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**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, 27 June 2019**

**Present:**

*County Councillors:*

J Chandler (Chairman)

G Butland

J Deakin

B Egan

C Guglielmi

J Henry (Vice Chairman from appointment at agenda item 2)

P May

R Pratt

P Reid

C Souter

C Weston

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, was also present throughout.

**1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted incorporating membership changes agreed at Full Council on 14 May 2019. Councillor Chandler had been appointed as Chairman of the Committee and she thanked Councillor Maddocks for his leadership of the Committee in the previous two years.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Baker, and Richard Carson, Educational Co-optee.

*Declarations of interest:*

Councillor Butland - Code interest – Chief Executive, East Anglia's Children's Hospices. He considered that this did not prejudice his consideration of the public interest and to speak on the matters on the agenda.

Councillor Chandler – Chairman of Chelmsford Advisory Board

**2 Election of Vice Chairmen for the 2019/20 municipal year**

The Chairman invited nominations for Vice Chairman for the 2019/20 municipal year. Councillor Baker was nominated by Councillor McEwan and seconded by Councillor Souter, and Councillor Henry was nominated by Councillor Egan and seconded by Cllr Guglielmi. With no other nominations received, by general consent their appointments were agreed.

**3. Minutes**

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The draft minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2019 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

**4. Questions from the public**

There were no questions from the public.

**5. Respite Care**

The committee considered report PAF/14/19 incorporating details about a petition received regarding services provided at Lavender House and The Maples short break residential respite facilities in Colchester and Harlow respectively and further information on respite care provision in Essex. From April 2019, an operational short term decision had been taken at both homes to operate one flat (four beds) rather than two in response to reduced use of both homes over time.

The following petitioners were invited to address the committee, outline their concerns and respond to questions from members.

Gary Knowles – Lead Petitioner  
Fay Knowles - Petitioner  
Lorraine Who – Petitioner

During the subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted:

- (i) Children using the facilities were all individuals with unique needs and could not be easily categorised. It was also stressed that children needed respite as well as the parents;
- (ii) The facilities at lavender and Maples provided 24 hours a day support and it was questioned whether that was available for those needing it in all the alternative facilities;
- (iii) Lavender and Maples residents were supported in safe and secure surroundings and encouraged to develop life skills and taken on outings and it was questioned whether other care settings would be able to offer all this;
- (iv) There was a suspicion that qualifying for respite care had become more difficult and that there was little information about the eligibility criteria;
- (v) There was little information available about how the assessment panel was constituted and any appeals process.

Thereafter, the petitioners returned to the public gallery and the following joined the meeting:

Councillor Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member – Children and Families,  
Christina Pace, Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy, Essex  
County Council,  
Russell Breyer, Director Local Delivery (Children and Families).

The Chairman asked for a response to the concerns raised by petitioners and to be updated more generally on respite care provision in Essex. Councillor McKinlay advised that no final decision had yet been made on the proposal to confirm the continuation of the current short-term change to capacity at Lavender and Maples although she expected to make that decision soon. She acknowledged that respite care for each individual child was a complex and emotional issue.

The Cabinet Member and officers considered that the proposed confirmation of the reduction in capacity at both Lavender and Maples would not impact on availability due to a reducing demand for overnight stays at those homes. An array of options for overnight respite care were available in Essex ranging including short term- foster carers which, it was acknowledged, would only be suitable for some and not all children.

### Reviews

- A review was looking at the range of options for the overall provision of overnight care, which included family-based care, short break foster care as well as some early discussions with schools. However, it was recognised that not all the options would be suitable for all children. The intention and opportunity afforded by the review was to expand choice.
- There would be a review of direct payments arrangements and whether, in some cases, they could further empower some families. It was acknowledged that this needed to be flexible as extra responsibility may overly burden some families and carers.

### Assessment process

- There had been no recent changes to assessment criteria. However there had been a pause put in place in new referrals specifically to Maples and Lavender in December 2018 to facilitate the review of the service and range of support available.
- The assessment of need for respite care was a professional process instigated by the social worker, informed by both national and local criteria, which would then be brought before an assessment panel. The conduit for communications with parents and carers was through the social worker and it was acknowledged that that conduit may need further review. It was stressed that the social worker

should explain to families the process for escalation and complaints process if they are dissatisfied with the assessment outcome.

- Since the temporary pause in new referrals to Lavender and Maples, there had been 17 cases identified for overnight respite care with some placements to still be found for the very recent ones. However, respite care had been provided for the remainder.
- The panel membership included two service managers to bring an element of peer challenge, as well as other professional practitioners. Whilst the managers of both the Lavender and Maples facilities were usually consulted as part of the assessment process, it was acknowledged that perhaps they could be used more.
- Members were keen to encourage greater transparency about the make-up of the assessment panel and to consider if families should be represented on the panel.
- Where a need for respite had been identified, a range of options within a reasonable travelling distance would be discussed with families and carers and might include some out of county options depending on circumstances.
- A recent OFSTED review had concluded that there were adequate social workers in place to undertake assessments and that caseloads were deemed to be manageable.

#### Trend data

Collection of further historical trend data for children requiring the type of overnight respite care accommodation available at Lavender and Maples was underway.

#### Transparency

Members stressed the importance of there being a robust assessment process, a clear and transparent decision-making process and clear guidance and transparency on dispute escalation and complaints options.

Respite care would be discussed at the Essex Family Forum and members encouraged working with petitioners to help formulate ideas about future service delivery and consider a more formal service user group.

#### Conclusion and actions

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Lead Petitioner responded to the discussion by emphasising his continuing frustration with the lack of

consultation with families and carers on the respite needs for children and inadequate communication of a number of processes.

It was agreed that further updates were required to provide members with assurance about the robustness and transparency of the assessment and appeals process for respite care, that there was clear communications with families and carers, and that there would be opportunities for families and carers to help influence future service delivery and range of options. Specifically, the Committee recommended that the Cabinet Member and officers:

- (i) Undertake a review of the respite care assessment process to address issues raised in the meeting specifically around the transparency of the process and the eligibility criteria thresholds and to consider service user representation on the assessment panel;
- (ii) Review procedures to improve communications with families and carers particularly around the assessment process, appeals process;
- (iii) Investigate and check that social workers are providing all necessary advice on options and process to escalate dissatisfaction with assessment outcomes, including the formal complaints procedure;
- (iv) To report back on the review being undertaken to investigate further empowering some families through the Direct payments Scheme.
- (v) Provide further information on historical trends for overnight respite care demand with particular reference to the type of service provided at Lavender and Maples.

[During the Work Programme agenda item later in the meeting, some members suggested the Committee should be able to have further formal discussions and updates before a decision was made specifically about the facilities at Lavender and Maples. After further reflection after the meeting, those members agreed that this was not necessary as they had been reassured that further discussions between Cabinet Member, officers and petitioners would now be established allaying many of the concerns about service providers being involved in future consideration of service improvements, options and delivery].

The witnesses then left the meeting.

## **6. Pre-birth to 19 Virgin Care contract**

The Committee considered report PAF/15/19. The report provided an update on the operation and performance of the Pre-birth to 19 Contract placed with Virgin Care which commenced on 1 April 2017 and incorporated services previously delivered in SureStart Children's Centres, Family Nurse Partnership, Healthy Child and Healthy Schools Programmes.

Richard Comerford, Managing Director, Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service, Virgin Care Services Limited and Chris Martin, Director, Strategic Commissioning & Policy (Children and Families), Essex County Council, joined the meeting to introduce the update and respond to questions. Councillor McKinlay had given her apologies for this item.

During the introduction the following key features of the contract were highlighted:

- Moving from counting the volume of activity to quality of outcome with new measures now developed and agreed. Providers would be able to start reporting on actual impact from this year.
- A focus on those at risk of not achieving outcomes, with resource diverted accordingly (rather than traditional universal service).
- An integrated multidisciplinary model with early years/family support staff now working closely with health visitors, school nurses and others.
- Children's therapy services delivered in West Essex (commissioned by West Essex CCG) also included in the contract.

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

- Commissioners were expecting to see more visible benefits from the contract during year 3.
- Increased focus on reaching and helping priority groups. Sub-district reporting was now allowing greater focus on the geographical areas where there is the greatest need as well as any poor performance.
- There could be better links with planning authorities to encourage more conversations about planning local environments for children.
- Health commissioners in other Essex CCG areas were monitoring the operation of the contract before instigating any decision to add their commissioned child therapy services to the contract. Some of those health commissioners may also be operating longer term contracts which might preclude them from pursuing that at present.
- North quadrant in particular had some challenging areas with significant complexity and vulnerability.
- Mid quadrant had had some staffing challenges, particularly in Braintree and Maldon, and difficulty in updating some estate. Mid performance was strong in meeting mandatory health checks but it had struggled to get ante-natal information on time from the NHS

and the service had now placed a member of staff in the maternity department to help speed up that process.

- South quadrant had been hitting performance targets but had had the challenge of significant staff shortages (especially Health Visitors).
- There was a longer-term strategy to 'grow our own' through dedicated training programmes with a large number of those soon graduating from a current scheme targeted for placement in the south.
- It was confirmed that safeguarding concern and escalation processes were considered to be working satisfactorily. It was suggested that families were safer under the new service model with clearly identifiable safeguarding leads and more consistent and relevant staff training undertaken with expert practitioners.

### Conclusion

The Chairman thanked the witnesses for their attendance. It was agreed:

- (i) Further information on the KPIs being used for each Outcome Measure should be provided;
- (ii) Further information on the district breakdown for priority groups data should be provided;

Members were encouraged by the new focus and direction of the contract and requested a further update in twelve months' time.

## **7. Work Programme**

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/16/19. Councillor Guglielmi updated the Committee on the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group looking at drug gangs, knife crime and county lines. An update on the Young Carers service would be scheduled.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be on Thursday 11 July 2019.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 13.05pm.

**Chairman**