
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 9.30am on Monday, 9 October 2023 in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:

Cllr Ray Gooding (Chairman)

Cllr Marie Goldman

Cllr Ian Grundy

Cllr Carlo Guglielmi (Vice Chairman)

Cllr Eddie Johnson

Cllr Daniel Land (left the meeting during agenda item 4)

Cllr Sue Lissimore

Cllr Peter May (Vice Chairman)

Cllr Aiden McGurran

Cllr Ross Playle

Cllr Michael Skeels

Cllr Wendy Stamp

Cllr Mike Steel

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer and Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex were also present throughout the meeting.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

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

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 14 September 2023 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Questions from the public

There were none.

4 Essex Youth Service

The Committee considered report PAF/17/23. The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Cllr Mark Durham, Cabinet Member for The Arts, Heritage and Culture
- Julie Auger, Youth Services Manager
- Hannah Thurston, Business Development Manager
- Thomas Williams, Essex Young Assembly representative.

As part of introducing the update, the following was highlighted:

- The service predominantly worked with 13-19-year-olds and up to 25 for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- Increasingly seeing more children not being ready for their teenage years.
- There had been a move towards building more community capacity to support youth services. The Youth Service had a strong direct local presence in some areas and in others they worked with other partners to help provide the service. The model for building more community capacity had been under constant review and adapted to enable specialist work to grow alongside the community development work.
- The Youth Service was part of a wider local system responsible for broader corporate parenting and support and the voluntary sector was an important part of that. There was sometimes joint work to submit funding bids. There was currently 3-year Levelling Up Funding in place helping to increase reach and pilot new initiatives. There was also additional funding from Public Health to expand the youth support in hospital model.
- Around 450 schools engaged with the Multi Schools Council which had a focus on raising awareness and best practice around school attendance, speech, language and communication, and behaviour in schools with significant work also undertaken with Active Essex.
- Support on social isolation, mindfulness, goal setting and building friendships and peer groups was provided via the Education Access Team and as part of the I-Can Project.
- The role and level of involvement of the Young Essex Assembly (YEA) was outlined and examples of events hosted by the YEA were given.

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

- (i) Some members stressed that the original motion discussed at Full Council in July 2023 had questioned the uniformity of youth service provision across the county and that they would have liked to hear more about where there were specific challenges in providing youth services. It was acknowledged that the county was vast and diverse with different needs for each community and one of the biggest challenges was pitching the service offer right in all locations.
- (ii) Some members sought clarity on the number of 'attendances' being quoted and whether it included one-off attendances and how many were repeat engagements. The County Council had a three-hour threshold to record participation as an attendance and if it was less than three hours then it was classed as a light engagement instead. There were a significant number of light engagements as well. There was no access to data from other partners' contact with young people.

- (iii) Youth Support Groups (YSGs) had worked well in some areas but not so well in others where they had not been sufficiently supported by local members and/or key community leaders. Some members were concerned that their local YSG had been discontinued without a replacement structure being put in place. It was stressed some support could be given to help facilitate similar group meetings continuing in the locations where the structure worked for them. It was suggested that there needed to be a mechanism for local members to meet the youth service and young people locally so a possible replacement for the YSGs was under consideration.
- (iv) There were ongoing initiatives to try and ensure that the youth service reached a good mix of young people and was more attractive to those not already using it. A Youth Service supported Takeover Day for young people on 25 October was being planned with invites extended to young people from every type of project that Essex supported.
- (v) There was a variety of engagements with schools including specific targeted work and supporting the Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme. It was important that schools 'bought-in' to the youth service offer and support.
- (vi) The Young Essex Assembly were looking to moving towards greater engagement and integration with County Councillors and their work. Reference was made to the co-production of a Charter with partner organisations to commit to facilitating and responding to youth voice.
- (vii) The costs quoted in the presentation included staff costs. Some members challenged the actual spend per young person and whether it had effectively reduced year-on-year. Whilst the overall budget had increased it was suggested that it felt like it had gone down in real terms due to supporting more young people, inflationary and staff cost pressures. It was suggested that it was important to understand more on the quality of the engagement with young people.
- (viii) It was suggested that the youth service performance should be measured against how it was meeting the requirements of s507b of the Education Act. It was stressed that the legislation was about minimum levels of service.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that further information would be circulated on the Takeover Day so that some members could attend if they wished although numbers might need to be limited. Those members attending could then be invited to feed-back to the rest of the Committee.

[Clerks note: further actions were agreed during discussion under Matters Arising later in the agenda].

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11.38 and reconvened at 11.45am.

5 Adult Social Care Priority area of focus: Safeguarding Adults

(i) Discussion with Sue Turner, Healthwatch Essex Ambassador

The Chairman welcomed Sue Turner to the meeting and invited her to outline her family circumstances and family carer role and any observations she had about carer support services.

Ms Turner opened by stating that it was an essential part of support for carers that they should not feel alone and isolated, that they needed respite to stay healthy and they needed appropriate support. In particular, she observed that there seemed to be no respite for children with learning disabilities who were also deaf and whether that was possible. In terms of practical help she queried how her children could be sent to respite care when there was no communication support at the facility. She also suggested better training was needed so staff understood how to communicate with her sons and provide the support they needed.

Ms Turner then detailed her family history and the diagnosis for each of her sons who each to some extent had varying levels of learning disabilities, deafness and/or being partially sighted. She felt that the NHS had not been good at recognising these symptoms. She stressed that it was hard to cope and provide the support within a family and that it would not have been possible without her husband.

Finally, Ms Turner suggested that the County Council did not comply with certain requirements of the Care Act particularly for those congenitally deaf and/or blind.

The Chairman thanking Ms Turner for her lived experience as a family carer and her insight on the carer support needed.

(ii) The Committee considered report PAF/18/23. The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care and ICS Integration
- Nick Presmeg, Executive Director, Adult Social Care
- Clare Burrell, Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy
- Simon Griffith, Director for ASC
- Christopher Martin, Director for Strategic Commissioning & Policy (C&F)

The opening presentation included outlining and /or confirming the following:

-
- The six commitments to carers.
 - The development of the Carers Strategy, which was part of an all-age approach although the focus of the scrutiny discussion this time was on adult carers
 - The use of a Carers Voices Model developed with Healthwatch Essex.
 - That ECC was seeking to improve identification of carers and aimed to reach a minimum of 14,000 new carers by 2024.
 - All known carers would receive a Think Carers Guide in the next few weeks.
 - The Essex Wellbeing Service now was a first point of contact for carers and would signpost pathways to core offers of support and/or to Adult Social Care for assessment.
 - Options being considered for providing respite breaks to carers.
 - On going campaigns on carers' rights promoting information advice and guidance and services and linking to other campaigns such as for example Domestic Abuse.
 - The specialist core offer would be commissioned on the existing NHS Integrated Care Partnership footprints with four key components: Specialist IAG and support, brief solution focused support (for wellbeing including coaching, counselling, conflict resolution and mediation), Wellbeing Grants, and Peer Support Groups. There would be an extended procurement period of 10 weeks to give more time to enable voluntary groups to work together to submit bids.
 - Probably the biggest concern with launching the new offer was that there would be sufficient capacity to meet the demand for support. Some additional incremental resource was being planned.
 - Members stressed that Sue Turner had clearly felt isolated at times. It was important to continue to have ongoing dialogue with carers and further understand their needs for support. There was a specific workstream looking at issues specific to parent carers.
 - Practical support should be easier to access using the Essex Wellbeing Service (EWS) as the 'front door' to services. In addition, continuity of personal support was important and it was confirmed that EWS would be able to facilitate that with carers should only need to tell their story once as everyone should be using the same case management system.

- Rules had been significantly tightened on the issue of Blue Badge Parking Permits with greater emphasis on assessing the mobility of the carer.

Conclusion

Members were encouraged that the new strategy could be a step change but at a future update they would also be keen to hear what was not working and the approaches being taken to work through those issues. It was agreed that the following would be considered further and/or provided to the Committee:

- (i) The previous witness (Sue Turner) had suggested that ECC were not compliant with the requirements of section 78 of the Care Act and specifically the service it provided for deaf and blind people. Members were concerned by this suggestion and stressed that this needed to be investigated further and requested an update as soon as possible.
- (ii) During the discussion both presenters and Committee members acknowledged that some areas still needed further development (notably but not exclusively plans for respite care) and regular future updates needed to be scheduled.
- (iii) Officers would check to see if it was a freephone or other call-rate for the Essex Wellbeing Service.

6 Work programme

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/19/23 comprising the work programme for the committee. A broader education update would be arranged to cover a number of issues and it was **agreed** that that update should include reference to the capital programme as it related to education provision.

7 Matters Arising

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/20/23 comprising outstanding matters arising from previous meetings. Some progress had been made in closing off some of these items since publication of the agenda and the report would be further considered at the next meeting.

Some members voiced concern at the length of the youth services presentation (agenda item 4) which had reduced the time available for the subsequent agenda item on carers. Cognisant of that, it was agreed that a further update on Youth services was necessary but needed to be focussed on specific 'asks' and that the following be requested:

1. (a) Whilst noting the aim to build closer links between Councillors and young people, to be given more detail on how this is being done and specifically
 - (b) the process to facilitate and re-institute in a similar form any local YSG forums that wished to reform in some way and how that would be anticipated to work in practice, and
 - (c) to further update on any replacement bodies for YSGs more generally being considered and/or proposed?
 - (d) to understand how projects previously supported by the YSGs can continue to be supported and delivered (for example, delivery of productions at school such as Crucial Crew) and where they are currently being and not being delivered.
2. Whilst noting the success of the youth support role at Basildon Hospital Accident and Emergency, to understand more how this scheme is being considered for expansion to other hospitals, the role of the Violence and Vulnerability Unit and other partners in the scheme and the structure of funding it, and the contributors.
3. What measures are in place or are to be put in place to reach hard-to-reach individuals including the home-schooled? What are the challenges and limitations in this area?
4. More information on the equity spread of services across the county, identifying any unevenness of provision and what can be done to address it. This should include participation rates as well across the county to identify if that is also uniform and whether there are particular rural areas, for example, with travel and infrastructure challenges.

It was further agreed that a small working group of Committee members may be formed to observe the delivery of some youth services and report back to the full Committee. Councillors Gooding, Guglielmi and Stamp indicated interest in serving on such a Group should it be formed.

8 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 9 November 2023.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.24pm.

Chairman