

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD AT AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 10  
SEPTEMBER 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

\*present

The following Members were also present:

Councillor A Brown  
Councillor K Bobbin  
Councillor M Maddocks

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:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr D Blackwell	
Cllr R Boyce	
Cllr A Wood	
Richard Carson	

## 2. Refugee Situation

The Chairman asked Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Adults & Children, to address the meeting on recent developments regarding the Refugee Situation. He welcomed Cllr Madden and Helen Lincoln, Executive Director for People Operations, to the meeting.

Cllr Madden reminded Members that the Government had resolved to allow 20,000 refugees into the country, a number of whom would be coming to Essex. These will come from the camps and will probably enter on the basis of the Government's vulnerable persons relocation scheme, which is already in place. It involves the UN High Commissioner for Refugees identifying suitable

individuals, and the Home Office overseeing the entry process. Refugees have a support worker for their first year and are able to claim benefits (unlike ordinary asylum seekers) and will be able to apply for permanent settlement in the UK after 5 years. Funding details are still awaited.

Ms Lincoln added that David Wilde had been appointed as Executive Director on this. The response from the districts has been good. And offers have also been received from voluntary organisations. Particular issues for local authorities will be accommodation and schooling. The scale is uncertain at the moment, but the County Council has much experience and planning has already started.

Although it was hoped that most children will be able to stay with their families, the existing fostering system will be used if necessary, with all of the customary safeguarding components in place. Mr Wilde is setting up a project manager to deal with queries. Cllr Madden intended to keep Members informed.

In response to a Member's suggestions that the Government's response to this situation was inadequate, and that Essex should be making efforts to publicise the importance of its actions, Cllr Madden pointed out that he would deal with this from a humanitarian point of view, rather than a political one. The financial situation is not clear after the first year, but the comprehensive spending review in November may alter this. He has already written to the Home Secretary and the Treasury about unaccompanied asylum seekers and will bring this situation into that debate. He also acknowledged the need to include Communications in the process and confirmed he would take this message back to David Wilde. He also hoped all parties would come together in this scheme.

The Chairman acknowledged the work being done and reminded the meeting that the Committee needed to be sure that everything is being done appropriately. He thanked the Cabinet Member and asked to be kept up to date on developments.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

There were no new declarations of interest.

### **4. Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee meeting of 9 July 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

Regarding progress on the NHS Success Regime (Minute 7), the Cabinet Member for Adults & Children informed Members that NHS England had not yet appointed a Project Manager. The Leader had written to the NHS local trusts, to enquire about progress and intended to write to the Head of NHS England, to ask why there was a delay.

### **5. Questions from the Public**

There were no questions registered from Members of the Public.

## **6. Meals on Wheels**

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Adults & Children and Louise Hall, Head of Commissioning, Vulnerable People, to the meeting and invited them to give Members an update on the new arrangements regarding the provision of the Meals on Wheels service.

Ms Kershaw pointed out that 141 individuals had been affected by the closure of the Colchester depot. 95% of these are over 65 and 82% over 75; 76% has no other support from ECC and 68% are female. Every one was contacted:

- 60 of these opted to make other arrangements;

- 39, the most vulnerable, are being dealt with by social care teams and are expected to have a new regime, with daily visits;

- 8 people have physical/sensory impairments and ECC are working with them;

- 18 are working with Community Agents, to find more local solutions; leaving 16 individuals with whom ECC is still exploring options.

Rural areas have proved more challenging, but the provision is there. Some additional local providers have been discovered. Now they are in the process of ensuring not only that alternative providers are aware of the necessary protocols, but also that prices have not risen.

There have been some problems with getting a full complement of Community Agents, particularly in Colchester and Brentwood; their work is being covered by neighbouring agents while the situation is resolved. Overall, the introduction of community agents has been very successful.

In response to a question on feedback on the impact of the changes, Ms Hall pointed out that some people had found receiving a meal at a set time each day quite restricting, as it did not encourage them to explore other options. Where other avenues were explored, the outcome was very positive, and she intended to share some very good case studies in the final report.

Even where the van delivery service has continued as before, many of the providers are now locally based, which means that meals are locally produced, which tends to improve their quality; and also any transport problems, such as those caused by poor weather conditions, are likely to be reduced.

The Cabinet Member asked Members to let his office know of any problems as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Ms Hall for their contribution.

## **7. Educational Attainment Task & Finish Group**

Members received Report PAF/16/15, the final Report of the Educational Attainment Task & Finish Group. The Chairman welcomed Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning, and Clare Kershaw, Head of Commissioning, Education & Lifelong Learning, to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member drew Members' attention to his response to the Task & Finish Group's Report, which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting.

Members also noted the provisional performance indicators for 2015. It was particularly noted that Essex had made improvements under every indicator and those schools rated good or outstanding had reached 80% in both the primary and secondary sectors.

Several points and certain issues were raised:

- Recruitment is a problem, both for positions within management teams and ordinary classroom teachers. This is a perennial problem, shared with other authorities. Given that good leadership is crucial to a school's performance, there is much pressure on those considering becoming head teachers, which may put some off. Essex does run a "Heads in Waiting" programme, aimed at deputy head teachers who aspire to headship. But more strategic thinking is required and it was suggested that any progress being made in this area should be reported back to the Committee, in due course
- With regard to ordinary class teachers, Essex is looking to encourage people new to the profession as well as former teachers back into teaching. One means was in effect an apprenticeship scheme, providing opportunities for people to work in classrooms, being mentored by existing staff. It provides valuable classroom experience early on and seems to improve retention rates among those qualifying
- Concern was expressed over certain aspects of teaching, eg the amount of bureaucracy, the constant scrutiny, public deprecation of the profession and poor financial incentives. The Cabinet Member acknowledged these and pointed out that Essex strived to provide full support to its teachers
- Regarding standards in schools, Essex monitors the performance of all Essex schools, including academies and free schools, and is especially diligent regarding underperforming schools. Essex does try to work alongside the academies, even though they have no responsibility for them. Essex also works with Dr Coulson, in his Government role, with multi-school trusts, where appropriate
- Long-term planning is seen as important; demand on school places is rising at present in primary schools, which will work through to secondary schools in due course. However, it is not easy to see what will happen in several years' time, eg whether this increase will fall away or be sustained.
- School Governors were another group of people important to the running of schools; they need to have a wide range of skills to fulfil their roles. A small, well qualified group of focused individuals would probably be most effective, but it was by no means clear on how best to achieve this
- The work-readiness of pupils was noted as important, ie providing students with those "soft skills" sought by employers, as well as academic ones. In the Cabinet Member's view, this was not only a school issue, but one for the community as well.

One final point was made by a Member that, although matters had improved in several areas, and the Cabinet Member could feel pleased with certain outcomes, there still remained much scope for improvement and the Committee

was not taking a negative approach in raising these issues but was fulfilling its scrutinising function, in order that the provision of education would improve across the County.

The Chairman acknowledged this point; he felt congratulations were in order on the level of improvement to date, but Members would continue to monitor the situation and would want to see further improvements in future.

Cllr McEwen thanked all those who had contributed to the report. She particularly acknowledged the input of the Scrutiny and Committee Officers, as there had been an unexpected level of work involved.

## **8. Residential and Domiciliary Care Review**

Members received Report PAF/17/15, a scoping document relating to the establishment of a Task & Finish to consider the provision of residential and domiciliary care in Essex.

The Chairman intimated he intended to chair the Task & Finish Group and the following Members were noted as volunteering to be members of the Group: Cllr Gibbs, Cllr McEwen and Cllr Whitehouse.

The Chairman pointed out that the Group might divide into sub-committees, as the brief was very wide. An inaugural meeting would likely be held later in the month, with Cllr Maddocks.

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

Members received PAF/18/15, the Committee's Tracker and Work programme.

It was pointed out that the Carers Strategy Task & Finish Group had produced their final report, but had decided to continue their scrutiny function, meeting on a quarterly basis.

The programme was noted.

## **10. Date of next meeting**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: 10.30 am on Thursday 12 November 2015. Venue: Committee Room 1 at County Hall.

Members also noted that Thursday 8 October would be a Members Activity Day and a site visit to Mistley Village was planned.

The meeting closed at 12:07 pm.

Chairman