
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, 12 September 2019

Present:

County Councillors:

J Chandler (Chairman)
J Baker (Vice Chairman)
G Butland (left after Item 4)
B Egan
C Guglielmi
J Henry (Vice Chairman)
J Lumley (left after Item 4)
P May
M McEwan
R Pratt
P Reid
C Souter (until 1pm)
C Weston

Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex and Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, 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 Councillor Deakin.

Declarations of interest:

Councillor June Lumley declared a code interest as she was a Director/Chair of Trustees of SCAFT (Supporting Carers and Families Together) – a voluntary sector provider of YC Services in Rochford District mentioned in agenda item 5. She considered that public perception might be that it would prejudice her consideration of the public interest and therefore she would withdraw from the meeting for that agenda item.

2. Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2019 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the public

There was one question from the public at this point in the agenda specifically relating to agenda item 4 that followed (the question is reproduced in the Appendix to these minutes and it was indicated that the issue raised would be addressed during subsequent discussion).

4. Update on Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB)

The Committee considered report PAF/20/19 providing an update on the work undertaken by the Board in the past year and future priorities. In addition, there was an update on new governance arrangements resulting from new statutory guidance.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item and participate in discussion:

Phil Picton, Independent Chairman, ESCB.

Alison Cutler, Business Manager, ESCB.

Lisa Llewelyn, Director of Workforce, Suffolk & NE Essex Integrated Care System.

Paul Secker, Director, Safeguarding & Quality Assurance, Essex County Council.

Jo Barclay, School & Early Years Safeguarding Manager, Essex County Council.

Elliott Judge, Detective Superintendent, Essex Police

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

New statutory guidance

- New statutory guidance defined three partners (upper-tier authority, NHS and the Police) responsible for ensuring that an appropriate local structure was in place to co-ordinate and support safeguarding arrangements for children. The decision had been made to continue to use the 'Essex Safeguarding Children Board' brand.
- The statutory responsible Partners had decided to continue with having an independent chairman although this had not been specifically required under the new guidance. It was expected that a new chairman would be appointed at the end of the month. The new chairman would be expected to have a vision, be confident that they will take into account what they are hearing, and have confidence in driving agendas forward.
- Recognised that there were considerable structural changes for some partners (Health being cited as an example) which would make future partnership working more challenging.

Role of the safeguarding Board

- The role of the ESCB was not operational. It was to ensure effectiveness of safeguarding work undertaken by agencies, advising and challenging on the development of policies and procedures, service planning, raising the profile of the importance of

safeguarding arrangements, and facilitate inter-agency training and networking.

In response to the public question (and reproduced in the Appendix to these minutes) Broomfield Hospital CQC concerns:

- The safeguarding boards request particular providers to attend on a regular basis to ask how they are dealing with specific issues when concerns were raised.
- Separately, the Independent Chairman meets health officers (especially Directors of Nursing) on a regular basis.
- The Boards do ask health providers to advise if they were identifying themes and trends. Each provider would be expected to have a sub-committee or other forum for reviewing performance and training statistics.
- Providers would be expected to develop improvement plans in response to CQC concerns, overseen by commissioners.
- There are multiple levels of governance for assurance and to identify lessons learnt.

Home schooling

- Currently there was no power for local authorities to monitor the quality of home schooling or intervene unless specific safeguarding concerns were raised. There had been some expectation of legislative changes to give greater powers to local authorities but this had not yet happened.
- Approximately 2,100 children were home schooled in Essex and many parents and carers undertook their responsibilities very seriously. However, it was recognised that children being home schooled could be a particularly vulnerable group.
- Members questioned how the county council could deliver on children making a positive contribution as stated under 'Every Child Matters' guidance when there was so little oversight of home schooling standards? At the moment the county council cannot insist that home schooled children have to access any particular activity or organisation – the whole safeguarding environment relied on children being seen or heard - if they are not then they do not come to the attention of agencies until a concern is raised.
- The County Council was looking to restructure the support that currently managed elective education. It had worked with schools through Behaviours and Attendance Partnership forums to provide more guidance. Schools had a statutory duty to report when children were removed from the School Roll.

SEN pupils

- Members queried whether there was any evident trend of more SEN pupils being excluded from mainstream schools as they were a particularly vulnerable group. Agreed: further information to be provided on safeguarding arrangements for this group particularly in view of the imminent restructuring of the SEN team, and the support for SEN in mainstream schools.

Feedback

- It was acknowledged that perhaps the Board's approach had not focussed enough on actively hearing the voice of young people. There would be further discussion on this at the next meeting of the Board. It was highlighted that consideration of how partners had listened to the voice of the child would be part of any Serious Case Review. New chairman applicants will also be interviewed by some Young People who will give feedback on the proposed appointees.
- Essex Police had recognised importance of understanding and responding to feedback from young people and it now formed part of training for domestic abuse officers.
- Coldicott principles should be followed with the eighth principle making it clear if there was a conflict between patient/user confidentiality and safeguarding, that the latter should always take precedence.

Partnership working

- There were already examples of good co-ordinated partnership working but there would continue to be challenges for partners around limited resources and demand for services.
- There was a good relationship with district councils with many sitting on quadrant based 'stay safe' multi-agency groups and these relationships would continue to be built upon.

Conclusion

The Chairman thanked the witnesses for attending. Further consideration would be given to the format of future updates on the work of the Board and operational matters.

Thereafter, Councillors Butland and Lumley left the meeting.

5. Public Questions

The Chairman re-opened the Public Questions item for two questions to be asked specific to the following agenda item on Young Carers (the questions are reproduced in the Appendix to these minutes and it was

indicated that the issues raised would be addressed during subsequent discussion).

6. Young Carers service

The Committee considered report PAF/21/19 which provided an update on the first year of operation of a new in-house service supporting young carers.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item and participate in discussion:

Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education and Skills;
Tim Frances, Commissioner Youth Work.

The witnesses outlined the background to the procurement of the new service and key features.

During the introduction and subsequent discussion, the following were acknowledged, highlighted or noted:

Background

- A comprehensive review had been undertaken of the services commissioned by the County Council which had then prompted a re-design and re-procurement with future provision being brought in-house in 2018 as a result. In response to a public question, it was confirmed that a further review at this time was not considered necessary. The redesigned service had been framed around a five-year programme so it was acknowledged that a further review may be appropriate at the end of that period.
- There had been slight initial delays in recruitment for the new service, but it had been fully up and running from September 2018.
- There was still a role for a number of other agencies and voluntary sector providers in supplementing and complementing the County Council's service;

Reach of the service

- There had been 1300 referrals into the service with 13% from BAME groups. This was an increase from 6% in 2016/17.
- There were discussions with Virgin Care to see if they could assist in early identification of young carers as part of their 0-19 family support contract.
- There had been referrals from 148 schools although the service was actually working with 226 schools in total through ongoing casework.

The awareness of the service was being raised through presentations at various other local forums including colleges.

- There had also been referrals from 21 voluntary sector providers and it was considered that overall reach of the service had been extended in the past year. There had been 88 self or family referrals and 92 anonymous referrals, most of which looked like they might have come from schools.
- Members questioned the level of engagement with very young carers. In these instances, there were often referrals from nurseries, and from Virgin Care through their 0-19 family support contract provision. It remained an area for further development and focus.
- There had been issues with providing drop in centre provision in Braintree and Brentwood and there were discussions with providers in other areas to see if they could support those areas.

Education and transitions

- There were ongoing discussions about further support for transitioning young carers to adulthood and employment and further education.
- Two specific support workers now worked with Essex schools. There were ongoing discussions with OFSTED regarding improving the educational support care package for young carers and to not penalise non-attendance due to caring duties.

Evidence of outcomes/impact

- It was considered that outcomes had not been evidenced previously as they were now. There was now significant promotion of the service to raise awareness which had led to more referrals.
- 879 statutory assessments had been undertaken - double the number in any previous year.
- Greater support from the service had facilitated improved attendance and attainment at schools.

User feedback

The Committee had also requested information to evidence seeking and responding to user feedback. Healthwatch Essex had undertaken a random 'dip sample' of services to provide a taste of some lived experience and this had been circulated with the agenda papers for the meeting. In addition, Councillors Guglielmi and Henry had attended young carer events during the summer and reported orally their impressions of those sessions.

The HWE report had suggested that some families may be choosing to home educate their children in order to avoid fines for low school attendance. The Cabinet Member would investigate this issue further.

Conclusion

The Chairman and Committee were encouraged by the update on the redesigned service. It was noted that the service sought to further improve against their performance targets which the committee supported.

7. Work Programme

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/22/19.

Councillor Guglielmi updated the committee on the work of the Task and Finish Group established to look at the multi-agency arrangements in place for drug gangs, knife crime and county lines. The Group expected to report back in November or December.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be on Thursday 10 October 2019.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.20pm.

Chairman

APPENDIX

Text of Public Question asked at Agenda item 3: Paul Osman

How did the Essex Safeguarding Children Board react to the devastating January report on Broomfield Hospital by the Care Quality Commission which stated the legal obligation for change as follows?

“The Trust must ensure that there are effective safeguarding systems and processes in place and embedded across all areas. Regulation 134(1)(2)(3)”.

There was lack of safeguarding training in the key areas of A&E and Children and young people’s wards. The “Baby P” episode revealed the child was repeatedly taken to hospital but the hospital staff never highlighted that his injuries were not accidental so safeguarding training is essential in these and all other areas.

Text of Public Question asked at Agenda item 5: Paul Osman

Page 80 of the report on progress of the Young Carers’ service in the section “Evidence of Outcomes and Impact to September 2019” states that “Referrals have been received from 148 schools”. This suggest that the service is reactive rather than proactive. As there are at the very least 552 schools in Essex, how is the service reaching out to all potential young carers in all Essex schools?

Action for Family Carers regularly visits over 100 secondary schools in Essex in a proactive mode without waiting for referrals.”

Statement and Questions from James Clarke, Chief Executive Officer, Action for Family Carers asked at Agenda item 5

Questions to the Committee

1. Given that Young Carers in Essex achieve outcomes from a combination of local authority and voluntary sector provision can a comprehensive review of Young Carer support in Essex be undertaken to reflect this complexity?
2. What has been the impact on Young Adult Carers of the decision to cease the all-age service - which included a dedicated Young Adult Carer service - and instead to commission an Adult Carers provision and deliver a local authority Young Carers service separately?

Context

Details of Young Carers services provided by Action for Family Carers (and other voluntary sector providers including Crossroads, SCAFT etc.) and the outcomes achieved do not feature in the Young Carers Service Re-design Progress Report or the Insight report from Healthwatch Essex.

Action for Family Carers has provided support for unpaid Carers in Essex since 1990 and led the all-age countywide Supporting Carers in Essex provision 2015-18. It delivers targeted, specialist support services for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers funded by

Global's Makes Some Noise, Children in Need, Rotary Clubs and other funders. The Charity is a Carers Trust Centre of Excellence and one of only 4 charities in the UK to achieve the National Council for Voluntary Organisation's Quality Mark at Level 3.

We would welcome visits by Essex County Council and Healthwatch Essex to learn about the range of our work with Young Carers and Young Adult Carers in Essex, and to meet with and listen directly to Young Carers we support. Our provision in summary includes:

Young Carer Support in Schools

Since April 2018 we have supported 653 Young Carers in secondary and primary across Essex through one to one meetings and group work. Every Young Carer has a named support worker to coordinate family support, and to liaise between school, health and social care services independent of statutory authorities. We actively and directly support schools to achieve Carers Trust's Young Carers in Schools Award.

Young Carer Clubs

Action for Family Carers provides regular scheduled Young Carer club nights in 5 Districts: Maldon, Colchester, Harlow, Epping Forest and Uttlesford. 385 Young Carers between the ages of 7 and 18 years participated since 1 April 2018 engaging in a variety of activities including games, cooking, music, external speakers/visitors and themed evenings and with direct access to one-to-one support from their Support Worker.

Additional Respite Activities

Young Carers have participated in trips to Adventure Island in Southend, visits to Care Farms and to the theatre and enjoyed a Christmas party, all giving Young Carers different experiences which they otherwise might miss out on.

Young Carer Development Programme

A programme of targeted 6-week group sessions for Young Carers in different localities across Essex. The sessions are developed by and for Young Carers so they address the common issues experience such as self-confidence, self-esteem and social isolation. Sessions have included mindfulness, breathing exercises, and other stress reduction techniques and 86 Young Carers have participated to date.

Young Adult Carer Transition Support

Action for Family Carers supports 32 Young Adult Carers between the ages of 16 and 24 years living in Uttlesford. This work is 1 to 1 based on what Young Adult Carers want and funded by Uttlesford District Council; recognising the need to overcome the barriers of rural isolation, lack of transport and therefore a higher risk of social isolation.