.15 Targeted work to ensure there are more opportunities for the voice of children and young people to directly inform practice has taken place. The BrightSpots survey collected feedback from over 300 children and young people about their experiences of being in Croydon's care or as care experienced young people. Analysis of the outcomes will inform the development of services. Further planned opportunities for children's voices to directly inform practice include:

- Young commissioners, working alongside the commissioning team to evaluate and select service providers
- Young recruiters, to join recruitment panels for staff across the service
- A Young Director, to shadow the Executive Director and advise on decision-making
- Total Respect training delivered by young people with elected members who sit on the Corporate Parenting Panel and the CYP Scrutiny Committee

3. Areas for further development

3.1 Whilst significant, measurable improvements have been made there is no room for complacency. Areas for further improvement over the coming year include:

- Improve the quality of work with children in need and their families;
- Ensure families receive the right level of support from early help services as swiftly as possible;
- Work with partners across the Council and in the voluntary and community sector to review and improve the response to 16 and 17 year olds who present as homeless;
- Further improve the quality of work with children looked after, including:
 - Timely and effective responses when children in our care have additional vulnerabilities
 - Improved care planning with children's wishes and feelings at the heart
 - Improve the range and quality of accommodation for children and young people in our care, and care leavers
- Improve pathway planning for young people in care, aligned with a cohesive offer to independence develop skills and so better support care leavers into adulthood.

4. Areas that need ongoing attention

4.1 Recruitment and retention of staff continues to be significant issue, both in high demand service areas such as assessment and social work with families, but also in services such as children with disabilities and care leaving, where caseloads are towards the top of the service targets and many of the children and families have complex needs. One or two vacancies can have a measurable impact on workloads.

4.2 Three Heads of Service are travelling to South Africa this month to interview potential recruits. The children's social care digital recruitment site is being refreshed to ensure Croydon capitalises on publicity when the recent inspection report is published in mid-March.

5. Future plans

5.1 Operational priorities:

- Embedding the systemic practice framework
- Ensure a service wide understanding and response to vulnerable adolescents (exploitation and missing, particularly children in care)
- Care for every child looked after as our own, supporting and challenging carers to do same
- Balancing performance and quality through reflective supervision
- Single Point of Contact and Assessment redesign
- A real focus on improving the journey of children looked after

5.2 Strategic priorities:

- Relentless focus on recruitment and retention
- Agreeing shared priorities in Children and Young People's Plan
- Improve joint working with health for children looked after and care leavers
- Challenge partners to hold risk more confidently
- Embed contextual safeguarding and trauma-informed practice
- Create multi-agency, locality-based safeguarding teams to meet parent needs
- Integrate health and social care for children with disabilities

6. Update on Education

6.1 In the last education year Croydon achieved some significant steps forward: above national attainment at the end of early years, phonics at both key stage one and key stage two, for the fourth consecutive year. This was achieved despite Croydon having a significant growing youth population, with large pockets of deprivation bringing challenges such as recruiting leaders and teachers that are able provide a high standard of education within sometimes challenging contexts.

6.2 Performance at Key Stage 4 was not on the same trajectory as early years and key stages one and two. This was due to a small number of schools seeing a significant drop in results that was large enough to have an impact on the overall Croydon attainment and provisional progress 8 scores.

6.3 The Vulnerable Adolescents review recommended that schools take a central role in supporting multi agency work in this area and this was warmly welcomed by headteachers and governors. We have been successful in participating in the 'Trailblazers' bid a project to support pupils mental health and well-being a key priority for us.

6.4 We have a good proportion of Croydon secondary schools judged by Ofsted at good or better. 86% of these schools are good or better and 33% are

outstanding. 86% of our secondary school pupils now attend a good or better school and almost 50% attend an outstanding school. The percentage of primary schools that are good or better is 86%

- 6.5 Absence rates at primary schools in Croydon have increased slightly against a bigger national increase. Absence rates at secondary schools are lower than the national average but have increased very slightly on the previous year.
- 6.6 Croydon's rate of permanent exclusion from school is lower than the national, statistical neighbours and London averages.
- 6.7 The 0 – 25 SEND Strategy was launched in October. It was attended by parents, young people, schools, health colleagues and council staff. The five delivery groups have attendance from all key stakeholders.
- 6.8 The SEND Strategy and Delivery for Croydon is progressing forward. A quality assurance framework is in place consisting of the Local Area SEND Board, SEND Forum and the 5 Priority Delivery groups. The model received strong support at the recent DfE and NHS Challenge meeting where it was noted that Croydon had made rapid progress in the last 6 months with improving Local Area SEND delivery and that they viewed Croydon as being in a strong place to continue with these improvements.
- 6.9 In the summer of 2019 Croydon's new Legacy OnSide Youth Zone opened its doors to children and young people across the Borough. Legacy, the name chosen by young people. Attendance has been extremely positive and is making a real difference to our children and young people.

7. Priorities for improvement in Education

In the coming year the Education division will be focusing on the following areas to improve outcomes for children and young people further:

- 7.1 We will continue to work with our schools to further improve Ofsted outcomes in conjunction with the school improvement team. This will include the use of termly school progress review meetings to provide detailed challenge and the brokering of support for any schools causing concern.
- 7.2 We will work with our schools to continue to reduce exclusions by challenging schools where exclusion rates are comparatively high and by providing support so that staff have the skills necessary to meet the needs of all pupils. We are developing a protocol to ensure that we are aware of all pupil movement and can challenge schools where appropriate.
- 7.3 We will support schools to improve inclusive practice, particularly for children with SEND and ensure that there is not delay to them attending schools. We want 'Inclusion and Opportunity' for all our pupils.
- 7.4 We will continue work to reduce our reliance on the non-maintained and out of borough independent sector for children with SEND by developing our own in-borough provision which will ensure children are able to go to good quality schools closer to home.

- 7.5 We have opened our in-borough post-16 provision for young people with SEND and have parents have been extremely positive about the provision. It has enabled our young people to be able to study close to home and make links with future employers.
- 7.6 In order to best support our families and schools we will be moving to a locality based model, in particular in the SEN Service.
- 7.7 We will submit a revised proposed Dedicated Schools Grant deficit recovery plan to address the cumulative and in-year overspend. The focus in the plan is on three key areas which specifically impact on High Needs Block spend:
- Development of local capacity to meet a broader range of needs and reduce reliance on higher cost placements in the independent/non-maintained sector
 - Strengthening capacity for inclusion in local mainstream schools. Croydon is the second highest London Borough in its percentage of pupils in special schools overall (1.06% of 0-19s compared to 0.9% England average). In addition, it has an above average percentage of pupils in mainstream resource bases (0.15% vs 0.08% nationally).
 - Improved pathways for post 16 young people with SEND (currently 36% of the High Needs Block is spent on young people aged 17-25 with an EHC Plan).

8. Budget Update

Children's Social Care

- 8.1 As a result of the Ofsted inspection in the summer of 2017, significant additional resources of £24.7m have been added to Children's Services addressing pressure in a range of areas including covering costs associated with additional placements, additional staff resources for social work and legal costs. This is in addition to £0.7m in Resources (Business Support base budget) to ensure adequate staffing and support for both the level of demand being experienced and also the areas of focus for improvement.
- 8.2 Additional one-off investment funding via the Council's Transformation Reserve has also being used to support the implementation of the Children's Services improvement plan. The estimated cost of this plan over the three years since the Ofsted inspection is expected to be £20m (of which £3.2m and £9.8m was spent in 2017/18 and 2018/19, respectively).
- 8.3 This level of one-off funding is based on a detailed assessment of the costs associated with the improvement plan and the improvements that will be achieved as a result of the investment have also been identified and are regularly monitored. It is expected that the need for transformation funding will reduce over the next financial year as this assessment also identified the level and areas requiring permanent budgetary growth in 2020/21.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

- 8.4 As a condition of the 2019/20 DSG, Local Authorities with an overall DSG deficit of one per cent or more at the end of the previous financial year were required to provide recovery plans for the deficits by 30th June 2019 submit a recovery plan. Croydon submitted a plan to recover the 2018/19 in-year High Needs Block deficit of £5.612 million over a five year period to the DfE, which is in line with the five year SEND strategy with key areas to be targeted. The intention is to improve our SEND provision while reducing the expenditure in order to ensure that we can fulfil our statutory duty to be meet the needs of all pupils with special education needs.
- 8.5 The DfE letter of response commended Croydon on the high quality and detail of our plan and informed us that as the High Needs Block allocation for 2020/21 would be increased (see below) and that subsequent year's allocations for 2021/22 and 2022/23 were under review, the Council would need to review and revise the previously submitted recovery plan.
- 8.6 In that revised recovery plan, the DSG will break even and start paying back the cumulative deficit in Year 6 (2024/25).
- 8.7 A detailed breakdown of the revised recovery plan, including High Needs Block budget setting for 2020/21 will be submitted to the High Needs Working Group in January 2020 in preparation for Schools Forum in the same month. It is anticipated that the Council will receive clarification about future High Needs Block funding allocations early in the New Year, which will inform strategic deployment of resources with greater certainty.

9. Budget Weaknesses

Children's Social Care

- 9.1 Croydon Council remains under huge financial pressures, deriving notably from continued chronic underfunding of adult social care and children's social care – the Local Government Association (LGA) has reported that children's social care budgets overspent by nearly £800 million last year and there is currently a £1.4 billion funding gap facing children's services in 2020/21.
- 9.2 This underfunding, coupled with significant demand led growth relating to increased pupil numbers; a significant increase in Education, Health and Care Plans, the arrival of Asylum Seeking Children given Croydon's gateway status, has created a number of pressures within the Children, Families and Education department.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC)

- 9.3 The Council is continuing to lobby the government to fund overspend against the budget for UASC, leaving care costs for former UASC and Appeal Rights. The UASC pressure continues to be as a result of the Home Office continuing to only fund a fixed rate per child, which does not accurately reflect our costs for looking after those children, not the costs of acting as a 'gateway' authority. The fall in the number of UASC has exacerbated this issue. While our numbers of UASC are decreasing, direct and indirect service provision costs are not decreasing at the same rate. Options to reduce this funding gap through the reduction of costs and maximising Home Office income are still continuing to be explored.
- 9.4 Additionally, Croydon acting as a 'gateway' authority continues to fund provision for UASC both leaving care and for those who have exhausted all appeal rights. This additional expenditure further increases the cost of exceptional items for

the council.

Dedicated Schools Grant

- 9.5 The budget pressures are principally attributable to the increase in demand, which has led to an over-reliance on the independent / non-maintained sector, due to shortage of local state funded special schools and / or resourced provision. This is being addressed and a strategy developed to move to a more sustainable framework.
- 9.6 Croydon Council has a long term plan to increase special schools, Enhanced Learning Provision and post 16 specialist places, including a new free special school with 150 places opening in September 2020. Through this strategy the intention is to provide an effective pathway of local education provision for young people which is an efficient use of resources and supports young people in becoming independent in or near their local community.
- 9.7 Management of the high needs block and reducing the overspend requires that together there is an approach that manages reliance on EHCP plans for children with lower levels of SEN, reduces demand and ensure placements of children are delivered through the continuum of state-funded education provision at efficient values.

Table 1 – Summary of forecast revenue outturn position at Quarter 2¹

Department	Quarter 2 Forecast Variance £'000s	Quarter 1 Forecast Variance £'000s
Early Help and CSC Directorate	922	55
Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC), UASC Leaving Care and All Rights Exhausted associated costs	8,550	9,415
Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block cumulative deficit	18,392	18,497

10. Budget Opportunities

Early Help and CSC Directorate

- 10.1 The Directorate is currently undertaking a detailed needs analysis of the Looked after Children (LAC) population, identifying Croydon's placement needs and costs to inform commissioning priorities and drive engagement with the provider market as a means of tackling high unit costs for externally provided placements and improving outcomes delivered. This is in addition to identifying and securing health funding and ensuring early planning and securing more appropriate placements for our care leavers

Cross-department working is underway to support the standardisation of the systems used to track placements, costs and commitments

¹ Quarter 3 monitoring position is not yet available

Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC)

10.2 During 2019/20, the Home Office released the review of funding rates which did not result in any change to the enhanced rates that Croydon currently receives. The Government did uplift and equalise the rates currently paid to all other authorities and the Home Office is working with DfE and partners in the local government sector to encourage further participation in the National Transfer Scheme.

Dedicated Schools Grant

10.3 The Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered a statement on the 2020/21 Spending Review on 4th September 2019, followed by a more detailed statement by the Minister of State for School Standards. Whilst the majority of the Spending Review announcements outlined the government's departmental spending plans for 2020/21 only, the announcements as they relate to education, and specifically schools, funding cover a three-year period from 2020/21 to 2022/23.

The Spending Review confirms:

- a) £7.1 billion increase in funding for schools by 2022/23 (£4.6 billion above inflation), compared to 2019/20 funding levels.
- b) per pupil funding for all schools rising in line with inflation (1.8%).
- c) schools funding increase includes over £700 million more in 2020/21 for children and young people with special educational needs;
- d) increased early years spending by £66 million to increase the hourly rate paid to childcare providers through the government's free hours offers; and
- e) £400 million in 2020-21 for Further Education.

10.4 The provisional 2020/21 DSG allocations were published on the 11th October 2019. Final schools and high needs allocations for LAs in the DSG are expected to be announced before the end of December 2019.

The total 2020/21 DSG allocation for three blocks (Schools, High Needs and Central Schools Services) for Croydon is £331.652 million and is detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: DSG allocation (before recoupment)

Financial Year	Schools Block £ million	High Needs Block £ million	Central Schools Services Block £ million	Total Announced DSG Allocation £ million	Early Years Block £ million
2020/21 Provisional	259.759	66.491	5.402	331.652	TBC

2019/20 Final	247.512	61.086	6.117	314.715	28.264
Variance	12.247	5.405	-0.715	16.937	N/A

11. Budget Tensions

Children's Social Care (General Fund)

- 11.1 Following the spending round announcements, the government committed to publishing a draft Local Government settlement on or around 5 December, with the final settlement coming no later than 31 January. It was acknowledged that moving the date to early December would give councils more time for scrutiny and more time to set budgets.
- 11.2 The agreed timetable has not been followed, due to the General Elections, adding to major uncertainty that LAs face from a lack of clarity on the government's plans for social care. This delay also relates to the finalisation of the DSG allocation and confirmation of the three year settlement previously announced.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

- 11.3 In 2018/19, the National Funding Formula created a fourth block within the DSG called the Central Services Schools Block (CSSB). This block is made up of two parts –Ongoing Functions and Historic Commitments.
- 11.4 Ongoing Functions includes services such as School Improvement and Education Welfare. The 2020/21 allocation for ongoing functions has reduced by £0.072 million based on a reduction in the CSSB unit of funding decreasing by 2.5% from £56.91 per pupil in 2019/20.
- 11.5 Historic Commitments covering prudential borrowing costs for SEND provision and historic teacher pension costs has been reduced by 20% from 2019/20 equating to £0.643 million. Representations have been made to the ESFA on the impact of this significant reduction – particularly on the prudential borrowing costs of a capital programme with a pay-back period of 10 years (up to 2025/26) with this commitment remaining. The ESFA have confirmed that they are looking at this request in conjunction with other LA's in similar positions.

CONTACT OFFICER: Robert Henderson, Executive Director Children Families & Education

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

APPENDICES: Appendix 1, Responses to recommendations 2018/19

