

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD AT AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 14
JANUARY 2016**

County Councillors:

* I Grundy (Chairman)	* C Guglielmi
D Blackwell	T Higgins
* K Bobbin	* P Honeywood
* R Boyce	* R Howard
* J Chandler	* A Jackson
M Danvers	* M McEwen
* K Gibbs	* J Whitehouse
* A Goggin	* A Wood

Non-Elected Voting Members:

Mr R Carson Ms M Uzzell

*present

The following Members were also present:

Councillor G Butland

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox Scrutiny Officer
Matthew Waldie Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.30 am.

1. Apologies and Substitutions

The Chairman reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr D Blackwell	
Cllr M Danvers	Cllr K Bobbin
Cllr K Gibbs	
Cllr T Higgins	Cllr J Whitehouse
Mr R Carson	

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Questions from the Public

Mr Derek Adams addressed the meeting. Before he spoke, the Chairman pointed out that normally he would only allow a public question relevant to an item on the agenda of the meeting; however, because this matter was referred to him by a Committee Member, and in the interest of free speech, he had exercised his discretion and was allowing Mr Adams to speak on this occasion. He reminded Mr Adams not to refer to any individuals by name.

Mr Adams informed the meeting he was the Chairman of Governors of a high performing Essex primary academy. The Headteacher was a highly regarded practitioner, but Senior Officers at the County Council agreed to refer him to the National College of Teaching and Learning, with the intention of having him barred from teaching for life, because of a letter he had written to the parents of the Academy. The Academy believed this referral to be rushed, ill-thought-out, misleading and erroneous.

The Author of the referral was informed of this error, as the letter had nothing to do with the Headteacher, and the author acknowledged this, but then allowed the referral to proceed on a false premise, by not pointing out the error to the NCTL.

The Academy had had what it considered to be legitimate concerns about the conducting of a Schools Appeal Panel that had considered the cases of two children that the Academy had turned down, as it did not believe the Clerk and Panel had followed the Schools Admissions Appeals Code; but the senior officers had consistently refused to meet the Academy to discuss the cases. They abused their power by only responding to the questions they wanted to, by rejecting established procedures and by not allowing direct contact with those officers responsible for the referral. A conflict of interest existed, as these senior officers were not suitably placed to judge their actions. The senior officer concerned had not applied the seven Nolan principles in dealing with the Academy's concerns.

Before the referral to the NCTL, the EFA had expressed concerns about the letter that had been circulated to the parents and had received responses to these concerns from both the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher. These responses were acknowledged by the EFA and no further action was taken by it. This is the letter that the Council believed should lead to the termination of the Headteacher's career.

The Academy asked the Committee to propose to the senior officers concerned that the two issues were not resolved and that these officers should meet with the academy to discuss all the points raised so that a resolution to the two issues could be set in motion.

The Chairman reminded the meeting that the role of Scrutiny was to hold the executive to account and to contribute to the development of policy and strategy on matters affecting this Council and its citizens and not to examine individual cases or deal with individual complaints.

The Committee noted his statement and the Chairman agreed to forward the list of questions that Mr Adams had produced to the relevant officers. But the Committee could do nothing more.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

- i. The minutes of the People and Family Scrutiny Committee meeting of 2 November 2015 (Call-in meeting in respect of Housing Related Support Funded Older People's Services) were approved and signed by the Chairman.

- ii. The minutes of the People and Family Scrutiny Committee meeting of 12 November 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman

5. Adult Community Learning

Members received PAF/01/16, a report on the Adult Community Learning Redesign. The Chairman welcomed Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, and Ros Parker, Head of Skills and Adult Community Learning, to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member introduced the item by pointing out that the service had been on quite a journey over the past 18 months. It was an important service, being used by approximately 12,000 people each year. But it had been under some pressure recently, not least financially. It was funded by Government, through the Skills Funding Agency, but had been facing reductions year on year. Coupled with this, the most recent Ofsted inspection (November 2014) had produced a lower rating than had been hoped for: 'requires improvement'. The service met a wide range of needs, from moving NEETS forward, through helping people get back to work, to more social activities such as holiday Spanish. There was a need to make a number of changes, particularly to make it more commercial.

Ms Parker pointed out that the whole service had been reviewed and over the last year or so had seen a significant improvement in its financial situation. Enrolments were up by 1200 and higher levels of success rates were being recorded, which meant that more people were obtaining the qualifications they wanted. This increase goes against the national trend, with dropping numbers across the country.

Responses were given to points raised by Members:

- The service is provided in twelve main locations, but some 200 external, community-based venues are also utilised
- The courses range across a broad spectrum: a few geared to the 16-18 age group, some relating to apprenticeships, and the majority, both for qualifications and not, are for anyone over the age of 18, the oldest individual currently enrolled being 92
- All courses are closely and constantly monitored by management, and efforts created and tailored to meet demand. With regard to public health, for example, courses can be run to tie in with particular initiatives. Other particular areas are those courses helping adults to be more work ready, and, similarly, preparing those who are returning to work after some time away. Qualifications go up to Level 4
- This process has led to the loss of some courses and the growth of others. Some courses simply go out of fashion (particularly non-qualification ones). Numbers can dwindle, not only making that class financially not viable, but also creating poor environment for learning. Apprenticeship provision is a growth area and market research is being carried out to see what people want within their communities
- Generally, fees have risen but courses have been given greater publicity. Many people have to pay the full fees, but there are subsidies available to deprived communities, those leaving school without qualifications and vulnerable adults. Also, Essex cannot charge for certain courses, such as

Levels 1 & 2 in English and maths for those who do not have these already as this is a part of the funding rules

- Schools and colleges have great potential as venues that often seem underutilised and this is an area likely to be developed further in the future, as part of the drive to maximise the use of resources
- A study examining the skills gap for adults has been commissioned, with a view to taking a broader view of the skills agenda in due course. Referring to the particular situation of Canvey Island, Ms Parker offered to explore further the wider skills agenda there, through the possible use of Time Banks
- Tutors are having to adopt a different mindset. In the past, their role was simply to teach; but now they are much more aware of having to promote the courses and their enthusiasm can serve as the best of advertisements for the service
- The service is subject to full Ofsted inspections. The most recent gave a rating of 'requires improvement'. It is important for Essex to improve on this, not only for the benefit of those using the service, but it affects potential Government funding. One consequence of this rating is that an Ofsted inspector periodically makes a 'Support and Challenge' visit, and these have proved helpful in asking questions of the service
- It was pointed out that a Cabinet Member Reference Group had looked into this issue in 2014, considering all options. It had concluded that working alongside colleges would be a good way forward. This was the origin of the strategic alliance. The strategic alliance not only allows learners to make use of their facilities but also presents college staff with development opportunities, perhaps with groups that they would not normally have the opportunity to interact with.

Ms Parker informed Members that a promotional pack is being developed, that she would like to share with Members; and she hoped that Members would be able to act as ambassadors for the service.

The Chairman requested that the Committee a statistical breakdown of learning provision countywide, by age, location and attainment be circulated to Members after the meeting.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Gooding and Ms Parker for their visit and invited them to come back to the Committee in about six months' time, to provide an update, particularly on strategic alliance and on progress on the linking of the commercial necessity with the needs of local communities.

6. Communities and Healthy Living

Members noted the Communities & Healthy Living Portfolio Newsletter, dated December 2015, which had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Chairman welcomed Cllr Anne Brown, Cabinet Member for Communities and Healthy Living, Helen Gilbert, Senior Commissioning Delivery Officer, Commissioning Support, and Verne Lewis, Senior Communications Officer, Communications & Marketing, to the meeting. Cllr Brown invited questions.

Responses were given to issues raised by Members:

- Now that the health visiting service is back with the County Council, the intention is to combine it with the role of Children's Centres, to provide

children with the best possible start to life. This will form part of a complete 0-19 years of age service. £20 million extra funding is available, so the service will be fully reviewed and tailored appropriately. Public Consultation will begin in February

- The County Council will be providing public health practitioners in the community from April 2016 and will be looking at issues jointly with Chelmsford, Braintree and Maldon. They also want to look at housing, which is a big area that is not being tackled at present
- The Living Well Essex website (www.livingwellessex.org) has been created as a main resource to help meet our duties under the care act to provide high quality information and advice, in particular carers. Our intention is to continually develop this site to improve the quality of the information with the support of carers. The Supporting Carers in Essex Partnership is now well established and is also providing a single point of contact for carers for high quality information and advice. This single point is also important as we are monitoring the data closely to identify needs of carers and to also identify any specific gaps to inform future commissioning decisions. The ECC Organisational Intelligence team undertook a review of peer support for carers and we are exploring how to use this information effectively as carers continue to tell us they don't know where to go for support.
- There are a substantial number of young carers, in Essex, many who are hidden. They form a very vulnerable group of low achievers and have much fewer life chances. Traditionally support for carers has been offered via groups, however, since 2015, whilst there is still group support available, assessments for young carers is now undertaken by the ECC targeted youth advisors. This is giving us access to much better information about needs of young carers. Young carers funding has been brought in line with the carers programme. A new offer for carers, including young carers will be available from April 2017. In particular self-esteem is a major issue for young carers and it is important to engage schools to assist. Statistics show that young carers can achieve more, when they get support, and the intention is to provide more information and training to schools.
- We were in the bottom quartile for support for carers when we reviewed the position last year. The joint carers strategy with CCGs is addressing this.
- Community Agents represent a completely new way of working, which has evolved in the 12 months since launch. The Community agents are now part of the continuum of care supporting frail older people in the community. As the referrals increased in number, their time was prioritised to supporting people in the community to ensure the savings were delivered which meant that they had less time to spend with parish councils and local groups. The scheme has good evidence of delivering savings and improved outcomes. There are only 32 community agents, who are part time. They do have targets to hit and face a challenging year ahead. A newsletter was issued before Christmas. The Chairman asked that this be circulated to Members. Ms Gilbert also agreed to feed back concerns that the profile of Community agents is not being raised with Parish Councils
- Regarding Health Visitors, the bringing together of services for the 0-19 age range aims ensure that health visitors and children's centres work

together. A consultation is taking place on this, so Members were asked to encourage residents to provide their input, and for them to make their own views known.

Cllr Jackson left the meeting at this point.

Miss Lewis gave Members a brief report on the Essex Weighs In campaign (www.essexweighsin.com), which seeks to encourage people to take control of their own health and weight management in an achievable way. She pointed out that the figures for excess weight in adults in the districts ranged from 62% to 72%. Quite apart from the impact on individuals' general wellbeing, this creates a strain on services. The new campaign aims to facilitate changes to the individual's lifestyle, rather than to encourage any dependence on particular diets. It is website based and not only provides useful information, such as healthy recipes and health tips, but gives people the opportunity to create a personalised profile, make pledges about their diet and activity levels, and be able to monitor their progress. It also aims to create a community feel, by encouraging an element of competition between the districts and other defined groups.

Members raised several issues:

- Miss Lewis agreed it should be linked to the 'Tuck IN' campaign, run by Environmental Health Teams Officers, to encourage those selling takeaway food to make positive changes in the way they select, prepare and serve food in relation to fat, salt, sugar and portion size
- It was acknowledged that the title puts emphasis on the weight loss aspect, but it was also confirmed that the project had much broader aims, in seeking to encourage changes to individuals' lifestyles.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Brown and her team and agreed that they should provide an update on this to the Committee for the May meeting.

Cllr Boyce left the meeting at this point.

7. Children's Centres and Healthy Child Programme consultation

Members received PAF/02/16 and noted that consideration of this item had been deferred and so would form an item on the March meeting agenda.

8. Scrutiny recommendations tracker and work programme

Members received PAF/03/16, the Committee's Tracker and Work programme.

The Scrutiny Officer drew attention to several points.

- The next scheduled meeting (on 10 March) would also include: The annual report on educational attainment in Essex, an implementation report from recommendations of the Educational Attainment T&FG and an interim report of the Residential & Domiciliary Care T&FG
- At the private briefing session on 11 February, Members would look at the annual reports of the Essex Safeguarding Adults and Essex Safeguarding Children's boards
- Following the work of the National Living Wage Task and Finish Group (from Corporate Scrutiny Committee), it was agreed to circulate the

consequent report to Members of this Committee, along with the Leader's Letter to the Prime Minister on this issue.

The programme was noted.

9. Committee Meeting Dates 2016-17

Members received PAF/04/16 and noted the dates of meetings through to March 2017, which were all scheduled to begin at 10.30 am, with a pre-meeting for Members only at 9.30 am, both times subject to confirmation before each meeting. Venue: Committee Room 1.

Thursday, 10 March 2016

Thursday, 12 May 2016

Thursday, 14 July 2016

Thursday, 8 September 2016

Thursday, 10 November 2016

Thursday, 12 January 2017

Thursday, 9 March 2017.

Members also noted the dates of the Committee activity days, with 10.30 am start in Committee Room 1, but also subject to confirmation:

Thursday 11 February 2016

Thursday 14 April 2016

Thursday 9 June 2016

Thursday 13 October 2016

Thursday 8 December 2016

Thursday 9 February 2017.

10. Date of next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: 10.30 am on Thursday 10 March 2016. Venue: Committee Room 1 at County Hall.

The meeting closed at 12:46 pm.

Chairman