
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.30am by video conference on Thursday, 17 September 2020

Present:

County Councillors:

J Chandler (Chairman)
J Baker (Vice Chairman)
J Deakin
M Durham
B Egan (Vice Chairman)
C Guglielmi
J Lumley
P May
P Reid
C Souter
M Steptoe
L Wagland

Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex, Emma Tombs, Democratic Services Manager, and Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, were also present throughout.

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on updated Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Hardware and Pratt.

No declarations of interest were made.

Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2020 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public. The Chairman agreed that representatives from the Essex Young Assembly would be invited to participate at an appropriate point in the discussion for the following agenda item on drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines.

4. Task and Finish Group Report - Drug Gangs, Knife Crime and County Lines

The Committee considered report PAF/17/20 comprising the final report of the Task and Finish Group established in response to the Full Council request for this Committee to look at the multi-agency response to the issue of drug gangs, knife crime and County lines in Essex.

The following joined the meeting to respond to the conclusions and recommendations in the report:

County Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education and Skills;

County Councillor Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member – Children and Families;

County Councillor Dick Madden, Cabinet Member, Performance, Business Planning and Partnerships;

Michael O'Brien, Head of Specialist Education Services, Essex County Council.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Guglielmi, as Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group, introduced the item. The conclusions of the review commented on partnership working, leadership, funding, the role of education and raising awareness, and communication and transparency. As a result, the Task and Finish Group had made eight recommendations

In turn, Cabinet Members were given the opportunity to give an initial response to each recommendation. During that discussion the following was acknowledged, highlighted, suggested and/or agreed:

- (i) The County Lines business model was dynamic and fast changing and agency resources to challenge it were limited;
- (ii) There was significant emphasis on joint partnership working within the local Violence and Vulnerability Framework requiring individual agencies to be transparent and report back on those activities on which they led and/or for which they were responsible. It was important that duplication of work between partners be minimised;
- (iii) The governance structure and leadership of different work strands should be regularly reviewed to ensure the most diverse and effective leadership;
- (iv) The Task and Finish Group had struggled to adequately obtain all the information it needed in a timely manner so as to robustly challenge the accountability on how partnership funding was being used. There was also some uncertainty on the structure of

funding from the two unitary councils in Essex. However, it was stressed that the overriding principle was to buy into the project with less emphasis on actual boundaries and being prescriptive.

- (v) An overall Violence and Vulnerability Unit communications strategy had been agreed in July which had acknowledged that sometimes messaging might need to vary where geographical differences in challenges being faced had been identified across the county. It was suggested that further review of the strategy should be in 3-6 months to gauge the impact of the current strategy.
- (vi) It was important that there were interventions to discourage school exclusions and ensure there was adequate support for schools to facilitate young people quickly returning to school after a period of exclusion. The decision to exclude a pupil sat with the Head Teacher and the County Council believed that there should be more pre-conditions required to be met before that happened;
- (vii) There was less influence over academies than maintained schools;
- (viii) More work may be needed to further heighten awareness of youth services on offer.
- (ix) Members were encouraged that there was a review of youth service outreach work and it could start at an earlier age in future compared to the present;

At this point, the Chairman invited representatives from the Young Essex Assembly to participate in the discussion. The following specifically contributed to the discussion:

Satine Dawes, Member of Essex Young Assembly.
Ms Hatch, Teacher, Gilberd School.

and advised that through the Essex Young Assembly they had also been looking at issues around drug gangs and County Lines and confirmed that it was perceived to be a significant issue in schools. It was suggested that schools were not getting all the support they needed and that the pandemic had also made access to those services more difficult. It was stressed that raising awareness of both the early warning signs of involvement in drug gangs, together with the availability of support services, needed to further improve.

Conclusion:

The Chairman thanked the Task and Finish Group members for their time and commitment in undertaking the review.

It was agreed that:

- (x) The Task and Finish Group report, conclusions and recommendations, be endorsed;
- (xi) The report should be distributed to Essex MPS, Essex Borough, City and District Councils (including the two unitaries);
- (xii) Councillor Guglielmi would seek further clarifications on source and use of partnership funding at a meeting to be held with the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner;
- (xiii) Responsibility and owner for each recommendation was as follows (subject to any further clarification from Cabinet Members);

Recommendation 1 – Councillors Gooding and McKinlay.

Recommendation 2 – Councillor Gooding.

Recommendation 3 – to be referred to the Health Overview and Policy Committee.

Recommendations 4, 5, 6 and 7 – Councillor Madden.

Recommendation 8 – Councillor McKinlay

- (xiv) The Committee be updated on progress in approximately 3-4 months;
- (xv) Email contact details of the YEA participant in the discussion would be provided to Cllr Guglielmi so that they could be kept informed of progress.
- (xvi) A copy of the finalised Healthwatch Essex report looking at child exploitation would be circulated in due course.

Thereafter the meeting briefly adjourned and then resumed at 12.15.

5. Essex County Council – Adult Social Care response to the pandemic

The Committee considered report PAF/18/20 updating members on adult social care issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the County Council's responses to the challenges being faced.

The following people from Essex County Council joined the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member Health and Adult Social Care.

Moira McGraph, Director, Commissioning, Adult Social Care.

Steve Ede, Head of Procurement.

Jo Rogers, Commissioning Manager

Nick Presmeg, Executive Director, Adult Social Care

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

- (i) Research was underway looking at people's experiences of the pandemic and their future choices and aspirations;
- (ii) Whilst it had been a challenging time, there had been positives such as greater creativity and flexibility (particularly around Day Opportunities), further embracing technology and closer working with District Councils and the NHS;
- (iii) Increasingly technological solutions would need to be used to facilitate more electronic-based home care systems in future;
- (iv) Demand for reablement and domiciliary care was expected to significantly increase. Occupancy rates and levels of demand for residential care had dropped significantly and were not, at the moment, expected to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels;
- (v) The current average occupancy rate for the approximate 400 registered care homes in Essex was 81% (compared to just over 90% before the pandemic) but the pandemic had not hit all residential homes equally and some had seen a more dramatic reduction in their occupancy rate. Demand year-on-year had been reducing but the pandemic had accelerated the trend;
- (vi) There were significant cost pressures for providers and the County Council was expecting to work with a smaller number of providers in future. Rural areas provided a further challenge as they tended to be less sustainable areas to serve for providers;
- (vii) There was now over-supply of care home capacity in some areas and further work was needed to align retaining high quality and specialist provision with the expected levels of future demand. Essex County Council needed to provide support to the wider market during this transitional process but realistically it was thought that there needed to be a reduction of approximately 1000 beds which could lead to the closure of 20-30 care homes;
- (viii) Notwithstanding the above, longer term population demographics projected that the number of people over 80 and 90 would significantly increase. However, it could be expected that, as a result of the pandemic, a higher proportion of those would choose to stay in their own home with enhanced support. In addition, future demand for residential and nursing care was likely to be significantly driven by the rates of dementia in future;

- (ix) There was now weekly monitoring of all care homes in Essex, looking at vacancy levels, financial risks and other factors and proactively looking at emerging issues. Two care homes in Essex had closed since the start of the pandemic - one due to it already having poor occupancy rates which had then been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic and another care home was in the process of closing for a rebuild.

Conclusion:

The Chairman advised that some issues raised during the discussion would be further explored as part of a Task and Finish Group review of domiciliary care that was about to start. The Committee would give further consideration on how it would want to be further updated on other issues.

The witnesses were thanked for their attendance by the Chairman and then left the meeting.

[Before leaving and with the Chairman's consent, Councillor Spence raised and updated the Committee on an unrelated issue which is recorded under Urgent Business.]

6. Work Programme

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/19/20 comprising the current work programme for the Committee.

7. Urgent Business

With the Chairman's consent, Councillor Spence responded to recent media coverage on suicide rates. Whilst increasing numbers of mental health cases were expected as a result of the lockdown, he had been in contact with the local Coroners' Office and reported that there was currently no evidence of an increasing number of suicides in Essex nor any identifiable trend to suggest an increasing number of suspected suicides.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 8 October 2020.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.55 pm.

Chairman