

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2009

Membership

* J Aldridge	S Mayzes
* J Baugh	* D Morris
* A Brown	R Pearson
L Dangerfield	* T Sargent
* J Deakin	* K Twitchen (Chairman)
* J Knapman (Substitute for C Riley)	* J Young
Mrs. M Hutchon (Vice-Chairman)	
(* present)	

Non-Elected Voting Members

* Mr. R Carson	* Reverend P Trathern
* Mr. O Richards	Vacancy

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Vivien Door	- Committee Officer
Graham Redgwell	- Governance Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

79. Apologies and Substitution Notices

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:-

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr Colin Riley	Cllr John Knapman
Cllr Margaret Hutchon	
Cllr Roy Pearson	
Cllr Stephen Mayzes	

80. Declarations of Interest

The following declaration of interest was recorded:

Councillor D Morris	Personal interest as a Member of the Fostering and Adoption Panel
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81. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 October 2009 were received and signed as a correct record.

82. Matters Arising

Minute 71, Teams Around Schools, Children and the Community (TASCCs) and Children's Trust. It was confirmed that the Committee still had not received the information requested in relation to the reorganisation of TASCCs and Children's Trusts.

The Committee **agreed** that:

- i) The information on the reorganisation of TASCCs and Children's Trusts should be requested again by the Committee Officer; and
- ii) The Committee should have sent a letter to the Cabinet Member, before this item was presented to Cabinet, informing the Cabinet Member that the Committee had been unable to scrutinise this subject due to confusing evidence. This referral system would be used in future as a matter of course.

Minute 73, Government statement regarding the reduction in funding for Education. There had been no further information on the Government's proposals. More information may be forthcoming in the pre-budget announcement.

Minute 77, Non County Placements. Wendi Ogle-Welbourn had been tasked to review every Non County Placement. She had a weekly meeting to consider each placement. Members of this Committee should be given the opportunity to attend this confidential meeting as observers if they wished to do so.

83. Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families

Malcolm Newsam, the new interim Executive Director for Schools Children and Families, presented his vision and proposals for the Directorate to the Committee.

Mr Newsam informed the Committee that there were five key challenges for the Directorate:

- Restoring confidence in the leadership of Schools, Children and Families, which had to involve all managers at every level;
- Improving Children's Social Care;
- Taking control of the budget;
- Contributing to transformation; and
- Repairing Essex's reputation nationally. The reputation of Essex was not as high as it should be, which then makes it difficult to attract staff into the Directorate.

His vision for the Directorate was that:

"We want Essex to be a place where children could thrive and grow up safely free from harm and neglect."

There had been a significant improvement in the last six months which had been recognised in the recent unannounced Ofsted inspection.

Mr. Newsam apologised for the confusing presentation the Committee had received at the last meeting on the locality review. There were 1,800 unallocated cases at the end of November 2009. There had been critical gaps in the numbers of front line staff. Social Workers were only able to do so much and therefore they focused their limited resources on the high risk cases. The managers in Social Care had lacked confidence as they had been battling with this problem for a long time. As improvements were made some things may get worse in the short term. This was the normal cycle when making major organisational changes and some staff, including agency staff, may be unhappy. The situation would improve with the right staff in place.

The number of Children Looked After (CLA) had increased over the last three years. The increased number of CLA had an effect on the number of external placements, which had increased. The term 'external placement' could be within the borders of Essex but with an independent agency or could be Out of the County Placements with either private agencies or with other Local Authorities. The largest proportion of these external placements was within Essex but with the private sector. External placements were twice as expensive as internal placements. There had been a down turn in the number of internal placements available for CLA.

There was a vicious circle starting with poor assessment and care planning, leading to crisis admissions of children and young people into care. The number of children and young people in care then grows, which culminates in over spends on the budget. This provides an ineffective support system. Social Workers were the gateway to the service, to provide the right service and assessments for families, whereas poor assessments mean more children and young people taken in to care. Reshaping the way this works was beneficial for the children and young people and also impacts on the Performance Indicators. The Directorate and staff want to make a difference for Children in Essex. Essex County Council was working with partners to safeguard children.

It was important to concentrate on the acute problems and get these right and then move on to other issues. Overseas Social Workers were now in place and an agreement had been negotiated with SERCO to provide experienced Social Workers on short term contracts.

During a lengthy discussion the following points were made:

- A Member informed this Committee that the Executive Scrutiny Committee was very concerned regarding the Corporate Score Card Performance Indicators for Schools, Children and Families Directorate;
- It would be beneficial to develop the workforce, and to make Essex a prestigious place to work but it takes time (three to four years) to become a Social Worker;
- There were some very good Social Workers already working in Essex;
- That it only takes losing a few key managers and front line vacancies to make a good Local Authority decline quite quickly;
- The Social Workers who had been recruited from overseas had been given a three year contract with Essex County Council;
- The Baby P case had an effect on Social Care nationally but not all Local Authorities had an increase of work. Confident Local Authorities did not move the Social Worker thresholds, whereas the less confident and more

vulnerable Local Authorities did and then had an increase in Social Work cases;

- Too many adolescents were placed in care because they were a problem to their parents;
- That a Social Workers case load ideally should not exceed 20;
- There were always teething problems with new IT programmes but the SWIFT system was no longer sustainable;
- That, although Malcolm Newsam would be concentrating on the Social Care side of the Directorate, he had an excellent and respected colleague in Terry Reynolds, so he had every confidence that the educational standards would continue to be high;
- The Lead Member for Children's Services sits on the Children's Trust Improvement Board;
- SERCO Social Workers were contracted until March 2010; and
- The Directorate was working to improve its staff base and expertise.

The Chairman thanked Malcolm Newsam for his informative and honest presentation. The Committee would invite him to give an update at a future meeting.

84. Corporate Score Card Issues

The Committee considered the Summer 2009 Corporate Score Card (CYP/24/09) which raised a number of issues in relation to Schools Standards and Looked After Children. Six issues were considered in turn, as follows:-

SCHOOL STANDARDS

NI 89a, Number of Schools in Special Measures

The Chairman updated the Committee on the School Standards in the light of a recent discussion with Terry Reynolds, Director for Learning School Improvement and Early Years.

The Chairman's main concerns were whether the Directorate had sufficient resources to take the appropriate action to move schools out of special measures and to ensure that the schools causing concern had the appropriate action taken to prevent them from going into special measures. Schools were judged on criteria and marked 1 to 4, with 4 as the lowest mark and causing concern. Within the range of work taking place two examples of assistance were Advanced Skills Teachers and working with School Governors.

There was a new Ofsted Framework this year. Ofsted issued a Statutory Improvement Notice to ensure schools in Special Measures improved. Not all schools in Essex were good all the time but the Chairman was confident that there were systems in place to analyse and provide the help any school required. The target of 0 schools in Special Measures was set by Essex County Council, but the Committee acknowledged that this was difficult to achieve in a County as large as Essex. Terry Reynolds had informed the Chairman that he would be happy to answer questions on this Performance Indicator at any time.

The Committee **agreed** that it would continue to monitor this Performance Indicator but was reassured at the responses given and need not invite Terry Reynolds to the next meeting.

NI 117, 16-18 year olds who were not in Education, Training or Employment (NEET)

Essex was performing worse than its statistical neighbours, and was performing relatively poorly each year. There was a project "Total Place" which focused on the reasons that young people become NEET in the Tendring Area, which was the area of greatest concern in the County.

The Committee **agreed** that

- i) The following Members could visit the Total Place project and report back to the Committee.
 - Councillor J Baugh
 - Councillor A Brown
 - Mr R Carson
 - Councillor J Deakin
 - Councillor K TwitchenThe Committee Officer would organise this visit.
- ii) That the Committee should receive details per electoral division to enable it to see where the hot spots in the County were.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Nicky Pace, Director, Vulnerable Children & Young People was present to answer questions on the Score Card regarding Children Looked After and had provided a paper commenting on the score card (CYP/25/09). She was accompanied by Paul Abraham, Head of Performance.

LI 38, Number of 14 to 17 year olds in care

This was a local Performance Indicator. It measured how many adolescents were in care but it would be more useful to measure how many adolescents were going into care.

There had been a recent judgment by the Law Lords that any homeless 16 or 17 year old young people need to be cared for by the Local Authority and not just housed. Essex had set up an adolescent team to provide these young people with assessments.

The Committee noted that the Local Area Agreement would be refreshed at the end of 2010, and this Performance Indicator was likely to be changed at that time.

NI 59, Percentage of initial assessments for children's care carried out within 7 working days; and NI 60, Core assessments carried out within 35 working days

These two Performance Indicators were taken together. The Government was considering extending the initial assessment period from 7 days to 10 days to enable this assessment to be carried out effectively. The reduced number of Social Workers and front line teams had affected these Performance Indicators. The written report from Nicky Pace had informed the Committee about the error in reporting this data. Paul Abraham informed the Committee that now the reporting of data was accurate there was a new lower base. Team Manager's skills had been developed and they would be held to account to prepare correct data.

There were two pilots taking place of joint working with multi-agencies to provide "wrap around services" and resources for families in Colchester and Basildon.

The Directorate had been working hard to provide timely decisions and referrals and consistent thresholds across Essex. The assessment support team had been restructured to provide consistent Common Assessment Frameworks (CAFs). The new ICS system had been in place in Mid and West Essex and would be rolled out to North Essex on 9 December.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- That the period of notice to Improve Safeguarding could be extended by the Government;
- That there was a month by month improvement in social care services;
- That these two pilots in Colchester and Basildon end on 31 March 2010 and then the work would be rolled out across Essex by the Multi Agency Assessment Groups (MAAGs);
- That there was clear guidance on assessments and that a decision should be taken within 24 hours, with a Social Worker visiting the child, the outcomes shared with the family, written up and signed off by the manager. There were very clear expectations that all Social Workers and Managers must comply with the assessment decisions. The Government acknowledges that assessments could be made hastily hence the possible extension from 7 to 10 days;
- The lack of Social Worker staff had led to these assessments not being completed within the time frame; and
- The timescales took no account of the quality of any assessment.

NI 64, Children with long term protection plans

This Performance Indicator was for a small cohort of children. One large sibling group coming in or out of care could easily distort these figures. With the right plans in place a child should be taken off the Child Protection Register in 13 months. The Directorate was trying to avoid children being on the Child Protection Register for two years. Current indicators were that the position was improving, and that this should be GREEN by the year end.

The Chairman thanked Nicky Pace and Paul Abraham for their information on the Performance Indicators. The Committee would continue to monitor any adverse indicators as and when they arose.

85. Members Visits to Children's Residential Homes

Members who visited the Children's Residential Homes on 5 November reported back to the Committee on their visits to the five homes. Members had enjoyed meeting the staff and found them very dedicated. All Homes were clean and welcoming.

Hargrave House, Chelmsford - Beds 16, Age 5-18CWD

The new manager had made changes and the children were being looked after better. The trikes and bikes for children with disabilities required were very expensive so staff would welcome a "swop shop" between the Residential Homes. One child was in the home during the visit as she had just returned from hospital. Staff were also concerned regarding the cost of decorating the home. There was a waiting list for children to get into this home. This home had a good support group, Friends of the Home, who had purchased play equipment for the playground.

Lavender House, Colchester Beds 12 Age 5-18 CWD

Some staff were concerned about the level of staff absences, due to illness. Staff wondered if there could be some reward for staff who were not sick for a year.

No children were in the home on the visit. One Member returned to the home at a time when children were home from school. The children said that they enjoyed staying in the home. Every child was treated as an individual person. The home was working on an Anti-Bullying project. There was a complaints book which included both pictures and words. The children used this book to explain their complaint and good use was made of this book. The staff were very good with the children. The children enjoyed helping in the kitchen.

The Lodge, Clacton on Sea - Beds 8, - Age 12-16

Staff were concerned that the estimated cost to paint a room had been thousands of pounds and there were other outstanding issues concerning payment of contractors. Staff suggested that there should be an equipment swop shop between the Residential Homes.

Members were concerned to meet a 13 year old who had not attended school for a term and said that he had seen his Social Worker but nothing had happened.

The Sailings, Harlow - Beds 6, Age 12-16

There was a problem with a child unable to access PCT services effectively, which the local Member was pursuing. The main issue was that the young people leave the home at 16 years old; some have good interim care from MOSAIC whilst others were just housed. The staff would like specific accommodation located close to the home where the young people could go in the transition stage before full independent living. The staff found that the young people return to the home at Christmas and weekends or when they have a problem as they have no other support networks.

The Willows, Ongar - Beds 7, Age 8-12

The staff received training on pedagogy, which Members found very interesting. All children currently present were under ten years old. The Children had their photographs on the walls. All the children were involved in cooking. All the children were receiving education, but there were often failures in the education system meeting the needs of these children when they leave this home in their early teens.

Range of issues arising from these home visits

- The cost and standard of decorating and maintenance for these homes;
- Education and Schooling;
- Managing absenteeism and a reward system for staff who stay well;
- Appropriate IT access; and
- Spare equipment to be included in a swap shop for the Homes;

The Committee **Agreed** that:

- i) The Committee Officer would contact Maureen Caton with Members issues for her to investigate and respond; and
- ii) Members should revisit the Residential Homes in one year's time.

86. Draft Essex School Organisation Plan 2009 – 2014

The Committee received the Draft Essex School Organisation Plan 2009 – 2014. The consultation period would conclude on 21 December. All Members had been sent a copy of the Plan direct from David Mason in School Organisation and Planning.

The Committee **Agreed** that the following group should be set up to read the document fully and comment on its behalf.

Reverend P Trathern
Mr. O Richards
Councillor K Twitchen
Graham Redgwell

Graham Redgwell would collate the Member responses and provide the Committee's comment on this Plan by the closing date.

87. Forward Look

The Committee considered potential items for the Forward Look, presented by Graham Redgwell.

The Committee **Agreed** the Forward Plan with the following additions.

CRB

Members would like to know the cost of this new scheme to Essex County Council and if there would be a real outcome.

TASCCs

Members requested a detailed explanation regarding the organisational changes to this service.

Safeguarding Report

This report was sent to all Members on 26 October by Graham Redgwell.

The Forward Look would now be prioritised and resubmitted to the next meeting.

88. Essex Youth Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman informed the Committee that the Essex Youth Scrutiny Committee draft report on Anti-Bullying would be taken to the Scrutiny Board and then would be included in the Scrutiny report for the Full Council meeting on 15 December. The young people had produced valuable work and had questioned a range of witnesses. The recommendations from this report would be monitored by this Committee as agreed previously. The Chairman thanked all the officers who supported this pilot Committee for their work with the Young People.

89. Families and their Children living in Caravans in the winter

The Chairman informed the Committee that she had received a response from the Essex Association of Housing Officers, informing her that the Districts and Boroughs would investigate this matter and inform the Chairman of the outcome.

90. Report to the Secretary of State on the Review of Elective Home Education in England by Graham Badman, June 2009

The Reverend Trathern informed the Committee that this review of Elective Home Education in England would mean changes in the relationship between the Local Authority and Home Educators. 40 Local Authorities took part in the review. The DCSF was currently requesting other Local Authorities to take part and make their views known. This legislation would be in place in 2011.

The Committee **Agreed** that the Committee Officer would confirm when the consultation period finishes. (NB: Post meeting, it was ascertained that the consultation period had already concluded – Committee Officer).

91. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings and noted that they may comprise:

- Meetings in private
- Meetings in public
- Working groups
- Sub-Committee meetings
- Outside visits

Thursday 7th January 2010

Thursday 4th February 2010

Thursday 4th March 2010

Thursday 1st April 2010

The meeting closed at 12.55 pm.

Chairman