
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.15am in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 14 February 2019

Present:

County Councillors:

M Maddocks (Chairman)

J Baker (Vice Chairman)

G Butland

J Chandler (Vice Chairman)

M Durham

B Egan

J Henry

P May

M McEwan

P Reid

C Souter

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, was also present throughout.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Deakin, Lumley and Pratt and Richard Carson, Educational Co-optee. No declarations of interest were made.

2 Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the Public

There were no questions from the public

4. Drug gangs, knife crime and county lines

The Committee considered report PAF/05/19 which was an introduction to the issue of drug gangs, knife crime and county lines. Also attached was a draft scoping document to be considered to framework future work.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the issues:

Tanya Gillett, Head of Youth Offending;

Andy Phopphet, Assistant Chief Constable, Local Policing/Crime & Public Protection, Essex Police.

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

- Gangs had evolved and franchised out into rural locations.
- The Youth Offending Service (YOS) had identified county lines as a trend and impacting on local people around two years ago and it had been raised through partnership agency forums. The YOS had an average caseload of 450 people with up to 60 per cent of those cases sometimes connected to County Lines activity.
- There were an estimated 2000 county lines across the country with around 134 thought to cover Greater Essex; at the moment, most of the County Lines operating in Essex originated from London.
- The criminal use of drugs dictated the criminal supply and the main risk and harm did seem to disproportionately affect the young and vulnerable although was not exclusive to these groups.
- A long-term approach and strategy was needed to confront the issues with a strong partnership landscape utilising and joining up the work of safeguarding, education, social care and housing (and other) governance structures. It was acknowledged that agencies needed to recognise that communities change and evolve and they needed to be responsive to this.
- Targeted prevention and intervention activity plus disruption of county lines were all needed. i.e. a holistic focussed approach.
- More joined up working was needed with agencies being advocates for each other and share information on what each other were doing. It was suggested that districts could use their licensing powers more effectively to build more resilient communities.
- The development and adoption of the Violence and Vulnerability Framework (led by the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner) was expected to lead to improved joint working and information sharing with Essex Police.
- There was also often insufficient information or notice of people being rehomed within Essex by London Boroughs and specific support that they may need.
- It could be difficult to affect change if vulnerable children are not in school. Emerging research suggested that the support gained from having good family and personal relationships, access to education and training and employment were important factors in building resilience to the influence of drug gangs and county lines. There was also some emerging evidence about the impact of poverty on families and increased likelihood to be attracted to drug income.

- Education had been identified as a key component in the strategy. Members queried whether support would be stepped-up in primary schools to increase awareness, prevention and early intervention – thereby increasing resilience. However, there was also a counter argument that due to their smaller size there was better interaction between teaching staff and pupils in primary schools anyway and that focus should be more on secondary schools.
- There was also an issue about pupils being on a school roll but not actually in regular attendance at the school and this could also be an indicator of vulnerability. It was a significant step to actually permanently exclude a child so some schools would suggest alternative educational packages often delivered remotely but where they could still stay on the school roll.
- YOS was looking to launch a youth justice team (on a partnership basis) for more considered approach assessing each crime where a child or young person is a main suspect to try and identify early safeguarding, vulnerability or support requirements rather than immediately pushing them through the criminal justice system.
- Knife crime was trending upwards with a significant proportion linked to drug gangs. The Police felt that they needed more targeted visible use of stop and search powers complemented by more educational programmes stressing that carrying a knife did not make someone safer. It was highlighted that recent knife crime prevention orders legislation being promoted by the Home Office would enable control orders being put on people who were found carrying a knife.
- Members queried the amount of advice that was available for parents and carers to access. It was suggested that the Essex Young People Drug and Alcohol Service and also the Family Hubs could provide advice. It was acknowledged that probably more could be made available through schools.
- Information on truants and non-attenders at school was shared between partner agencies.

Conclusion

The Chairman thanked Tanya Gillet and Assistant Chief Constable Andy Phophet for their attendance and they left the meeting.

[Clerks note: In discussion after the formal meeting closed, the Committee agreed that further discussion was needed on awareness within and agency links with schools and that the draft scoping document be used to framework future work.].

The meeting then adjourned at 11.45am and reconvened ten minutes later.

5. Special Educational Needs

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/06/19 which comprised an Executive Summary of a review undertaken on current SEN provision including parent and teacher views. Also attached within the report was a draft scoping document to be considered to framework future work. Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation joined the meeting to introduce the item and assist initial discussion.

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

- Essex had a higher number assessed with Special Educational Needs than statistical neighbours and that trend was continuing.
- The number of people diagnosed with autism had also increased resulting in resourcing extra provision for those people in schools.
- The County Council had specialist autism support centres in eight maintained schools offering an integrated model of provision which over time could help pupils integrate back into the mainstream educational provision in the school.
- Between 250-300 pupils a year received their SEN support outside of the maintained school sector in Essex due to insufficient places being available in the maintained sector but this was more expensive and outcomes could be variable in that sector (some could be outside of the county of Essex).
- The new garden communities' developments would put further pressure on school provision and likely lead to further numbers being diagnosed with SEN.
- There had also been a rise in exclusions and it was likely that some could be connected to autism, speech and language difficulties.
- There was no obligation on schools to notify ECC about pupils not accessing full-time education. A new OFSTED framework would help emphasise the importance of this.
- Further attention needed to be given to post-16 transitions particularly looking at SEN provision in colleges and other vocational settings so as to avoid the leaving of school being seen and experienced as a "cliff-edge".
- The County Council was looking to restructure SEN services. It would be launching a public consultation the following month inviting parents and carers etc to co-design future service provision and help identify where and how some services could be delivered differently.

There could be some shrinkage of non-statutory services. Staff were also being involved in the co-designing of future services.

- Members queried the outcome being sought from the planned public consultation and whether it was about changing the quality of services and/or reducing the financial costs of the service. It was stressed that it was about quality and direction of a service which had evolved in response to legislative changes over the years rather than being designed from the start. The County Council wanted to move towards seeking specific outcomes rather than outputs (i.e. volume count on how many people have accessed a service). It was suggested that one specific outcome being sought was to encourage a better understanding by parents that resource is limited and that spending heavily in bespoke specific circumstances would limit ability to invest more widely.
- The County Council wanted support to move towards a 'whole school' approach permeating change through the whole school.

Conclusion

The Chairman thanked Mr Holloway for his attendance. It was **agreed** that (i) a draft of the proposed consultation document(s) be distributed to members in advance of publication for general comment on style and readability (ii) the Committee intended to continue to monitor the consultation process and would continue to liaise with Mr Holloway regarding further discussions (iii) the draft scoping document be used to framework future work.

6. Member Updates

Councillor Henry recommended a virtual autism tour he had recently undertaken and a short film link that was to be circulated to members.

7. Work Programme

The committee considered and noted report PAF/07/19.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Committee activity day was scheduled for Thursday 14 March 2019 which may be held in public, be a private session, briefing or site visit – to be confirmed nearer the time.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.55pm.

Chairman