

APPENDIX 2

NOTES OF A PRIVATE REVIEW AND REFLECTIONS SESSION HELD ON 11 MAY 2023 ATTENDED BY MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (PAF)

Review

The Senior Democratic Services Officer presented some analysis of how the Committee had spent its time over the last two years matching agenda items to the Committee's Terms of Reference. This prompted further discussion which is summarised below.

Approach

PAF members wanted to add value by challenging and collaborating with decision-makers to drive improvements.

In relation to the Committee's Terms of Reference, members reflected that the PAF had not discussed or decided to give a greater priority or focus to any specific areas. However, PAF Members did acknowledge that a significant proportion of the Council's budget and resources was directed towards adult social care.

Members agreed that some further financial context would often help increase their level of understanding of some of the issues being presented especially on sensitive formal decisions being proposed. It was also felt that more detailed and informative service spend information could often be buried within consolidated disclosures in ECC's budget.

It was suggested that the PAF could prepare for formal items by speaking to witnesses with lived experience beforehand. This had seemed to work well with two previous agenda items.

Members discussed the balance between the committee's work programme being driven by them and requests from Cabinet Members asking to attend and present a new strategy or issue.

There was a suggestion that a future approach could also consider themes as opposed to just specific services. In addition, a more holistic approach could be taken so that, for example, when looking at SEND services, to look at the whole family impact and not just the child with SEND.

Outcomes

Commenting on draft corporate strategies and policies was the policy development part of the PAF's remit. However, there seemed to be an imbalance at present with those dominating the work programme.

Outcomes continued....

The PAF had commented on several draft corporate strategies during the last two years. Currently, members felt that the Committee was not yet seeing outcomes from their implementation and particularly the difference their implementation should be making to residents. It was suggested that there should be a change in approach and focus from the PAF going forward and that it should increase the focus on challenging what was changing in the delivery of services.

It was suggested that future agenda items could include more data on how ECC was achieving outcomes with some degree of KPI reporting and an indication of impact assessment.

It was suggested that further consideration be given to analysing Committee outcomes with anticipated dates for any outstanding matters possibly via an expanded Matters Arising Report for discussion (probably) at pre-meetings.

To assist the above, going forward Members may need to consider some re-framing of suggestions/recommendations being made in formal meetings and push for a time scale to investigate and respond.

Members confirmed that they thought the private reflections time after the close of formal meetings should resume.

Advance notice of upcoming proposed decisions

Consulting the Forward Plan could be useful to see upcoming proposed decisions but there needed to be other mechanisms in place to get even earlier notice to enable meaningful scrutiny engagement with the issue beforehand. Reference was made to recent changes in the Cabinet-Scrutiny protocol which would be presented to the next Full Council as part of the Annual Scrutiny Report.

Call-ins

It was suggested by some members that two recent call-ins had been based more on concerns about process and governance. Concern was expressed by those members that there had been no advance briefing and consultation with PAF ahead of those decisions being taken which could have given the PAF the opportunity to ascertain full context and, in the case of the decision on Lavender House, how the user consultation had been structured.

See overleaf for Work Programme suggestions and the update from Healthwatch Essex.

Work Programme suggestions

Missing Children/Children Missing Education and link with youth mental health issues such as anxiety and depression - partly as part of post pandemic recovery.

Look at absentee rates including post pandemic trend. Is pastoral care in schools sufficient?

Follow-up on County Lines Task and Finish Group

- understand impact on mental health
- PFCC involvement

Services in rural areas (including SEND in the Dengie).

Sufficiency of education services

(Housing) Provision for domestic violence victims/other vulnerable people

Responsibility for academies and Regional School Commissioners.

Healthwatch Essex update

Sara Poole from Healthwatch Essex (HWE) then joined the session via Zoom and outlined some of their upcoming lived experience work. This included:

- Young Mental Health Ambassadors particularly looking at transitions
- Collaborate Essex Forum for people with disabilities and helping them with day-to-day activities
- Hidden Voices Network:
 - Podcasts
 - Gambling
 - Drug addiction
 - Mental health
 - LGBT+ groups
- Essex Fellas forum
- Trauma Ambassador Group – developed a Trauma Awareness Card
- Learning Disabilities Ambassadors – looking to do some more work with learning disabilities nurses in local hospitals.
- Travellers wellbeing – further building connections

HWE were keen to assist the PAF with its work wherever it could.