

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 16  
JANUARY 2014**

County Councillors:

* G Butland (Chairman)	P Honeywood
* S Barker	* R Howard
* D Blackwell	N Hume
* K Bobbin	R Lord
R Boyce	* M McEwen
* J Chandler	M McGeorge
* J Deakin	* C Seagers
R Gadsby	A Wood
T Higgins	

Non-Elected Voting Members:

Mr R Carson	Rev R Jordan
* Mr M Christmas	Ms M Uzzell
*present	

The following Member was also present:

Councillor J Aldridge (*item 5*)

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

## 1. Apologies and Substitutions

The Chairman reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr R Boyce	Cllr S Barker
Cllr R Gadsby	
Cllr T Higgins	Cllr J Deakin
Cllr P Honeywood	
Cllr N Hume	
Cllr R Lord	
Cllr M McGeorge	Cllr K Bobbin
Mr R Carson	--
Rev R Jordan	--

## 2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

### 3. Minutes

The minutes of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee meeting of 5 December 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Item 7, paragraph 3, to read “....as only Essex Cares was being used, Mr Tempest pointed out that Essex Cares was the main provider but there were other parties involved.”

### 4. Safeguarding Essex Annual Report

Members received the Adults, Health & Community Wellbeing Safeguarding Essex Annual Report, 2012-13, (PAF/01/14). Stephen Bunford, Senior Consultant Practitioner, Safeguarding Team, was in attendance.

Mr Bunford started by asking Members to note that the Report is not that of the Safeguarding Adults Board. He reminded Members that this Report had been published in May 2013, and he had seen positive developments in the meantime. He referred to the main elements of the Report and Members had a range of questions and comments.

**Residential Care.** The Essex Hospital Trusts have all been co-operative and now he holds regular meetings about Safeguarding with them. They had also all attended a half-day workshop in 2013, which had been useful and encouraged an ongoing exchange of information and good practice. In his view, risks have been minimised.

Essex has a disproportionately high number of residential institutions, for historical reasons. In the past it has been cheaper to run residential homes in Essex, so it has 12 of these, whereas a similar authority might expect to have only four. It is not simply a case of London boroughs paying to export their responsibility; Essex do the same – looking for the most appropriate placement for the individual.

Private providers have been moving toward having larger units; whereas Essex is looking to adopting other approaches, for example by having small units of special housing with only three or four residents.

In Mr Bunford's view, a new generation of carers is coming through now, with an approach centred on the individual's needs, and much training now includes risk management.

In response to a point raised by a Member, about the potential negative impact on a residential area of the creation of a home, Mr Bunford pointed out that Essex cannot dictate location to their providers. However, he added that many providers now are building their own properties, often away from residential areas. Another Member described a similar, personal experience as positive.

Regarding referral rates – Essex now has one of the highest rates in the country. In the past few years, these have risen from 600 to 5,200 per annum. Mr Bunford regarded this positively, as it demonstrates that people are no longer prepared to remain silent when confronted by situations they are unsure about. They are now referred to as “concerns” rather than alerts. When this started, the referral rate from initial concerns was 85%; now, this has dropped to 70%.

Regarding regulations, Members noted that more than three vulnerable people in a residence would be regulated by CQC, but less required no regulation. And an ordinary residential property would not need to fulfil any special planning requirements.

Mr Bunford informed Members that anyone in the caring and teaching professions are in notifiable occupations. This means that if an arrest is made, the County Council is informed by the Police. If so informed, Essex would then suggest that the individual inform their employer, as Essex would do so if they did not. This was a good example of how communications between relevant parties are improving.

With regard to those who need to be prevented from leaving a psychiatric unit, for their own good, a Deprivation of Liberty Standard (DoLS) is issued. After an initial spate of applications for these, the number has now reduced and has remained steady for the past two years.

Regarding advocates, Members were informed that, although it was up to individuals who they used as their advocate, the County Council could remove the advocate, if they believed he/she was not acting in the individual's best interests. However, this was rare.

**Domestic Abuse.** This remains a significant area of concern. There were seven domestic homicides in Essex in 2013; and there are 80-100 domestic abuse alerts every day, of which 10 are serious.

One positive development has been the creation of a Joint Domestic Abuse Triage Team (JDATT). This brings together several parties, eg ECC, Police and Health, to share information and resources. This improves efficiency and is less stressful for any victims, as they only require one interview.

**Cyber Abuse.** Funding had been sought, but had not been forthcoming. However, they benefit from a lot of hours' assistance from volunteers. And various policies and procedures have developed across the eastern region.

**Trafficking.** This is a relatively new area and the scale of the problem is not yet clear. The Police Commissioner has appointed an Officer to look into this. A particular area of concern is those who are moved on from place to place.

Concern was expressed by Members about financing, in the wake of Transformation 2 and the significant increase in cases over the past few years. Mr Bunford pointed out that safeguarding has always been at the heart of social workers' activities. However, everyone needs to be smarter and clearer about

cases. Better triaging is helping. Safeguarding Essex has its own budget, but otherwise this is absorbed into the overall budgets.

Mr Bunford suggested that the AskSal Helpline should be promoted, and added that Essex is the only local authority with such a helpline. In response to a Member's question whether AskSal produced clear outcomes, Mr Bunford pointed out that AskSal is funded by various agencies. He suggested that it not only gives people the confidence to ring and voice their concerns, but it actually does make things safer for the people of Essex. It is not a befriending service, but they are seeking to put the user at the centre, to gain a clearer picture of what people want and so improve on the service being provided.

To conclude, Mr Bunford made two special requests of Members:

- To make any GPs with whom they may have dialogue more aware of safeguarding. Officers can make a follow-up visit if they wish
- To let Social Services aware of any intended visit to a care home. This is to ensure that the visit would not compromise any investigation.

The Chairman thanked Mr Bunford for his helpful responses.

The Committee noted the Report and it was suggested that the Committee should consider ways of raising awareness of these issues with all Members.

## **5. Ageing Well**

Members received report PAF/02/14, the final Report of the Ageing Well Task & Finish Group, and PAF/03/14, the responses of Members to the Task & Finish Group's recommendations. Cllr John Aldridge, Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care, and Mike Boyle, Executive Director for Adult Operations, were in attendance.

The Cabinet Member considered this to be a good report, in that it had raised a raft of issues. Much work has been done since the Report was published, in particular since the "Who Will Care" commission. Also, the forthcoming new Care Bill should cover some of the points.

Members raised several issues.

Regarding Recommendation 1, it was noted that the substantial cost of maintaining such an extensive network of footways in the County clearly required Highways to prioritise work to be done, and that there was a preventative agenda regarding interior falls; but there was also a potential impact on resources of caring for those who have suffered falls. One Member queried this situation. Mr Boyle replied that a system was in place to identify those with a higher risk of falls; and there were teams ready to deal with this situation. Older people were also encouraged to use modern technology to help them call for assistance if required.

Regarding Recommendation 7, relating to innovative schemes related to transport issues, one Member suggested setting up an Integrated Transport Panel, with a view to facilitating the use of school buses for public use.

In response to a question on the likely impact of part-night lighting on older people, it was pointed out that much of the concern seemed to hinge on people's perceptions of the situation, rather than any difficulties encountered by experience.

Regarding issues of Loneliness and Isolation, Cllr Aldridge pointed out that this was an important area, where Health and Social Services were unable to cover all the bases. Self help and community involvement were areas that County wished to build upon. The Village Agents model, which had been trialled in certain areas, seemed good and should be extended. Their role was reactive at the moment and the Cabinet Member wished to see them become more proactive. This was an area that Essex wished to take forward.

The Chairman noted the good work of this Task & Finish Group and also that former Councillor Janet Whitehouse had expressed her appreciation that half of the Group's recommendations had drawn a positive response from Cabinet Members. The Chairman also thanked Cllr Aldridge for his attendance.

## **6. Children in Care Task & Finish Group**

The Scrutiny Officer gave a brief update on the activities of the Children in Care Task & Finish Group.

The Group has met three times. The first meeting set out basic parameters and noted there were two main areas of likely activity: aftercare service and sexual exploitation of minors. At the second, the review was scoped and it was decided to concentrate on aftercare service for the moment. At the third meeting, the Cabinet Member for Families and Children and the Executive Director for Family Operations responded to Members' questions. Ofsted have just begun an inspection of children's services, which is likely to take a month, so the work of the Group has been suspended for a month.

## **7. People and Families Scrutiny Committee**

The Chairman considered the work of the Committee, which had now been going for about 6 months. The work carried out so far had mostly consisted of the consultation on the Deanes School and of picking up on pre-existing reports. Now he believed they should think on more strategic issues over the coming 15 months, to May 2015.

He proposed two principal streams of work during this period, subject to the Committee's approval:

1. Commissioning. For example, how are services to vulnerable people commissioned? How does the voluntary sector fit in?

2. Educational Performance and Attainment in Essex. There are several potential areas here – for example, how performance is measured, the relationship between the LEA and academies, and how the new elements impact upon the working of Essex as an LEA.

He added that there may be funding available to allow the Committee to bring in external expertise.

Several comments were made on these proposals. On the Commissioning:

- One particular aspect that should be considered is the regulation of those providing services for older people:

On educational performance:

- In response to a question on how this would tie in with the work of Ofsted, the Chairman pointed out that it would consider different aspects – eg, how is it done? What are the successes and failures?, what is the broad picture? How do certain elements impact across the ECC?
- The work would consider both primary and secondary elements
- Good statistics would be required, to enable valid comparisons to be made with other LEAs, for example
- Particular concern was expressed over the increasing trend for the work of a head teacher to become more like that of a business manager.

All Members having given their full support to the proposed two topics, it was AGREED that a scoping document on both should be produced for the next meeting, and that consideration of these should become the principal work for the next 12 months.

## **8. Young Essex Assembly**

The Chairman reminded Members that he, along with Councillors Deakin and McGeorge, had held a meeting with YEA members and had invited them to suggest a subject for the Committee to consider in the coming months. As yet no reply had been received.

## **9. Date of next meeting**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: Thursday 13 March 2014, Committee Room 1, at 10.00 am.

[Future dates subsequently circulated to Members:

Thursday, 10 July 2014  
Thursday, 11 September 2014  
Thursday, 13 November 2014  
Thursday, 15 January 2015  
Thursday, 12 March 2015  
Thursday, 14 May 2015]

The meeting closed at 11.52 am.

Chairman