

Members noted the recent changes, as made at the May Council meeting, as set out in PAF/16/14.

One member suggested that the Chairman of a scrutiny committee should be a member of the opposition, rather than of the administration. In response, it was pointed out that this was not the right place to debate such an issue. However, the Chairman noted the point. He hoped that Committee members felt able to speak freely at these meetings and did not feel constrained by political affiliations.

Councillors Higgins and McEwen were each proposed and seconded as deputy chairmen of the Committee. A vote having been taken, they were both duly elected.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee meeting of 12 March 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

5. Questions from the Public

There were no questions registered from Members of the Public.

6. Commissioning Strategies

Members received report PAF/17/14 on ECC Commissioning Strategies.

It was noted that the County Council had set out a clear vision for Essex, agreeing a set of seven outcomes that should be worked toward and which formed part of the Council's corporate priorities. Three of these are considered to fall within the remit of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee:

- People in Essex can live independently and exercise control over their lives
- Children in Essex get the best start in life
- People have aspirations and achieve their ambitions through education, training and life-long learning.

The Committee considered each one, as per the paper.

A) People in Essex can live independently and exercise control over their lives

Members were referred to Annexes C and F to the paper. Councillor Anne Brown, Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care, and Sheila Norris, Director for Integrated Commissioning & Vulnerable People, were in attendance.

Mrs Norris emphasised the importance of getting this right, as there was not only the need to manage resources carefully (especially in view of an ageing population and the requirements of the Care Bill), but it also improved outcomes for individuals and their families, and gave them greater control over their lives.

She added it was structured around those most at risk:

- Young people – those disabled and those acting as carers
- Adults with health problems
- Older people and end of life.

Mrs Norris responded to some questions from Members.

Although the whole population does need to be considered, the main focus has been on those needing support, and mostly the intention is for people to stay in their own homes where possible. But it is acknowledged that some people would prefer a residential option – some through a fear of loneliness, but there may be other reasons. This also applies to end of life scenarios, where some people would prefer to be in a hospital to remaining at home. These demonstrate the need to personalise cases.

With regard to end of life, there is a need to ensure people are kept informed and that close relatives and friends are involved, so that informed choices can be made. Dealing with those who are neither children nor elderly is an area that presents opportunities to hospices and hospitals to provide end of life care best suited to individuals' needs.

The community does have a pivotal role – a question to be addressed is how the County's and the community's roles can complement each other. There is an issue in how to find people from the community. One initiative is the relaunching of the County Council's staff volunteering scheme, which gives Council staff two working days for voluntary activity per annum. Were the uptake widespread, this would contribute many thousands of hours to the voluntary sector's activities in the community. And the intention is to encourage other organisations to consider contributing in a similar fashion.

Mental health, particularly with respect to the elderly, is another key element.

The strategy does not make much reference to the grass roots voluntary sector. Some 10,000 voluntary organisations are active in Essex. The County Council has no intention of imposing any central control over these, but it does wish to engage with local groups, perhaps providing some funding and/or assistance where appropriate and possible.

There is no reference to any market analysis in the report, but there detailed implementation plans, sitting below the strategy.

Another area is that of personal budgets, where the intention is to increase the proportion of individuals with these. It is hard to estimate any actual figures – this will depend on how many individuals are thought to be able to do operate in

this way. And a balance will be required, to ensure that the service they receive is of good quality.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Mrs Norris for their input.

B) Children in Essex get the best start in life

Members were referred to Annexes A and D to the paper. Councillor Joe Pike, representing Councillor Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Families and Children, and Chris Martin, Director for Integrated Commissioning & Vulnerable People, were in attendance.

Before Mr Martin addressed the meeting, Councillor Pike reminded Members that this work was ongoing. Mr Martin acknowledged that the importance of giving children the best start in life is obvious and added that all research carried out in this field confirmed this. When things are got right for children under the age of five – and particularly those under two – this produces the best likely outcomes in terms of educational and personal achievement and wellbeing, throughout those individuals' lives; so this is an important area.

However, it is also important that children in Essex feel loved and safe and that they are valued; that they are able to make lasting relationships with others; that they feel a connection to their place and locality; that they benefit from stability; that they are able to follow their dreams and maximise their potential.

A number of key indicators will be used in the process of delivering this strategy. Four of these are regarded as key:

- The percentage of children ready for school
- The percentage of children achieving a good level of development at five years old
- Percentage of families living in temporary accommodation
- Percentage of children from non-working households

Our statistics indicate that 70-73% of Essex children are held to be ready for school, which puts the County in the top quartile. However, this also indicates a significant number of children – 30% – who are **not** ready, and this is a cohort unable to do basic activities, such as eat using cutlery, toilet themselves.

Those children with a good level of development at five is about 52-53% (which is above the national average), but this can vary according to location. For example, the overall figure for the Harlow area is 38% and for boys in Harlow is 29%. This needs to be addressed.

The number of families living in temporary accommodation is relatively low, but research indicates this as a very disruptive element in a child's life, effecting not only education and school life directly, but also reducing connection to place.

The numbers of those in workless households is also not very high, but again research indicates that children being brought up in a workless household has a very negative impact on their ambitions and aspirations, and that this is particularly strong where unemployment has been long term.

An Early Years Review was conducted as part of this project. This showed that, although there are a large number of services available to them, parents can find it difficult to navigate their way through to what they need. This can be a fragmented process, involving a lot of people, which may not be delivering as effectively as it should.

Mr Martin addressed some issues raised by Members.

Identifying those in need and achieving the desired early intervention can be difficult, particularly when the families do not fall into obvious groups. Some people are aware of services, but just do not know how to use them; others lack the confidence to avail themselves of them. Social Services will need to review its whole services package and think hard about how it provides them. As for the harder to reach groups, most people will have certain touch points to the system; the need is to ensure that these are spotted and followed up on.

There has been input from external sources. First, the Commissioning Outcomes Group has been involved in the process and is made up of County Council officers and representatives of CCGs, NHS England and the third Sector. Secondly, a partnership group called "The Public Office" has provided third party input into what is being done, particularly looking at the extent to which the proposals are new, or are essentially what is currently practised.

There are different and specific strategies targeting certain groups (Gypsies and Travellers, for example), although this may not be evident from the broad strategy document.

Parents are key to these proposals, as they are the route to the children, so they need to be engaged. Input has been sought from parents. An ethnographic approach was taken, digging deep into people's lives. There have been accusations of tokenism in the past, but these should now be avoided. It was found that in many cases those unable to access and use the services had blocks in their lives that contributed to this, such as narrow friendship groups, poor relationships with others, and a limited range of external activities.

A targeted approach is needed – dealing with specific areas with specific problems. For example, Basildon, Harlow and Tendring come up frequently as needing attention. There is another element here: poverty. There is a poverty strategy, as every district (barring two) has small pockets of deprivation. This makes a homogenous approach more difficult to achieve.

Councillor Pike added that Children's Centres are still developing. A part of this process is that each Centre has a focus group with input from local Members. Councillor Pike invited Members to get involved in these.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Mr Martin for their input.

- C) People have aspirations and achieve their ambitions through education, training and life-long learning

Members were referred to Annexes B and E to the paper. Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, and Chris Kiernan, Director of Commissioning: Education and Lifelong Learning, were in attendance.

The Cabinet Member introduced the item by pointing out that education spans both the extremes of the previously covered issues – children to end of life. The local authority has a responsibility to provide the tools to enable people to achieve the others.

There are eight key indicators, as set out in the document. One of the most sobering is the fifth, which concerns NEETs, where one statistic suggested that 25% of those classified as NEETs were likely to be dead or seriously ill by the age of 35. So this is a serious and important issue; Essex must give these young people the tools and the opportunities to take them out of this situation.

Also, the final one, concerning rates of volunteering, which was seen as important in the other presentations. Here, young people can be given the opportunity to contribute in this way. This brings out the fact that these issues do not fit in silos and should not be seen in isolation – it is important to have cross-fertilisation.

Mr Kiernan suggested that, although all the indicators are important, three are particularly significant:

- The percentage of children attending a good school
- The percentage of children achieving at school
- The percentage of young people aged 16-19 not in education, employment or training (NEET).

He pointed out that the County Council that the strategy is a strong one. Essex is more of an influence, rather than a player. Essex has demonstrated a much stronger interventionist role in failing schools over the last few years. Although the Government has reduced the role played by local authorities in schools, it has not repealed any of the legislation giving them statutory powers to intervene in failing schools, or the legislation giving local authorities a duty to ensure that children receive a good education. Also, the commissioning strategy is not merely aspirational – it has been in place for some time and is producing results. An example is: in 2010, 64% of primary schools in Essex were rated good or better (320 schools); in 2014 it is 76% - which represents another 60 schools reaching this standard.

There are still schools that do not meet good enough standards but Essex is taking action and is using its statutory powers to intervene. Two out of every five interventions in the whole country are made by Essex.

Mr Kiernan addressed some issues raised by Members.

Academies are legally independent of the County Council, but Essex still has a duty to ensure they are good enough and subjects them to the same quality assurance process as other schools. If Essex is not happy with the results, it will suggest appropriate action. If the school refuses to respond to this, and the situation persists, Essex will voice its concerns to Ofsted and the Secretary of State. That said, Essex has a very good relationship with its secondary academies, and works alongside them in this regard.

Core adult literacy still receives grants from the Government, which are used to directly fund adult learning programmes in the community; whereas continuing adult learning programmes are provided on a purely financial basis.

With regard to access to these services, much work is going on to attract individuals to these. It was noted that that adult literacy issues have bearing on children as well. Mr Kiernan agreed to ask Peter Cook, as Head of Commissioning: Education and Lifelong Learning, to provide fuller details of what Essex is doing about access.

It was also agreed that Peter Cook would be asked to provide details of the role that employers may be playing in dealing with illiteracy.

Migration (ie children going out of area to attend a school perceived as better than the local one) does create problems. It is the result of parents' natural response to a particular situation, and them wishing their children to get the best possible education. The only way to deal with this is for the local school that is losing pupils to regain its reputation, which can take time. An education panel has been set up in one area, to repair the reputations of certain schools, and this has had some success.

In response to the suggestion that NEETs should be offered voluntary work, Mr Martin pointed out that this should not be at the expense of education and training.

The importance of good leadership teams in schools was noted, but Mr Martin added that it was also important to get good classroom teachers, and this was often difficult in many places, such as rural schools and in commuter areas.

There is a strategy in respect of dyslexia, or rather "specific learning difficulties". It was noted that different parents want different approaches – eg some do not wish their children to be labelled as dyslexic; others want this, to enable them to receive whatever help they can. The key element here is assessment, which the better schools do from a very early age and require no input from County and then put a plan in place to address the condition. Sometimes extra intervention is required and there is a well established process that will be used.

With regard to the size of schools, small schools that are designed as such are seen as viable (although more vulnerable when things go wrong). Where there are several mixed year group classes, the school may think it wise to consider federating with others, to create a larger infrastructure. A large school with low numbers is different. If it is not attracting sufficient pupils, and there is little

prospect of population growth, it may need a difficult decision, and Essex is prepared to close schools if it thinks this a necessary course of action.

At present, the County Council has two aspects of its role with regard to schools over the past few years. These are:

- Quality assurance, including the right to intervene if necessary. This will remain
- A traded service, offering schools the opportunity to buy services from the Council. At present, this service is funded by a grant of £900k to maintain this, which allows Essex to buy services for those schools it believes no longer have the ability to do this. This will reduce to nothing in three years, which may impact the staff of this service as it moves forward.

The Cabinet Member added that encouraging and assisting schools to improve on their Ofsted ratings should also be seen as part of the overall process.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Mr Kiernan for their input.

The Chairman then informed the Members that he intended to write to each Cabinet Member on their behalf, expressing broad support for these three strategies and recognising the work involved.

He will also consider three particular issues, determining how the Committee might take these forward:

- End of life
- Voluntary sector engagement
- Adult literacy.

7. Sensory Service Review Update

Members received report PAF/18/14 on pathway redesign for people with sensory impairments. Anna Saunders, Head of Commissioning for Vulnerable People, was in attendance.

The Chairman welcomed Ms Saunders and invited her to introduce the item.

Ms Saunders drew attention to the 180,000 people living with sensory impairment in Essex. Most of these are elderly and many refuse to identify themselves as having any impairment, so this represented a challenge to the County Council, to reach these people, many of whom had a higher risk of other injury because of their sensory impairments.

The Reablement Support Service is a major function. This has been carried out by Essex Cares, whose contract is being renewed for a further year. As part of the review process, a "Requirements Document" has been prepared. In response to suggestions that it was not very accessible, it is being simplified and Ms Saunders will circulate a copy to Members when this process is complete.

She listed four key elements of the new pathway:

- People should be able to live independently- in line with corporate outcome 7
- There is true integration of Social and Health services
- The pathway applies not just to adults but for whole life
- The Care Bill requires increased preventative services, which may mean an increase in required budget

If services were to be reduced, public consultation would be required, but the increased demands of the Care Bill make a shrinking of the service unlikely.

Ms Saunders responded to some questions asked by Members.

There are three areas of sensory impairment: sight loss, hearing loss, and those who are affected by both (the biggest group in older people). There is a considerable amount of data on the first two, but less on the third and this is an area needing more attention. Ms Saunders agreed to provide statistics to the Committee.

Regarding statutory requirements – these are undergoing change with the introduction of the Care Bill, so are under current review.

Although the Health Service would provide glasses or hearing aids, if someone was considered in need of 'sensory rehabilitation' (eg, long cane training for those losing their sight, or support around hearing aids), they would be referred to the County Council's Services. The Council already commission voluntary bodies to help in various processes. The intention with the new pathway is for the system to become seamless, so that the individual will automatically get appropriate help at point of diagnosis.

As well as Essex Cares, there are some providers interested in providing a similar service but doing it differently. The model being explored is a lead provider model who coordinates the overall provision, but does not make all the provision itself. This reflects the emerging national model and could ensure equity across the county.

Equity of service across the county is important – at the moment, there are pockets of provision. The intention going forward is to ensure quality provision all across the county. It was noted that there is a risk that the lead provider could add another layer of complexity but it is felt that specialist organisations are best placed to ensure joined up support and that it should feel seamless to the users .

8. Educational Attainment in Essex

Members received scoping document PAF/19/14 (previously circulated as PAF/13/14). It was agreed that this item should be considered at the September meeting.

9. Commissioning Services for Vulnerable People

Members received scoping document PAF/20/14. It was agreed that this item should be considered at the September meeting.

10. Scrutiny recommendations tracker and work programme

The Committee noted the tracker and work programme. The Chairman drew Members' attention to the scrutiny website, which publishes papers for Task & Finish Groups

www.essex.gov.uk/scrutiny

One Member expressed his disappointment at the ostensible lack of representatives of charities, voluntary organisations and other interested parties who might attend meetings. He believed consideration should be given to encouraging this.

Members noted this point.

11. Date of next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: Thursday 4 September 2014, in Committee Room 1.

The meeting closed at 12.57 pm.

Chairman