

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY
1 NOVEMBER 2012**

County Councillors present:

T Chapman (Chairman)
S Barker (Vice-Chairman)
R Callender
J Deakin
I Grundy

E Hart
T Higgins (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr S Hillier
T Sargent

Non-Elected Voting Members present:

Mr R Carson
Rev R Jordan

The following Members were also present:

Councillor R Gooding
Councillor R Madden
Councillor V Metcalfe
Councillor C Riley

Items 1-6

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Graham Redgwell
Vivien Door

Governance Officer
Principal Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies and Substitutions

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr J Baugh	
Cllr A Brown	
Cllr L Mead	
Cllr D Morris	
Cllr J Young	
Cllr R Pearson	
Mr S Geddes	

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Callender declared that he had a daughter working in Social Care in Suffolk and Councillor Sargent declared that she was a Cabinet Member for Community Services at Basildon Borough Council. Both were personal interests. There were no other declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 October 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Matters Arising

Minute 5, MAAGs Report, under the information requested. The Governance Officer informed the Committee that the information requested would be sent out today.

Minute 6, YEA Updates. The Chairman indicated that she would meet with Sheila Woodward, Head of Service, Involvement of Children and Young People, later today.

5. Essex Families Pilot Scheme / Families with Complex Needs

Members received an oral report from Councillor Gooding, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Dave Hill, Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families

Introduction

Troubled Families Project

This was a Government scheme, and Essex is part of the Pilot project. These families have struggled over many years and, often, generations. Families accepted under the scheme need to meet the following criteria:

- At least one Adult not in work;
- Children with school attendance issues;
- Members of the family with anti-social behaviour or criminal involvement.

Each Local Authority must have a service plan for the Troubled Families Project in place by March 2013. The Government would provide ring fenced funding to help these families.

Complex Families

These families have the most difficult and complex issues which normally include all or some of the following:

- At least one Adult not in work;
- Children with school attendance issues;
- Members of the family with anti-social behaviour or criminal involvement;
- Domestic Violence Abuse;
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse;
- Teenage Pregnancy.

The Service had produced a Business Case to set up a Multi-Disciplinary Team in each District, by October 2014 although some Districts, (for example, Basildon and Tendring) may need two teams in the longer term.

Complex and Troubled Families

The County had decided to join up its work for both the Complex and Troubled Families through the creation of Multi-Disciplinary Teams, with professionals from the following agencies:

Core Professionals

- Social Workers;
- Health Professionals;
- Job Centre Plus;
- Drug and Alcohol Service;
- Housing.

Professionals used as appropriate

- Apprenticeship Services;
- Access to Early Child Care;
- School Admissions Services;
- Any other services as appropriate for the individual families.

The Service had identified more than 6,000 Troubled Families with between 8,000 to 10,000 Complex Families.

Multi-Disciplinary Team

Over the next six months the Multi-Disciplinary Team would work with the 380 identified Troubled Families for the Pilot Scheme. Each family would have a Core Worker who would negotiate with the Family on how to improve their particular issues. The Core Worker will be identified as the most appropriate officer to work with the family and may be drawn from any of the agencies who were part of the Multi-Disciplinary Team. This Core Worker would share the family's information with other agencies as appropriate and would liaise with agencies to provide the required support. If a family required high level expertise from a particular agency then an officer from that agency would work directly with the family.

Work would take place with Complex Families next year. Agencies have signed up to work as a Multi-Disciplinary Team. An example was given that one particular family received 110 visits from different agencies in one year, which proved very invasive for the family and would have cost the agencies a total of £150,000.

Volunteers

It had been recognised that Complex and Troubled Families often receive support from agencies but then are unable to cope when support is removed. It had been decided to use volunteers to befriend these Families and work with them over a two to three year period providing support when required. The same approach had been used in the London Borough of Bromley and by Southend on Sea Borough Council. Over time it was hoped that each family

could have a volunteer/mentor to help them with any support or advice they required.

The Community Services Volunteer (CSV) nationally provides intensive training for volunteers working with challenging families. Initially volunteers already in the system would be approached, before widening the initiative to extra volunteers. £1 million would be provided initially to support and train these volunteers.

Discussion

During the discussion the following points were made:

Troubled and Complex Family Scheme

- That this would be a costly process but all agencies recognised that it would help families and provide value for money in the long term. Maintaining the current styled provision was not an option;
- Tanya Gillett, Head of Youth Offending Service would be recruiting officers to the teams to begin working with the 380 Troubled Families in November 2012;
- The Multi-Agency Team Project Leaders could be invited to attend scrutiny sessions on a regular basis, with statistical information. Tanya Gillett would be invited in the first instance;
- It was expected that this work would grow and that in the future external agencies may be commissioned to provide the administration service for volunteers;
- Families would have a contract drawn up regarding the changes they needed to make to improve their lives. Most families want to be helped and would be amenable to this. The professionals would be robust with the families when required;
- The County would pay for CRB checks for the volunteers.

Core Workers

- The Core Workers would have a case load of six to seven families, whilst the Volunteers would work with one family;
- Generic Social Workers were now carrying a caseload of 15 families, previously in 2010 they had 25 to 30 cases;
- In response to recent police cases involving local murders, Social Workers have been co-located in Chelmsford Police Station for a six month trial period to provide a joint response to such cases across the whole of the Essex Police boundaries.

Volunteers

- Volunteers would be paid expenses only;
- Some of the Government funding provided for Troubled Families was designated for supporting and training volunteers and would be available for a three year period;

- Members were concerned that Volunteers may suffer abuse from the families and would therefore need to have supervision and support;
- Volunteers would be used at the end of the process once the families were reasonably stable requiring support and advice and therefore should not be placed in dangerous situations;
- The London Borough of Bromley model provided high level training, support and supervision for the Volunteers to enable them to provide the Troubled and Complex families with extended support. Normally when families were removed from the Child Protection Plan 20 percent went back on Child Protection. By using these Volunteers London Borough of Bromley reduced this slippage remarkably;
- The London Borough of Bromley paid their Volunteers;
- Professionals would provide the family with short term intervention whilst volunteers would provide longer lower level support and advice;
- Members were concerned that there may be a mismatch of volunteers and the areas where families needed help. Volunteers could support the family over the telephone but face to face contact would be preferable;
- Faith Groups should be included in any volunteer workshops.

Education

- Evidence shows that families who support their children's education work well, but that the majority of the Troubled and Complex Families struggle to engage with their children's education and learning;
- Skills could provide a way out of economic difficulties for individuals.

Benefits and Housing

- The Department for Work and Pensions was working with Schools Children and Families Directorate as some of these families may have budgetary consequences from the benefits changes due in 2013;
- Some District Councils have transferred their housing stock to Social Landlords, in these cases the Social Landlords were invited to become part of the multi- disciplinary team. Regular meetings were taking place with either the District Councils or Social Landlords to engage housing agencies in this work;
- Due to the cap on housing benefits some London Boroughs were moving families into Essex housing stock, including caravan parks. The County were not responsible for these families but does have to provide schools and other infrastructure.

The Divisional Based Intervention Team (DBIT)

- The Divisional Based Intervention Team (DBIT) was working with teenagers to try to keep them out of Care. Parents who previously had abandoned older teenagers in the expectation that they would be housed in their own accommodation were now informed that the teenager would be placed with a Foster Family. There were now less parents wishing to abandon their teenagers;
- When teenagers need protection they were brought into Care.

Medium and Long Term Objectives

- Monitoring would take place with the families although it will take many years to evaluate the work;
- All County Members should be provided with a briefing session on this scheme. Members would therefore be able to cascade the information to their Districts.

The Committee **Agreed** that:

- i) A briefing session would be set up for all Members on the scheme;
- ii) The Multi-Agency Domestic Violence Pilot scheme should continue to be scrutinised at future meetings;
- iii) Dave Hill would provide for Members an acronym glossary with a brief description of the initiative/team and indicate where initiatives had changed names.

6. Schools Children and Families Procurement

Members received an oral report from Councillor Gooding, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Dave Hill, Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families and Suzie Goodman, Interim Head of Externally Commissioned Placements and Family Support Commissioning and Procurement.

The Committee was reassured that children are only placed in residential care if absolutely necessary. When the County had 1600 Children in Care the Service was often struggling to locate placements close to their homes. Now that there were less Children in Care (currently about 1300) it was easier to find placements. Annually there is a turnover of approximately one third of the Children in Care population, some leave Care through adoption; others at 18 leave Care and move to Adult Services. Currently there were more children in the lower age group coming into Care than the teenager group. More Foster Carers were being recruited above the number that were retiring or leaving. The closure of the County's Children's Homes had not meant that private Residential Homes have necessarily been used, as these young people have mainly been placed with Foster Carers. Residential Care was only used if it was the correct placement for the child. Members were reminded of the issues arising from the Rochdale Case. Young people were only placed in Residential Homes that have received a good or outstanding Ofsted Report.

Placements usually breakdown due to young people having difficult histories with very few boundaries set. It then becomes difficult when Foster Carers and staff try to put the boundaries/discipline in place. When placements breakdown, urgent new placements were located. Currently 100 young people were placed in Residential Homes; this number had reduced from 2010 when there were 140 young people placed. Of the young people placed in Residential Care a third were placed in Essex, a third in authorities bordering Essex and a third placed further away from Essex. Block booking contracts are not used.

The Service was keen to develop services locally in partnership with Education resources which may be required. The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy

identifies gaps and / or needs in provision in or close to the Essex borders able to meet the needs of the following groups of children and young people:

- Children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders and challenging behaviour;
- Young men who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour, including supporting them to access local educational provision;
- (Mostly) young women who place themselves at risk of serious harm through sexual exploitation or self-harming behaviour;
- Children and young people who have been sexually abused and who need specialist care and support;
- Young people who display particularly challenging behaviour and require small children's homes with integrated education and sometimes also therapeutic support.

Members were concerned that they were unable to carry out visits to external provider Childrens Residential Homes. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services informed the Committee that this was being reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Panel and a framework was being drawn up. This framework would be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel at its next meeting. A Member sub-group would be provided with additional training to carry out this work.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- The Local Authority which places a young person in Care remains ultimately responsible whether the young person is within its borders or further away from home;
- Approximately 600 young people have been placed in Essex from other Local Authorities, (with 400 from the London Boroughs);
- Members were concerned that Childrens Residential Homes were chosen on good or outstanding Ofsted inspections but this had not always been an indicator of an appropriate home;
- The Service plan that young people should only be in Residential Homes for a shortest time as possible;
- Members were concerned that children and young people should receive the service that they deserved within the allocated funding, as it was felt that the provider did not always provide the resources requested within contractual arrangements;
- Members did not want to lose their Corporate Parenting duties;
- A number of Childrens Residential Units in the future would be designed to hold two or three young people rather than much larger groups.

The Committee wished the issue around Member Visits to be resolved in future and for advice to be available for the new Council in May 2013.

7. Forward Look

The agenda items already agreed by the Committee for the remaining meetings in 2012/13 were noted.

For 6 December 2012 it was agreed that there would be two substantial items:

- SEN Strategy;
- Academic results and absence rates.

plus brief item (five minutes) in Part 2 to update on Families Safeguarding Sub-Committee.

8. Dates of future meetings

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 6 December 2012 in Committee Room 1. The Members' pre-meeting would now start at 9.30 am and the Committee meeting at 10.00 am.

9. Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

PART II (business taken in private)

10. Safeguarding Update (Paragraph 2 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))

Items discussed at the most recent meeting of the Families Safeguarding Sub-Committee were noted. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services informed the Committee that a protocol and guidance would be available for all Members within the next few months. Members were concerned that they were unable to challenge whether the process had been correctly applied on behalf of their constituents who had contacted them. Members understood that some information was confidential and subject to data protection and that they should not be able to influence a decision but felt that as part of their role as a Councillor they needed to check that the process had been applied correctly. The Cabinet Member undertook to bear these points in mind when drawing up the protocol.

The meeting closed at 12.45 am.

Chairman