

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 5 DECEMBER 2013**

County Councillors:

* G Butland (Chairman)	* T Higgins
* S Barker	* P Honeywood
A Bayley	* R Howard
* D Blackwell	* N Hume
* K Bobbin	* M McEwen
R Boyce	M McGeorge
* J Chandler	* C Seagers
* R Gadsby	* A Wood
* K Gibbs	

Non-Elected Voting Members :

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

\*present

The following Members were also present:

Councillor J Aldridge ( <i>items 4 &amp; 7</i> )	Councillor D Kendall ( <i>items 4-5</i> )
Councillor A Brown	Councillor V Metcalfe
Councillor P Channer	Councillor A Naylor

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

**1. Apologies and Substitutions**

The Chairman reported the receipt of the following apologies:

<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
Cllr A Bayley	Cllr K Gibbs
Cllr R Boyce	Cllr S Barker
Cllr M McGeorge	Cllr K Bobbin
Mr M Christmas	--
Rev R Jordan	--

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

**3. Minutes**

The minutes of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee meetings of 12 September and 14 November 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

#### 4. Home to School Transport Consultation

Members received report PAF/13/13, which set out several options being proposed in the wake of the recent Home to School Transport consultation. Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, Tim Coulson, Director for Commissioning: Education and Lifelong Learning, and Emma Toublic, Head of Transport & Awards, were in attendance.

Members noted that these proposals were being prepared for consideration and approval by Cabinet and the intention today was for Members to be given the opportunity to indicate any pointers they thought would be useful. The Chairman pointed out that, with the Christmas break imminent, there might be potential timing issues here, if Members had concerns they felt needed to be addressed. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the intention was to have this in place before the next round of negotiations.

Members expressed their views, sought answers to concerns and made suggestions:

- Having noted the intended bulk purchase for the Over-16s, Ms Toublic agreed that the same should be considered for the Under-16s
- In response to a concern expressed, that the removal of transport from Over-16s might result in their withdrawal from education, Ms Toublic pointed out that although originally the intention was to remove it entirely, some entitlement criteria would remain. Currently, about 30% of children pay the £550
- Members expressed a concern that assistance might be withdrawn from children from low income families who had succeeded in getting a place at a selective school. Ms Toublic confirmed that this situation is being reviewed
- As regards the phasing in of reduced fares with the imminent raised school leaving age, it was pointed out that the bus companies could pick any age they wished for concessionary rates; and the Government had made no provision for school leavers. It was noted that Essex had a bulk purchasing sachem in place, which students could use
- The “exceptional circumstance” referred to in the fourth bullet point of the Overview (Page 14 of 80) would be something like cases of domestic violence or a severe medical condition within the family
- The option of using “nearest school” instead of catchment raised concerns over possible scenarios, eg when the nearest school was of an inappropriate faith, or had a poor Ofsted rating, or was oversubscribed. These seemed to be at odds with the principle of parental choice. Ms Toublic pointed out that “nearest school” was government policy and permitting schools to set their own catchment areas exposed Essex to financial risk, where these were different to the catchment areas used by the County Council. She noted the points made and confirmed that Essex was considering these different scenarios and options

- As a principle, it was suggested that the Local Authority should not be doing anything to prevent children from attending the most suitable school for them
- The Cabinet Member's view was that Government had always lagged behind the County with regard to these issues and he suggested that Essex as a Local Authority should be lobbying them about this, seeking legislation and some financial help in this area.

There being no further comments, the Chairman confirmed that the Committee noted the Report and asked the Cabinet Member to consider the points raised by Members. He added a request for earlier submission of any future proposals.

## **5. Youth Service Redesign**

Members received report PAF/14/13, which provides some early responses to the recent consultation on the Youth Service and an update on the emerging operational model. Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, Tim Coulson, Director for Commissioning: Education and Lifelong Learning, and Mike O'Brien, Head of Commissioning, Essex Youth Service, were in attendance.

The Cabinet Member pointed out that the Youth Service needed both to reduce expenditure and to do things more efficiently. The general response to the consultation had been strong, and particularly so from young people themselves, many of whom had made helpful and constructive comments.

The Chairman once again pointed out that there were timing issues as far as the Scrutiny process was concerned. He then invited comments from Members.

It was suggested that in some instances effective youth work can have a dramatic effect on young people, turning them away from potential damaging lifestyles and choices. Seen in these terms, reducing workers was a false economy, leading to other problems that would need to be addressed later on. Another Member agreed, referring to schemes specifically mentioned in the paper, such as the Duke of Edinburgh, which could have similarly positive impacts on young people.

The Cabinet Member pointed out that he was reconsidering the level of cuts and this was reflected in the paper. He added that he was keen to develop these schemes, such as the DofE, and they were exploring ways of doing this.

In response to a Member's enquiry whether any other service had seen such extensive cuts (if brought down to £2m, from the £12million of a few years ago, that would see an 83% reduction), the Cabinet Member pointed out that this was a redesign and the reduction in funding would not necessarily mean the removal of the service.

The dedication of those working within the service was acknowledged and it was important to protect it. Another Member emphasised the point out that although

it was good to see the excellent work carried out by the many people volunteering to work with young people, professional input was vital.

The Cabinet Member pointed out they were looking to coalesce funding, doing away with some silos that had built up and so achieving more with less funding. He intended to increase the importance of the Youth Strategy Groups. There were 12 districts in the County, each with its unique set of problems and needs. The YSGs would be encouraged to do more, not in the delivery, but in providing the necessary local knowledge.

In response to one Member's question, whether the YSGs had the most appropriate membership – given that many County Councillors for example were a generation or two older than the YSGs' target groups – Mr O'Brien confirmed that they were actively encouraging young people themselves to provide input to these groups.

The Chairman allowed a question from the public gallery, seeking clarification on how much of the funding would be allocated to the YSGs. In response, the Cabinet Member pointed out that it was not possible to say at this stage, as not only were the overall figures not confirmed, but neither had the means of allocating to the groups been established.

There being no further comments, the Chairman confirmed that the Committee noted the Report and asked the Cabinet Member to consider the points raised by Members. He repeated his request for earlier submission of any future proposals.

## **6. Special Educational Needs & Disability**

Members received the latest draft of the *Strategy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disability 2014-19* (PAF/15/13). Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, Tim Coulson, Director for Commissioning: Education and Lifelong Learning, and Karen Jones, SEN Project Manager, Schools, Children and Families, were in attendance.

Councillor Higgins, as Chairman of the Task & Finish Group, noted that it had been set up to consider this, in order to ensure that Members be informed as early as possible, so that they can be given a full opportunity to provide input on the development of strategy.

Ms Jones drew Members' attention to the summary on page 54 of 80, and to the intention to set up a SEND Strategy Group, with representation from a wide range of interested parties.

It was suggested that the statistics provided in the paper should be reproduced in tabular form, for clarity, when it goes before Cabinet.

The Committee noted and endorsed the paper and proposed that the Task & Finish Group remain, to monitor implementation.

## **7. Essex Sensory Service Review**

Members received report PAF/16/13, the latest Essex Sensory Service Review. Councillor John Aldridge, Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care, and Peter Tempest, Executive Director for Adult Operations, were in attendance.

Mr Tempest confirmed that they were trying to find new ways of working with the organisations used by the County Council. No solution was forthcoming as yet; the project was behind schedule, as there was a continuing commercial dialogue with Essex Cares, and the consultation has continued till 12 December, which has led to some slippage. The new timetable was set out on page 73 of the meeting paper.

In response to the observation that there seemed to be little commissioning, as only Essex Works was being used, Mr Tempest pointed out that Essex Cares was the end user at present but there were other parties involved.

Noting the two options of either the joint venture or prime provider approach, the Cabinet Member pointed out that whichever model was chosen, it must be acceptable to all parties. He agreed with the feedback given by the Chairman, that all providers must be tested, and added that there were commercial issues here, which constrained him at present.

The Chairman noted the changes to the timetable and asked that the Committee receive a written report on progress being made during 2014.

## **8. Scrutiny Recommendations Tracker and Work Programme 2013-14**

Members received and noted report PAF/17/13, the latest Tracker and Work Programme.

A scoping document for the Children in Care Task & Finish Group was tabled. Members' attention was drawn to the terms of reference, which referred specifically to leaving care services; it was noted that the sexual exploitation element would not be considered for the moment. The Committee endorsed the terms of reference.

## **9. Date of next meeting**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: Thursday 16 January 2014, Committee Room 1, at 10.00 am.

## **10. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

### **Resolved:**

That, having reached the view that the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information, the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds

that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**11. Update on Case relating to Essex Social Services**

(Exempt under paragraph 2 – information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

Councillor Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, gave an update on a recent case involving an Italian national whose baby had been offered for adoption by Essex Social Services.

The meeting closed at 3.51 pm.

Chairman