

---

**Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 9.45am on Thursday, 13 October 2022 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.**

**Present:**

*County Councillors:*

R Gooding (Chairman)

S Barker

M Durham

J Fleming

M Goldman

I Grundy

C Guglielmi

J Lumley (via Zoom)

A McGurran

R Playle

L Shaw

W Stamp

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.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors May and Wiles.

**2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2022 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

**3 Questions from the public**

There were none.

**4 Domestic Abuse update**

The Committee considered report PAF/17/22 and the following people attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Councillor Beverley Egan – Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Early Years,
- Clare Burrell – Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy.

The Committee received a presentation from Clare Burrell which highlighted the impact of the new statutory duties since they had come into place in April 2021, improvements that had been made in terms of support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and developments that had been happening across the local domestic abuse partnership.

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

- (i) 16 Days of Action was taking place between 25 November and 9 December 2022. This took place nationally and supported the end to violence against women and girls. A conference was being held in Essex around stalking and coercive and controlling behaviour.
- (ii) The vast majority of the £2.7m of government funding received by the Council for 2021/22 to help fulfil its statutory commissioning duties had been allocated. The Council was not aware what the allocation would be for subsequent years, if any, which made it difficult to plan and commission long-term.
- (iii) The specific Government funding for domestic abuse could only be used on directly supporting people and not to increase capacity such as accommodation. One way some of the funding was being used was by trying to think more innovatively about enabling people to continue to stay in their own accommodation where possible and safe to do so; an example of this was working with a digital team as currently technology was a disadvantage for some victims.
- (iv) A Whole Housing Approach was being promoted with district and borough councils as part of providing support to get the capacity required into the local system to support victims when they need to leave their own accommodation.
- (v) All providers of domestic abuse accommodation in Essex had received an increase of funding, including refuges, to be able to support victims. Specialist therapeutic work was being funded.
- (vi) Increased levels of reporting may have been at least partly due to the service being more accessible and that it had been promoted.
- (vii) Victims of coercive behaviour did not always realise they were experiencing domestic abuse. Within the partnership there would be workforce development to help staff on the frontline spot signs of coercive control.

- 
- (viii) Initiatives to support providers to increase the number of refuge places available continued, including for men.
  - (ix) Risk assessments were undertaken when victims stayed in their homes. The assessments were reviewed on a regular basis and were regularly updated with victims to ensure it was still appropriate for them to be at home or whether the risk had increased.
  - (x) Domestic abuse was becoming more prevalent among young people and so a lot of early intervention work was taking place around supporting young people to understand what a healthy relationship looked like. Funding was also used to support children and young people who had witnessed domestic abuse.
  - (xi) The different cultures of some ethnic minorities and refugees, Gypsy and Traveller communities was highlighted by some members. There had been an increase in reporting from these groups which may have partly due to more targeted communications. No specific work had been done with the refugee council, and it was agreed this would be raised and discussed with the Board.
  - (xii) The Discovery project had conducted surveys and interviews with perpetrators, victims, young people, and professionals and the report was due to be delivered in January 2023. The findings would be presented to the Domestic Abuse Board to consider and to start looking at how they will design the service offer moving forward.
  - (xiii) An item for discussion could be taken to the Essex Faith Covenant, work had already been undertaken regarding representation on the Board.

### Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that:

- Further data on how domestic abuse cases broke down by area would be provided to the Committee. Data was compiled on a quarterly basis.
- An information leaflet/card would be circulated to food banks before Christmas.
- Information cards for COMPASS would be sent to members if this had not already been done.

- As part of a discussion around the assessment/criteria for deciding if someone can stay at home and the availability of sanctuary schemes for safety, it was advised that there was a detailed safety/risk assessment planning process and an example anonymised safety assessment plan would be shared with the Committee.
- It would be looked into whether support was provided to those victims who were directed to commercial rental market.
- During discussion about coercive behaviour there was reference to private legal proceeding in family court being brought against victims inappropriately. It was advised that this had been taken to various governance boards to look at and there would be a further update on this next time.
- The link for the Conference taking place in Essex during the 16 Days of Action would be circulated to the Committee.
- Opportunities to work with the Refugee Council would be raised with the Domestic Abuse Board.
- The impact of Court backlogs was discussed regularly at the Domestic Abuse Board. It was agreed an update would be provided on the current situation.
- Figures showed a rise of repeat victims. It was indicated that more detail could be provided on this from the Police.
- That clarification on Domestic Abuse Crime and Domestic Abuse Non-crime would be provided.
- A representative from the Police Fire and Crime Commissioners Office had offered to attend a future session.

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 11.15am until 11.30am.

## **5 Call in: Cabinet Member Decision FP/490/08/22 Closure of Essex Teacher Training Programme**

The Committee considered report PAF/18/22 comprising of a call-in of a proposed Cabinet Member Decision made on 22 September 2022 to close the Essex Teacher Training Programme.

Councillor Gooding declared that he had been the responsible Cabinet Member at the time that the Essex Teacher Training Programme was

transferred from Essex Education Services. Councillor Durham declared his daughter was a teacher in the Essex Teacher Training Programme.

The reasons for the call-in

On 27 September 2022 the decision was called-in by Councillor Scordis with the support of Councillor McGurran. At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Scordis (who joined the meeting via Zoom) outlined his reasons for the call-in:

- (i) Members had not been given any advance notice or briefing on this or a chance to scrutinise the decision.
- (ii) The decision being made at a time when the country faced a national shortage of teacher trainees which could make that problem worse and have a detrimental effect on the teaching quality in Essex.
- (iii) Essex County Council had known about the failed Ofsted report for a while and he had concerns around why the decision seemingly had taken so long to be taken.
- (iv) Would like to see the decision and the decision-making process scrutinised properly and ensure that lessons were learnt.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor McGurran outlined his reasons for supporting the call-in:

- (i) The lack of consultation with Members was a concern and that Members had been deprived of any opportunity to scrutinise the decision in any meaningful way.
- (ii) He suggested that there had been a number of opportunities when scrutiny Members could have been consulted. In particular, he highlighted that some quality issues had been raised soon after responsibility had been transferred from Essex Education Services.
- (iii) He was concerned that early opportunities to respond to concerns about quality had not been taken.
- (iv) He suggested that the decision had effectively been taken in April and sought clarification on some approval sign-off dates within the paperwork.

Cabinet Member response to the call-in

Thereafter, at the request of the Chairman, Councillor Ball, Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability,

responded to the issues raised in the call-in notice with support from the following officers:

- Clare Kershaw - Director of Education
- Anita Kemp – Head of Strategy Planning and Performance
- Jonathan Boddam-Whetham – Cabinet Office

The following key points were made in response to the call-in:

- (i) Public scrutiny would not have been appropriate but the Cabinet Member acknowledged that, with hindsight, a private scrutiny session could have taken place.
- (ii) There was no evidence to suggest that this decision would affect teacher recruitment within Essex. There were other training providers with which the 36 candidates had now found training places.
- (iii) Felt unable to provide a good quality service to the candidates signing up.
- (iv) From February 2020 the priority within the service had been to respond to the pandemic and try to support children's education and remote learning which needed the full leadership skills of the senior Education team in conjunction with Public Health during that time.
- (v) Following the Ofsted inspection, an external review was commissioned which concluded that the service was not going to get re-accreditation.
- (vi) 36 candidates had been signed up to the service, however 93 candidates were needed to make the service viable. In terms of financial sustainability there had been the option to further promote the service to try and increase the numbers or run the service at a loss.
- (vii) The Government had made it clear with the new re-accreditation requirement, that in September 2023 they would be looking for more of a school-led system.
- (viii) The national position was to move towards Teacher School Hubs, with the view was that local authorities were becoming a minority provider in terms of delivery of initial teacher training. The national context was also a factor in the decision being proposed.

Issues raised by the Committee

---

During subsequent discussion the following clarifications were given and/or points acknowledged and noted:

- (i) The Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment (ECIA) was submitted on the 27 April 2022 which some members pointed out was before the date of the Ofsted report. Officers confirmed the ECIA had started to be written in response to the review and the Ofsted inspection as the outcome was known in February 2022 but had yet to be published. Officers confirmed that the date of the ECIA stated should be August 2022 and not April 2022.
- (ii) Members expressed their concerns and frustrations that a private session was not brought to the Committee before the decision was taken.
- (iii) Some members suggested that the report of the external review should have been included in the paperwork.
- (iv) Attempts had been made to try and secure an external reviewer of the service during the first stages of the pandemic but this had not been possible and so it was Autumn 2021 before the external review had been undertaken. The Improvement Board was put in place as a result of the review and some 'quick wins' had been achievable but the required systemic improvements could not be completed in good time for re-accreditation.
- (v) There was a shortage of people coming forward seeking teacher training from all providers and not just Essex Teacher Training.
- (vi) Members raised concerns that it looked as though the decision had effectively been taken on 8 April 2022 when it had been decided the Council would not be re-applying for re-accreditation. The Cabinet Member reassured Members that the decision was not taken until September 2022 but acknowledged that some degree of a direction of travel had started before that and there had to be consultations undertaken prior to the decision being made.
- (vii) An Improvement Board, with the support of the external review, had looked at whether the service could meet the criteria for re-accreditation in May/June 2022, and determined that the service would not be able to present the necessary evidence and successfully apply for re-accreditation; this meant the Council was already working under the understanding that the service would not be able to continue beyond July 2023 in any case.
- (viii) The Cabinet Member confirmed officers consulted with him from the beginning and highlighted that there were problems in seeking re-accreditation and that a decision was likely to be needed at some point on the future of the service. He reassured

the Committee that he was comfortable that he was consulted at the correct time and had made the right decision.

- (ix) The proposed decision had been added to the Forward Plan on 18 August 2022. Members highlighted that the Forward Plan often did not contain much information on proposed decisions.
- (x) The Teacher Training services was a non-statutory service.
- (xi) There were four redundancies and all other staff had been redeployed.

#### Motions proposed and the decision of the Committee

The Committee had the following courses of action open to it:

- (i) Allow the proposed decision to be implemented without further delay;
- (ii) Refer the proposed decision back to the decision taker setting out in writing its concerns; or
- (iii) Refer the matter to Full Council, also with a record of its concerns.

Councillor Guglielmi moved the following motion, which was seconded by Councillor Grundy and when put to the meeting was agreed with eleven votes in favour and none against with the Chairman abstaining:

#### Resolved:

1. To allow the decision to be implemented without further delay.
2. That the Scrutiny Board be asked to consider (i) holding a lessons learnt discussion on the chronology and governance path of this particular decision and (ii) to determine an appropriate process with the Cabinet for advance notice and briefing on future issues and proposed decisions including the use of private briefing sessions where deemed necessary.

[Clerks post-meeting note: It has been advised following the meeting that the Scrutiny Board already have a consideration of the Call-In process and how this can best be managed on their work programme. It is likely that the more general element of this resolution (rather than the 'lessons learnt' discussion in relation to this particular decision) can be addressed via this existing item.]

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.



**6 Work Programme**

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/19/22 comprising the work programme for the committee.

**7 Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 10 November 2022.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.46pm.

**Chairman**