
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 9.30am on Wednesday, 11 January 2023 in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:

Cllr Ray Gooding (Chairman)
Cllr Susan Barker
Cllr Jude Deakin (substitute)
Cllr Mark Durham
Cllr Jane Fleming
Cllr Ian Grundy
Cllr Carlo Guglielmi (Vice Chairman)
Cllr June Lumley (via Zoom)
Cllr Peter May (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Aidan McGurran
Cllr Mark Platt (substitute)
Cllr Ross Playle
Cllr Laureen Shaw

Members of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee:

Cllr Paul Gadd (via Zoom)
Cllr Alan Goggin
Cllr Paul Honeywood (via Zoom)
Cllr Dan Land
Cllr James Newport (via Zoom)
Cllr Mike Steel
Cllr Holly Whitbread

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer and Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer 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 Cllr Marie Goldman for whom Cllr Jude Deakin was substituting, Cllr Andrew Wiles for whom Cllr Mark Platt was substituting, Cllr Wendy Stamp and Cllr June Lumley who however joined the meeting via Zoom.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2022 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

- Minute 4, under bullet point xviii – replace ‘Members challenged if such closures would adversely impact the implementation of the

Strategy and achieving outcomes.’ with ‘Members challenged that such closures would adversely impact the implementation of the Strategy and achieving outcomes.’

3 Questions from the public

There were two questions from the public relating to agenda item 4 which were asked at the end of the introductory presentation for agenda item 4.

First Public Question: Andy Abbott

With no mention in the current strategy, can people in Essex be assured that the so-called "community libraries" plan has been dropped?

Second Public Question: Katy Vargas

Could we have a plan for the older children/pre-teen age group (approximately age 9-13), to build on efforts being made with younger children? This is an age when many children stop reading and visiting the library even if they did so before. In my own area (Colchester), the book stock for this group is poor - too young in the children's library, too old, too gendered or not open to them in the Young Adult section. There is also no physical, welcoming space for them where they don't have to sit amongst toddlers/very young children or adults for reading or research. I feel this would help to hold on to and develop existing child readers as well as attracting new older child readers, otherwise any progress made with the strategy could be undone as children grow older.

Please could we have a published local phone number for local libraries? The Essex switchboard is very frustrating as call handlers are not familiar with the library service and have even given me wrong information. This would fit the intention of improving communication with readers.

4 Everyone's Library Service 2022-2026 Update

The Committee considered report PAF/01/23. The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Cllr Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance
- Geoff Pearson, Service Delivery Plan Manager
- Carolyn Peters, Service Development Manager
- Juliet Pirez, Head of Libraries
- Jo Powell, Literacy Lead

Contributors provided the Committee with an update on the development of Everyone's Library Service 2022-2026 Plan including an update under the three pillars of the plan: Library Service and Literacy; Communications and Infrastructure; and Supporting our Communities and Levelling Up.

Within the opening presentation, it was highlighted that there had been an increase of active members, loans and visits in 2021-2022 and over 60,000 new members. There was an update on the progress of the Service Delivery Plan where projects included the creation of Literacy Areas in libraries and the Summer and Winter Reading Challenges as well as library services for adults.

A smaller mobile library van was leased in May 2022, it had visited 68 venues and had signed up 332 new members. A communications plan was being developed to highlight the service and target it in the right places.

In response to the Public Questions and subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) The Cabinet Member confirmed they were not currently seeking or accepting offers from voluntary groups to take over current professionally run libraries.
- (ii) Volunteers were important to assist with the delivery of the service and were in addition to paid staff. Staff reviews took place throughout the year, looking at what resources were in place and how that fitted with skillsets and any staff training required.
- (iii) Some members referred to previous public feedback to not reduce the library service. The Cabinet Member confirmed her commitment to maintaining the current 74 libraries.
- (iv) Broader communications on accessing libraries services would be considered.
- (v) The 9-13 age group was a notoriously difficult group to reach and influence and a significant portion of the Summer Reading Challenge had tried to focus on this group, and the service wanted to see this extended and expanded further and to look at what could be made more relevant to younger people.
- (vi) A welcoming space for the 9-13 age group would be considered although it might only be an option for larger libraries, and there could be funding implications, including for signage and seating.
- (vii) Currently there was one commercial charge to hire library space but from April a new charge would be introduced which would focus on supporting more partnership and community initiatives in the libraries. These cheaper community rates would soon be published.

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- (viii) Members asked if consideration could be given to provide adult changing facilities for disabled customers in the design of the new Shenfield library.
 - (ix) There had been a recent exercise to make sure all paperwork, such as public liability insurance, was in place for all those organisations hiring library space and that the process was as streamlined as possible and not an unnecessary burden.
 - (x) Some members referred to the Warm Welcome winter initiative encouraging greater use of library buildings but pointed out that a significant number of libraries did not have public toilets. All libraries had staff toilets but they were often located in the back office although it was expected that staff would not refuse a customer request to use the staff toilet. All new buildings would have public toilets. Members suggested that if there was an opportunity to seek alternative funding to enhance those particular facilities it would be worth pursuing that in the future. Members highlighted that it was important to have disabled friendly toilets in libraries.
 - (xi) Developer contributions for future large developments would need to include consideration of and impact on library provision and future locations.
 - (xii) A further roll-out of library cards targeted at sixth form students would be considered, although it was highlighted that there had already been some interactions in some places with this cohort by Community Connectors.
 - (xiii) Promotion of library services would focus more on communicating what was happening locally. There were implications on how this would be resourced and keeping it updated.
 - (xiv) A communications plan was being developed, targeting geographical areas and audiences, and around reaching non-users.
 - (xv) All partnership work and projects were being delivered throughout the year and it was hoped that this would start to have an impact to help more consistent usage of the library throughout the year.
 - (xvi) The service would be looking at suitable key performance measures to evaluate each of the projects underway.
 - (xvii) All sites for the mobile library had recently been reviewed and there were further plans to look at the sites that were not attracting many users. Requests for new sites were received all

the time. The service would be looking to implement changes to the timetable in consultation with the public over the next few months.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed:**

- A discussion would take place off-line with Cllr Aidan McGurran on the school welcome programme in Harlow and whether there were opportunities for further roll-out (especially in Basildon).
- To provide amended trend data and charts that compared to periods/years before the pandemic and not just 2021.
- That, as part of a future scrutiny session, and further to an upcoming public consultation, to include more information on what users and potential users want from their libraries and what matters to them.
- More information would be provided on the campaign to issue library tickets to encourage usage and particularly how many of the tickets issued had subsequently been used to loan books and to breakdown, if possible, by adult and children. It was stressed that the service wanted to encourage broader use of libraries and not just focus on loans.
- Members were concerned by some of the data on current performance on literacy. The Chairman advised that he was already minded inviting the Chairman of the Education Task Force to discuss these and other challenges with the Committee in the near future and indicated that he would like to extend that discussion to include Cllr Louise McKinlay and appropriate officers as well as Cllr Tony Ball and education officers.

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11.15am and recommenced at 11.30am.

5 Update on the HCRG Contract for the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service

The Committee considered report PAF/02/23. The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Cllr Beverley Egan, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Early Years
- Adrian Coggins, Head of Wellbeing and Public Health
- Richard Comerford, HCRG Care Group
- Kathleen Ely, HCRG Care Group
- Christopher Martin, Director – Strategic Commissioning & Policy (C&F)

- Carolyn Terry, EYCC Sufficiency and Sustainability Manager

Contributors provided the Committee with an update on the performance under the HCRG Care Group Contract for the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service (ECFWS) and proposed next steps. The update included background on the contract, what was unique about the Essex contract, performance to date, support offered by ECFWS to Essex families during the pandemic and challenges. It was highlighted that the contract was for 7 years with the option to extend for a further 3 years, and that the contract had started in April 2017 and was currently in year 6. There were 22 Outcome Measures focused on improving life experiences for children and families in Essex with over 100 activity-based KPIs sitting underneath those 22 measures. Under the ECFWS contract, in West Essex HCRG were also co-contracting with the NHS in providing additional children's therapy services.

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

- (i) HCRG had put together a fully integrated, co-located multi-disciplinary team around each Family Hub / district in response to families saying they wanted to tell their story only once to a single trusted person.
- (ii) All HCRG volunteers had to complete a safeguarding awareness programme. However, it was acknowledged that training was not offered to individuals/families who decided to run their own support group but this could be looked into.
- (iii) ECC was the only council which was commissioning for outcomes rather than activity. Therefore, it was difficult to benchmark against other local authorities when they did not have a comparable outcomes-based contract. Families were asked for feedback on whether they think goals had been achieved.
- (iv) It was acknowledged that it remained a challenge to encompass everything into a holistic offer that extended into the 5-19 age group but there were some examples of linkages being made by HCRG such as transition assessments before children started school, the school nurse service, supporting the PHSE programme in schools, drop-in sessions in schools and some specific work with young carers.
- (v) The hard-to-reach often needed the most interventions and were often identified needing additional support in later life. Some limited data was available on reach within the educational system that could be used for analysis. There was a 2-year check facilitating a way to track issues earlier and further

analysis was being undertaken on younger children not going up in the age groups, this could be reported in future years.

- (vi) It was thought that every family was registered with the service as local maternity services advised the service of all their pregnancies. Vulnerabilities within the family were assessed against 7 specific categories and appropriate support was then put into place. Data collected could be provided on population and levels of need.
- (vii) Members referred to the initial performance slide and the percentage of outcomes being met. Members felt that it needed to show more than just a raw percentage and needed to show target outcomes against it and commentary on reasons for any missed targets.
- (viii) For the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities, the service was trying to coordinate a programme of Outreach across as many organisations as possible, particularly through the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit. Outcomes were worse in the GRT communities than the general population. The complete offer was available to those communities and more local activities were also run.
- (ix) The flexible structure of the multi-disciplinary teams helped support career progression. Retaining the workforce in south Essex in particular had been a struggle which was often due to the fact that it bordered London and staff could earn more money working there. Open days and workshops took place to encourage people to return to nursing, and other ways to attract people into the service were always being considered, including paying training and education fees and golden hellos.
- (x) The service co-located with some libraries and operated hubs within them. In other areas the outreach service visited libraries. The service was taking part in the Year of Reading and were undertaking a range of activities in libraries and around reading in primary schools to support that programme. ECC was working closely with library staff to look at how the library offer could be further diversified. A workshop took place at the end of 2022 with stakeholders.
- (xi) There were also some benefits and linkages from HCRG's involvement in other contracts such as providing some Tier 2 support within the North East London Foundation Trust's emotional wellbeing and mental health services contract with Essex and they had also successfully bid to provide some support services for children with autism admitted to hospital.

- (xii) For the first seven years the contract price was on an annual taper with the final three years fixed.
- (xiii) Staff received training on the data systems being used including ensuring that data stored was in line with national guidance around data collection, data storage and GDPR.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that:

- A table showing all 22 Outcomes and target outcomes with all KPIs would be produced.
- More information on the Affinity Programme would be provided to Members.
- Further information on the rate of the contract would be provided to Members.
- Further clarification be provided on the availability of statistics measuring reach, and the number of hard-to-reach families missing out on the early years services who were then later identified needing additional support in later life

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

6 Work Programme

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/03/23 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 Wednesday 15 February 2023. The Committee also considered and agreed future meeting dates for the Committee set out in report PAF/04/23.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.10pm.

Chairman