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# Cabinet Issues

## **1. A Schools and Education Strategy (School Improvement)**

The Council has set out its vision for the delivery of education in Essex, which aims to raise the aspirations and improve the life chances of every child and young person, protect vulnerable groups and promote the employability and skills agenda. Choice remains at the heart of the approach, along with ensuring that all parents have good options in choosing schooling for their children, and that all children are educated in well resourced and well run schools.

In order to achieve this vision and transform the strategy for schools and education, it was agreed by Cabinet that a core commissioning team would be established with the tools to improve the school system and raise standards across all schools.

The new strategy reflects the Council's move towards becoming a commissioning authority and a champion of children and families.

Cabinet approved a new model for school improvement, to be implemented across Essex, comprising of:

1. a core commissioning team (including a data and intelligence unit, access and inclusion unit, schools and standards unit, pathways and partnerships unit);
2. a re-shaped traded services team (becoming commissioning and traded services); and
3. an information and guidance service for all local authority schools.

## **2. Commissioning Strategy - Home to School Transport – Subsidy to Faith Schools**

As part of the Council's Transformation Programme, a significant review of the previous Home to School Transport policy was undertaken, to ensure it was equitable, supported the most vulnerable and provided the best value for money. A range of options was considered during the review, including options considered by Cabinet in December 2010, and February 2011.

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Cabinet agreed the following changes to the policy:

1. to remove the subsidy for travel to faith schools, whilst retaining it for low income families;
2. to remove the subsidy only for new entrants to both primary and secondary schools with effect from September 2012.

Cabinet noted that this would not affect the eligibility of pupils attending faith schools who have a statutory entitlement to free transport.

### **3. New Ways of Working – Customer Services Strategy**

Cabinet adopted the Customer Services Strategy that sets out the strategic intent for customer service in Essex County Council and is intended to compliment the customer services programme, alongside setting the context for changes to improve customer experience and operational efficiency.

The strategy proposes eight guiding principles to drive the transformation of customer services:

- i) work with the teams who deliver services to create a higher-quality, simplified and consistent customer experience across all channels;
- ii) give citizens a voice;
- iii) simplify contact and create easy access to services;
- iv) enable and encourage customers to self-serve wherever possible;
- v) create a single-view of the customer and/or (extended) family as legal and appropriate;
- vi) achieve consistent standards and levels of service throughout the process and across all locations;
- vii) increase the percentage of enquiries resolved at first point of contact; and
- viii) deliver services in a pro-active way based on citizens' evolving needs.

By 2013 customers will be able to contact the Council through a single Customer Service approach and a single website that will provide information, advice, and advocacy about the services the customer needs. This will be delivered in such a way that enables the Council and partners the opportunity to work with each other to further join up information and advice over time.

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#### **4. Improvements to Children's Services**

Cabinet considered an overview of the improvements achieved in Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Essex since the start of Government intervention in December 2009, setting out the Council's plans to deliver good and excellent services in the medium and longer term.

Both the recent unannounced Ofsted inspection and the Local Government Improvement and Development Safeguarding Children Peer Review confirmed the Council's own assessment, establishing clear evidence and a firm basis for Government intervention to be coming to an end and for Ofsted to rate Essex as satisfactory.

Cabinet and wider Council support, both in terms of political prioritisation and financial commitment has been fundamental in securing the improvements now being demonstrated.

The report provided the basis for a paper to be submitted by the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, and the Independent Chair of the Childrens Services Improvement Board to the Department for Education in October 2011, requesting that Essex be removed from Government intervention. It is likely that Ofsted will return to Essex before the end of October 2011 for a further inspection, of which the Council will receive 10 working days notice.

Peter Martin  
Leader of the Council