

DRAFT MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 March 2012 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Angie Gaywood (Chair), Mike Revell, Cathy Kent, Diana Hale, James Halden, Mark Coxshall,

Additional Members: Mr S Cray – Parent/Governor Representative
Mrs P Wilson – RC Church Representative
Rev D Rollins – Church of England Representative

Apologies: Councillor S MacPherson

In attendance: Ms J Olsson – Director of People Services
Ms C Littleton–Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes
Malcolm Taylor – Strategic Lead, Learner Support
Sue Green – Strategic Lead, Early Years, Families and Communities
Cllr O Gerrish – Portfolio Holder for Education
Cllr B Rice – Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care and Health
Ms E Sheridan – Electoral & Democratic Services

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S MacPherson.

2. ADDITIONAL ITEMS

The following items were mentioned under Additional Items:

- a) The Chair thanked Members who were invited and attended an event at Lakeside Shopping Centre to read to children.
- b) Cllr C Kent informed Members of the recent event at O2 arena attended by St Thomas Primary and Quarry Hill Primary School Children and the fantastic evening they had.
- c) Cllr D Hale informed Members of the recent schools poetry competition and the excellent work of the 6-11 year old children who recited poetry on stage at the Civic Hall.
- d) Cllr J Halden informed Members of his invitation and attendance with the Mayor to a citizenship event at Hassenbrook School and noted the challenging questions they faced from the children.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

Councillor Gaywood declared a personal interest as she has children attending Arthur Bugler Junior School, St. Clere's School. She is a Governor at Arthur Bugler Infant School; she has a disabled son in receipt of special care and is the Chair of the East Tilbury and St. Clere's Schools Collaboration Group. She is an SEN Parent Governor at St. Clere's School and a stakeholder member of Thurrock CVS. She is a member of the Adoption Panel.

Councillor Cathy Kent declared a personal interest as she has children attending St Thomas Primary School, Grays Convent School and Grays Media & Arts School. She is a Parent Governor at Grays Convent School. She is also a member of the Admissions Forum.

Mrs P Wilson declared a personal interest as she is the Chair of Governors at St Thomas's Primary School.

Mr S Cray declared a personal interest as he is a Parent Governor at St Clere's. He has a child attending St Clere's School and is a member of the East Tilbury School Collaboration Committee.

Reverend D Rollins declared a personal interest as he is a Governor at Corringham Primary School.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 1 February 2012, were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments and queries:

Ms P Wilson asked for the removal of the word Councillor against her name on page 3 of the minutes and her personal interests to be recorded.

Councillor D Hale asked that the minutes in relation to item 5, reflect accurately her statement that there had been 8 serious case reviews since 1998, some were deaths from natural causes but that in other serious cases, Members had agreed to be called in for an urgent pre-meeting. Officers confirmed that they were happy to continue this practice.

5. BEHAVIOUR AND ATTENDANCE

The Strategic Lead for Learner Support introduced the report and highlighted that the Pupil Referral Unit had undergone a restructuring

process and was now out of Special Measures. Members heard that the Jack Lobley Centre had relocated to the Culver Centre and all services now operated from the Culver Centre. Services at the Culver Centre were now going through further improvements including an improved curriculum offer at the Pupil Referral Unit. The Pupil Support Services has been under review and work is underway with Head Teachers to establish priorities and the future of Managed Moves.

The Strategic Lead outlined the development of Inclusion Centres and Day 6 provision and Members heard that there are three centres across the borough in Tilbury, Hassenbrook and the Culver Centre. Members were informed that Academies have to purchase Day 6 provision.

The range of support for effective behaviour and attendance was discussed and its links to the Early Offer of Help strategy. Members noted that there is a focus on primary schools and pupils at risk of exclusion.

Members discussed the report and requested circulation of colour copies of the Appendices.

A Member asked and was informed that Academies were represented on the Fair Access Panel.

A Member asked how the PRU was funded and was informed that once a child is permanently excluded from an Academy, it is the statutory duty of the Council to educate the child. A legislative change is underway and it is expected that in future Academies will have to purchase an Inclusion place. Another Member raised a similar question and asked if the new arrangements will help the local authority financially. The Committee heard that it was too early to outline the new arrangements but it is likely that the Academies will have an ongoing commitment.

A Member asked and was informed that the management and day to day running costs of the Pupil Referral Unit were part of the DSG, Dedicated Schools Grant.

A Member commented on fixed term exclusions in Thurrock Primary Schools being above the national average and asked why this was the case. Officers responded that the quality of effective management may be the reason but also said there was no indication that the population group was to blame. A range of factors may contribute to the reason and further work is required. Governing Bodies should ensure that fixed term exclusions are appropriately scrutinised. Officers also stated that fixed term exclusions are sometimes used instead of permanent exclusions which may distort the figures.

A Member asked if Primary Schools were as familiar with Managed Moves as Secondary Schools and with the process of Fixed Term Exclusions. Officers responded that they were but may need to increase the awareness.

A Member discussed the permanent exclusion figures further and asked if statistics were available to detail concentration of figures and schools. The Strategic Lead for Learner Support confirmed that the detail was available. Another Member asked if the figures were from the schools or the local authority and queried differences arising in the statistics. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes outlined that there may be a lag in the figures reported which accounted for the differences but the final report would contain the same figures. Officers confirmed they would send the report to all Members of the Committee and the Chairs of Governors.

A Member asked if reporting of exclusions was a statutory requirement of Academies. Officers confirmed they would check the requirements and respond.

A Member queried the referral process to the Pupil Referral Unit and asked what was being reviewed. Officers confirmed the process is being referred and clarified it was how referrals were received. The Member raised the further concern that high referring schools were not penalised or subject to full transparency. Officers confirmed that the local authority supported managed moves but not all moves were brokered by the authority and were between schools themselves. Officers confirmed that results of the review would be published.

A Member asked what targeted support would be on offer in relation to Fixed Term Exclusions. Officers responded that they would target schools with the greatest need, publish the information and work with Governors.

Members commented on unauthorised absences and how this correlated with holidays in term time. Officers responded that a very firm line was taken by schools in relation to holidays in term time and Members were pleased to note this but asked what could be done to discourage the trend. It was known that children are taken out of school and this contributes to the unauthorised absences. Headteachers don't want unauthorised absence as it looks like truancy. Officers agreed that there is a need for more publicity and actions including letters back to parents highlighting the issues regarding the number of lost school days.

A Member asked what high quality alternative programmes would be commissioned. Officers outlined a range of programmes including Gateway Connect, a vocational programme and Motivations, a basic skills programme. It was confirmed that these were funded from the PRU. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes outlined the

current position where the local authority had to decide whether to continue to run these services themselves or commission an external provider. The key issue for the future will be what will secure the best quality provision for the services.

Members noted that a visit to the PRU had been arranged for 28 March and the Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes asked Members to let her know if they wished to attend or arrange an alternative date after May 2012. Officers outlined the Academy model for PRU provision and the opportunities to link in with other organisations. They confirmed that legislation is changing and the Managing Body will be changed to a Governing Body.

A Member asked how many pupils were sent to Gateway Connect. The Officer confirmed it was 3 – 4 pupils but that there is no contract, just a slot purchase. Members confirmed they would welcome the opportunity to visit Gateway Connect.

RESOLVED that

1. **Overview and Scrutiny note recent developments relating to behaviour support and proposals to make further progress: and**
2. **Overview and Scrutiny note the progress on improving attendance and receive a briefing note following the release of benchmarked data in March 2012; and**
3. **Members of Overview and Scrutiny make arrangements with Officers if they wish to visit the Pupil Referral Unit.**

6. EARLY OFFER OF HELP

The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes introduced this item along with the Strategic Lead for Early Years, Families and Communities.

Members were informed of the progress made on the development of the draft strategy and were invited to endorse the direction of travel. Consultation had been undertaken with targeted services and Members noted that the response had indicated they required further time to discuss and respond.

The support available from the Early Offer of Help Strategy was explained and Members noted that 15% of the child population may need the Early Offer of Help. A range of areas had been identified with the greatest concentration of need where the risk of inequality was greater.

The key priorities for the Early Offer of Help were outlined and Officers clarified that the Strategy would be very clear about the core offer of services to be delivered along with those no longer to be delivered.

Officers confirmed that the Strategy would be taken to Cabinet in June 2012 with a rolling programme of implementation, finalised in April 2013.

A Member questioned adult behaviours and the harmful impact on children and was informed by Officers that Drug and Alcohol Team (DAAT) was part of Public Protection and therefore part of People Services. He further questioned that adults don't always appreciate the harmful impact of their lifestyle and asked what the plan was for engagement and outreach. Officers responded that they would identify and target services by looking at indicators and triggers such as drug and alcohol problems. Officers confirmed that it was a wider issue than 'parents will tell us vocally' and will include items such as drugs testing and indicators such as a reduction in domestic abuse cases. The Member confirmed it would be clearer if the Strategy reflected the actions more clearly and Officers confirmed it could be included although it was detailed in the Performance Management Framework.

A Member highlighted to the Committee the areas that had been identified as at risk but commented this was a large area of Thurrock. Officers confirmed that these had been listed on a Ward basis but they could identify at street/base level areas with greater concentration of need. There were also pockets outside of the listed areas which would not be ignored.

A Member raised the concern that 3000 families had been identified as requiring specialist services. Officers clarified that this should read 3000 children but agreed this was still a high figure. Performance Management would be reported internally through Overview and Scrutiny and the Health and Well Being Board. Officers and Members debated the reporting frequency and confirmed that a twice yearly report would be appropriate.

The Troubled Families Project nationally was also discussed. The Director of People Services confirmed that the Troubled Families Programme is completely integrated and the council will not run two parallel programmes. This was an integral part of the Early Offer of Help Strategy. The bid will be submitted at the end of March and work is underway to develop this.

A Member raised a concern with Health taking the lead on issues. Officers confirmed that Workforce Development is crucial with an in built reporting framework where Health takes the lead.

RESOLVED that Members note the progress made on the development of the Strategy and discuss any feedback on the draft Strategy.

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN REVIEW AND REFRESH 2012-2013

The Director of People Services introduced this item and outlined that the Review was very strong and the Refresh retained key pillars. The Review also retained key objectives with some objectives refined to reflect policy changes or reshape direction.

A Member raised the issue of CAF (Common Assessment Framework) forms and the need for the forms to be standardised to make them more parent friendly and remove inconsistency. Officers responded that CAF is not intended to be a form. Rather, it is a process and there is a need to strengthen the use of CAF as a system. The use of the process needs to be completely embedded in the Early Offer of Help.

With regard to the Refresh, a Member questioned the shortage of provision of services. Officers responded that they are working to identify premises and are looking at the outlined changes to Children's Centres which may provide premises that can be offered to private providers. Additionally they are working on links with Planning Services to identify opportunities but stressed that there are not a large number of parents who are unable to access free entitlement. They will improve the targeting of groups who might not access what is available to them.

Members also heard that Officers are working with Colleges to strengthen their offer for 16-19 year olds with SEN and achieve closer liaison and easier transitions.

Officers confirmed that they are meeting with Colleges week commencing 19 March to discuss the difficulties experienced delivering the range of services required and Officers will provide further feedback when it is available.

Members highlighted the good work of Adult Lifestyle Solutions and the Committee noted the recent visit to Davy Down.

RESOLVED that

- 1. The Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Children and Young People's Plan Review and Refresh 2012-2013**
- 2. That, subject to any comments or amendments it may wish to recommend, the Committee receives this report and endorses**

the Review and Refresh prior to publication on the Thurrock website.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair asked Members to consider any items for the future work programme and if they had responded to a previous request for items.

Cllr M Revell raised his previous request for a financial report on Grangewaters and this was circulated to Members of the Committee at the meeting.

No items for the Work Programme were raised at the meeting and Members were asked to consider and feedback further to the Chair and Officers.

The meeting finished at 8.30 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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