

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY  
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON  
THURSDAY 1 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	* A Brown

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.

**55. Apologies and Substitutions**

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
Cllr E Johnson	
Cllr D Morris	Cllr A Brown
Cllr C Pond	
Cllr C Riley	Cllr K Twitchen
Mr R Carson	

**56. Declarations of Interest**

There were no new declarations of interest.

**57. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 July 2011 were approved as a correct record, subject to a minor amendment, to clarify that Councillor Baugh is Chairman of the Braintree Children's Partnership, and signed by the Chairman.

#### **58. Matters Arising/Chairman's report**

- a) Non-elected vacancy on Committee (Minute 42(b) July 2011). The Governance Officer informed the meeting that he had received 18 preliminary expressions of interest in response to his invitation to all primary infant and junior school parent governors. Once the initial deadline had passed (Friday 2 September), he would contact each of these individuals again, to confirm whether they wished to put their names forward for election. A ballot would then be held, involving all parent governors in those schools.
- b) Essex Safeguarding Children Board. Simon Hart, interim ESCB Chairman, would be attending the next CYP meeting, on 29 September, and Councillor Aldridge would be meeting him before then.
- c) Externalisation of Children's Homes (Minute 48 July 2011). The Chairman confirmed he had written to the Cabinet Member on 22 July, expressing the concerns raised by Committee members. However, for various reasons, no formal reply had yet been received, although a response had been drafted. At present, he was not sure if all the concerns expressed by Members had been addressed, but he confirmed he would circulate this to Committee members as soon as possible.
- d) Apprenticeship visits (Minute 49 July 2011). The Chairman reminded Members that further visits were planned in October. The Committee Officer would circulate details in due course.

#### **59. Schools, Children and Families: Improvements and vision for children's social care**

The Committee considered Report CYP/22/11 (Cabinet Paper CAB/9/11, which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on Tuesday 6 September), relating to improvements to children's services. The Chairman welcomed Dave Hill, Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families, and Helen Lincoln, the recently appointed Director for Children's Social Care, who was attending her first meeting. He invited Mr Hill to address Members.

Mr Hill pointed out that the paper originally drafted had covered both improvements and a vision for children's social care but it had been considered too long, so it had been split into two papers. The paper under consideration dealt only with improvements, and the second paper, which would become available on 16 September, would look at the Vision for Children's Services. *[This would be on the agenda for the 29 September Scrutiny meeting.]*

Based on the Phasing agreed during the Peer Review process and shown on page 3 of the Report, where 0 is unsatisfactory and 3 is excellent, Essex was,

Mr Hill believed, on 1 – stable and safe. This was also the opinion of the Peer Review Group. It was now hoped that Ofsted/CQC would carry out their full inspection within the next few weeks, as, if they do not arrive before the end of October, the inspection outcomes will not be valid until 2012/13. The Council must receive 10 days notice of the visit.

Mr Hill and Ms Lincoln then addressed a number of issues raised by Members.

- a) The Council (SCF) must be clear as to why things went so wrong in the past and that the lessons have been learned. Mr Hill believed a major factor had been the Council's lack of self-awareness and even honesty with itself at changes, which had spiralled into a situation where in 2009 it had 2000 unallocated cases. He believed this situation had been addressed, and the Directorate was now very aware of its own position. Furthermore, accurate data was now available that had not been before. Members felt that it could be inferred in the Report but that it might help to say so explicitly.
- b) There was little mention of the role of scrutiny in the report, which Members found disappointing, given the amount of time the Committee has spent on examining safeguarding issues in particular. The role of scrutiny should be given more prominence in the development of SCF policy, especially if the involvement of the Improvement Board is to cease. It was particularly noted that Members had a wider responsibility, as corporate parents, so involvement was important.

Mr Hill pointed out that the Improvement Board should disband soon. He suggested that when that happens, both the Essex Safeguarding Children Board and the Safeguarding Sub-Committee should take on its role.

- c) It was pointed out that the timing of the production of this paper has not allowed the Committee to exercise its scrutiny function. The Committee can make a more informed and constructive input to Council policy changes if it gets the opportunity to look at proposals at an early stage. Members would welcome the chance for more pre-scrutiny.
- d) Members noted that there are still too many children currently being referred for initial assessment and believe that the Council needs to identify how safeguarding services can be targeted better in the future.

Ms Lincoln pointed out that over-allocation was symptomatic of a crisis situation – which the Council had experienced recently. She believed the situation would certainly improve, with better processes and more permanent staff in place.

- e) The Committee noted and welcomed the changes the Council is making to bring in Indicators that measure outcomes and the quality of service, as well as quantitative issues.

- f) With regard to staffing issues, Mr Hill confirmed that, across Essex as a whole, over 80% of staff were now on permanent contracts. He admitted that the figure was much lower in certain parts of the county, but historically it had proved difficult to retain staff in certain areas, for reasons of location and accessibility, and the Directorate was trying to address this issue. At present there are about 100 interim posts, the ultimate target being 70. Caseloads are down to 14-20 per social worker, and he believed morale had improved overall. He also believed that the adoption of the Quadrant based approach would improve staff communications and management. Ms Lincoln added that, with the rising confidence that comes with greater awareness of our own position, comes the ability to dismiss certain staff who are unsuitable or unable to deliver what is required.

The Committee welcomed the moves made to recruit more permanent staff, believing that a well trained and consistent workforce is at the heart of good child care practice. It is vital the resources remain available to keep staffing levels up, and that caseloads are kept at or close to current levels.

- g) The Committee noted that there has been some reaction from the Government to the Munro Report recommendations, particularly with regard to local areas being able to determine their own needs. However it was also aware that it is likely to have an impact on other ways of working and this will be the subject of future scrutiny when the Government declares its policy in respect of the Report's recommendations. It was noted that both Mr Hill and Ms Lincoln had an involvement in the process nationally, and they would have some ongoing input.
- h) Members expressed strong support for greater focus on "effective joint working" between SCF and Adult Services in the context of children leaving care.
- i) It was noted that a number of terms are used in the Report to describe children who the Council has a responsibility for, viz 'Looked After Children', 'Children Looked After'; and "Children in Care". Consistency in terminology would be welcomed and Members were of the view that "Children in Care" is perhaps the most appropriate and unambiguous description.
- j) The reference to "garrison towns" had been made at the express wish of Ofsted.

The Chairman confirmed that he would send a letter to Councillor Candy prior to the Cabinet meeting, raising the above issues. He thanked Mr Hill and Ms Lincoln for their contributions.

## **60. Director for Children's Social Care**

Following an invitation by the Chairman to introduce herself formally, Ms Lincoln pointed out that she had twenty years' experience of social work, and

had spent 8 years at the London Borough of Merton, where the situation had been almost identical to that of Essex at present and outstanding issues had also been very similar. She admitted to having an intolerance of poor social work. She emphasised the need to concentrate efforts on the right concerns and regarded her relationship with the Policy & Scrutiny Committee as highly important.

The Committee looked forward to developing a good working relationship with her and her colleagues in the SCF Directorate and invited her to participate in the discussion in Minute 62, below.

#### **61. Pupil Premiums**

The Committee considered Paper CYP/24/11, which provided information on the Pupil Premium. It was noted that a second paper, on the cash flow position, would be circulated to Members after the meeting. The Chairman welcomed Jim MacDonald, Senior Finance and Performance Manager, SCF, and invited him to address the meeting.

Mr MacDonald pointed out that, although the Pupil Premium had been introduced by the Coalition Government as a direct grant for the benefit of children and young adults coming from socially deprived or challenged backgrounds, the decision about how the monies are used remain entirely with the schools themselves. The County Council has no explicit duty to ensure how this is done, although Ofsted inspectors are encouraged to look into this aspect of expenditure during school inspections.

It was noted that there is no overlap of support between the three groups in receipt of this grant, viz children with a free school meal entitlement, those from military families, and children in care, and so only *one* payment is possible per child. It was also noted that the approximate average funding received by each school for each child now amounted to £3,500 for primary schools and £4,500-5,000 for secondary schools.

The Chairman thanked Mr MacDonald for his helpful comments. It was agreed that the Committee should receive an update on this issue in about 6 months' time.

#### **62. Safeguarding – Report on stage 2 of the Scrutiny**

The Committee considered Paper CYP/23/11, the report on the second stage of the work undertaken by the Safeguarding Sub-Committee. Councillor Sargent pointed out that the most important part of the paper was the section with Findings and Actions. She sought the Committee's views on this final draft.

Various points were made:

- Essex Safeguarding Children Board. It was suggested that the ESCB Chairman might make an annual report to the Committee on the work of the Board.
- Concern was expressed on how best Members could monitor the safeguarding of children in care. Ms Lincoln explained there were two groups: (1) those under a Child Protection Plan (formerly Register). There are about 900 of these, who remain with their birth families. Their situation is monitored by social workers, but the local authority has restricted powers, as the arrangement has a consensual basis. Where access is denied by parents, there is an escalating scale of actions that can be taken, culminating in a visit accompanied by a police officer. (2) children in care who have been removed from their birth families and placed with others. The local authority has responsibility for these. These children get frequent visits from different people, such as social workers, and can get tired and frustrated by these. It was noted that fostered children usually wish to fit in with their friends and peers, and so would not wish to be visited, which would mark them out. This makes it important for Members to take a different approach to fulfilling their responsibilities as a corporate parent, rather than visiting. The best alternative is likely to be engaging them at events. It was AGREED that the Chairman should write to the Essex Foster Carers Council about this situation.
- In response to the suggestion that the Committee should conduct an annual review, with relevant statistics about numbers of children in care, their movements, etc, it was pointed out that this was covered under corporate parenting, with work being led by the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Regarding designated teachers in schools, Ms Lincoln confirmed that safeguarding roles were the same and were required in every school in every school, irrespective of the kind of school it is.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Ms Lincoln agreed that the MASH running in Devon had proved very successful, but she added that it could not be treated as a “bolt-on” feature. It was very complicated and demanding on resources. Furthermore, Essex is a much larger and more complicated authority than Devon – for example, it has 5 health authorities, and each of the 4 quadrants is the size of a London borough. However, she would be happy to give a presentation on this to the Committee or Safeguarding Sub-Committee at a future meeting. The Committee AGREED that such a presentation should be prepared.

The Chairman thanked Ms Lincoln for her assistance.

The Committee approved the report in principle, subject to any changes required as a result of today’s discussion. Once updated, it will be sent to all interested parties with a covering letter by the Chairman.

### **63. Corporate Parenting**

The Committee noted a Briefing Note on matters discussed at the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting held on 21 July, which had been tabled by the Chairman.

**64. Forward Look**

The Committee confirmed the Forward Look (CYP/26/11) for items to come to meetings for the remainder of 2011, as circulated.

It was AGREED that a scrutiny on Quadrants should be added to the draft Forward Look for 2012.

**65. 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 29 September 2011

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 12.50 pm.

Chairman