

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD AT AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 12  
NOVEMBER 2015**

County Councillors:

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

Non-Elected Voting Members:

* Mr R Carson	Ms M Uzzell
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\*present

The following Members were also present:

Councillor K Bobbin  
Councillor S Lissimore

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:

<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
Cllr D Blackwell	
Cllr R Boyce	
Cllr R Howard	
Cllr A Wood	

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no new declarations of interest.

**3. Questions from the Public**

There were no questions registered from Members of the Public.

**4. Child sexual exploitation**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Adults & Children, and Paul Secker, Director for Safeguarding, to the meeting and invited

them to give Members an update on developments with regard to child sexual exploitation.

Mr Secker reminded Members that in the three years since he took up his post, much had happened in this area, most importantly the unveiling of the events in Rotherham and the publication of the subsequent report. This high profile case brought Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) to the forefront of public attention and had revealed a very extensive level of activity carried out by a gang of Asian males, over a ten year period, including rape, trafficking, abduction and beating of young girls, and included the threatening of families. Although the report acknowledged the very complex nature of CSE in general, made worse by the extensiveness of this particular case, it also was very critical of the failings of the system to pick this up and deal with it.

CSE should be seen as a particular form of child abuse, in which the abuser has almost total control over the abused. It usually involves a grooming process, which increases individuals' dependence on the abuser and distances them from their own peers. But the abused should in no way be considered as consensual in the process. Although some high profile cases have involved groups, it can be perpetrated by individuals.

The authorities do not believe that there is a major problem in Essex, but it has been looking to make progress in certain areas over the past three years (mostly driven by the Essex Safeguarding Children Board):

- County Council Services have been working with Southend and Thurrock
- They have worked to increase awareness and understanding of the issues
- All agencies now have CSE "champions", ie those who take a lead in relevant matters; and all schools have someone in a similar position
- They have provided considerable training for practitioners
- An assessment tool based on risk indicators has been introduced
- The referral routes to be used by professionals have been clarified
- A Police led triage team has been established
- The links and practice arrangements between children who go missing and exploitation (which are often are connected) have been strengthened
- They have increased involvement with children's organisations such as Barnardo's and the Children's Society.

A historical survey has been carried out, covering the past 5-6 years, which has not produced evidence of any major incidences that had been missed. However, looking back at the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, when there was not the same awareness of CSE, we are aware of certain behaviours and activities that suggest that a level of CSE may have been taking place.

Ongoing activity includes:

- Rewriting of the Strategy for Essex, Southend and Thurrock, bringing out the strategic strands of prevention, identifying those most at risk, assessing risk, disruption of perpetrators (a crucial element) and providing support for victims
- Holding Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings across the quadrants, to focus on the most vulnerable individuals and to look at what steps are actually being taken, including the work with districts
- 57 social workers have now completed their Masters with CSE modules

- Working with the Police and Health, to strengthen links with them, which is a vital way of dealing with abuse of all kinds
- Creation of a co-ordinating post, to bring together the work of groups from across Essex.

There was a need to focus more on boys suffering abuse, as 30% victims are male; also, 40% of abuse is carried out by young people. These are two areas needing to be developed.

Cllr Madden pointed out that Members had various roles within safeguarding, including the Cabinet member himself observing at the Essex Safeguarding Children Board, being a member of the Safeguarding Performance Sub Group and Corporate Parenting Panel, and meeting members of the Children in Care Council. Ofsted now includes CSE as an element of their inspections, and also recognises Essex as a leader in this field. And Cllr Madden is now on the national Committee for Children's Services of the LGA, and this is kept on the agenda.

Cllr Madden and Mr Secker then responded to issues raised by Members:

- The districts have been putting CSE on their Council agendas. They have been looking at certain areas where CSE activities may occur, such as fast food outlets
- Relations have been improving between the districts and the County Council, who will share good practice with each other. Although there are other areas of child exploitation, such as slavery, the Police have over the past two years focused on sexual exploitation. They had a team gathering intelligence on this, but it became overwhelmed and was shut down. Now the team is being reinstated, in a different form
- Another area needing attention is that of gangs, which have developed in several towns across the County. To date, progress has been slow on this; more coming together by the relevant parties is still needed
- As far as the amount going on, it was very probably more common than has been reported (as was the case with domestic violence, where it was estimated less than half was reported). There has been considerable media coverage of CSE recently, with some high profile cases. This is to be welcomed, as it opens people's eyes and raises awareness. This has also helped us move on politically, where we can be more open about what is going on and where
- The Government has decided to give funding to certain volunteer organisations, such as the Children's Society and Barnardos, and the County Council is working with them
- A programme is needed for schools, as raising awareness in young people can help prevent problems developing.
- Even professionals may have problems gauging signs of CSE, as often symptoms can be hard to detect, although there have been improvements here recently. In fact most referrals come through children's social care and schools
- Members with concerns in this area were asked to contact the County Council's Families Operations Hub or the Cabinet Member's office, or, in extreme cases, to go directly to the police.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Mr Secker for their honesty. There is always more to be done, but Members are now much more aware. He suggested Members could also remind district councils of their role here.

## **5. Essex Youth Service redesign**

Members received Report PAF/21/15, an update on the Youth Service redesign. The Chairman welcomed Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning, and Michael O'Brien, Head of Commissioning, Education & Lifelong Learning, to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member introduced the item by pointing out that the redesign was broadly completed; he now felt more secure about the service and that it was now more sustainable.

Mr O'Brien drew attention to a few salient points. He noted that the Senior Management Team had been reduced for nine to five, with some new people brought in. Overall, redundancies equivalent to 26 full-time posts had arisen, involving 38 individuals.

Processes had been put in place to deal with two issues that had been of some concern to staff: constant change and having to cover for those off sick. Consequently, staff morale had risen and absences dropped significantly.

There has been an emphasis on seeking the involvement of the local community, which has led to more volunteers coming forward than it can deal with. If greater resources were available, they would be able to train even more people and run more activities. Even so, there has been a 200% increase in outcomes over a few years ago and 120 to 150 more youth sessions per week across the County. Also, 189 youth clubs are being supported that were not previously.

Another area is providing work experience for youngsters, as very few schools still provide this. The number is rising all the time, and is probably almost double the 140 stated in the papers.

A new model has been produced to deliver the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, as it had been declining in Essex. Essex is now one of the few local authorities to deliver this.

Provision for young carers has been extended and there is more emphasis on developing young people.

The Youth Strategy Groups range in what they do and achieve, but have proved very successful. An emphasis has been on providing young people with the ability to make the right choices. Another is raising the self-esteem of young people. The intention is to provide three-year funding for YSGs, to enable them to take more strategic views. The funding is not to do specific tasks, but to develop activities and move away from receiving support.

The National Citizen Service has been very successful, providing excellent opportunities for young people to contribute to their local communities. It is being rolled out and expanded across the country.

Young Inspectors. These use an Ofsted framework to assess services. Essex's intention is to be assessed as good in all fields.

The Cabinet Member made two points:

- He asked that Members take every opportunity to promote work placements for youngsters with any businesses they come into contact with
- The National Citizenship Service is particularly good in mixing with different individuals and groups (as opposed to the D of E, where they tend to stay in their own groups). And this includes high achievers with those with special needs.

Members raised some questions and issues:

- It would be helpful to receive actual figures indicating growth and how supply is meeting demand. Mr O'Neill agreed to provide such figures but pointed out that demand was always likely to outstrip supply. It was noted that the Committee was due to receive an update in 6 months' time, at which such figures would be made available
- The future of the YEA. In 2010 the YEA was moved outside the Youth Service. It has subsequently moved to different parts of the organisation. Mr O'Neill wants it to return to the Youth Service. There has been liaison with the YEA and the intention is that it might have more input into Youth matters in future (rather than just ratifying commissioning decisions made by others). Cllr Gooding also expressed support for the YEA, adding that little joined up thinking had been taken with them in the past. The Chairman added that the Committee had a good working relationship with the YEA and would be likely to have them on the Committee agenda in 2016
- Regarding the work experience – Mr O'Neill agreed with the suggestion that interview skills should be part of a placement, as employers have identified a common skills gap in personal qualities, such as confidence and dealing with people. Essex will also match what youngsters do to their aspirations, so, for example, if they want to work with animals, they will not be placed in a fast-food restaurant
- Members were positive about the role of YSGs and their involvement with them, geared as they were to local circumstances and they endorsed the prospect of three-year funding becoming available.
- In response to a query on whether young people were able to feed back information, Mr O'Neill confirmed that it was an ongoing process and that they had to work hard to get feedback, as their target group did not form a captive audience and young people could just walk away at any point. There was not a countywide approach, but it was carried out at a local level
- It was noted that there was potentially a lot of information available about CSE. Mr O'Neill pointed out that those perpetrating such crimes would only get away with it if people are unaware of what was actually going on, so the Youth Service were very open about it, to bring matters into the open.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Gooding and Mr O'Neill for their informative visit.

Councillors Guglielmi and Honeywood left the meeting at this point.

## **6. Children's centres and healthy child programme consultation**

Members received Report PAF/22/15, giving an update on the ongoing activities taking place across Essex on the redesign of the current service offer for the Children's Centres and Healthy Child Programme. Stav Yiannou, Head of Commissioning Early Years and Childcare, Integrated Commissioning and Vulnerable People – People Commissioning, and Chris Martin, Director for Integrated Commissioning & Vulnerable People, were in attendance.

Ms Yiannou pointed out that the formal consultation would not start until January 2016, but this report served to alert Members. Mr Martin confirmed that this was an important piece of work and he was unaware of any other local authority contemplating a redesign to the same extent. It would also be of strategic significance, as getting it right would positively impact on those individuals as they progressed into adulthood.

Responses were given to issues raised by Members:

- A review was carried out of the early years system, with particular reference to the children's centres, health visitors and school nurses services. This threw up some interesting insights, and through further consultation, this led to a potential way of working and a set of outcomes. Two particular issues had been raised: the system is very fragmented and you get a different response, according to where you access the system. This proposal aimed to address these and provide greater consistency.
- Children with disabilities up to age 25 will still be covered under contracts that aim to cover whole families' needs
- They were working with Communications to ensure that the consultation process achieved the appropriate coverage. Essex was also already speaking to parents and parents' groups as part of an initial engagement process that would precede the actual consultation. From the Committee's point of view, once information being garnered had been analysed, a further report would be brought to the January meeting

The Chairman thanked Ms Yiannou and Mr Martin for their initial advices and looked forward to their return in January.

Cllr Jackson left the meeting at this point.

## **7. Member visits to residential homes**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Maddocks, as Deputy Cabinet Member for People and Families, and invited him to address the Committee.

Cllr Maddocks reminded Members of the importance of Members' visits to residential homes, as these helped the Authority gain a better overall picture. A new system should be in place in January and he explained how this would work.

Each Member would receive an individual sheet, providing basic details of the homes situated within their division. On deciding to make a visit, the Member should inform Essex, who would then provide more detailed information on that

home, as well as a recording form, on which the Member would be able to insert their observations. This would then be received by the Quality Improvement Team, who would add it to the database.

Cllr Maddocks pointed out that, as Councillors, Members had a personal responsibilities in respect of these homes; but he added that they might also ultimately have a personal interest, as they might have their own loved ones needing to go into residential care, or even themselves. He hoped to arrange a Members' briefing in December.

One Member, citing her own experiences of trying to arrange visits, asked if homes fully understood the role of Members (ie that they had a statutory right to visit, but were not inspectors). In response, Cllr Maddocks confirmed that he had asked that all managers and staff be made aware of the requirements, in written form.

#### **8. Scrutiny recommendations tracker and work programme**

Members received PAF/23/15, the Committee's Tracker and Work programme.

The programme was noted.

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

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: 10.30 am on Thursday 14 January 2016. Venue: Committee Room 1 at County Hall.

The meeting closed at 12:46 pm.

Chairman