

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD AT AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 9 JULY
2015**

County Councillors:

* I Grundy (Chairman)	* T Higgins
D Blackwell	* P Honeywood
R Boyce	* R Howard
* J Chandler	A Jackson
* M Danvers	* M Maddocks
* K Gibbs	* M McEwen
* A Goggin	* A Wood
* C Guglielmi	

Non-Elected Voting Members:

* Mr R Carson	Ms M Uzzell
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*present

The following Members were also present:

Councillor K Bobbin
Councillor R Gadsby

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 M Maddocks
Cllr A Jackson	

2. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Gadsby declared a personal interest as a Deputy Cabinet Member to Cllr Madden.

Cllr Higgins declared a personal interest in that her daughter works as a volunteer at a women's refuge.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee meeting of 21 May 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

4. Questions from the Public

There were no questions registered from Members of the Public.

5. Meals on Wheels

Members received Report PAF/12/15, which set out the recommendations for the new community meals service, commonly known as “meals on wheels”. The Chairman welcomed Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Adults & Children, Louise Hall, Head of Commissioning, Vulnerable People, Sean Chadney, Senior Commissioning Officer, and Rhona Gilder, Community Engagement Officer, to the meeting and invited the Cabinet Member to introduce the item.

Cllr Madden was pleased to have the opportunity to explain the proposals to the Committee and wanted Members’ feedback.

The current contract with Sodexho would terminate in September. Given Sodexho’s stated position, that they would not continue to provide the service at the current price (£4.79 per meal), the Council had three options: 1, to cease the contract; 2, to renew it in full (at greater cost); or 3, to agree a new contract with reduced coverage. The Cabinet had agreed the last approach, which involved Sodexho running the service from a smaller operating base. This would impact 120 service users, who would have to be provided for by alternative provision. Entering upon this new contract for one year would give the Council the opportunity to assess new ways of providing a service, before embarking on a more long-term approach from October 2016.

All current users have been reassured that a service will continue, and the 120 have been told they will be visited. Substantial involvement of the voluntary sector is envisaged, and several of these are already lined up, along with social workers, to provide a service. But other options may be explored, such as creating lunch clubs. The aim will be to provide at least 15 minutes’ contact time per visit, with the use of frozen meals as a contingency.

Cllr Madden pointed out that it should not be seen in isolation, but as a part of an improved wider provision.

Several points were made and issues raised:

- This might be the only contact some of these service users receive in the course of a day, so it must provide a proper service and not be seen to be achieved “on the cheap”. 15 minutes did not seem long. The Cabinet Member reminded the Committee that this was a pilot scheme, which would fully embrace localism. Each area would be able to take its own approach. It was noted that 15 minutes was longer than what was achieved at present, as a certain number of meals had to be provided within a certain timeframe, on a commercial basis. Moving on, the current requirement for Sodexho to make deliveries between 12 and 2 will continue, and new routes are currently being tested, to ensure this is feasible
- Community agents will endeavour to provide links to clubs. It will not be a case of finding new volunteers, but using people and resources that already exist

- Specialist meals will be provided at no extra cost to users
- The club approach may not be suitable for everyone, as some people prefer to be private
- The perception of these changes may not be positive, and the Council should ensure that the media, local communities and MPs are kept updated.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and his team for their input and suggested that the Committee should receive an update on the implementation of the scheme in September. He added that getting the message across was important, and suggested that Members should get involved in this process, especially at the Parish level.

6. Domestic Abuse

Members received Report PAF/13/15, which provided an update on progress being made against the priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan, in respect of Domestic Abuse. The Chairman welcomed Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Adults & Children, Sheila Norris, Director for Integrated Commissioning and Vulnerable People, and Peter Fairley, Head of Policy & Strategy, People Policy and Strategy Resourcing Unit.

Cllr Madden provided some background information on the paper. For some years, the Government has been developing a national strategy relating to domestic abuse. Several years ago, there had been three Cabinet Members involved in different aspects relating to domestic abuse and Cllr Madden had suggested that it would be better for it to be the responsibility of just one Cabinet Member, especially in the wake of certain tragic events that had recently taken place in the County. Furthermore, around this time, the new Essex Police and Crime Commissioner took up his role, and a new Chief Constable for Essex was appointed. All three made domestic violence a priority and the Essex Domestic Abuse Strategic Board was created, chaired by Nick Alston.

He briefly drew attention to the main areas of activity covered in the report:

- Support services for victims. A number of new positions have been created: Individual Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), who are case workers supporting victims. There are now over 20 of these, spread across the County
- Community based services for victims (ie Refuges). A new approach has been taken, with services being commissioned, and more emphasis going on an outcomes based use of funding
- Information sharing. A multi-agency group, based at County Hall, works together to provide a more informed approach to decision making. This includes representatives of the Police, health, housing, the probation service and social workers. It covers Southend and Thurrock as well
- Education and prevention. The Risk Avert Program is being piloted, and resources are being put into schools to help teachers identify children at risk
- Perpetrator Programme. This has recently been strengthened, forming a single cross-agency working group with the Essex Criminal Justice Board. Essex is one of 4 areas nationally piloting a new approach to perpetrator

change programmes. The first Pilots will begin in September 2015, in Tendring and Colchester

- Safer Accommodation. Progress has been made recently, to improve information gathered and to bring a more unified approach to the problems. The districts, boroughs and city are working together more
- Early intervention in health settings. There has been much progress here, with a work plan being implemented across greater Essex, and several specific health based posts being created

Mrs Norris stressed that the aim was to take a more outcomes based approach overall, ensuring that the changes being made did actually make a difference to people's lives. She pointed out that she expected the number of incidents reported to go up, but that the number of repeat victims to go down. She added that another emphasis was to enable victims to remain secure in their own homes.

Several points were made and issues raised:

- The broader, community based approach included those groups of victims who had traditionally been less well identified, eg men, the disabled and the elderly
- The education of children from homes where there was abuse often suffered. Not only were efforts being made to encourage awareness of these issues in schools, but the effective dealing with problems with education, mental health and social issues all formed part of the service's measured outcomes
- Number of cases. The figures Essex uses are based on Police data and suggest around 20,000 reported cases per annum. However, national findings suggest that the reported cases only represent approximately one third of what is actually going on. Cllr Madden agreed to provide the actual figures for Essex to Members
- Family Solutions. Essex extended the original criteria initiated by the Government, to include more families. Now there are 8 teams across Essex. We have been approached by other authorities, as we seem to be keeping figures low, with all the accompanying benefits as well. Much is carried out on a local basis
- Refuges. Cllr Madden would not encourage Members generally to make contact with refuges, although he acknowledged that some Members had become involved with them, and some carried out voluntary work. He pointed out that refuges were in effect the individuals' homes, therefore Members should await an invitation, rather than be seen to be pushing themselves forward, in any way. He confirmed that there were processes in place to ensure the maintaining of appropriate practices within refuges
- Sharing information. Cllr Madden stressed the need to share information; this was critical. He pointed out that in serious case reviews, the lack of information sharing will always crop up as a major factor leading to the death of a victim. He suggested that if any Member was alerted to anything by a constituent, at a surgery for instance, they should inform the office of the Cabinet Member (unless it was an obvious case requiring a 999 call). Victims of abuse would often speak in coded language and expect their interlocutor to pick up the intended meaning.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Madden and his team; he was encouraged by the good work being carried out and by the way certain parties seemed to be coming together.

Cllrs Honeywood and Howard left the meeting at this point.

7. NHS Success Regime

Members received Report PAF/14/15, which provided an update on progress being made against the priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan, in respect of Domestic Abuse. The Chairman welcomed again Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Adults & Children, Sheila Norris, Director for Integrated Commissioning and Vulnerable People, and Peter Fairley, Head of Policy & Strategy, People Policy and Strategy Resourcing Unit.

Mr Fairley brought out the main features of the scheme. The NHS Success Regime aims to provide certain "challenged" authorities with increased support, with reference to their entire health and care economy. Essex had been identified as having challenges in a number of areas – operational, quality, financial sustainability and with its workforce; but this did not mean that the services were failing. Although Essex was relatively healthy and wealthy, and parts of its health and care system were good, there were particular issues:

- Three of the five acute trusts have financial problems and all acute hospitals have performance issues
- The population is growing and is disproportionately older than the national average
- Primary care, which is under pressure, with regard to numbers of current GPs and likely numbers over the next few years
- There are clear interdependencies between the health and care sectors.

Consequently, a Programme Director will be appointed to work with all parties. It was still unclear how the Regime would work, but they were due to have a meeting the following week, when they would find out.

The Council should not regard this as a takeover, but should welcome it as an opportunity for its services. The manner of engagement with the process would be critical.

Several points were made and issues raised:

- In response to the suggestion that the real root of the problem is funding, the Cabinet Member pointed out that the current system is not working, and this initiative gave Essex the opportunity to consider the system in its entirety. He certainly had no intention that this should be a meaningless exercise; he would be vocal at the meeting next week and he hoped that the others involved would also be clear in their views. There were certain issues that needed to be addressed, such as how to find ways to help people return home when they come out of hospital, rather than then have to go into residential homes. The Council approach must be positive in trying to work alongside others to achieve solutions
- The fact that health and social services had been set up as separate organisations had always been a problem. One outcome here should be to bring them together. This will take the services further along where they

want to go already. It should enable an integrated approach to areas such as learning disability, CAMHS, and the frail and elderly

- Essex had already contacted Devon, as another area submitting to this regime. It has similar demographic and financial issues, and a large number of hospitals. The intention is to contact Cumbria as well, and to establish regular contact with both these authorities, when their respective criteria are clear
- The Cabinet Member pointed out that he had intended to carry out a review of the entire system in any case; the introduction of this Regime could be seen as a bonus
- The Cabinet Member agreed to take forward concerns expressed by one Member, with regard to the engagement of the NHS in the planning process, when new schemes were being considered
- Another concern expressed related to the provision of access to all in hospitals. The Cabinet Member noted this and agreed to take it forward, although this might not fall within the Success Regime
- The Cabinet Member was reminded that the patient was the ultimate number priority, and he should keep this in mind throughout the process
- In response to Members' concerns expressed about the state of certain existing hospital facilities, as well as the hope that the Regime will be able to learn from services that are being well run, the Cabinet Member reminded Members that all aspects of the system as a whole would be under scrutiny, particularly with regard to primary care
- This is a three-year process. HOSC will receive regular feedback on progress made, but some arrangement will also be made for Members of People and Families to receive feedback as well

The Chairman thanked Cllr Madden for the update. He acknowledged the challenges ahead and agreed that the Committee should receive some kind of feedback in due course.

Cllr Guglielmi left the meeting at this point.

8. Educational Attainment Task & Finish Group

Members received an introduction to the draft Report of the Educational Attainment Task & Finish Group (PAF/15/15).

Cllr McEwen acknowledged the Task & Finish Group's thanks to all involved in the production of the report, from the contributors to the Scrutiny Officer, for pulling the findings together to produce the actual report.

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that the version circulated had been the first draft (about 50 pages); the second version was now ready and had 250 pages, as it included several appendices providing educational data. There was also an additional recommendation and action relating to recruitment and retention of staff.

The Recommendation:

"Where staff shortages exist schools be encouraged to pool their resources and employ subject specialists to work for a cluster of schools."

The Action:

“More work is required to understand the nature, level, location and causes of teacher recruitment and retention issues.”

An additional sentence has also been added to the 5th Recommendation, relating to bringing all schools up to the level of the top quartile for achievement:

“It should also set the ambition that the improvements already seen in Essex in the secondary sector are matched in the primary sector.”

The draft had been seen by all contributors and responses from them to the Recommendations had been wholly positive. The second draft included a response from Dr Tim Coulson, Regional Schools Commissioner for the East of England and North-East London at the DFE, which also included two additional recommendations that the Group might wish to consider. Although included in the written material, these related to academies, so lay beyond the remit of the Task & Finish Group.

The Cabinet Member would be formally presented with the Report at the September Committee meeting, when he would give his response.

A few comments/observations were made:

- It would be interesting to compare academies’ performance against that of local authority schools, as it could help both parties learn from it. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to follow this up with the Education Team
- Maintaining teachers in post has a very positive impact on outcomes
- The particular success of the “Harlow model”
- The high numbers of teaching staff coming from overseas, which is a recent development.

Having noted the comments made, the Committee endorsed the Report.

9. Date of next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: 10.00 am on Thursday 10 September 2015. Venue: Committee Room 1 at County Hall.

The meeting closed at 1:00 pm.

Chairman