

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON
THURSDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2011**

Membership

Councillors

* J Aldridge (Chairman)	* R Madden
* S Barker	S Mayzes
* J Baugh	* D Morris
* J Deakin	* R Pearson
E Hart	C Pond
* T Higgins (Vice-Chairman)	* C Riley (Vice-Chairman)
E Johnson	* T Sargent
* J Knapman	J Young

Non-Elected Voting Members

* Mr R Carson	Reverend P Trathen
<i>Vacant</i>	Ms M Uzzell
(* present)	

Named Substitute Elected Members

R Callender	M Fisher
K Twitchen	* S Hillier
* I Grundy	

The following Members were present for part of the meeting:

Councillor A Brown	(Items 66-70)
Councillor W Dick	(Item 71)

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Graham Redgwell	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.30 am.

66. Apologies and Substitutions

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr E Hart	Cllr S Hillier
Cllr E Johnson	Cllr I Grundy
Cllr S Mayzes	
Cllr C Pond	
Cllr J Young	
Rev P Trathen	--

67. Declarations of Interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

68. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 September 2011 were approved as a correct record.

69. Matters Arising/Chairman's report

- a) Membership of the Committee. The Chairman informed the meeting that Councillors E Johnson and C Pond had indicated that they wished to resign from the Committee and he proposed that Councillors Ian Grundy and Sandra Hillier should be proposed to fill the vacancies. It was noted that Councillors Grundy and Hillier were acting as substitutes at this meeting, and that they would become members, once approved by full Council.
- b) Externalisation of Children's Homes (Minute 58c/ 1 September 2011). The Chairman noted that Councillor Candy's letter of 6 September, addressing the Committee's concerns in its letter dated 22 July, had been circulated to Members before the meeting. It was AGREED that the Safeguarding Sub-Committee should take forward the outstanding issue of how Members could fulfil their corporate parenting duties in respect of children in care.
- c) Non-elected vacancy on Committee (Minute 58a/ 1 September 2011). The Governance Officer confirmed that there were now 8 candidates going forward. The ballot papers would be prepared and circulated to all school governors at the beginning of October; they would then have until the end of the month to vote.
- d) Eating disorders. The Chairman confirmed he would be meeting Sheila Woodward, Service Development Manager, about the involvement of this Committee.
- e) Apprenticeship and Children's Centre visits (Minute 58/1 September 2011). The Chairman encouraged Members to make these visits if possible.
- f) Family Centres. Councillor Riley confirmed that he had requested an overview of Family Centres, which would be circulated with the minutes.
- g) South Quadrant Day. Councillor Riley informed Members that he had attended a South Quadrant Day in July. Papers relating to this would be circulated with the minutes.

70. Safeguarding Issues

The Committee considered an update on the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (Report CYP/27/11). The Chairman welcomed Simon Hart, Interim Independent Chairman to the Board, and invited him to address Members.

Mr Hart pointed out that there will be a special meeting of the Board shortly, to approve certain changes to the Board's governance. He noted a few salient points:

- There has been an understandable emphasis on serious case reviews over the past three years; but there are other elements of the work that are important
- Information gathering is improving, and this has to be used to improve services
- Good management of the workforce is important, as these are labour intensive services; and there are recruitment issues
- Keeping abreast of serious case reviews remains a vital role.

Mr Hart responded to queries raised by Members.

The Board has statutory duties, but relies on others; how does it check on these? It has a small team, including a training officer. They are developing a number of employment triggers, which will work through a number of sub-committees, made up largely of officers of organisations.

In response to a question on what he would do if one of the bodies did not respond to the Board, Mr Hart informed Members that he would alert the CEO of the relevant organisation. (This was an explicit part of his brief.)

The annual overall cost of the Board is about £250,000, paid for by all contributing bodies, principally the local authority, NHS and Police. Mr Hart pointed out that the Board is not a provider of services, but it does provide a multi-agency training programme. He will provide a break-down of the finances for circulating after the meeting.

Communications seems to be an area in need of attention. Concerns were expressed on this, particularly with regard to information filtering down from top to bottom, and in respect of young people. Mr Hart admitted that the Board had not concentrated its efforts in this direction to date. However, a sub-committee is to be created, charged with dealing with the whole communication issue, including seeking the views of young people.

As far as engaging with young people is concerned, Mr Hart believes there is already good engagement, but this will still need to improve. Ofsted has issued best practice on this, as there is particular interest in finding out how young people feel on a daily basis. They want to hear young people themselves articulating on the concerns in their lives. The approach to take will be to give young people Board time, when they can present their own views to Board members. They will also create a group to provide advice on youth matters to the Board.

Training will be in part provided by the contributing agencies and also from other bodies. The need is to ensure that Essex has sufficient trained individuals. Schools are central to this, so the designated individuals are very important.

The position of the Essex Adults Safeguarding Board (ESAB) was considered. There is no statutory reason why the ESCB cannot be merged with the ESAB – at present, ESCB is statutory, ESAB is not. What matters is that the work gets done; and at present there is so much for each to do, that keeping them separate is preferred.

Regarding the standard of Serious Case Reviews, Mr Hart pointed out that the most recent case had been given an “outstanding” rating from Ofsted, and the one before that “Adequate”. He pointed out that the important thing was not the Ofsted evaluation itself, but whether Essex is rigorous enough in drawing out the lessons that should be learnt. A sub-committee will be created to manage this serious case review work. Mr Hart also emphasised the importance of the ordinary case work and wanted to see the development of a greater understanding of the quality of this work. There was no reason why a regular (monthly?) update on any reviews should not be available to Members.

Members suggested that outcomes were important and it should be clear which had been achieved and which had not. Mr Hart pointed out that this should be clear from the Annual Report, which it was AGREED the Committee would be considering early in the new year. He added that the Board should be accountable and he was keen to see a scheme in place enabling the Committee to exercise scrutiny. Members be satisfied that the Board is fulfilling its role.

One further issue was raised, that of the Board’s position vis a vis the media, in the wake of a recently screened documentary television programme, which had given a “fly on the wall” account of life in an Essex school. Mr Hart’s own view, which he believed was not dissimilar to that held by many major bodies, was that they should work alongside the media to a sufficient degree to encourage public confidence, but that it was not right to go so far as identifying individuals on broadcast television.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hart for his comprehensive and helpful responses. Mr Hart left the meeting at this point.

71. Vision for Children’s Services

The Committee considered Report CYP/28/11 (Cabinet Paper CAB/10/11, which would be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on Tuesday 18 October), providing an overview of the wider vision in children’s services. The Chairman welcomed Councillor Sarah Candy, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, and Dave Hill, Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families, to the meeting. He invited Councillor Candy to address Members.

Councillor Candy reminded Members that this is a Vision Statement and as such it does not include substantial policy proposals at this stage. She wished to ensure that the whole Council is behind it. It is the next stage of moving the service to satisfactory and good and up to excellent. The Ofsted members currently inspecting the service were aware of this report.

The Committee noted its aspirational nature and that it is based on three principal themes: multi-agency working (in quadrants), early intervention, and a preference for children living with their own families if possible. Several specific comments were made regarding these:

- It was noted that other agencies (eg NHS and Police) have already been advised of this Vision and had expressed their support for the approach taken
- Early intervention – the importance of the involvement of schools was noted here, and of district nurses and health visitors for instance, who might be able to spot early signs of trouble at the pre-school stage
- Children living in families. Following on from the early intervention point, it was suggested that the effectiveness of removing a child from his/her own family could vary widely, according to the age of the child. The ideal was to give the child a stable, loving home environment at as early a stage as possible. However, it was generally better for a child to remain at home, rather than go into care - unless circumstances required such action - and generally the benefits of removing a child into care reduced as the age of removal increased. That said, Mr Hill's view was that they should be firm in taking action, if this were thought necessary.
- Another concern expressed was that there seemed to be an emphasis on the family, rather than the child. Mr Hill pointed out that the child's welfare was always paramount, although the Children's Act did make explicit reference both to the welfare of the child and to the importance of the family as its two overriding principles.
- The transformation programme for the Directorate would include some Invest to Save projects.

Committee Members also raised several other issues:

- Performance indicators. Concern was expressed over the relevance of some of these; outcomes were needed, rather than processes. Mr Hill believed that progress was being made here, with meaningful data being an important element in the assessment of actual benefits. Furthermore, many of the current national performance indicators would no longer be required next year, in the wake of Munro, which should enable Essex to use their own indicators. The Committee AGREED to bring suggestions on the content of any "soft" indicators (eg, those not based on procedural issues, but more everyday matters for the children themselves, such as attendance at after-school activities).

- Commissioning activity. Concerns were expressed that the nature and extent of these activities were not clear to the Committee. It was pointed out that further papers would be produced on these as they were developed, which the Committee would be able to consider. It was AGREED that the Committee should select a small number of these issues and that a sub-group should consider them in detail. The Cabinet Member herself might suggest one or two areas where she would particularly welcome comments.
- Briefing Sessions. It was AGREED that Members should alert the Cabinet Member of any particular topics that might be of interest to all Council Members.
- Residential care outside Essex. The Committee noted that residential facilities for young people who are outside Essex will only be used in limited and clearly defined circumstances.
- Visits. It was confirmed that the Committee will continue to encourage its Members to visit residential homes for children in the County's care, together with schools and Children's Centres.
- Terminology. It was suggested that the term "Children in Care" should be used, rather than alternatives such as "Children Looked After" or "Looked After Children".

Members expressed their desire to be a part of the Policy and Scrutiny process, suggesting that they needed more time to be able to contribute fully. Mr Hill confirmed that the Directorate needed to map out its programme for the coming year, in order to tie in its progress with the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Candy and Mr Hill for their attendance. He confirmed the Committee's enthusiasm for the work and its wish to see real results across Essex. He looked forward to working on these developments over the coming months.

72. Speech and Language

The Committee noted Report CYP/29/11, which provided an update by Ms Annemarie Blackshaw, Manager of SEN and Disability Support Services, on the provision of speech and language services in the County. This was an interim report, a more detailed report being scheduled for April 2012.

Members asked that the follow-up report should indicate the sources of the budgetary provision.

73. Corporate Parenting

The Committee received an oral update from Councillor Riley.

The Corporate Parenting Panel has just undertaken a review of its terms of reference, with a major change being the reduction of frequency of meetings to quarterly.

Councillor Riley confirmed that the Summer Event at Danbury for children in care had been a great success, and he noted with appreciation the input of those Members and officers who had been able to attend.

Kathryn Adams, Interim Head of the Virtual School, had proposed contacting the local Member when she makes a visit to a school, to invite him/her to accompany her. This was noted and welcomed.

As of 1 October 2011, a new structure and fees for foster carers had taken effect. Details will be circulated with the minutes.

74. Corporate Scorecard

The Chairman informed Members that he had received a Briefing Note from Paul Abraham, Director of Transformation and Performance, SCF, on Performance Arrangements. This explains the new approach to performance, following the abolition of the Corporate Plan Performance Scorecard. It will be possible to produce a more detailed, useful Directorate based scorecard, which is more tailored to the scrutiny requirements of the Directorate. A copy of the Briefing Note will be circulated after the meeting.

The Chairman also confirmed that he holds a monthly meeting with Paul Abraham, to keep him abreast of developments.

75. Forward Look

The Committee confirmed the Forward Look (CYP/30/11) for items to come to meetings for the remainder of 2011, and provisional items for 2012, as circulated.

76. Dates of Future Meetings 2011/12

The Committee confirmed the dates of future meetings as set out below and noted that they may comprise:

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

Thursday 3 November 2011

Thursday 1 December 2011

Thursday 5 January 2012

Thursday 2 February 2012

Thursday 1 March 2012

Thursday 5 April 2012

Thursday 10 May 2012

The meeting closed at 12.40 pm.

Chairman