

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 December 2012 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Diana Hale (Chair), Clare Baldwin, James Halden, Charles Curtis, Cathy Kent and Sue Little

Mrs Pat Wilson

Apologies: None

In attendance: C. Littleton – Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes
B. Foster – Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes
E. Sheridan - Democratic Services Officer & Electoral Services Manager
M. Taylor – Strategic Lead – Learner Support
J. Waud – Strategic Lead – Troubled Families and
C. Moore – Service Manager
A. Cotgrove – Children's Partnership Manager
C. Armstrong – Directorate Strategy Officer

Also Present – Tracy Smith and Parents from Participation Groups
Councillor W. Curtis

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – None received

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 8 November, were approved as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None

The Chair agreed to change the order of the agenda.

Item 7 was taken after item 5.

Item 6 was followed by Item 9.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

5. THURROCK JOINT HEALTH AND WELL BEING STRATEGY 2013-2016

The Officer introduced the item which provided the Committee with an overview of the draft Strategy and its purpose and asked members of the Committee to have an input into the development of the final strategy, by seeking the views of the Committee and asking them to respond to the consultation which finishes on 31 December. The strategy will go to Cabinet in February and full Council in March.

Members queried the health inequalities across the borough and asked how Health and Well Being could be improved without enforcement. The Officer responded that there were initiatives that could be focused in deprived wards to reduce inequalities.

Councillor Halden outlined that a written response would be provided by the Conservative Group and requested a formal acknowledgement.

Officers responded to Councillor Halden comment that the strategy does not pinpoint individual communities and their profiles. The Strategy does not provide such a level of detail but will develop one year plans that will reflect the Joint Strategic needs Assessment and the wards that need to be focussed on.

More strength in strategy for Violence Against Women and Girls requested and officers confirmed that this would be recognised.

Councillor Curtis raised the issue of the way of life and traffic jams. Officers responded that the Health and Well Being Board has a remit to understand the wider determinants of Health and Well-Being and work with other departments and identify what actions influence good Health and Well Being.

Councillor Hale discussed the issue of residents responding to invitations for breast cancer screening and the low take up rate and asked how they could increase education. Officers responded that when public health becomes the responsibility of council, they can look at needs within the borough, work with public health and also use role models to tell the story. Officers confirmed that notification of the public health funding allocation is due at Christmas and they will then be able to prioritise and allocate the available resources.

Councillor Halden commented that the strategy referenced successes but not weaknesses and wanted to ensure inequalities are addressed and map this out.

Officers responded that the strategy should be balanced in terms of successes and weaknesses, and needs a focused approach. This can be rebalanced if required.

The Chair invited everyone present to read and respond to the Strategy by the close of Consultation.

RESOLVED that

- a) **the Committee notes progress made on the development of Thurrock's inaugural Health and Well-Being Strategy – including the incorporation of the Children and Young Peoples Plan; and**
- b) **the Committee provide comment on the draft strategy.**

6. YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE FUNCTION AND PERFORMANCE

The Strategic Leader for the Youth Offending Service introduced the item which provided members with an update on the Service and outlined the challenges the service had encountered with staffing and the involvement with Troubled Families Programme.

Members questioned the secondment of YOS staff to the troubled families Programme and officers confirmed that they could not confirm how long the programme would continue for but they had been keen to appoint on a secondment basis to give the Programme a head start. Agency staff for the YOS had been considered but discounted.

Councillor Kent questioned the impact of the loss of Grays Court. Officers confirmed that the biggest impact was on staff time on non scheduled court days and relationships with the court remained good. The Member also questioned the government policy on reduced use of custody and Officers confirmed that despite the potential cost to the Local Authority the cost is not something that the court should or would consider and they need to ensure the public is safe.

Councillor Halden referred to the Crime and Disorder Act and officers confirmed they were fully integrated with the Safety Partnership and were on the Board.

Members and officers debated the issue of remand costs devolving from the MOJ and officers confirmed that spike events were purely one off serious events with no trend. Councillor Halden questioned if additional support was required to make remand less appealing. Officers confirmed education provision and specialist foster beds may be options but the challenge is to have enough provisions for the few occasions they would be required.

RESOLVED that the report is noted.

7. REVIEW OF THE DISABLED CHILDREN'S SERVICE

Officers introduced the item which provided members with the outcome of the Service Review and made recommendations about the future delivery of services especially in light of national developments and proposed changes in

education. Officers confirmed that they had worked with an external consultant with specialist knowledge and directed members to examine the four workstreams.

The Chair asked officers to clarify the budget split between children and adult adaptations and how we ensure that child adaptations are managed in an equitable way. Officers outlined that there is only one budget and this is priority led. The Chair questioned if this could be split and officers responded that historically the budget had been held by occupational therapy through adult social care and she had not been made aware of any adaptation issues.

Councillors Little and Halden referenced the membership of proposed groups and commented that there were no councillors in the membership. The Chair reminded the Committee that the groups are operational and Members are concerned with strategic issues.

Councillor Halden questioned how the resource information network would be developed and if the data management system was in place. Officers responded that there is already a Family Information Service and outlined a number of different agencies holding information including parents groups and SEN statutory service. Officers informed members about the parent participation groups and a hub and spoke model outlining the two way flow of information.

The Chair invited Tracy Smith, Transition Support Group to speak. Ms Smith outlined that as a group they were very supportive of the Service and the opinions of the group were heard and barriers removed.

Councillor Little raised the issue of accessing information and the need to remember that not everyone has access to the internet. The Service manager outlined that a directory is mailed to every family on the SEN database and social workers deliver a hard copy too. The Chair requested that copies of publications are lodged in the Members library area.

Tracy Smith confirmed to the Committee that there had been a vast improvement in the Transition stage and Members and officers discussed the work being undertaken in Further Education.

Councillors Halden and Little were not in agreement with Recommendations 1.1.1 and 1.5.1 and a vote was taken

In favour: Councillors Baldwin, Hale, Kent and Curtis (4)

Against: Councillors Halden and Little (2)

Abstained: Pat Wilson (1)

RESOLVED that

- a) a joint SEN and Disability Strategy Group is developed to provide the framework outlined in the report and inline with the Terms of Reference in Appendix A of the report.
- b) An integrated health and social care model of service delivery is implemented, with strategic and specific links with the two special schools and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) by March 2013, to transform the way in which statutory social care services to disabled children and families
- c) A more detailed analysis be undertaken of the efficacy of short break services including family support and activity services at the Sunshine Centre
- d) The service plan and prepare to meet the requirements outlined in Special Education Needs and Disability Green paper 2011 – Support and Aspiration: A new approach to SEND March 2014 by working with Education, Social Care and Health Agencies to develop a pilot from March 2013.
- e) A Multi-Agency Transition Strategy Group – MATSG be developed which draws together the differing strands of transition in operation across the Council and which will report in the JSDSG. Proposed TOR are outlined in Appendix B.
- f) A formal relationship be developed with parents, carers and young people who take into account the need for:
 - * an independent umbrella body such as the CVS to provide a clear governance framework and support to the development of a Parent/Carer and young persons involvement board
 - * the need for funding
 - *incorporation of all existing and future for a in which parents/ carers and young people are involved.
- g) a resource and information network be developed across the council.

Members of the Parent Participation Groups, Malcolm Taylor and Clare Moore left the meeting at 8pm.

8. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS

The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes introduced the item which provided members with an overview of the service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and provided information as to statutory and legislative changes that may have an impact on the service. Members were reminded that the annual report was reported to Corporate Parenting Committee and the report before members at this committee therefore was an overview.

The Chair and Officer highlighted the Charter for Care leavers and members heard that this had not yet been before Corporate Parenting Committee. Members noted that the document would be reviewed by Open Door with young people and be discussed at Corporate Parenting Committee.

The Chair was keen to ensure that the distinction between Corporate Parenting Committee and Children's Overview and Scrutiny did not lead to a duplication of reporting but equally not leave a gap that was not scrutinised. The Vice Chair reminded members that the Chair of Corporate Parenting would report to full Council.

Councillor Halden referred in general to reports lacking specific detail and his wish to receive more detail in order to better understand the context. The Chair and officers were not of the opinion that this Committee needed to receive more detail.

Councillor Little questioned and received answers relating to the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers and the reference to 12 young people currently not recorded.

The Chair highlighted and praised the reference to young people attending university and the Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes widened the reference to recognise the achievements of all the young people.

Councillor Little commented on care leavers in suitable accommodation. Officers confirmed that 'sofa surfing' was not suitable but it was the choice of the young person despite having alternatives. The situation highlighted the importance of leaving the door open to provide ongoing support.

RESOLVED that the report is noted.

9. TROUBLED FAMILIES PROGRAMME

The Service Manager introduced the item which updated members on the Troubled Families Programme and reminded members of the criteria for Troubled Families. The Committee were informed that work commenced with the first 15 families last month and compared to neighbouring authorities, Thurrock appeared to be progressing well.

Following a comment from the Chair, the Service manager confirmed that the chosen families did not receive an introductory letter. The Programme is introduced to the chosen family through contact with their lead professional and a Troubled Families Programme Manager.

Councillor Little raised the issue of cruelty to animals, the link to cruelty to children and commented on an observation made by a midwife. The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes confirmed that this was well documented and is spelt out in the strategy. The committee also heard that training had been delivered to midwives and there is a monthly meeting with midwives and the child protection team.

In response to a question on funding and non engagement, the Service Manager outlined that funding is front loaded and provided in two parts, with payment by result a small proportion in the first year.

Councillor Halden asked if redundancies were built into the system. Officers responded that this would depend on results and if positive and genuine savings were achieved over and above the cost of delivery. The Chair asked if the Programme would be self sustaining but Officers cautioned that it would be a mistake to be over ambitious as serious problems won't disappear.

The Committee were informed that meaningful results should be available at the start of the new municipal year and could be reported to the Committee from this point onwards.

RESOLVED that the report is noted.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair and Vice Chair congratulated Officers on completion of items to date within the work programme.

The Chair highlighted the work pressures for the January meeting and proposed that the two items be limited to a 30 minute discussion in order that the budget item could commence at 8pm.

The Chair proposed an additional item for the March agenda – Post 16 curriculum for Thurrock.

The Committee agreed the items listed above.

The Chair reminded Officers of a previous agreement to visit Children's Centres. The Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes agreed to put together a half day programme to visit Aveley and South Ockendon. The Chair requested a briefing prior to the visit.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be noted.

The meeting finished at 9.15 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk**

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