

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2010

Membership

Councillors

* J Aldridge (Chairman)	S Mayzes
J Baugh	* D Morris
* A Brown	* R Pearson
L Dangerfield	* C Riley (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs J Deakin	* T Sargent
Mrs M Hutchon (Vice Chairman)	J Young
* Mrs E M Hart	

Non-Elected Voting Members

* Mr R Carson	* Reverend P Trathen
* Mr O Richards	Ms M Uzzell

Named Substitute Elected Members

L Barton	R Callender
K Twitchen	
(* present)	

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Graham Redgwell	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr J Baugh	
Cllr J Deakin	
Cllr Mrs M Hutchon	
Cllr J Young	

2. Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were recorded.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 July 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Corporate Scorecard

Malcolm Newsam, Executive Director, and Jean Imray, Interim Director for Improvement, Schools, Children and Families, were in attendance. Mr Newsam pointed out that the figures circulated with the agenda related to May and confirmed that a new system was in place allowing much more recent data (on a weekly basis); and Ofsted were aware of the progress made here. A chart was tabled, showing the improvement in the proportion of assessments carried out on time. Also, 25% fewer assessments were being carried out than at the start of the year, because new processes had been introduced. Reason 1: formerly, the default situation was to carry out an assessment; now these are allocated appropriately, where necessary (eg to Social Services). Reason 2: unqualified staff had problems making correct assessments; now the process is better managed and qualified staff make decisions.

Mr Newsam responded to questions raised by Committee members.

- Target figures are set by the Department of Education. We are now performing well in comparison with other authorities; we now need to be judged on this year's performance, once we have cleared up the backlog from last year
- We need to be raising the quality of the work, now that we have reduced the outstanding cases. Jean Imray pointed out that all managers conduct a number of random case audits every month, measuring each case against agreed standards. These enable managers to identify weaknesses and deal with them and have demonstrated an improvement recently
- With regard to staff requirements, we have taken on good frontline managers and have taken on a large number of temporary staff, to clear the backlog of cases. As this backlog reduces, not only will we be able to reduce the staff levels, but we will also be more attractive to prospective permanent staff, as social workers like to work in environments with sound management and reasonable caseloads
- Looking forward, Mr Newsam suggested that 12 months of ordinary operating figures would fully demonstrate the benefits of the new procedures.
- Dave Hill, his successor, will start in November, although he is already visiting the Directorate
- In response to the suggestion that there seemed to be an over-emphasis on data, and not enough on the lives of actual children, Mr Newsam acknowledged the danger in focusing so much on Essex getting out of its current poor rating, but he pointed out that the basics had to be right. He added that Essex deal well with children once they are looked after, and the inspectors acknowledged that. It is the initial stage that needs a firmer grip
- On the education side, our position is only slightly lower than our neighbours. This year's GCSE results saw a 6% improvement in those achieving 5 A*-C ratings, which was good – probably exceeding the national average. There were now 8 schools in special measures (as opposed to only 2 at the end of the 2008/9 academic year); but Mr Newsam pointed out that the Ofsted framework has changed and nationally there are more schools in special measures than before. Also,

Essex had a good record in getting schools out of special measures. Mr Newsam was asked to confirm whether either of the two listed in 2008/9 were still in special measures. He did not have the information to hand so it was **Agreed** that he should advise Members accordingly, after the meeting

- Asked about whether he was aware of any regional elements that affected results, Mr Newsam admitted he had encountered the “that’s how it is in Essex” attitude, but in the light of his experience, he did not see why Essex should not be in as strong a position as other authorities. He added that he was part of a regional group sharing good practice, and he had been in discussion with high-performing authorities about these issues
- Members will be able to assist in the process by continuing to show an interest in the work, such as visiting homes and speaking to officers.

The Chairman thanked Mr Newsam and confirmed that the Committee would do whatever it could to assist the Directorate.

5. Educational Attainment

The Governance Officer gave an update on how the Committee might wish to move this issue forward. Following the publishing of the Ofsted results, he had consulted Terry Reynolds, Director for Learning, School Improvement and Early Years, who had pointed out that attainment for children in Essex generally had risen this year, at a higher rate than that of our statistical neighbours or nationally.

There are three main groups of children who are looked after: children in care (who achieve a noticeably lower level than the average), those being fostered (who achieve the national average) and those being looked after out of county (who are in effect outside the control of Essex Services). The proposal is to set up a task and finish group specifically to consider children in the first of these groups, in order to identify problems and seek to make changes.

A few points were raised: children in residential care almost always had to cope with a more difficult personal background; they were often on reduced timetables; and staff sometimes seemed to be constrained by the restrictions laid upon them - which could be exploited by those in their care. Councillor Riley, as chairman of the Group, wished particularly to examine this last point.

It was **Agreed** that Councillor Riley should take the work of the Group forward, in consultation with the Committee support officers, and that a scoping document should be produced for the Committee’s consideration.

6. Safeguarding Sub-Committee

The Committee noted the unapproved minutes of the Safeguarding Sub-Committee meeting held on 1 July 2010.

Councillor Sargent informed the meeting that, owing to the poor CQC/Ofsted results for Safeguarding, she was proposing that the Sub-Committee concentrate its efforts on the Areas for Improvement set out in the Report.

The Committee agreed that the Sub-Committee should take this approach.

7. Corporate Parenting

Councillor Riley updated members on recent events.

“It’s my life” forums were held over the summer, where children who are looked after and disabled children were encouraged to express themselves. These events included feedback sessions, when ways were sought of improving children’s lives. These forums were considered good overall, but they had not been well attended by Members. Councillor Riley reminded the meeting that such events could be seen as forming an element of their corporate parenting role.

Other aspects are visiting homes, and visiting schools as school governors. Corporate parenting should not just be seen as challenging officers, but giving support to young people, and offering assistance where possible.

8. Visits/Apprenticeships

Councillor Riley reminded Members that visits to homes could be organised and made either with other Members or with officers; alternatively Members could ring homes directly and say they would like to visit.

The Chairman pointed out that the Apprenticeship schemes were likely to be under pressure soon, as a result of the impact of imminent spending cuts. He added that emphasis was placed on developing skills that employers wanted and he encouraged members to make these visits. He encouraged members to make visits and it was **Agreed** that they should inform him of their wish to visit one or more of the apprenticeship schemes that were sponsored by the County Council.

9. Community Cohesion

Mr Owen Richards reminded members that the promotion of community cohesion in schools was a statutory requirement, and he pointed out that it tied in with the Government’s commitment to the “Big Society”. He suggested that the Committee might wish to give this further consideration.

In response to a question on how this would benefit schools and children, Mr Richards conceded that some benefits might be intangible, but he suggested that it could help children relate not only to their own school and community, but even further afield.

It was **Agreed** that it should be added to the Forward Look and Mr Richards and the Governance Officer should prepare a scoping document for consideration.

10. Badman Report Response

It was noted that Essex had not made a submission to the original Badman consultation, but had responded to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) follow-up. Reverend Trathen, as chairman of the Badman sub-group, pointed out that although the previous Government, which had commissioned the Report, had wished to see changes made, the present government have put this aside for the time being. However, Rev Trathen

believed it had been a useful exercise. One fact it had brought to light was that the 700 families affected in Essex were supported by only 2 Council officers.

The Committee noted the current position and **Agreed** that the issue be brought back to a meeting in 12 months' time. In the meantime, the Safeguarding Sub-Committee should keep a watching brief.

11. Background Information

a) Academy Schools

The Governance Officer pointed out that none of the five Essex schools listed in the information paper had actually taken up academy status in September 2010. In fact, only 31 schools in the whole country had become academies.

b) Contact Point

It was noted that the review of Child Protection to be conducted by a team led by Professor Eileen Munro of the LSE, would be looking for a replacement system for Contact Point. An interim report was due in January 2011, with a deadline of April 2011 for the final report.

12. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee confirmed 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 30 September *[Date changed from 7 October]*

Thursday 4 November 2010

Thursday 2 December 2010

Thursday 6 January 2011

Thursday 3 February 2011

Thursday 3 March 2011

Thursday 7 April 2011

Thursday 12 May 2011

The meeting closed at 12.05 pm.

Chairman