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**Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.00am on Thursday, 03 February 2022 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.**

**Present:**

*County Councillors:*

R Gooding (Chairman)

S Barker

L Bowers-Flint

M Durham

M Goldman

C Guglielmi (Vice Chairman)

J Henry (substitute)

P May (Vice Chairman)

A McGurran

R Playle

L Shaw

W Stamp

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. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Fleming (for whom Councillor Henry substituted), Councillor Wiles and Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex.

**2.           Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2021 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

**3.           Questions from the public**

There were none.

**4.           Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2021 Update**

The Committee considered report PAF/01/2022 comprising of a further update on the development of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy.

The following people from Essex County Council attended the meeting to introduce the item, deliver a presentation and respond to questions:

Councillor Andrew Sheldon – Deputy Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability,  
Alex Abercrombi – Education Delivery Manager,  
Helen Wall – SEND Strategy Lead: Participation and Inclusion.

The presentation provided information on the actions that had been taken since the last meeting when the Strategy was presented to the Committee, which included further engagement with partners and families, work with the Essex Family Forum, ensuring the delivery plan had specific metrics for each measure and that the report had clear alignment with the Ofsted/CQC outcomes from the 2019 inspection.

Early identification and early support were a top priority identified from the public engagement in 2019. Since then, new guidance training had been released for the workforce across education, health and social care relating to identification and support for children and young people with SEND. The delivery plan set out the new Inclusion Framework which was a process and a toolkit for schools and settings to support accurate proactive early identification of need for children and young people.

After the presentation, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) There had been further engagement with parents and main feedback was to include children and young people more and not just parents. The first strand within the Strategy was 'My Voice, My Choice' which ensures that every child and young person's views were listened to.
- (ii) Following the survey taken place between March and May 2019, young people put together a Children and Young People's POET challenge, this included their three priorities. A video was presented at the SEND Governance Board and to headteachers at a conference where they were asked to make a pledge, the young people were then to contact them to ask what difference had been made and report back through their networks with young people, the survey would then be repeated.
- (iii) Post 16 opportunities for young people was in the fifth strand of 'My Life, My Opportunities'. There was an employment team working with local businesses and employers to help prepare children and young people for work.
- (iv) Work was taking place on the new Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP). There would be input at the point of implementation to ensure the plan could be delivered effectively for children/young people. There was a system of moderation and quality assurance which was being held jointly by education, health and social care and partners from schools and families.

- (v) Members challenged how the Strategy was going to be implemented, how it was going to make a difference to families and young people and how this would be monitored.
- (vi) A virtual Graffiti Wall was open all hours for families to share their experiences.
- (vii) There was an Ordinarily Available Offer which ensured that there was the same high-quality offer in every early year's setting, school and college across Essex. Schools that believed they were doing well at inclusion had been asked to come forward as well as schools that were finding it a challenge. Early adopters would work with Essex for six months to set the standard and then it would be rolled out fully to other schools.
- (viii) The Inclusion Framework had been piloted mainly in mid-Essex and small pilots in the north-east, west and south of the county and it was currently being formally evaluated before it was rolled out more widely.
- (ix) The Essex Headteacher Roundtable had grown in membership and shared best practice and learning and helped drive inclusiveness.
- (x) Children were finding it difficult to make the transition back to school since the pandemic and it was important to recognise the trauma that a lot of families had experienced. Strategies and support were to be put in place that enabled children and families to make that transition back to school feel safe again.
- (xi) Some Members raised concerns regarding the lack of provision in the Dengie area and the long journey times a lot of young people had had to endure as a result. As well as building specialist provision, evaluation of the use of enhanced provisions in more mainstream schools was taking place.
- (xii) There was a new Essex Local Offer platform to be put in place which would be a one-stop shop where families could go for information. There was funding for a content writer which meant that information would be written in a way that should be accessible to every young person and family. In July 2022 further details would be provided.
- (xiii) Information leaflets were suggested. The Essex Family Forum was looking into what would work as a resource to support schools to give to families that would point them to the Essex Local Offer.

Conclusion:

Members encouraged further clarity on the links and golden threads between different corporate strategies within the portfolio.

**It was agreed:**

- (i) That there would be a further update to the Committee as the Strategy developed into implementation.
- (ii) To report back on the ongoing evaluation between investing in specialist schools and where/when to incorporate into mainstream and more detail on relevant aspects of planned capital programme.
- (iii) That a brief written response be provided on how climate considerations were to be incorporated in the approach to home to school transport in future.
- (iv) Further information would be circulated on the Young People's POET challenge, how families can share their views with the independent parent carer network for Essex through a virtual graffiti wall, and the newsletter for families.

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

**5. Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022-2027**

The Committee considered report PAF/02/22 comprising of a further update on the development of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022-27. The following people from Essex County Council attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

Councillor Beverley Egan – Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Early Years;  
Carolyn Terry – EYCC Sufficiency and Sustainability Manager.

The new Early Years and Childcare Strategy had been officially launched and set out the commitments to improve outcomes for young children and ensure every child in Essex got the best start to life. The presentation included a summary of the visions and aims, key priorities for Year One of the new Strategy, the delivery plan, further information of the Word Gap and summary of the analysis of feedback from surveys and consultations that had been undertaken.

Following the presentation, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- i) The priority for the coming year was to ensure that there were effective systems in place to help identify, as early as possible,

those children that needed most help and to track their progress with a main focus on disadvantaged 2 year-olds identified as eligible to access a funded childcare place. These children would then be a core cohort to focus early language and communication development to help close the Word Gap outcomes.

- ii) Good nutrition, the use of cutlery and toilet training was important in terms of child development. These aspects were covered as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The Essex Child Family Wellbeing Service also supported families regarding nutrition and toilet training and there was a School Readiness Pathway in place with the Essex Child Family Wellbeing Service.
- iii) In the survey two thirds of respondents were aware of the tax-free childcare allowance but less than a third were using it. It was expected that this would improve with more information on eligibility being provided to parents.
- iv) The Free Early Education Entitlement Funding was provided by the Department of Education based on participation levels derived from local census data.
- v) All of Essex's Extended Free Entitlement was paid at a set rate of £4.30 an hour for each child so there was no discrepancy between areas.
- vi) During the pandemic all possible information regarding covid support grants was given to providers and guidance on what they could access. Local councils were also contacted to encourage early years' settings to access the grant funding. A team of business management consultants worked with early years settings to help them look at other grants that were also available, with an advance for the Free Early Education Entitlement Funding also an option to help with cash flow.
- vii) There were big ambitions for the Charter including creating accredited modules for childcare providers to undertake and get quality accreditation and this included a module on the environment.
- viii) A high percentage of early years' settings in Essex were judged as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted. When a setting fell into 'required improvement' or 'inadequate' there were quadrant teams to support those settings. If they were unable to improve then the Free Education Entitlement Funding could be taken away.
- ix) As part of the Essex Child Family Wellbeing Service there was a new-born visit as part of a handover from midwives to Health Visitors. A six-to-eight-week check took place and further 1 year

and 2 year checks. The checks helped to see whether parents required any targeted support.

- x) Funding had been received across Burnham North, Burnham South and Burnham West to create new early years' places.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed:**

- (i) I Can Do advice to be distributed.
- (ii) Further information to be provided on the rates of school readiness.
- (iii) To include in the next update, some further information on the consideration of the environmental impact of Early Years' settings and work planned with providers on this.
- (iv) A further update to be scheduled to review progress.

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

**6. Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group**

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/03/22 comprising of the one-off meeting convened in the form of a whole-committee Task and Finish Group looking at information available to local members to help them signpost services. Members discussed raising the profile of the report.

**Work Programme**

**7.**

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/04/22 comprising the work programme for the committee.

**Future Meeting Dates**

**8.**

The Committee considered and agreed report PAF/05/22 comprising of future meeting dates for the Committee.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 10 March 2022.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.30pm.