
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 11am in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 13 February 2020

Present:

County Councillors:

J Chandler (Chairman)
J Baker (Vice Chairman)
G Butland (items 1-4 only)
B Egan (until 1.15pm)
C Guglielmi (until 1.15pm)
J Henry (Vice Chairman)
J Lumley
P May
M McEwan
R Pratt
P Reid
C Souter
C Weston (items 1-4 only)

County Councillor Jill Reeves (Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee) was also present until the end of agenda item 4. Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex, and Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, were present throughout.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Deakin.

Declarations of code interest were made by Councillors Pratt and Lumley (Chairmen of Governors, and Governor respectively of Primary Schools). These were noted although not considered sufficient to prevent participation in the meeting.

2. Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2020 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

4. SEND Services – Care Quality Commission/Ofsted Inspection

The Committee considered report PAF/04/20 comprising (i) a joint Inspection Report dated 17 November 2019 from the Care Quality Commission and OFSTED on SEND services in Essex, (ii) a joint briefing paper from North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (as lead for the five Essex CCGs) giving context to the inspection conclusions and initial reaction and (iii) anecdotal case studies of lived experience in relation to SEND services from Healthwatch Essex.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item:

County Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education (from 11.20am);

Clare Kershaw, Director – Education, Essex County Council (ECC);

Adrian Coggins, Head of Wellbeing and Public Health ECC;

Ed Garrett, Chief Executive, North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (NEECCG);

Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation, ECC;

Lianne Nunn, Associate Director of Nursing, NEE CCG;

During discussion the following was highlighted and/or noted:

- (i) Reforms under the Childrens and Families Act 2014 placed a statutory duty on Education, Health and local authority to work together to deliver the requirements of the legislation;
- (ii) Government had recognised the extra financial cost to deliver the reforms and some further short-term funding had been provided;
- (iii) OFSTED had deemed that the Essex self-evaluation undertaken before the inspection was accurate and officers felt that no 'surprises' had come out from the inspection;
- (iv) The CQC/OFSTED had judged the pace of change and reform to local services had been too slow although acknowledging that it had accelerated since 2017. The acceleration did align with the timing of a leadership restructure at ECC;
- (v) Agencies were required to respond to the inspection through the submission of a written statement of action to the CQC/Ofsted by the end of March 2020. Essex Family Forum would be contributing to the submission;
- (vi) Agencies would increase prioritisation of the issues raised in the inspection report;
- (vii) The inspection had re-confirmed that there was inconsistency of services across Essex and that development of a joint commissioning framework would ensure a 'common offer';

- (viii) Partnership working could be difficult when partners may have different priorities. There had been challenges in co-ordinating work across five CCG areas and the nomination of North East CCG now as lead for the five of them was seen as a positive development and welcomed by ECC;
- (ix) There was significant over-identification of moderate Learning difficulties – this was at a level considerably higher than any other local authority area. ECC had already recognised this prior to the inspection but had not addressed the issue;
- (x) The process for obtaining Educational Care Health Plans (ECHP) process was not working properly for everyone. However, it was important to recognise that families should still be able to receive support whilst awaiting formal assessment;
- (xi) There was no consistent or single approach to speech and language therapies. ECC had jointly commissioned children's services in West Essex with West Essex CCG, which included additional speech and therapy services, and they were keen to support other CCGs in sharing that learning and benefits of that commissioning structure;
- (xii) It had been recognised during the inspection that not all schools had signed the Inclusion Statement and that this process needed to be re-energised;
- (xiii) The number of Tribunal appeals were high. Partners were looking to establish a better system that can resolve concerns before they need to get to a tribunal. There was ongoing work with advocacy groups to agree a new protocol to enable more discussion rather than families going straight to tribunal;
- (xiv) A concept of a SEN navigator had been agreed and there was ongoing work to ascertain if this should be an actual person or digital platform (or both) so as to assist families better understanding the system and processes;
- (xv) Links with Healthwatch Essex needed to be further strengthened so as to link it in more with relevant strategic governance groups;
- (xvi) ECC were talking to stakeholders to clarify the complementary role school nurses should play in contributing to and promoting public health.

Conclusion:

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their attendance. The following actions were **agreed**:

- (i) A draft of the local statement of action would be shared with Councillor Baker, as the Committee's lead member on this issue, ahead of submission to the CQC/Ofsted;
- (ii) The committee to consider seeking feedback from families, possibly through visiting the Essex Family Forum;
- (iii) A further update on the responses and actions being taken would be scheduled for July 2020 to align with the already planned update item on the SEN service restructure to be given by Mr Holloway. The timing of further updates beyond that may align with the submission of progress reports to regulators and the DfE;
- (iv) That officers be requested to investigate formalising the requirement to enter into the Inclusion Statement as a pre-condition of appointing Head Teachers for new schools.

The meeting adjourned at 12.45 and reconvened at 12.52pm. Councillors Butland, Reeves and Weston left before the meeting reconvened.

5.

Adult Community Learning – update

The Committee considered report PAF/05/20 providing an update on the Adult Community Learning service. Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education and Katherine Burns, Adult Community Learning Principal, joined the meeting to introduce the item. During discussion the following were highlighted, acknowledged and/or noted:

- (i) ACL activity had a social investment value with savings to the wider health and social care system which was difficult to quantify.
- (ii) A new national framework to measure outcomes was being developed to facilitate future benchmarking with six identified high-level outcomes – health and wellbeing, employment and skills, attitudes, aptitudes and confidence, integration and inclusion, creativity and culture and skills for life transitions.
- (iii) There were nine ACL centres across the county. The last OFSTED inspection had asked the service to assess whether learners felt safe in their journeys to and from ACL centres. There could be greater use of libraries to host future activities;
- (iv) Approximately 130 outreach centres (such as schools) were also used for some family learning activities.
- (v) The ACL service were looking at how to further motivate those with low literacy skills to undertake courses.

- (vi) Members encouraged further communications exercises to highlight and promote ACL courses.
- (vii) Discounts were available for some courses for those on low incomes. However, it was acknowledged that course prices could adversely impact the broader outcomes being sought for ACL.
- (viii) Family learning courses were open to any carer of children.
- (ix) At the moment the only quality assurance undertaken was via self-assessment against the OFSTED new education framework which was submitted once a year and subsequently used by OFSTED for their future inspections.
- (x) Future OFSTED inspections would assess against three components – the intent of the curriculum offering and the learner, secondly the implementation (where doing it and how much offering) and thirdly measuring the impact of the intent.

Conclusion

The following actions were agreed:

- (i) Recommendation – Community Learning Team to further promote that grandparents could attend family learning courses.
- (ii) A copy of the latest ACL self-assessment to be provided.
- (iii) To consider a future visit to an ACL centre.
- (iv) A further update to focus on the new OFSTED inspection framework and also the measurement of the impact against the national outcomes framework once it was established.

Councillor Gooding and Katherine Burns were thanked for their attendance and then left the meeting.

6. Work Programme

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/06/20 comprising the current work programme for the Committee.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be on Thursday 12 March 2020.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.29pm.

Chairman