
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.15am by video conference on Thursday, 14 May 2020

Present:

County Councillors:

J Chandler (Chairman)

J Baker (Vice Chairman)

B Egan (Vice Chairman from appointment at Minute 2)

C Guglielmi

M Hardware

J Lumley

P May

R Pratt

P Reid

C Souter

M Steptoe (from 11.55am)

L Wagland

R Carson (Education co-opted non-voting member), Sharon de Cortez-Westfield from Healthwatch Essex (until 12 noon) and Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, were also present.

It was agreed to re-arrange the published agenda order so that Urgent Business was considered before Work Programme. The remainder of the agenda running order to remain unchanged.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on updated Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted. Councillors M Durham, M Hardware, M Steptoe and L Wagland were welcomed as new members and those members who had stood down were thanked for their contributions to the deliberations of the Committee. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Deakin and Durham.

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Appointment of Vice Chairman (vacancy)

The Chairman expressed gratitude to Councillor Henry who had served as Vice Chairman but had now moved to other responsibilities and no longer served on the Committee. To fill the vacancy the Chairman asked for nominations for a second Vice Chairman. Councillor Egan was proposed by Councillor Souter and seconded by Councillor Baker. There being no further nominations, it was **agreed** by general consent that Councillor Egan be appointed as a second Vice Chairman of the Committee.

3. Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2020 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman. A record of an informal discussion about the Meaningful Lives Matter programme with Essex County Council officers on 9 April 2020 was also noted.

4. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

5. Educational Attainment update

The Committee considered report PAF/09/20 comprising an annual report on educational attainment in Essex schools dated 20 April 2020. Supplementing the report at the meeting was a brief power point presentation which had also been published alongside the agenda papers.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item:

County Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education;

Clare Kershaw, Director - Education;

During the introduction the following was highlighted:

- (i) The format of the annual report had been reviewed in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairmen earlier in the year and now focussed more on strategies and actions, some detailed case studies and deep dives into areas of concern.
- (ii) 90% of primary schools and 84% of secondary schools were rated as good or outstanding which compared favourably with national figures and statistical neighbours. Tendring and Maldon were the districts that recorded the lowest percentage of schools achieving the good or outstanding measure for primary and secondary schools respectively. A new OFSTED framework for primary schools was expected for the next academic year;
- (iii) The good level of development measure for Early Years Foundation Stage stood at 74.5% in 2019 which compared favourably with national figures and statistical neighbours;
- (iv) Overall Essex was achieving expected standards at Key Stage 1 with Brentwood and Uttlesford the highest performing districts but Tendring was struggling for reading, writing and maths. Harlow and Colchester districts each struggled with one of the

three subject areas. It was a similar picture for key Stage 2 with Tendring again struggling;

- (v) There had been a drop in the average progress scores for Key Stage 1 to 2 across all indicators with Maldon the highest performing district and Tendring the lowest;
- (vi) Overall 63.9% of Key Stage 4 pupils achieved 9-4 for English and Maths. Harlow and Tendring districts struggled with this measure.

During subsequent discussion and questioning from members the following were acknowledged, highlighted or noted:

- (vii) Maintaining high levels of attainment moving between KS1 and KS2 required simultaneously focussing on reading, writing and maths whilst at the same time overseeing all schools in Essex which was a significant challenge. Improved continuity of staff together with further encouraging the value of reading outside of school would be critical to improving this measure.
- (viii) There was some indication that secondary school pupils could 'switch-off' from the curriculum, particularly if the new GCSE's were viewed as too hard. However, this did not fully explain the decline in KS4 measures such as Progress 8. Greater flexibility to enable pupils to focus on a smaller number of subjects may improve some individual performances.
- (ix) Tendring performance figures could be disproportionately impacted due to the small number of secondary schools in the district. A sub-group of the Tendring Strategic Group, comprising the CEOs of academy trusts, had been established to focus on key non recruitment/retention and attendance issues in the area.
- (x) A national definition was used to identify those vulnerable in Essex. However, an Essex pilot project looking to increase the outcomes of disadvantaged children was advocating a whole-school approach and not just focussing on specific groups.
- (xi) Disadvantaged children in Essex did not perform so well compared nationally. The recent SEN service redesign was responding to that in supporting schools to develop more customised responses and support for disadvantaged children. Essex County Council had established separate strategic teams for emotional and mental health, autism, and speech language and communications, to help schools in developing their teaching programmes. A SEN Inclusion Partner was allocated to each cluster of schools to help support their SEN training and support. A Trauma Perceptive Practice programme had been established

for all the school workforce to help them understand challenging behaviour and support pupil health and wellbeing.

- (xii) As part of improving overall outcomes for all pupils with SEN, there needed to be further improvement in the overall practice of supporting all pupils with any degree of special needs and not just those with ECHP plans.
- (xiii) Some members questioned the links between educational performance and local job and skills performance data. A major challenge for schools was to enthuse young people and to support their aspirations which may not necessarily always be academic.

Conclusion:

The following actions were agreed:

- (i) A breakdown of performance data for Harlow schools would be sent to Councillors Hardware and Souter.
- (ii) A breakdown of data on apprenticeships to be provided to all members to help clarify those completing apprenticeships compared to those entering them.
- (iii) An update on the Disadvantaged Pupils Pilot would be scheduled into the Committee's work programme.
- (iv) That the new more focussed format of the annual report should be continued for future years.

6. Urgent business

Councillor Reid asked an urgent question relating to the support being put in place to help nurseries and child minder services to re-open after the enforced closures due to the pandemic.

Clare Kershaw responded on behalf of the Cabinet Member:

- ECC had set up a brokerage system (using large providers as hubs) so that parents could access child-care support;
- A helpline was in place for all providers to seek advice and guidance which included financial advice and eligibility for, and signposting to, grants and funding that may be available;
- Many Early Years providers had decided to temporarily close at the start of the pandemic and furlough staff. The Government had since

clarified the furlough rules for nurseries stressing that furlough was only permitted for those parts of their business that were not already receiving public funding;

- Government advice was that before an early Years setting could re-open a full risk assessment had to be undertaken, taking into account the premises and staffing levels. ECC had put in place a framework to help providers undertake that assessment. It was acknowledged that initial take-up for undertaking this assessment could be low;
- The Government was currently only advising the use of PPE in limited circumstances and, instead, advocated other protective measures such as hand hygiene, and the regular cleaning of surfaces, toys and soft furnishings.
- Child minders could now start operating in single households.
- It was acknowledged that there was no guarantee that all Early Years settings would survive and re-open after the pandemic restrictions were relaxed.

The Chairman thanked Clare Kershaw for her oral update.

Councillor Gooding and Clare Kershaw then left the meeting.

7. Work Programme

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/10/20 comprising the current work programme for the Committee.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be on Thursday 18 June 2020.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.08pm.

Chairman