

**DRAFT MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 October 2012 at 7.00pm.**

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**Present:** Councillors Diana Hale (Chair), Charles Curtis, Wendy Curtis (Substitute), Cathy Kent, Sue Little, Joy Redsell (Substitute)

**Additional Members:** Mrs P Wilson – RC Church Representative

**Apologies:** Mr S Cray – Parent/Governor Representative  
Rev D Rollins – Church of England Representative

**In attendance:** Ms C Littleton–Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes  
Ms B Foster – Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes  
Ms J Clark – Strategic Leader, Operations, Resources and Libraries  
Ms V Cutler – Interim Strategic Lead, School Improvement, Learning and Skills  
Ms E Sheridan – Electoral & Democratic Services

At the start of the meeting the Chair advised those present that the meeting would not be Audio Recorded and welcomed new Members to the Committee.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Halden (substituted by Councillor J Redsell), Councillor C Baldwin (substituted by Councillor W Curtis), Steve Cray and Reverend D Rollins.

**2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on 3 July 2012, were approved as a correct record.

**3. ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

The Committee agreed to take an Urgent Item – Community Hub, in order that their comments may be fed back to the November Cabinet. The Chair confirmed that this item would be taken after Item 6, which was later amended and taken as Item 9.

The Chair informed the Committee that she would be requesting the Chief Executive and/or the Leader to bring a paper to the Committee outlining the impact of shared services and its effect on vulnerable children to the November meeting.

The Chair informed the Committee that she wanted to broaden the remit of representation of co-opted members and intended to follow this up further with the support of the Members. Members agreed this course of action.

#### **4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following items were noted:

Councillor Diana Hale is a member of South Essex College Corporation

Councillor Cathy Kent has children attending St Thomas Primary School, Grays Convent School and Grays Media & Arts School. She is a Parent Governor at Grays Convent School.

Councillor Charles Curtis is a Governor at the Ockendon School and has grandchildren attending school in Bulphan.

Councillor Wendy Curtis has grandchildren attending school in Bulphan.

Councillor Joy Redsell has grandchildren attending Deneholm Primary School.

Mrs P Wilson is the Chair of Governors at St Thomas's Primary School.

##### a) Whipping

No interests were declared.

#### **5. PUPIL PLACE PLANNING**

Colour copies of the Plan were tabled at the meeting.

The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes introduced the report and outlined the strategic and robust approach taken to Pupil Place Planning.

The Strategic Leader, Operations, Resources and Libraries explained in detail to Members how data had been gathered and used to produce the draft Pupil Place Plan. The plan is scheduled to go to November 2012 Cabinet, be reviewed annually and the data monitored on a termly basis.

In considering the report and the Plan, Councillor Little questioned the formula previously used for Pupil Place Planning. Officers confirmed that there was a formula in place previously but that it had not been made public. The level of detail in the Plan is new and publication of the calculations is made to ensure transparency, which was welcomed by Members.

Several Members questioned figures relating to individual schools and asked how Officers would resolve issues in schools which showed a deficit of places. Officers confirmed the actions they would take in such circumstances and Members noted that in some cases the projected number of children may not

materialise. A further report on how the need (deficit) will be met will be produced by Officers.

Councillor Little questioned when the schools were last audited in relation to size and use of the accommodation. The Officer confirmed that there is an asset review annually and a condition report had just been completed showing the floor size of schools. Councillor J Redsell requested a copy of this report.

Ms P Wilson raised the issue of the free school in Tilbury and what impact this will have on the Pupil Place Plan. The Officer confirmed that they had looked at the impact on surrounding schools and migration and would have trend data available next year. The Chair informed Members that the free school could potentially lessen the pressure on Catholic Schools in the area.

Ms P Wilson and other members of the Committee discussed the use of demountables and the length of time they are used for. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes informed Members that they have a lifespan of ten years, can be reused, are cheaper than building permanently and provide a flexible way of meeting temporary needs. The Chair advised Members concerned with the use of demountables to view their use at the Adult College. Officers confirmed they would respond to Councillor Redsell on the question of long term use of demountables at Deneholm School. The Chair requested that Stifford Clays Primary also be included in the response by Officers.

Councillor Redsell questioned the impact of the Gateway freeschool on Woodside School. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes outlined the travel plan research undertaken and Members noted that the long term effect will make places available in local schools.

Councillor C Kent raised the issue of expanding schools and the impact on the roads especially at schools which take additional pupils and how this affects road safety. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes confirmed that in such cases they have discussions with the schools and carry out traffic impact assessments and draw up travel plans.

The Chair raised the issue of audit of schools and attendance of children according to where they live. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes confirmed that auditors had recently undertaken an audit of schools in Chafford Hundred and did not find a single case of fraud.

Councillor C Kent raised the issue of extra places required at schools, especially in Chafford Hundred and highlighted there was no room for expansion at these schools. Officers were questioned as to what were the current options. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes confirmed to Members that they were actively looking at the current options.

The Chair asked members to look in detail at the Plan and send comments to her.

**RESOLVED that Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment and propose any additions or amendments to help shape the plan prior to consideration by Cabinet.**

**6. PROGRESS REPORT ON STANDARDS IN THE EARLY YEARS, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PHASES**

The Interim Strategic Leader for School Improvement, Learning & Skills introduced the report which provided an overview of standards across all phases in settings and schools based on national tests and examination results for summer 2012. Members were informed that a more detailed report would be available in January 2013 when final figures are available. Members noted that overall it is a positive picture, especially at Key Stage One, and that Foundation now meets the national average. Each of the Key Stages was outlined to Members.

In response to the report on Key Stage 2, the Chair questioned which schools were below the floor standard and if they had been affected by academisation. Officers responded that academisation does require a focus on the process and does have risks but that some schools had been below floor standards over some time and that officers will support the schools and Governing Bodies. Members heard the support mechanisms in place to assist the schools below floor standard.

Members questioned the gender difference in results and Officers responded that this is a national issue and practical activities to support boys were required as well as support for education by parents at every transition.

Councillor Kent questioned Officers on how academy status affected support. Officers responded that academies can purchase support from the Local Authority and underlined that the duty is to the children of Thurrock.

The Chair questioned a previous growth bid that was discussed at Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and asked if the support strategy was working. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes confirmed that it was. The Officer confirmed that it was possible to amend the scheme of intervention if necessary, reprofile and allocate appropriate resources.

Councillor Little referenced the employment of male mentors in schools and welcomed this initiative, especially in relation to broken families. Officers agreed that it was difficult to employ male primary school teachers and male mentors and an increase of male staff would be welcomed by most head teachers.

In relation to Key Stage 4 data, the Officer outlined that the data is more problematic as the Department of Education data differs slightly from the Local Authority data. Generally the results have fallen slightly but remain above the national average. Members heard that the Authority has committed to the legal challenge on English results.

Members discussed the results for Looked After Children and the Officer confirmed that Year 11 and Year 6 children will be provided with individual tuition as they need it and mentored at school or through the Virtual School. Support will also be provided to their carers to support these children. Tracking through to GCSE will begin from Year 9.

Councillor Little questioned Officers on support provided to a child that subsequently leaves care. Officers confirmed that continuity is key and hoped that information is passed on but outlined that it would be a very small number of children that would be in that situation.

The Chair questioned officers to confirm if the Personal Education Plans of each child are adequate. Officers responded that there is room for continuous improvement and they will look at the Plans, put additional monitoring in place and work closely together.

**RESOLVED that**

- a) Overview and Scrutiny noted the outcomes of the summer 2012 tests and examinations and**
- b) Overview and Scrutiny are satisfied that the primary school improvement strategy is capable of ensuring standards reach the council target of exceeding national averages by 2013.**

## **7. OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes outlined the report which informed the Committee of the Inspection and how it compares with neighbouring and national results and gave Members the opportunity to comment on the Action Plan. Members of the Committee heard that the report had already been to Cabinet and was brought to Overview and Scrutiny as Members had expressed a wish to monitor and support the Action Plan.

The Chair questioned the Action Plan and why it had not been updated. Officers responded that the Action Plan was updated at management meetings and at the time of submission for printing the version brought before Members was the latest update. Officers agreed to circulate to Members of the Committee an updated Action Plan for information.

Members questioned who had ownership of the figures / electronic comments and Members were reassured of the security of the recorded notes.

Councillor C Curtis questioned the money allocated for Personal Education Allowance and how this is looked after by the school. The Officer outlined the allowances a child received and how they may be spent. Members with

individual questions regarding specific cases were advised to speak to the Officer outside of the meeting.

Councillor C Curtis raised the issue of immunisation for Looked After Children and why Thurrock is below average. The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes outlined that this had been questioned during the Inspection. Members noted that there had been a recording issue and the figures may not reflect reality.

The Chair congratulated the Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes on the Ofsted Report.

Councillor Little questioned Officers on children in care living in Council houses and was reassured by Officers on the systems in place. In response to a specific case, Councillor Little was advised to speak to the Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED that Members**

- a) note the process and outcome of the Inspection and congratulate members, staff and partners on the very good outcome achieved in Thurrock; and**
- b) note the progress on the implementation of the action plan and offer appropriate support and challenge to ensure any slippage is avoided.**

**8. REPORT ON ADOPTION INSPECTION AND ACTION PLAN**

Prior to the introduction of the report, the Chair questioned officers on the length of time it had taken for this report to be brought before the Committee. The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes confirmed that in order to meet the regulatory requirements of an Adoption Agency, the Service has to report regularly to a governance body on all aspects of the Service, which, in Thurrock, is the Corporate Parenting Committee. The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes outlined that the Inspection Report was presented to members of the Committee for scrutiny. Officers and members discussed the timing of the report and officers confirmed this was the first meeting slot after the Inspection.

Officers were asked to schedule the future work programme to enable the prompt discussion of such Inspection Reports.

**RESOLVED that**

**the Committee note the content of the Report and the progress of the implementation of the Action Plan.**

**The item of Urgent Business was discussed as Item 9 and the Work Programme was discussed as Item 10.**

## 9. COMMUNITY HUB

The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes outlined the report the purpose of which was to engage Members in the co-production of the South Ockendon community hub pathfinder and to brief Members on outcomes being sought, the emerging design features, the programme of implementation and decision making timetable.

Members heard that broad consultation had taken place in regard to the item and Councillor W Curtis had been involved in previous meetings. As Project Director, the Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes confirmed that the Hub was looking to open by the end of February/ March 2013, following consideration by Cabinet in November.

Members were informed that residents who were concerned about the closure of libraries had been consulted and were welcoming proposals that would aid this. This model would involve remodelling of the existing Belhus Library site and incorporate other shared services such as housing and adult social services.

The Chair asked that consideration be given to the use of vacant shops rather than the library. The Officer confirmed that it had previously been considered but discounted due to space requirements. They are conscious of leaving vacant shops in the high street and Councillor W Curtis confirmed discussions had taken place regarding pop up shops and discussion was taking place with the Director of Housing. Councillor W Curtis confirmed that the concept was good but reiterated concerns that the Community Forum building would be empty. The Chair asked that consideration be given to turning the building into homes rather than leave it vacant.

Councillor Redsell addressed the Committee in respect of how it may work in Corringham Library and Chadwell Library but it would not be possible in Blackshots Library due to space constraints and that it was not central to the area. The forum in Blackshots is shared with Stifford Clays. The Chair and Councillor Redsell were in agreement that there were pockets in Thurrock where this would not work.

### **RESOLVED that**

**Members of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee submit comments in relation to the project to the Chair of the Committee for inclusion in the November report to Cabinet.**

## 10. WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed the work programme and noted the following

- a) November meeting - would be primarily budget based

- b) November meeting – include a report from the Chief Executive on Shared Services
- c) Troubled Families Update – the Lead Officer be amended to Teresa Goulding

**The meeting finished at 9.30 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIRMAN**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
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