
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, 16 January 2020

Present:

County Councillors:

J Chandler (Chairman)

J Baker (Vice Chairman)

J Deakin

M Durham (substitute)

C Guglielmi (items 1- 5(i) only)

A Hedley (substitute)

J Lumley

M Maddocks (substitute) (items 1-4 only)

P May (items 1-4 only)

M McEwan

R Pratt (items 1-4 only)

P Reid

C Souter

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. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Butland (for whom Councillor Maddocks substituted), Egan (for whom Councillor Durham substituted), Henry (for whom Councillor Hedley substituted), Weston, and Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex.

Declarations of code interest were made by Councillors Pratt and Lumley (Chairmen of Governors, and Governor respectively of Primary Schools) and Councillor May, he was a Director of Business Opportunities for the Physically Handicapped. These were noted although not considered sufficient to prevent participation in the meeting.

2. Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 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. Day Opportunities

The Committee considered report PAF/01/20 detailing a proposal for a new contract for ECL Day Opportunities and Employment which was to be presented to Cabinet for approval in February 2020.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questioning:

County Councillor John Spence, Cabinet Member – Health and Adult Social Care;

Chris Martin, Director, Strategic Commissioning & Policy (C&F)

Nick Presmeg, Executive Director, Adult Social Care

Joe Coogan, Director of Operations, Essex Cares

During discussion the following was highlighted and/or noted:

- (i) Essex County Council (ECC) currently commissioned a range of services known as 'day opportunities' for adults with disabilities and older people to enable them to take part in activities outside their home, as well as enabling a break for family carers;
- (ii) Essex Cares Limited (ECL) were the largest provider of these services in Essex. The Cabinet member acknowledged that the current contract with ECL had not been as successful as he would have liked.
- (iii) ECC was now seeking to improve the model of care and increase the number of adults with learning disabilities and/or autism in meaningful paid employment and restructuring the Day Opportunities programme into a Supported Employment Programme. It was proposed to directly award an outcomes focused contract to ECL to deliver this.
- (iv) Employment was a key focus area of ECC's Meaningful Lives Matter transformation programme for people with a learning disability and/or autism.
- (v) With 16% of 18-64 year olds with a learning disability known to Adult Social Care already in employment, Essex already performed well compared to a national average of 6% but the aspiration was higher.
- (vi) Mr Coogan advised that he viewed the current service was following a fairly traditional model and that there was a cohort of people currently attending who could be supported into work. It was also acknowledged that there would still remain another client group of those with LD s with profound complexities who would still need an offer that helped them maximise their skills and opportunities to be as independent as possible.

- (vii) It was stressed that as ECC and ECL were trying to broker something different, it was anticipated that there would be more collaborative approach between commissioner and provider towards the effective operation of the new contract.
- (viii) Members highlighted other facilities that offered greater independence for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism such as Market fields and Acorn Village and that the day opportunities service should link with them if it had not already done so.
- (i) It was hoped that the changes would also give other organisations and employers the opportunity to further broaden their own offers. Further work was being planned with local employers, starting with the larger employers. However, members cautioned not to overlook the importance of working with smaller businesses as well.
- (ix) It was acknowledged that there may need to be some work needed with parents and carers about their expectations and to address any anxieties, and how to transition and support those that may be institutionalised in their family settings. Further thought would also need to be given as to how to engage with older demographics to get them to embrace the changes.
- (x) Further thought would also need to be given to thinking about improving the employability of those recovering from mental health issues and those with sensory impairments and care leavers.
- (xi) Further thought would also be given to fostering employment rather than just jobs - i.e. pop up stalls selling products.
- (xii) It was anticipated that some support would be in the employment environment including work shadowing if necessary.
- (xiii) Increasingly, ECC would be focussing on the social value aspects of its large procurement contracts and the inclusivity of employment practices.
- (xiv) Upon being challenged by the Committee on the proposal to award the contract to ECL, officers stressed that during the last year they had seen significant innovation and new ways of working from ECL which had convinced ECC that there was the appetite within ECL to deliver the new aspirations for day opportunities service.

Conclusion:

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their attendance. The following actions were **agreed**:

- (i) Cllr Spence agreed to amend the Cabinet paper to make it clear that employment support services, in particular, could be delivered from a variety of community settings in future.
- (ii) It was agreed that Cabinet Member/officers would give further thought to introducing some form of accreditation scheme for employers to support the project.

The meeting adjourned at 11.45 and reconvened at 11.50am.
Councillors Maddocks, May and Pratt left before the meeting reconvened.

5. Education portfolio update: follow-up actions

The Committee considered report PAF/02/20 addressing follow-up actions from July 2019.

The following joined the meeting to support the item:

Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education;
County Councillor Ivan Henderson (for the discussion on children missing education only – he left the meeting thereafter);
Clare Kershaw, Director – Education.

- (i) Children missing education
 - Councillor Gooding had hosted a cross party group of members to look into issues around children missing education. ECC had provided comprehensive responses to Department of Education consultations on the issue and put forward a number of key recommendations. The Committee were being asked to support ECC's approach to continue lobbying on this issue.
 - It was estimated that at least 2000 young people were being home educated in Essex. It was acknowledged that those parents and carers who had done this for religious and cultural reasons often had good outcomes.
 - Councillor Henderson stressed that the issue had been a good opportunity for cross party work and many of the conclusions aligned with the views of the Children's Commissioner.
 - The intention was that comprehensive advice and guidance on the expectations of home education should be made available to parents and carers thinking about it in future, to challenge their commitment to undertaking it, so that a fully informed decision could be made. Ideally, a registration system could be established.

- There should be provision for re-registration at the same school so that the school still retained responsibility for the young person being re-integrated back into mainstream education should that decision be made at a future date. Such an approach would also prevent using off-rolling as a mechanism to move a child to another school. However, it was acknowledged that there would be a financial impact on schools in having that ongoing obligation.
- Members encouraged processes that could enable the sharing of information on families travelling between areas between different local authorities.
- Those being home educated currently missed out on many of the educational awareness programmes delivered and available at schools including mental health awareness, cultural and social development, risk aversion and safeguarding amongst others.

Conclusion:

The Committee supported the approach and lobbying proposed. Cllr Gooding **agreed** to consider if, at this point in time, the proposed recommendations needed to be extended to cover -cross county arrangements and sharing information between local authorities.

Councillors Guglielmi and Henderson then left the meeting.

(ii) Expectations of interventions by the Early Years' Sector

Clare Kershaw gave an oral update on interventions by the Early Years' sector. There was work underway looking at establishing a new school readiness strategy. This strategy would include looking at the support for initial transition into a child's first school and the processes in place for communications and language development testing at the end of reception year. Development of the strategy also needed to align with other workstreams being led by Councillor Mckinlay (Cabinet Member for Children and Families) on deprivation, disadvantaged, and those just about managing, and also the interface with the children's wellbeing service delivered by Virgin care and Barnardo's. The strategy would also look at further improving the targeting of resource.

Conclusion: **Agreed** that the draft Early Years Strategy would be presented to the Committee ahead of launch.

(iii) Wellbeing programmes in schools and personal resilience

Clare Kershaw provided an oral update on work underway to further improve the linkages of wellbeing programmes operating in schools with the provider of emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people in Essex and the promotion of personal resilience.

- The intention was to focus further on more early intervention and prevention prior to the thresholds for the current commissioned service with the North East London Foundation Trust and to look at underlying reasons for bad or disruptive behaviour.
- There was an ambition for every school to be trained in trauma prevention practice. The practice was more than just a workforce development programme and sought to change the values and ethos in a school.
- Mapping of secondary support available had highlighted that there were around 300 support networks in Essex that can build upon and complement ECCs commissioned emotional wellbeing and mental health services. ECC were looking at developing a portal for this information as part of highlighting the suite of services available.
- In terms of personal resilience, ECC was looking at greater consistency in use of language and descriptions being used.

Conclusion

Agreed:

- (i) A copy of the Trauma Perceptive Practice to be circulated to members;
- (ii) Officers to revisit to see how Trauma Perceptive Practice will be monitored on an ongoing basis.
- (iii) A further update on wellbeing programmes and personal resilience to be given later in the year.

Councillor Gooding and Clare Kershaw then left the meeting.

6. Work Programme

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/03/20 comprising the current work programme for the Committee.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be on Thursday 13 February 2020.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.46pm.

Chairman