

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 8 MAY 2014**

County Councillors:

* G Butland (Chairman)	* R Howard
D Blackwell	N Hume
R Boyce	* R Lord
* J Chandler	* M Maddocks
* M Danvers	M McEwen
R Gadsby	* C Seagers
* T Higgins	* A Wood
* P Honeywood	

Non-Elected Voting Members:

* Mr R Carson	* Rev R Jordan
Mr M Christmas	Ms M Uzzell

\*present

The following Members were also present:

Councillor K Bobbin

Councillor A Naylor

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox	Scrutiny Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer
Lee McDermid	YEA Co-ordinator
Clare Ratcliffe	YEA Co-ordinator

The meeting opened at 5.00 pm.

## 1. Apologies and Substitutions

The Chairman reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr D Blackwell	
Cllr R Boyce	
Cllr R Gadsby	Cllr M Maddocks
Cllr N Hume	
Cllr M McEwen	
Mark Christmas	--

## 2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

## 3. Minutes

The minutes of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee meeting of 12 March 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

#### 4. Training and Jobs for Young People

The Committee was supplemented by six members of the Young Essex Assembly (YEA), who were welcomed to the meeting by the Chairman. The Chairman explained the Committee had committed to host a meeting at a time convenient for young people to attend and set the agenda in consultation with the YEA.

Members received report PAF/12/14, which set out a number of questions and issues relating to training and jobs for young people, as raised by Members of the YEA, and the scoping document for this review. Paula Hornett, Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager, was in attendance.

YEA Members voiced a number of their concerns:

- The impression gained by young people is that it is not what you know but who you know that is important when applying for jobs; what does the County Council do to help young people?
- Careers advice seems inconsistent and schools often seem not to do enough in this area. Is the County Council doing anything to rectify this? Does it produce any guidelines for schools?
- The first point of the Corporate Plan 2012-2017 is “Enabling every individual to achieve their ambitions by supporting a world-class education and skills offer in the county.” This seems very ambitious and relies on significant changes to the British educational system; what will the ECC do to achieve this?
- Will the ECC provide any support for young people who have left full time education?
- Can the ECC assure young people that there will be sufficient college places, following the raising of the school leaving age?

Members then asked questions of the YEA Members.

In response to a question on what the career advice provided in schools, there were several responses:

- Some schools do provide a good service, but there seems generally little advice available, and virtually nothing on how to find jobs
- Sometimes the advice given is very negative, discouraging young people from following their ambitions
- Career fairs, with potential employers/FE colleges coming to the school, can be very helpful
- Teachers do not know pupils well enough, to understand you as an individual and know what you do and wish to do
- There is pressure on the schools to get more pupils into university

Committee Members had their own views on this:

- Connexions may not have been the most effective organisation, but its demise has not helped the situation

- With the pressure on schools to attain good results and climb league tables, there is less emphasis on the pastoral side of teaching and taking an interest in pupils beyond their academic achievements
- Another side to this is the emphasis on testing means less effort is directed toward creating rounded individuals
- A different element is that very few teachers themselves have much knowledge of the wide range of jobs available

YEA Members suggested that their schooling tended to be narrow and did not give much help in the area of life skills. And there was the problem that schools tend to put their emphasis on exams, whereas many employers look for work experience.

Several Committee Members expressed their views on these points:

- Young people should certainly go for vocational courses, if they think these will be more useful than more academically based ones. There are schools and colleges that are putting more resources into such courses
- Members realise that young people want to see action, and not just words coming from politicians, to help their job situation. The County Council and local councils should be financing apprenticeships and encouraging local firms to go into schools, to meet pupils and let them know what work is on offer and what skills they are looking for
- Young people should persevere in pursuing their goals, but should be prepared to take on work that they might think inappropriate. Many skills are transferable. The most important element is being prepared to work hard to achieve their aims. They need ambition and confidence in themselves
- Nobody should expect things to be handed out on a plate, so they need to target their goals and work for these. But neither should they ignore helpful advice and assistance from friends and colleagues, who can often provide a different viewpoint of a situation
- Essex does provide a good platform for a range of work and a lot of opportunities with companies abroad.
- Also on a positive note, in a recent survey, the UK education system was rated second only to Finland in Europe, and sixth on the world

Mrs Hornett gave some responses to points raised at the meeting;

- Careers guidance is only one stage in the process, but it is a necessary one, which is initially provided by education staff. The County Council does not have responsibility for careers guidance, but it still supports it where possible
- Essex is working with schools to encourage more emphasis on pastoral care. However, the Government is directing schools to have their pupils concentrate on eight academic subjects, and achieve in six of these; this puts constraints on both time and resources for everything else
- The County Council is also encouraging colleges for 14-19 year olds to have studies tailored to vocational courses

- Schools are no longer obliged to provide work experience, and she suggested that, where work experience is not available, evidence of voluntary work can prove very beneficial
- With regard to the NEET situation: the current figure is 4.8%, compared to 5% in 2013; 94% of post-16 year-olds are in accredited education, compared to 91% in 2013; and the figure for Year 13 is 84% (81% in 2013). She reminded the meeting that, although it is not up to the local authority to ensure that young people stay in education, it is its responsibility to make adequate provision for those who do.

Mrs Hornett agreed to produce a response to the relevant points raised at the meeting and make these available for circulation to Committee and YEA Members.

## **5. Educational Attainment in Essex**

Members received the scoping document for the proposed review of educational attainment in Essex (as PAF/13/14). It was noted that the YEA had produced a response to this and it was agreed that it should be circulated to Members of the Committee for their consideration.

## **6. Public Health and Young People**

Members received report PAF/14/14 on Commissioning Public Health Services for Children and Young People. Jane Richards and Chris French, Heads of Commissioning Public Health and Wellbeing, were in attendance alongside Dr Ann Naylor, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Wellbeing.

Introducing the item, Ms Richards pointed out that the responsibility for commissioning public health and wellbeing services had had been transferred to local authorities in April 2013.

Elements of this were expressly referred to in the ECC Corporate Priorities:

- Children in Essex get the best start in life
- People in Essex enjoy good health and wellbeing
- People have aspirations and achieve their ambitions through education, training and life-long learning. Ms Richards stressed the importance of health to attainment.

There were five areas most relevant to children and young people.

### **1) 5-19 Healthy Child Programme (School Nurse Service).**

This involves working not only with all school aged children but their families. It seeks to reduce the likelihood of young people developing conditions like diabetes and coronary heart disease in later life. Its focus is intervention and prevention rather than treatment. There is an emphasis on equality across the service, but it also aims to cater for local needs. It will be accessed within schools and other appropriate community settings. It will involve other agencies as well, in order to achieve maximum impact.

2) Healthy School Programme.

This was a national programme, which finished in 2011. It had a good response. Stage one involved young people considering their personal health, physical activity, and eating & health. The second stage develops these. Take up is good, with 97% of schools getting involved, and 422 of these (75%) holding current "Healthy School" status. This is the best figure in the East of England.

3) Youth Health Champions.

This involves secondary school students raising awareness of various health issues with their peers. 31 schools are involved at present, including two special schools, but many Health champions work with feeder primary schools as well. That they are dealing with their peers is a particularly important factor here. Another positive element is that the schools set their own areas to be targeted.

4) Risk Avert.

This is another first for Essex, which has been piloted in eight schools, and funding is in place for it to be taken to another 12 schools. 1500 students were screened initially, with 10% of these progressing onto the full programme. It is aimed at developing resilience and skills in young people to prevent risk taking behaviour. It has been shortlisted for a national Community Education Award, and Essex have sold the programme to other authorities.

5) Sexual Health Services.

There is a mandatory requirement to commission health services in respect of certain areas of sexual health. Currently, these are provided by nine different providers across the county, but the intention is to have a fully integrated service in the county by April 2016. Work is carried out alongside other agencies, e.g. Essex Police. Essex has a relatively low incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, but it has seen a recent increase in HIV and syphilis. The most importance element to recognise here is that it is a difficult area and consequently the approach taken must be sensitive.

Some comments were forthcoming from Members:

- In response to a question on whether the areas of diet and/or exercise are targeted by any programmes, the Cabinet Member conformed that they are, but pointed out that this presentation was restricted to a certain number of areas
- One Member suggested that pastoral support is the most important element here, rather than education. In response Cllr Naylor pointed out that under the new arrangements with the Youth Services, young people would continue to have access to professional support
- It was noted that, given the stigma attached to sexual matters, efforts are being made to place clinics dealing with sexual health in more discreet locations, to make it less obvious why an individual is visiting a certain building, for example.

The YEA Members suggested that they should try to raise awareness of these programmes among the young people of Essex.

**7. Scrutiny recommendations tracker and work programme**

The Committee noted the tracker and work programme.

**8. Date of next meeting**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: Thursday 12 June 2014, in Committee Room 1.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked the YEA Members for attending and engaging Committee Members in such a positive fashion. He trusted this would prove to have benefits for all parties.

He also informed Members that he would be relinquishing his membership of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee at the end of the meeting. He thanked Members for their support over the past year and hoped they would continue to demonstrate an independent approach to scrutiny in the future.

On behalf the Committee, Councillor Howard thanked the Chairman and acknowledged his contribution to this new era of scrutiny.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm.

Chairman