
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.15am in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 14 November 2019

Present:

County Councillors:

J Chandler (Chairman)
J Baker (Vice Chairman)
J Deakin
B Egan
C Guglielmi
J Henry (Vice Chairman)
J Lumley
M McEwan
R Pratt
P Reid
C Souter

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

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors May, Reid and Weston.

2. Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2019 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

4. Special Education Needs update

The Committee considered report PAF/26/19 providing an update on a review undertaken of SEN provision in Essex and specifically public engagement on a SEND Strategy and Redesign. Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation, Essex County Council joined the meeting to introduce the update and answer questions.

During discussion the following was highlighted and/or noted:

-
- A public engagement survey had been run between 22 March and 31 May 2019 seeking views on a proposed vision and principles for SEND and ways of working. It was proposed to enable and support the development of a school-led SEND system, grow the specialist SEND provision in Essex and redesign and new approach for ECC SEND teams.
 - Around 30,000 parents of those children with ECHP plans had been consulted together with young people, and educational, health and social care practitioners. Over 1000 responses had been received with overwhelming support for the vision aspiration for the service.
 - However, there has been some concerns expressed about the changing roles of the SEN teams. Schools had also queried whether there would be a further shift of accountability to them.
 - The new strategy aimed to reduce the number of professional contacts for schools and parents and reduce the multiple handovers between professionals.
 - In the spring term the service would work with the Family Forum to develop an action plan. A lot of work would be done to increase parental confidence in the system and move away from a focus on crisis (statutory) services and plan earlier intervention.
 - There was some anecdotal evidence that some parents felt they had no choice other than to home educate to meet all their needs. As a result, the service was looking to see if they could develop a support model located within mainstream education which further reduced some of the barriers facing SEN pupils in such an environment – e.g. difficulties in moving around between classes.
 - The new service design sought to support schools strategically and encouraging the use of any pre-existing in-school specialism first. Where bespoke support was needed then the service would develop an appropriate training process and programme.
 - It was highlighted that in recent years there had been a 400% increase in diagnosis of autism. The number of people with an ECHP where the main component was autism, had increased significantly. Some members queried whether mainstream schools were able to meet the diverse needs across the autism spectrum. Four autism support centres had been established within mainstream schools to provide some specialist support and the service were looking to develop an outreach model to expand the access across the mainstream sector. Similarly, the service was looking at any opportunities for existing special and enhanced provision schools to share some of their specialist knowledge and support with the mainstream where appropriate.

- The new specialist schools being built were being funded by the Department of Education in a similar way to Free Schools. The County Council had limited influence on the surrounding infrastructure (i.e. parking provision) at specialist schools. However, Mr Holloway would raise the importance of adequate car parking provision with the infrastructure team.
- It was acknowledged that current feedback suggested that signposting for parents at a time of crisis was not as good as it could be with digital online tools, in particular, hard to navigate. To assist this, there would be an engagement facilitator role in the new structure.
- Four new 'preparing for employment' officers had been created in the new structure to work with employers and develop meaningful employment opportunities.

Conclusion:

The Chairman thanked Mr Holloway for his attendance. The new SEN teams would be in place in the new year. The following actions were **agreed**:

- (i) Mr Holloway agreed to return to update the committee in summer 2020 once an implementation review with schools had been completed.
- (ii) In the meantime, further information would be provided on the final service structure and individual roles.
- (iii) A briefing and discussion session in each quadrant would be arranged specifically for school governors and feedback on this would be provided to the Committee.
- (iv) Recommendation – Mr Holloway was asked to highlight and emphasise to the infrastructure team the importance of adequate car parking provision at the new special schools being built.

The meeting adjourned at 11.05 and reconvened at 11.14am.

5. Domiciliary care

The Committee considered report PAF/27/19 which had been prompted by the Chairman and Vice Chairmen who had suggested that the Committee should consider a future review of domiciliary care.

An appendix to the report, provided by Healthwatch Essex (HWE), had been circulated to members earlier in the week. The appendix indicated that the feedback received by HWE from domiciliary care users generally showed that the service provided by Essex County Council was supportive and safe but also needed to provide substantial time to talk and provide simple company for Essex residents. It was acknowledged that this might necessitate some discussion around funding for long-term domiciliary care and sustainability of the market. There was no indication from HWE data that there was any significant geographical concentration of specific concerns or issues.

HWE advised that the nature of calls received regarding domiciliary care was consistently varied, and included accessibility, availability, quality of care and how to make complaints, choice, and cost. Some case studies summarising the lived experiences of people in Essex were included in the Appendix. Members thought that some of the case studies had flagged up issues around discharge and inappropriate care packages, wrong medication and timeliness of it.

During discussion it was highlighted:

- (i) There can sometimes be difficulty in categorising calls as they can also be about other issues such as discharge from hospital or loneliness;
- (ii) Generally, those that contact HWE already had a support network to assist them to do it - often a befriending neighbour. It was unclear how many people without such a support network would make contact to seek help. It was thought that many people receiving domiciliary care could be overly reliant on their carer or care visitor and this could prevent them wanting to complain due to fear of repercussions.
- (iii) Reference was made to a private care provider app which family members could also access. This was an example of illustrating best practice and could be a role for the PAF in any review.

Conclusion:

The County Council had commissioned a review of the hospital discharge process and the appropriateness of care packages. It was **agreed** that:

- (i) the findings of that review should be presented to the Committee early in the new year;
- (ii) thereafter, a Task and Finish Group be established to undertake a detailed review of hospital discharge and domiciliary care issues.

6. Drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines

The Committee considered report PAF/28/19 providing an update on the work of a Task and Finish Group established to look at issues around drug gangs, knife crime and county lines. The report was supplemented with an oral update from Councillor Guglielmi, the lead member for the Group. The Group had met five times and had taken evidence from a variety of witnesses including representation from the police, Police Fire and Crime Commissioner, youth offending team, Public Health, educational and voluntary sectors. The Group expected to present its report to the next meeting of the Committee on 16 January 2020.

The report was **noted**.

7. Work Programme

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/29/19 comprising the current work programme for the Committee. It was **agreed** that further items on Adult Carers Strategy, PREVENT, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and Meaningful Lives Matter be added to the work programme.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be on Thursday 16 January 2020.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12pm.

Chairman