

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD AT AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 10
MARCH 2016**

County Councillors:

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

Non-Elected Voting Members:

* Mr R Carson	Ms M Uzzell
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*present

The following Members were also present:
Councillor K Bobbin

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 R Boyce	Cllr S Barker
Cllr K Gibbs	
Cllr A Goggin	Cllr M Buckley
Cllr A Jackson	Cllr R Hirst

2. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Barker declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda item 5, Children's Centres Consultation, as Deputy to Cllr Butland, Cabinet Member for Health.

Cllr Chandler declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda item 5, Children's Centres Consultation, as Chairman of the Chelmsford and Maldon District Children's Centres Partnership Board.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the People and Family Scrutiny Committee meeting of 14 January 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

In response to a Member's query, the Scrutiny Officer agreed to ensure that the Newsletter referred to under Item 6, bullet 6, in respect of Community Agents, be circulated to Committee Members.

4. Questions from the Public

There were no questions from the Public, but Cllr Dave Harris, Member for Colchester Maypole, presented a petition to the Chairman and briefly addressed the meeting.

This petition originated from the Berechurch Children's Centre Users and was supported right across the political spectrum. It expressed concern over any proposed closures of Children's Centres and asked the Council to retain them as they are now.

Cllr Harris shared with Members several views expressed by users of the Berechurch Centre, which indicated the level of support given to new mothers in particular, the benefits to both mothers and their pre-school children, and the importance of retaining a local service within the community.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Harris and confirmed he would pass the petition on, to be dealt with in the appropriate manner.

5. Children's Centres Consultation

Members received PAF/04/16, a report on the consultation being held on Essex Sure Start Children's Centres. The Chairman welcomed Stav Yiannou, Head of Commissioning, Early Years and Childcare, and Carolyn Terry, EYCC Commissioner for Sufficiency and Sustainability Integrated Commissioning and Vulnerable People – People Commissioning, to the meeting.

Members were reminded that they had been informed of the impending consultation at the November 2015 meeting, and had been informed of the changes in the pre-birth to 19 services envisaged at that time. This consultation related to the Children's Centres' element of the changes that will be made from 2017 onwards.

This sits under the Children and Young People's Plan, which is also under (separate) consultation. The overall intention is to seek greater collaboration of services and better use of resources. Children's Centres, the health visiting service, the school nursing service, the healthy schools initiative within schools and the family nurse partnership will all come under the same contract. Work has been done, based on previous research, on how people access the existing services, and on what the stronger areas are for people themselves. Various activities led to over 1100 responses being received from a range of stakeholders, including substantial numbers of parents/carers, children and young people themselves. This has led to a better understanding of what works,

and the intention to redesign systems to improve services to the people of Essex, from pre-birth to 19 year olds.

Certain features:

- There should be greater clarity on outcomes for families, both at a community and at County Council level
- There will be metrics used to measure performance
- There will be a strong focus on the community
- There should be one workforce, so families can deal with just one agency/contact.

With regard to Children's Centres specifically, feedback has been good overall, with responses particularly positive in respect of accessibility and location. Staff are seen as being good at listening and some parents have been helped to deal with their feelings of isolation. On the negative side, there is some perception that services/activities have been reduced and so more are sought; and stakeholders expressed the desire for longer opening hours and on different days. Also, a more integrated service, especially in respect of health services, was also considered necessary.

More up-to-date and accurate information is needed on what services are available, but without creating information overload.

The intention is to reduce the number of Children's Centre buildings. One in each District will become a Family Hub, which will become the focal point for services in that area. Other delivery sites will be used, but, as a study of the figures has revealed that the use of existing Children's Centres is predominantly between the hours 10.00 am to 2.00 pm, their opening hours will probably be restricted to reflect this. There are numerous questions in the consultation document about which days and times people would prefer.

There will be more taking the service to people in the community, rather than requiring them to come into Children's Centres. Families were saying that they did not necessarily want to go into the existing buildings. Two years ago, only 50% of priority groups were being reached; now the outreach figure is up to 72%.

There will be one point of access – a virtual place rather than a physical one, giving access to one system.

It was pointed out that, in previous consultations, changes had been made to plans, in the wake of comments received.

A number of points were raised by Members, with relevant responses from officers:

- The message regarding the shutting of buildings has not come across well so far, with many people thinking that users would be restricted to one location in each district. In fact the consultation document is quite clear that it is a consultation and that multiple delivery sites were intended. Various means would be used to signpost services – health visitors, going out to play areas, libraries, etc. It was strongly suggested that the

message needs to be relayed that the process is a public consultation and, as yet, nothing has been agreed

- The existing providers have been kept engaged in the process; the contract will go out to tender later in the year. CCGs across the county have been contacted
- The consultation has anticipated factors such as expected population in certain areas, insofar as these will be addressed with any potential bidders. It was noted that in some areas, there seem to be a concentration of delivery points in certain parts, but fewer in others
- It was not yet clear whether there would be one, pan-Essex contract, or one for each quadrant
- It was agreed that the Key Performance Indicators would be presented to the Committee at its 12 May 2016 meeting
- It was proposed that the three Children's Centres on Canvey Island should close, with the hub placed in Thundersley. It was suggested that this would not be acceptable, given the poor transport links to the Island. It was noted that there would be a consultation event on Canvey and that local people should be encouraged to present their views at this, and via the online consultation process
- A similar situation was noted in Jaywick, where closure of the centre was proposed and local residents did not tend to travel for services. It was pointed out that the centre had not been used for children's centre services and the intention was to use it for childcare services. However, local people would be encouraged to provide services from their own community and a consultation event would be arranged for the locality
- It was noted that advice had been taken with regard to various legal issues concerning the contracts, and in particular in respect of OJEU limits
- It was confirmed that getting access to priority families had increased since the closure of a number of children's centres across the county, and the intention of these proposals was to enhance services, rather than merely to save money
- Harlow centres were recognised as being well used and its specific situation was going to be reconsidered, to ensure the whole town continued to receive adequate services in future
- It was noted that in view of the analysis already carried out there would be considerable staff requirements and at present there was no conscious effort to keep the service contracts in house. However, HR could be asked to look at the practicalities of doing so and this option could be explored if it were thought appropriate
- One proposal was to make more use of libraries as venues, extending services available and using times when they would otherwise be closed. It was noted that some libraries were already very well used and some presented logistical problems such as having limited access. It was also noted that other venues would also be considered, according to availability and suitability
- Existing groups should be encouraged and engaged by future providers. Shenfield was cited as a good example of where local groups already provided a good service to the community, operating out of its local library. Consortium bids would be considered, so enabling smaller groups to be able to offer their services
- Regarding pre-schools, they do not provide services, although there already exists a measure of collaboration with early years provision, and there is no intention to make formal arrangements with providers in future.

The Chairman thanked officers for their presentation. He noted that they would be invited to the May Committee meeting, when the consultation period had finished, to address the Committee on KPIs.

He added that the questions and comments would be collated and formally submitted as part of the consultation process

**6. Overview of 2015 Education Attainment and Progress in Essex
Update on Task & Finish Group Report – Educational Attainment in Essex**

Members received PAF/05/16, a report on the 2015 education attainment and progress in Essex. The Chairman welcomed Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, Clare Kershaw, Director for Commissioning; Education and Lifelong Learning, and Pippa Shukla, Lead Strategic Commissioner for Intelligence Education and Lifelong Learning (People Commissioning), to the meeting. He confirmed that these two items would be considered together, with Ms Kershaw addressing the overview for 2015, followed by Ms Shukla giving an update on the Task and Finish Group Report.

Cllr Gooding introduced the item by pointing this was a good opportunity to demonstrate what progress had been made recently.

Ms Kershaw picked out some key headlines in progress in 2015. Overall, for another year running, outcomes for children and young people across the county have improved.

There are three key strategies that drive the work within Education & Lifelong Learning:

- i. Every school to be judged good or outstanding
- ii. Our performance to be judged in the top 25% of local authorities nationally
- iii. To improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people.

Noted were:

- Three or four years ago, Essex sat firmly in the third quartile nationally. Now, at KS1 Essex is in the second quartile; at KS2 it remains in the third quartile, but has moved up to 65th out of 151 authorities; at KS4, Essex has moved into the second quartile, ranked 56th; at KS5 it lies in the top quartile. There has been some degradation in special schools
- With regard to schools being judged as good or outstanding, now 85% primary schools, 82% secondary schools and 100% special schools are so rated. These demonstrate a higher rate of improvement than the national average
- With regard to the Early Years profile: increasing the good level of development, at 68%, it has risen from 53% in 2012 and is higher than the national average. Regarding the inequality gap, calculated on the difference between the attainment of the 20% most deprived children, set against the rest, this has dropped to below 29% (below the 32% national average), but still remains an area for further improvement
- KS1 has traditionally been a strong area for Essex, and the percentages of children achieving the expected level in the three key areas of reading, writing and maths, as well as in science, have risen consistently over the years 2013-15

- In 2015, for the first time, Essex moved above the national average in children achieving expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics at KS2 level
- In the primary sector, there is an standards & excellence commissioner, who works with most schools. Every school is given a RAG rating. Every school is visited termly, with a lighter touch given to green schools and more support to those classed as red. Additional support is given through targeted intervention work. Also, new head teachers gets more support, with help from experienced head teachers
- At secondary level, only 7 schools remain below the national floor standard (ie 40% pupils attaining five good GCSE grades including English & mathematics), which is an improvement. Also, over half secondary schools are involved in the peer review triad model, which involves head teachers peer reviewing themselves in groups of three; this has produced very good feedback from those involved
- In KS4, the criteria have changed over the past few years, but Essex, with 58.4% pupils achieving 5 or more good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics (the national indicator), sits above the national average in 2015
- In respect of the number of young people (16-19 year olds) not in education, employment or training (NEETs), the figure has been dropping, from 5.7% in 2012/13 to 4.4% in 2015/16. This is a very good figure, although the aim is to reduce it further
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This is the number one priority. It is a complex area, which requires disadvantaged children actually to make more progress than others, for them to close the gap. Although most measures show improved performance for disadvantaged pupils overall, there have not been the same improvements in reducing the gap
- Outcomes for children in care is a key area. For the KS4 national performance indicator, the improvement between 2014 and 2015 was 10%, but it still only stands at 19% (2014 was very poor). This is higher than the national average, but it is still remains a focus for activity.

Ms Shukla gave a brief update on progress made to the actions and recommendations of the Task & Finish Group in July 2015.

Recruitment and Retention Issues:

- Encouraging schools to pool resources, where possible, to address staff shortages. The Secondary Head Teacher Association (ASHE) has been active in seeking staff from overseas; and one strategy has been for some schools to overstaff in certain subjects, with a view to sharing staff within clusters
- Understanding the nature, level and location of these issues. A more strategic approach is desired and a major initiative has begun, involving Essex officers and head teacher groups, to consider this. The specific area of in-year supply cover is also being addressed.

Early Years Issues

- Linking early years provision with that of infant/primary schools to provide seamless transition. Focus here is on school readiness, particularly in respect of children from deprived backgrounds. There is already a school readiness project in place in Basildon, Harlow and Colchester, with further planned for Braintree and Castle Point. There are a number of schemes

aimed at helping this process, eg providing parent support, improving communication

- Schools with lower attainment than the national average have been targeted, with emphasis on the core subjects

Assisting Governors

- How employers could be encouraged to release employees for service as governors. A pilot scheme has just been launched, with five people being appointed as e-governors, who did not have to physically attend meetings. This would be monitored to judge whether it might lead to high quality candidates coming forward as governors
- How to encourage governing bodies to share best practice. The governance effectiveness mark has been used to judge how governing bodies rate in the 9 relevant areas. Two partnerships, in Basildon and Harlow, have looked at this and there are other clusters and consortia of schools have shown interest and become involved

Data and Standards

- Looking to achieving higher targets, with the express aim of being in the top quartile of educational achievement. In view of the substantial changes happening within this area over the next year or so, it has been decided to set interim targets in the meantime
- Provision of clearer annual reports to the Committee. More information has been provided this year and feedback would be appreciated on this
- Encouraging schools to make use of Pupil Premium to produce improved outcomes for pupils. Amount from Pupil Premium is about £45 million. The National Education Trust has engaged in certain activities to take this forward
- How the County Council is involved in raising standards within hard-to-reach groups. Flowing from the work with the National Education Trust, some work will be done to encourage parental best practice, and raising aspirations

School Organisation and Planning

- Impact of migrant children on schools, particularly with regard to class sizes. The number of pupils in primary schools had risen by 8% and the level of surplus places has fallen to 7% (still higher than the 5% recommended by the DfE); at secondary level, the level of children has dropped by 5% and the number of surplus places risen to 12%. It was noted that Essex is a net exporter of children into schools outside the County, although the impact is very small. Overall, the data suggests that this is not an issue for concern at present.

Cllr McEwen, as chairman of the Task & Finish Group, thanked all those involved with the initial work and noted the enthusiasm the Task & Finish Group had encountered in the schools, both amid staff and pupils, and at County.

In response to the question on whether the Group had been able to identify new issues, Ms Kershaw pointed out that the overall scrutiny had been welcomed, but spotlighting certain particular areas had been especially valued: the work on getting governing bodies to cluster together, recruitment and retention issues and the impact of migration on the need for school places.

A number of points were raised by Members, with responses from officers where appropriate:

- Members would receive information broken down into district profiles shortly. The Cabinet member added a caveat, that some figures might be skewed by the popularity of certain schools and the consequent uneven concentration of parental preference
- The disparity between reading and writing levels at KS1 was noted. It was pointed out that a number of schools had benefited from improvement opportunities in reading, which had raised this level. There was also a recognised problem with boys, who were noticeably better at reading at KS1 than writing. This discrepancy lessened in time
- Managed Moves/Permanent Exclusions. It was suggested that the use of managed moves for pupils, rather than exclusions, could be seen to be a manipulation of figures and give a wrong impression. It was pointed out that managing moves was a formal process, involving negotiation between families and schools involved, and the impact of an exclusion on the child concerned was generally much greater than that of a move. However, Members were asked to inform officers if they had evidence of any poor practice in this area
- It was acknowledged that there were issues concerning recruitment and retention of teaching staff in the county, in particular where schools were situated next to London boroughs, which might benefit both from enhanced pay for staff and a higher premium for each individual pupil. The size of the County added an extra dimension to this. Another source of discontent stemmed from the ongoing changes within the profession – some bringing clear benefits, but others more challenging in what they bring.
- It was noted that this report would be very different next year. Essex tries to give as support to schools where it can, and it would take the substantial changes into account when considering next year's returns
- A Task & Finish Group has been set up to look into recruitment issues
- Although Essex does not have any legal authority over academies, it takes its duty of care toward children very seriously and continues to work with all schools. It will send someone in to a school if it thinks it necessary, reporting that school to either the Academies Trust or the regional schools commissioner, who do have authority, if that is considered appropriate.

Cllr Higgins left the meeting at this point.

- The intention to achieve a “seamless transition” from pre-school to school can be thwarted when parents cannot get into their local school. Popular schools will fill up but efforts are being made to get schools to cluster, to help alleviate this problem
- School readiness. There were a number of factors involved in this, with the ability of the child to learn and not have to be looked after constantly the most important ones. KPIs relating to this aspect will be included in the detailed returns to members.

Cllr Barker left the meeting at this point

- The position of FE Colleges was noted. It was pointed out that Essex was not responsible for these, this falling to Ofsted and the Educational Funding Agency. FE Colleges had suffered from funding cuts but efforts were being made by Essex to assist them in achieving better results.

Cllrs Hurst & Buckley and Mr Carson left the meeting at this point.

- Funding of capital projects. Essex has made considerable efforts to obtain funding from central government and has been relatively successful, and is diligent in trying to get the best value for the children of Essex.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Gooding, Ms Kershaw and Ms Shukla for their comprehensive contributions and noted the improvements that had been made over the past two years. He suggested that they contact the Scrutiny Officer, if there was anything that the Committee could do to assist in the management of outcomes, such as those with regard to disadvantaged children, for example. He also suggested it might be useful to have a Members' session on schools admissions 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. Scrutiny recommendations tracker and work programme

The meeting noted:

- the Residential & Domiciliary Care Task & Finish Group was about to meet and would be producing an interim report for the May meeting of the Scrutiny Committee
- a final report of the Children's Centres consultation, plus KPIs, should be coming to the May meeting
- Cllr Madden should be bringing a report to the Committee on Children in Care at the May meeting.

8. Date of next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: 10.30 am on Thursday 12 May 2016. Venue: Committee Room 1 at County Hall.

The meeting closed at 1:27 pm.

Chairman