

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 7 JANUARY 2010**

**Membership**

**Councillors**

* J Aldridge	D Morris
* J Baugh	* R Pearson
L Dangerfield	* C Riley (Vice-Chairman)
* Mrs J Deakin	T Sargent
* Mrs T Higgins (Substitute for Mrs M Hutchon)	M Skeels
* J Knapman (Substitute for A Brown)	* Kay Twitchen (Chairman)
* S Mayzes	* J Young

**Non-Elected Voting Members**

* Mr R Carson	* Reverend P Trathern
Mr O Richards	Vacancy
(* present)	

Councillor T Smith-Hughes was also present.

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Vivien Door	Committee Officer
Graham Redgwell	Governance Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00

**1. Apologies**

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
Cllr Mrs M Hutchon	Cllr Mrs T Higgins
Cllr Mrs A Brown	Cllr J Knapman
Mr O Richards	
Cllr D Morris	
Cllr Mrs T Sargent	
Cllr L Dangerfield	

**2. Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were recorded:

Cllr C Riley	Personal interest as Member of the North East Fostering Panel: as Member of the provisional Children's Trust Board and as Member of the Children's Centre Partnership Board, (Strategic Group)
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Cllr J Baugh	Personal interest as Member of the Braintree District Children's Centres Partnership
Cllr Mrs T Higgins	Personal interest as Chairman of Colchester YMCA

### 3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 December 2009 were approved as a correct record.

### 4. Matters Arising

Minute 84, NI 117, 16-18 year olds who were not in Education, Training or Employment (NEET), Total Place Project. The Governance Officer informed the Committee that arrangements for the setting up of the Total Place Project were still in the early stages. An officer would be invited to the next meeting to update the Committee on this project, in addition to other work taking place across the County.

Minute 85, Members Visits to Children's Residential Homes, The Committee Officer would contact Maureen Caton for her response to the observations made by Members as a result of these visits.

### 5. Improvement Board Update

The Committee received an oral update on the work of the Improvement Board from Councillor P Martin, Deputy Leader, and Lead Member for Children's Services and Malcolm Newsam, Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families.

#### Background

The Improvement Board was set up in April 2009, initially to operate for a one year intervention period. A six monthly review meeting took place on 2 December at the Department of Children, Schools and Families with Dawn Primarolo MP, Children's Minister, to discuss the Action Plan with the Local Authority. This meeting took place after the Ofsted and the CAA inspections and subsequent reports in autumn 2009. Both the Government and Essex County Council recognised that the Council was making progress but that it was moving slower than was hoped. The main reasons for this slow progress were: (a) the under resourcing of Social Care; (b) the unallocated cases; and (c) the poor case reporting.

#### Strengths of the Service

The Minister recognised a number of areas of improvement:

- Independent Chairman of Safeguarding Board appointed;
- The move from the Swift IT system to the new ICS system;
- Out of Hours Duty Team;
- The recruitment of foreign qualified Social Workers and employing agency qualified and management level Social Workers from both Serco and Remedy leading to some 70 additional staff being in post;
- The new Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families, Malcolm Newsam, had made a huge difference to progressing the improvement;

- Children's Trust Arrangements;
- Initial Response Team.

### Improvement Notice

Following the six monthly review, an Improvement Notice letter was issued by Dawn Primarolo. This had not been received in time to be presented to the last Committee. The Minister recognised the commitment from the Members and officers and the improvement in resources but that progress needed to be faster. As a result, Essex County Council had now received a revised Intervention Notice.

A revised Intervention Board had been set up with an Independent Chairman, Paul Curran, who was the safeguarding lead at the Improvement and Development Agency. He was a qualified social worker and was previously the Director for Children's Services at Islington Council. The first meeting of this Intervention Board would take place on 26 January. In recognition that safeguarding of children was a shared agency involvement, the Police and NHS representatives had been invited to sit on this Board. The Chairman of this Board would report progress to the Minister bi-monthly. Councillor Martin would provide regular updates to Members at the full Council meeting and he intended to write to Members regarding progress before the next Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Malcolm Newsam had an Improvement meeting weekly for Senior Managers and Service Managers across the County directly involved with Assessment and Family Support, in order to provide a strategic overview. Wendi Ogle-Welbourn looked at individual cases in her weekly meetings.

The Council was also working with Julian Ward, DCSF Project Manager, to drill down into the detail in the Directorate checking progress made and look for any problems.

Finally two consultants provided by the DCSF would also provide advice for the Council.

### Question and Answer Session

During a lengthy discussion the following points were made:

- Essex County Council remained responsible for the day to day running of services for children and families. The Government provided advice and guidance through Paul Curran, Julian Ward and the two consultants;
- If insufficient improvements were made the Government could intervene, as it had in other Local Authorities;
- The Intervention Notice had been extended until March 2012. During the remaining period Essex County Council would continue to have six monthly meetings with the Children's Minister in the DCSF;
- The number of agencies who were required to be a member of the Improvement Board had been kept small, with the Police and NHS representatives involved. Other agencies involved in Safeguarding Children would be invited to attend as appropriate. All agencies involved in Safeguarding Children were Members of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board;
- Essex County Council had to work with the other agencies whilst improving its own services;

- There was a problem with regard to Social Worker thresholds in regard to referring children. Some inappropriate referrals were still being made and it was clear that Social Workers should be working on higher need cases;
- There was a strong commitment across all agencies within the Children's Trust, with the PCTs and the Police committed to supporting Essex County Council;
- There was awareness that the improvement was not just about processes and plans but that low morale amongst staff could produce a poor service for children. The front line services were under resourced which impacted on the Social Worker's case loads and reduced their effectiveness, which then produced low morale. Front line teams were now at full capacity which had reduced the Social Worker's case loads which would now raise morale. Next year Essex would need to rebrand itself to recruit Social Workers and retain its existing staff, by making Essex an excellent place to work;
- Although the Improvement Plan focused on strategic issues and data, the quality of the service provided to every individual child and family was very important. Staff had been unable to provide quality services for all children and families whilst they were under resourced;
- Training for existing and new Social Workers and front line staff needed to continue to take place to provide a consistent standard across Essex;
- It would take time to provide a consistent quality service across Essex;
- There were a large number of hard working staff who were committed to providing good services for children;
- The number of Social Workers was now slightly above what was required for the County;
- The amount and quality of data was discussed at the weekly meetings. Previously this data was analysed on a county wide basis and not broken down into individual teams. This data was now broken down into individual teams and each Manager was responsible for improving the work of his/her team;
- The IT system was in the process of being changed across the County from Swift to Liquid Logic ICS System. At present part of the County was on the old system and part on the new system. This provided problems with the data, but the data was now accurate to one per cent rather than the large inaccuracies previously. These inaccuracies would be corrected when all the County was using the new IT system;
- In the course of a month the number of unallocated cases had reduced from 1850 to 1290;
- The letter received on 4 December 2009 from Dawn Primarolo, Children's Minister was inaccurate and required changing. The revised and correct letter would be sent to Councillor T Smith-Hughes and the Members of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee;
- A Member reported that one of the new Children's Trust Boards was very enthusiastic with the new Trusts and all agencies were taking responsibility for their own safeguarding issues and working together;
- There were five Children's Trust Boards. These Boards included an elected Member who reported back to the Lead Member for Children's Services.

The Chairman advised Councillor Martin and Malcolm Newsam that, although this Committee would challenge and monitor the situation, it also had an advocacy

/support role. She informed Councillor Martin and Malcolm Newsam that Members had visited Residential Homes and the staff at the homes had found these visits useful. The Chairman invited Councillor Martin to regard the committee as a resource and Councillor Martin said he would inform the committee how they could best support staff.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Martin and Malcolm Newsam for their informative presentation.

## **6. New Schools, Children and Families Directorate Structure**

### Introduction

The Committee received report CYP/01/10 from Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Director for Commissioning. Wendi apologised to the Committee for the somewhat confusing previous presentation on the changes to the delivery of the services made previously. She informed the Committee that she had been employed by Essex since 1 April 2009.

The Chairman informed the Committee that Wendi had been asked to limit this presentation to the abolition of TASCs and their replacement structure. She would be invited to a future meeting to present on Children's Trusts.

### Abolition of TASCs

The main objective in the introduction of the TASCs was to provide early interventions to children and families locally; however no additional resources were provided to the staff deployed to the TASCs who kept their current work load whilst taking on referrals of a more complex nature. This limited the amount of preventative work TASCs could do. The small teams were spread evenly across the county which limited their ability to be flexible and responsive. The even spread of teams did not enable the higher areas of need to be provided with the appropriate services.

Following the review of the TASCs in 2008/09 it was decided that they should be disbanded and to return the staff to their original professional teams. These teams were managed on a quadrant basis. The critical mass of staff in the quadrants enabled them to be deployed more flexibly to areas of greatest need. Work bases for staff have been retained in each of the 12 Districts. All previous referrers to TASCs have been informed of the new arrangements and how to access services. This new system provided workers with appropriate professional supervision, which they did not always receive in the TASCs. As fewer managers were required there had been an efficiency saving of £600,000.

### Revised Structure

Whilst no additional resources had been made available the level of preventative services had been improved by developing the Multi-Agency Allocation Groups (MAAGs) that meet weekly in the districts. The MAAGs contained the professionals who formed TASCs, but now also included the other provider services from the statutory and voluntary sector, for example, Health, Police and Housing. Those agencies and organisations such as schools and health visitors who previously made referrals to TASCs were able to refer to the MAAGs to obtain a package of support for children and families who need more than universal services could provide. For example, local GP services, extended

schools services such as counselling, afterschool clubs, children's centre services, youth clubs and district leisure activities.

Professionals who referred children and families to the MAAGs use the Common Assessment Framework form, as previously used to refer to the TASCCs.

An example of a typical referral to the MAAGS was given. This related to where a school had identified that a child was not achieving well at school due to their behaviour, the parents were not working with the school to address the issue and it was evident there were problems in the parents own relationship. The MAAG could set up a package of support to help the school and family by the providers at the panel agreeing to work together to do this. The package could contain Catch 22 (a voluntary sector provider of young people's services), the Police (if Domestic Violence was an issue) and a parenting worker from a family centre. The lead professional would be agreed at the MAAG to decide which agency would make contact with the family to offer the package and co-ordinate the support package to ensure no duplication and to offer other services if appropriate.

Members were advised of two panels where cases could be referred to if they meet the criteria for specialist Social Care, Education or Health Services.

#### Question and Answer Session

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Members were concerned that young people placed Out of County who were young offenders did not receive adult support whilst in the police station. It was confirmed that an Essex and East of England region group of independent professionals had been set up to provide quality monitoring visits for children and young people placed Out of County;
- All Members were urged to contact Wendi Ogle-Welbourn regarding any concerns they had about individual Out of County placement issues;
- Young people did not always benefit from being taken into care more often they thrived when kept at home or in the community, as young people in care leave at 18 with no support system for any problems they may have;
- Social Workers presented their case to the panel at the Out of County weekly meetings for any child aged 0 to 18 years old;
- It costs at least £2,500 for an Out of County Placement per week and usually about £4,500 to £5,000 per week for a secure placement. 25 locally based packages could be provided for the cost of an Out of County Placement;
- The term Out of County Placements could be misleading. They could be within Essex borders but provided by an independent provider;
- The key difference between TASCCs and MAAGs was that the team could now provide more appropriate services for children and families and be allocated to a different part of the district and or county when required;
- There was a tapestry of services at four levels, that children and families could move up and down as appropriate for their needs;
- The move from TASCCs to MAAGs would be completed by March 2010;
- There was a dedicated adolescent service part of which was available 24/7 to provide a help line for families dealing with difficult teenagers. Parents had to make contact with the help line who would then assign the appropriate level of support and professionals, parents could not contact the 24/7 help line until they have been assessed.

The Chairman thanked Wendi Ogle-Welbourn for her informative presentation.

## 7. School Organisation Plan

The Committee endorsed the comments made by the working group on the School Organisation Plan, CYP/02/10. The Chairman thanked Owen Richards, Revd Paul Trathern and Graham Redgwell who had read the report and commented on the consultation to David Mason in the Schools, Children and Families Directorate.

## 8. Forward Look

The Committee received the Forward Look, CYP/03/10, from Graham Redgwell.

The Committee **agreed** the Forward Look with the following additions:

- i) **Children's Trusts**, Wendi Ogle-Welbourn should be invited to make a presentation at either the February or the April meeting, the Committee Officer to organise this;
- ii) **Badman Report**, A working group should be set up to look into the next stage of the Badman consultation process:
  - Revd Trathern – Lead Member
  - Mr Richards
  - Cllr Higgins
  - Cllr Pearson
  - Mr CarsonThe Governance Officer would help to organise this working group who would report back to the March meeting.

## 9. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee confirmed the dates of the future meetings and noted that they may comprise:

- Meetings in private
- Meetings in public
- Working groups
- Sub-Committee meetings
- Outside visits

Thursday 4 February 2010

Thursday 4 March 2010

Thursday 1 April 2010

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm.

Chairman