

---

**Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.30am on Wednesday, 10 November 2021 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.**

**Present:**

*County Councillors:*

R Gooding (Chairman)

L Bowers-Flint

M Goldman

C Guglielmi (Vice Chairman)

J Henry (substitute)

J Lumley

P May (Vice Chairman)

R Playle

L Shaw

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer and Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex, were also present.

**1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and the following was noted:

- Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Durham, Fleming (for whom Councillor Henry substituted) and Wiles.
- Councillor Barker would be replacing Councillor Crow on the Committee.
- Councillor May held a post with Business Opportunities for the Physically Handicapped in Canvey Island.

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2021 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

**3. Questions from the public**

There were two questions from the public relating to agenda item 4 (the questions are reproduced in the Appendix to these minutes).

Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation answered both of the questions raised, key points were as follows:

- (i) There was no specific SEND provision located in Maldon. A service sufficiency review, which would complement the main SEND strategy, would look at capacity across local areas. There was a headteachers roundtable forum to encourage and support local mainstream schools to be more inclusive and enhance provision in mainstream schools including looking at the expertise and resource within the school workforce.
- (ii) ECC wanted to extend how it worked with local communities, parents and young people so that families also had options other than just mainstream and statutory services. Mr Holloway confirmed he would reach out to the questioners to see how ECC could further help them and link them with the Family Forum.
- (iii) An ECC aim was to ensure journey times were kept to a bare minimum.
- (iv) A key point within the SEND strategy was preparation for adulthood and provision beyond school.
- (v) Work was being undertaken with the Targeted Employment team and employers to widen opportunities for young people with SEN and to think about possible routes into employment.

#### **4. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2021 Update**

The Committee considered report PAF/15/2021 comprising a further update on the development of a draft Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy. The following people from Essex County Council attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

Councillor Tony Ball – Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability,  
Ralph Holloway – Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation.

Ralph Holloway introduced the content of the draft strategy which included aspirations for improving equity, inclusion and equal access to opportunities and outcomes for young people with SEND. He also highlighted ECC's vision for every child and young person, and the ECC pledge to act in their best interests.

During subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) Some of the content in the strategy was about addressing the serious weaknesses that were identified by the CQC/Ofsted inspection report. During Covid further discovery work had taken

place of what worked and did not work in the local system and had included conversations with the Essex Family Forum and the Multi Schools Council.

- (ii) There would be a SEND sufficiency strategy which would look at where provision was based including where the population was likely to develop in the future to determine where there could be gaps in provision. Members emphasised the importance of working closely with local communities and district councils on local planning and housing issues.
- (iii) Essex compared relatively well compared to other counties in respect of the proportion of young people aged 16-17 with SEND who were not in employment, education or training. Opportunities to fund and support new businesses that would employ young people with SEND was being looked into.
- (iv) The Department for Education would be completing a SEND review which could impact what went into the strategy, it was important to ensure the strategy was a live document that responded to changes and circumstances and there was continued engagement with families.
- (v) Outdoor learning such as Forest Schools was being explored.
- (vi) Some Members raised concerns on long journey times and the sustainability of driving young people back and forth to specialist education centres. ECC was further encouraging how specialist provision could be included within mainstream schools to meet the needs of young people which could help reduce the need to travel long distances. ECC would continue to encourage all schools to sign up to the Inclusion Policy and emphasise the benefit to the whole community in promoting a culture of inclusion. Essex Passenger Transport could help with community transport options.
- (vii) An Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) might name a local school to attend but sometimes that school could not accommodate. This could then lead to a tribunal and the child missing out on formal education during the course of the appeal process. One of ECC's aspirations was to reduce the number of tribunals being requested. A piece of work was being undertaken that looked at where a young person with an EHCP lives and where they attended school, this helped to understand why parents made a decision to go to a school that's further away than other schools.
- (viii) The main way a child was referred into the system was by a request from the parent or school for a statutory assessment,

Essex County Council had a duty to consider requests and decide whether an assessment would be completed of that young person and decide within 20 weeks whether an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) would be issued.

- (ix) It was rare that a EHCP was ceased until the young person had left education. There was a need to consider whether there could be plans that were ceased earlier if that young person's outcomes had been reached and seen as a success.
- (x) Some parents felt they had no choice but to elect to home educate their child and this would be responded to in the strategy to try and reduce the conflict that sometimes caused that decision to be made.
- (xi) There was a need to prepare young people to be independent and parents to be more resilient and to support that independence. Opportunities were being looked into to use other sites to help prepare a young person. Also, ECC had invested in residential provision in two of their special schools to support independence and preparation for adulthood.
- (xii) Members highlighted that some young people may be 'falling through the net', especially during the pandemic and the challenge of reaching out to families not engaged with schools.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that there would be a further update to the Committee prior to the SEND Strategy being published which should include a workplan.

Members suggested the strategy needed:

- more detail on the rationale for a new strategy, and acknowledge the current failings in the system;
- that the narrative should link with the outcomes of the CQC/OFSTED inspection and subsequent actions;
- to include metrics as part of the section on Ambitions, and look for outcomes beyond just formal qualifications and link with individual Education Health Care Plans. Members challenged the outcomes being sought and there was the suggestion that some objectives could include reducing the number of tribunals, making it easier for parents to navigate the local system, clearer information and communications on alternatives to an EHCP and more early intervention.
- to actively promote further partnership working particularly in the community and with districts,

- to consider community transport options

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

**5. Work Programme**

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/16/21 comprising the work programme for the committee.

**6. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 9 December 2021.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.07pm.

## **APPENDIX**

First Public Question asked at Agenda item 3: Tara Strydom

I would like to raise a question for the SEND Strategy 2021 meeting on the 10th November 2021.

I am greatly encouraged by the My Life, My Rights brochure and in particular the reference to Local Area Priorities and that Children and young people can attend their local education setting and feel confident that they will be fully included and have their needs met effectively.

There is currently no option but a 3 hour daily commute to attend a SEND school for children in Burnham and the Dengie. These children who have less stamina, concentration and physical ability are forced to use their optimum concentration and learning time in travelling to school.

Imagine the possible improvements in development, learning and behaviour, if they did not have to start their day after a 1.5 hour tiring journey.

As a result of the 1.5 hour journey home, they are excluded from every local after school activity, as they are still travelling home from school when the clubs are on and exhausted from their 15 hour weekly commute.

As a mother of a SEND 9 year old, with severe learning difficulties, I believe there are three categories to inclusion of SEND children back into their communities:

1. children with SEND that need access to very specific equipment, care, and specialists.
2. children with SEND who are able to follow the curriculum.
3. children with SEND who aren't able to follow the curriculum that need access to a specialist teacher but will benefit greatly from remaining in their community.

The first, I appreciate is very difficult to implement due to such individual needs and equipment and will take time and a vast amount of funding.

The second, is easily achievable with access to EHCP and the right support.

The third and the category my son falls into, I believe is much easier and cheaper to implement than feared! It just needs the will of the local school and a classroom! In my ideal world, my son can be part of a SEND classroom for learning but can also be included throughout the mainstream lessons for art, cooking and PE. As an example, my son can be learning to make a sandwich in the same class where his friends are learning to make lasagne and requires no additional equipment or cost to the school.

My son needs to be part of our community where he can learn basic life skills, where he will be implementing them in only a short few years, like shopping in the local supermarket. He should be allowed the same opportunity to maintain the natural friendships he has made in primary school.

This year I set up SEND in the Dengie Facebook Group and arranged events to unite the isolated SEND families of the Dengie.

On behalf of the SEND families in our community, we would like to know what discussion there has been had with secondary schools to begin implementing this and to change their attitude and current strategy to facilitate enhanced inclusivity in accordance with statutory guidance with respect to the provision of inclusive education for SEND children?

Also does the "My Life, My Rights Essex Local Area Send strategy" include rural areas such as Burnham on Crouch and the Dengie Hundred, where currently there is no local provision in the district for SEND children after Primary school - who are not on the curriculum?

Kind regards,

Tara Strydom

#### Second Public Question asked at Agenda item 3: Sandra Taylor

What are you going to do to make sure families with SEN children have access to social groups within their local community please?

I ask as I live in the Dengie and there are no social groups for SEN children to attend at all.

My son is 15yrs old and in his EHCP is meant to be trying to attend social groups and learn vital skills to help make the transition into adulthood.

Unfortunately, this is extremely hard when all the groups available are in big towns which are so hard to get to in the evenings.

I feel young people (16yrs upwards) in particular find the lack of social groups the hardest yet it's so important for them. Not everybody drives and also families have other siblings to take into account.

The Dengie would hugely benefit from the Council's support in areas like this.

There has been a lot of upset from families in the local area as of late because we feel areas like ours are forgotten about because of our location.

If children of all abilities should have equal opportunities, shouldn't that be regardless of where in Essex they live.

I would also like to ask how you would reassure parents that when their SEN children leave school, they will continue to receive support from yourselves? I ask this as quite a few social media groups I've been reading actually say that local authorities tend to quite conveniently lose their children in the system when they leave school and suddenly they are on their own and the support stops even though it's meant to carry on until they are 25yrs old. When they stop having the school as their child's other voice the parents don't have anyone else to turn to.

Thank you for your time and help.

Yours sincerely,

Sandra Taylor