
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.15am by video conference on Monday, 7 December 2020

Present:

County Councillors:

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

Non-elected Members:

E Rigler (representing primary school parent governors)
C Martin (Catholic Diocese representative)

Councillor Anne Brown, Councillor Andy Wood, Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex, Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer and Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer, were also present.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted. Christine Martin from St John Payne Roman Catholic School, a new Catholic diocese representative, was welcomed to her first meeting.

There were no apologies.

The following declarations of interest were noted:

- Councillor Jenny Chandler declared an interest in that she is the Chair of the Chelmsford Local Advisory Board of the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service.
- Councillor Mark Durham declared an interest in that he is a Governor of Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust.

2. Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

4. Recommissioning of Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services for children and young people

The Committee considered report PAF/27/20 comprising an update on the recommissioning arrangements for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental health Services for children and young people in Essex.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item:

Christopher Martin, Director – Strategic, Commissioning & Policy (Children and Families);

Emily Oliver, Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy;

Sarah Garner, Associate Director – West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (lead health commissioner).

During the introduction the following was highlighted:

- Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing Services in Greater Essex were commissioned collaboratively by ten partners including Essex, Southend and Thurrock and the seven Greater Essex CCGs (the Forum). Work was underway to commission the new service from the 1st February 2022.
- It was confirmed that Chris Martin would remain the Chair of the Forum and so ECC would have a strong role to play in terms of the the future procurement. A role had been agreed for Clare Kershaw, Director of Education, on the collaborative commissioning forum.
- Internal stakeholders had confirmed that ECC should remain as part of the collaborative commissioning arrangements.
- Positive feedback about the current services had been received from young ambassadors who had used the EWMHS services but were not part of NELFTS patient care engagement forum.
- The single point of access had worked well rather than a fragmented entry into the service. Young people could directly refer into the service and they no longer had to go through a GP/ professional.
- Continuation of the current provision included an integrated and enhanced Tier 2 and Tier 3 service across Essex, Southend, and Thurrock, paediatric and liaison joint assessments where

appropriate, crisis intervention and a home based treatment service. These aimed to minimise hospital admission for this cohort of children and young people. Future services would seek to further improve access and outcomes for all groups, including vulnerable groups. There would also be closer working relationships with substance misuse and gambling addiction services.

- A range of early interventions would be offered including Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), CYP IAPT service, more coaching programmes such as Triple P, help and support for vulnerable children, and positive behaviour and trauma support.
- The role of Approved Mental Health Practitioners was included in the new arrangements.
- The new service would include advice and guidance for schools, complement and support Mental Health in Schools' Teams, and provide training where appropriate.
- The re-procurement timeline was underway. The contract awards would be published in Sep 2021 and then there would be six months of mobilisation and getting the contract into place.

Thereafter the following was acknowledged, considered and/or noted during subsequent discussion with members:

- That some competitive dialogue be encouraged during re-procurement process to flag up what will be needed by future service provider(s).
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- There had been a significant increase in demand for services in recent years with easier arrangements for referrals and less stigma. Staffing levels at the current provider (North East London Foundation trust) had recently been increased.
- It was confirmed that the arrangements for looked after children were consistent across all district, borough and city councils although local factors required some locality specific pathways.
- The new provider would be expected to replicate existing partner networks already established and continually develop them.
- It was suggested the new provider produce an engagement and communications plan to work with local community groups.
- Communications had gone out to all schools to remind them of support available from EWHMS during the pandemic, including some new counselling services. In North East Essex further funding had been put into groups such as Amaze and Open Door.

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- All of the supplemental support services put into place for Covid would remain in place until the end of March 2021 and then be subject to review, although it was anticipated that the services would be extended past March.
 - Both NHS England, and parent and carer engagement, had identified a need for EWMHS support to be accessible in special schools.
 - Children in home education were also eligible to access the service.
 - It was confirmed that there had been co-production with young ambassadors, the Essex Family Forum and parent carer engagement representative groups for Essex Southend and Thurrock.
 - It was highlighted as part of more integrated and collaborative services, further data sharing between different organisations should be encouraged so that as wide as possible data sources were used to further improve service provision.
 - It was highlighted that there could be encouragement of rotation of people between school-based and non-school based provision, particularly SEND.
 - Members suggested further consideration of processes for handling reviews, disagreements and disputes and especially conflicts of interest within the service and responding to direct enquiries from the public.

A concern was also raised on Tier 4 services around whether there were enough mental health beds for young people within Essex or whether they were still being sent out of the county. It was currently difficult to get a bed anywhere nationally. At a local level, intensive support programmes had been increased and there had been training in local acute hospitals. Parents were offered reimbursement of travel expenses and used Skype and Zoom to keep in contact with their child. It was suggested that the Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee could review this.

Conclusion:

It was agreed that a further update be scheduled in approximately 12 months.

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

The meeting adjourned at 11.53am and reconvened at 12pm

5. Children and Families Services - update

The Committee considered report PAF/28/2020 comprising an update on Children's and Families services and projects.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item:

County Councillor Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member – Children and Families;
Christopher Martin, Director – Strategic, Commissioning & Policy (Children and Families).

The Chairman expressed concerns about the late receipt of the advance written update. However, it was also acknowledged and appreciated that the service area had been focussing on and responding to recent extraordinary pressures.

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

- Government guidance had permitted some relaxation of rules and the regulations. In practice the only aspect that significantly changed was the use of virtual visiting which had received positive feedback, particularly from young people.
- Throughout Covid, the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service (ECFWS) had maintained services, with some moved online and, when needed, face to face contacts had continued. Next steps were to review how ECFWS could link in more closely with childcare settings to give a much deeper and comprehensive offer.
- There had been an increase in lower level referrals to Family Solutions. Child Protection Plan rates had increased since the first lockdown.
- Whilst there had not been a significant increase in children and family cases within Essex, cases had become more complex as lockdown had restricted the ability to access support early. There had been several communications to raise awareness. In April 2022 changes in the law would mean ECC would have a statutory duty to make provision for victims of domestic abuse.
- A key family project was in Tendring which was looking at support required for individual needs and not just what was needed as a parent. Further funding was going into this project to try and identify new opportunities and additional resources, especially on drug, alcohol and domestic abuse. Successful elements from the project would be taken over to Canvey Island. It was intended that the project would be brought to scrutiny in the near future.

The Working Families Programme had been adapted to respond to the pandemic. The summer camps were going to be expanded in terms of numbers of places and the geographical reach. More laptops could also be made available to vulnerable families.

- Additional Government funding was providing support to different groups although there were restrictions on how the money could be spent. Essex County Council was looking to combine targeting much of the support whilst also providing a comprehensive offer. The Essex Association of Local Councils were administering the funding to local communities. Members challenged the governance around community organisations receiving this funding. There would be an element of trust with providers but there was also a level of assurance from established working relationships and providers' own governance processes in place.
- Essex County Council were looking at how a broader respite offer and support for people could be provided, and how it could be linked with preparation for adulthood.

Conclusion:

It was agreed that a more detailed update would be scheduled in March 2021 with more information on the Virgin Care Children's Wellbeing Service and monitoring the KPIs in the contract as well as further developments on respite care.

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

6. Work Programme

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/29/20 comprising the current work programme for the Committee.

7. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 14 January 2021.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.59pm.

Chairman