
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 9.30am on Thursday, 09 March 2023 in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:

Cllr Ray Gooding (Chairman)

Cllr Susan Barker

Cllr Mark Durham (until 11.25)

Cllr Jane Fleming

Cllr Ian Grundy

Cllr Peter May

Cllr Aidan McGurran

Cllr Ross Playle

In virtual attendance via Zoom:

Cllr June Lumley

Cllr Laureen Shaw

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer and Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer were also present.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received.

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Marie Goldman, Cllr Carlo Guglielmi, Cllr Wendy Stamp, Cllr June Lumley and Cllr Laureen Shaw with the latter two however both joined the meeting via Zoom. Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex had also sent her apologies.

Cllr Ross Playle declared an interest in that his mother worked for Action for Family Carers.

Cllr June Lumley declared an interest in that she was an unpaid Chairman of Supporting Carers and Families Together, a local organisation supporting young carers and their families.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2023 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Questions from the public

There were none.

4 The Youth Service and Support for Young Carers

The Committee considered report PAF/06/23. The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Cllr Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability
- Julie Auger, Youth Services Manager
- Glenn Crickmore, Service Strategic Lead for Young Carers

Contributors updated the Committee on the Youth Service Delivery Model specifically in relation to support provided for young carers, and included:

- Data on the Young Carers Statutory Assessments
- The process from assessment to key worker allocation and their roles including action plans
- Examples of respite activities, workshops and training
- Overview and breakdown of the Young Carer in School Awards
- Examples of voluntary sector support for young carers
- System changes and service development
- A young adult carer conference was taking place this year to give the opportunity for them to co-design and shape the service

During the subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) There was currently three vacancies and two members of staff waiting to start within the assessment team. At full capacity there were twenty-five staff members. There were eighteen staff members across the key worker team and when under capacity senior youth workers from other youth service teams would provide support.
- (ii) Key workers were recruited from schools and other jobs working with children and young people. There was a training programme as part of the induction process. The service supported career progression.
- (iii) The service did not experience a great deal of resistance from families but they did have a right to refuse support. Conversations would take place to help the family to fully understand the young carers' offer.
- (iv) Referrals mainly came from social workers, schoolteachers, youth workers, parents and also self-referrals as raised awareness enabled more self-identification. Approximately fifty referrals were received a week. Referrals to an assessment could take up to three to four weeks. Assessments were only

carried out when the whole family were at home. Not all referrals led to an assessment.

- (v) The Department for Education now required schools to produce data on young carers as part of the school census. Generally, engagement with, and access to, schools was good but there was room for improvement.
- (vi) The service was raising awareness of young carers wherever possible. Assembly work in schools was helping young people self-identify.
- (vii) As secondary schools were often bigger and therefore had more complex mechanisms to work through, primary schools sometimes could be better at identifying young carers. Work around Levelling Up and the Inclusion Framework was helping schools to understand how to support young carers and it was important to help make it as easy as possible for schools to engage with what was on offer.
- (viii) There was school governors training available upon request, and governors also attended the Young Carer in School Awards training.
- (ix) Key workers also worked with some of the schools that were not currently engaged in the Young Carer in School Awards.
- (x) Each young carer had an action plan, with an ongoing assessment of how they were getting on in school. Key workers worked closely with schools as part of that.
- (xi) Digital systems needed to work better to be able to draw data down on school attainment and better manage data information to lead to improved analysis and data quality.
- (xii) A suggestion was made to look at the baseline assessments children took in schools prior to Year 7 to see whether caring responsibilities had an adverse effect on their education.
- (xiii) Respite activities for young carers were extremely important and had a positive impact on their education and general wellbeing and should be further promoted. The voluntary sector also played an important part as increasingly more support mechanisms were developing.
- (xiv) More digital communications would be considered in terms of promoting the service further.

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11.00am and recommenced at 11.05am.

5 Adult Community Learning Strategy

The Committee considered report PAF/07/23. The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Cllr Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability
- Lisa Jarentowski, Adult Community Learning Principal

Contributors updated the Committee on the Adult Community Learning Strategy Implementation, which included:

- Portfolio vision and statement
- Key points of Ofsted 3 I's; Implementation, Intent and Impact
- Key points of the delivery model including flexible hybrid and online delivery. Outreach activity would be expanded in Rochford, Dovercourt/Harwich, Canvey and Stansted
- Learner characteristics headlines such as 73.2% of learners were female and there was a higher take up of qualification courses in deprived areas compared to least deprived
- Curriculum streams and course offers
- Figures around apprenticeships including that Business and Finance apprenticeships remained the most popular
- Progress and future work for ACL property

Following the presentation, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) From July 2023 the nine physical centres would be reduced to eight. Learner numbers had dropped significantly at the Rayleigh library centre in recent years, and it was estimated that it would be more cost effective to run that provision on an Outreach basis although some teaching may still be delivered in a shared space in the library.
- (ii) Room utilisation data had been used to inform the decision to reduce the ACL footprint on the Maldon site and consolidate it to one floor above the library.
- (iii) There was discretionary support for travel and there were online and flexible offers which helped learners who had difficulties accessing education due to travel.
- (iv) Learners who attended courses during the day preferred to attend face to face, whilst learner feedback suggested people attending in the evening found courses easier to attend online.

- (v) Following the Government consultation there would be no change to the ESFA community learning funding allocation until 2024/25 as the sector had been successfully vocal on the benefits of Community Learning. The curriculum being followed by each learner receiving Education and Skills Funding Agency non-accredited community learning funding had to align with one of seven identified educational, health or social strands as part of an external check that it offered value for money.
- (vi) Investment from the National Skills Fund was used to help adults train and gain skills to improve job prospects. ACL had reached their target allocation from the National Skills Fund at the end of November 2022 and subsequently had been successful in requesting further investment.
- (vii) A levy Transfer Hub would be created to support Levy paying employers to 'gift' unspent levy funds to Essex based SME's. Additionally, the County Council had committed to also gift 25% of any unspent levy although first it would aim to spend what it could of the levy.
- (viii) The rising cost of living had had some impact and had influenced some of the rolling programmes, flexible starts and in-year starts being offered. Learners could apply for the discretionary support fund. Community learning courses now included cooking on a budget and enabling people to make life choices which were more cost effective.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that:

- The Committee supported the work done on developing and finalising the strategy and its implementation.
- There would be a scrutiny briefing and a consultation process to consider all options before a decision was taken on removing the nursery provision for ACL learners.
- An update on Canvey Island and staffing activities would be provided to Cllr Peter May.
- Further information would be provided on the efficacy of outcomes for apprenticeships and specifically what percentage successfully completed their end point assessment.
- Further information would be provided on how apprenticeships could lead into further opportunities for professional qualifications.

Ms Jarentowski was thanked for her attendance and left the meeting.

6 Life-Long Learning and Belonging Strategic Plan

The Committee considered report PAF/08/23. The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Cllr Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability
- Ruth Gilbert, Head of Employability and Skills
- Anita Kemp, Head of Strategy Planning and Performance

Contributors updated the Committee on the draft Lifelong Learning and Belonging Strategic Plan, which included:

- Defining Lifelong Learning and explaining that Belonging had been included in the Plan to emphasise the importance of building more access and links to local opportunities
- That the Plan had been developed with the Education team and through working with schools, colleges and industry
- Explaining some of the interlinks with other corporate strategies
- Outlining the delivery approach and suggestions as to how and where ECC could have the most impact, including the priorities that needed more work such as Careers, Digital and Integration
- Visual examples of delivery including the Essex Opportunities Portal and Apprenticeship Brokerage and wanting to further involve anchor institutions and the private sector

Following the presentation, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) Project Jigsaw was an internal Skills and Employability Team transformation project to bring more cohesion to the service offer. It was focussed beyond just education and training and looked at linkages with other partners including the NHS and facilitating links to schools.
- (ii) Some members challenged how ECC were working to encourage employers to bring high quality jobs to Essex both with current and potential future employers.
- (iii) A greater focus was needed on careers education and that young people, in particular, were supported to make informed career choices with clear signposting and navigation routes to such support.
- (iv) There would be greater focus on raising attainment at 16 so more people can progress to Level 3 courses, ongoing refinement to the place-based curriculum offer, and a more strategic approach to investment in initiatives with more depth for greater impact and greater sustainability.
- (v) It was suggested that further work was needed with some employers to encourage greater accessibility and inclusion in

their selection processes. A new post in the Skills and Employability Team was working on brokerage and breaking down some of the barriers and would be able to update more on this in the Autumn.

- (vi) Initiatives to facilitate re-training were highlighted and encouraged with retraining for electric vehicles maintenance given as a specific example.
- (vii) Small businesses constituted the vast majority of employers in Essex and it was important to further develop existing links with the Federation of Small Businesses and the Chambers of Commerce to further understand the priorities of their members. There was also a Department for Education initiative for priority skills-based work with schools.
- (viii) The Skills and Employability Team were looking to further promote joint work with other service areas within ECC and also understand more what other local authority partners were doing.
- (ix) A new careers magazine was available through the Essex Opportunities portal and would be distributed in various community settings.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that a further update would be provided in approximately six months and that the Scrutiny Board be consulted on inviting colleagues from the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee to join the session.

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

7 Work Programme

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/09/23 comprising the work programme for the committee.

8 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was going to be re-scheduled and that the date would be confirmed and circulated as soon as possible.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.20pm.

Chairman