

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 January 2015 at 7.00 pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Val Morris-Cook (Chair), James Halden (Vice-Chair) and Tunde Ojetola

Reverend Darren Barlow, Church of England Representative

**Apologies:** Councillor Martin Kerin  
Patricia Wilson, Roman Catholic Church Representative

**In attendance:**  
Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services  
Janet Clark, Strategic Lead Operational, Resources and Libraries Unit  
Sue Green, Strategic Leader Early Years, Families & Communities  
Mark Livermore, Children's Commissioning Officer  
James Henderson, Youth Cabinet Representative  
Stephanie Cox, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

Reverend Barlow paid tribute to local resident Bradley Arthur in light of recent sad events and led those present in prayer and a minute's silence was observed.

### **17. Minutes**

The Minutes of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 11 November 2014, were approved as a correct record.

### **18. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

### **19. Declaration of Interests**

Reverend Barlow declared a non-pecuniary interest in the general business of the meeting as he had children attending St Thomas Primary School, Grays Convent and Palmer's College. He was also a trustee and corporation member at Palmer's College.

## 20. 2014-15 Savings - Libraries

The Director of Children's Services briefly introduced the report, and in doing so explained the library service had been relatively stable since the last restructure which had taken place in 2011/12, however the budget now needed to be reduced and the community consulted on possible options.

The Strategic Lead for the Operational, Resources and Libraries Unit further highlighted the following key points:

- Between £569,000 of savings needed to be achieved from the library service and the proposed options would be consulted on with the local community following this meeting.
- The Library had been through a restructure in 2011/12 and staffing was currently at a minimum owing to previous government budget cuts.
- A significant proportion of the library budget was spent on staffing; therefore any option would have a considerable impact on the service.

The Committee were informed of the three proposed options and advised that a consultation document had been prepared in order to gain the views of stakeholders.

Councillor Halden commented that he had given the proposals considerable thought and recognised that officers had made a good case as to why the savings needed to be made. He made the following further key points:

- That Options 2 and 3 were clever and had merit, but felt that Option 1 was not an option.
- That the mobile library was a needed flexible resource.
- He was concerned that the proposed library restructure would decrease opening hours and therefore capacity, and that this in turn would make the service less viable in future as footfall would fall as a result.
- He did not feel that the any of the options proposed presented a comprehensive offer and that enough detail had not been provided to demonstrate how the options would work in reality, for example if the opening hours reduced what would become of the buildings in the days that it was closed.
- That the proposals would have an impact on Community Hubs and if a hub was established in Stanford what this would mean for neighbours such as Corringham.

Members were concerned that a vague consultation document could drive down response rates and therefore the validity of the overall consultation.

Councillor Ojetola supported a wider review of the library service rather than a piecemeal restructure and felt that proposals needed to be both realistic and pragmatic in order to achieve the savings. He further added:

- That the timing was not perfect and felt that wide scale changes would be difficult to implement.
- He recognised that a consultation needed to begin as soon as possible but was concerned that due to the timings of meetings and the forthcoming election it was unlikely that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be able to fully consider the outcomes of the consultation in detail and recommend alternatives due to time constraints.
- He felt that it was important the consultation results be referred back to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee even if it required an extraordinary meeting to be scheduled.
- He questioned what would be the alternative uses for the library buildings if option 2 was agreed and how in reality these could be re-let to achieve the required savings.
- That option 1 – the closure of libraries – was not an option.
- That increasingly residents relied on the libraries to access IT services in order to conduct business, especially as the public sector was encouraging the use of online services.
- He recognised that this was a politically sensitive issue by all and recounted what had happened when the Chafford Hundred library was closed.

Reverend Barlow felt that the report was well written and highlighted the following key points:

- That it was important the public and library users had the opportunity to express their views.
- He echoed that that if the library opened less it would be used less and therefore could be viewed as a service not required in future budget savings.
- He felt that it was important a central library was retained in Thurrock and that any change to Grays Library at Thameside was not a good option.
- He raised concern that this work would be politicised especially in the time before the next election.
- That in the examination of options 2 'Community Hubs' and 3 'Community Partnered Libraries' it was important to consider disadvantaged communities and the fact that some library users were reliant on the service to obtain access to computers or have a social place they can meet to combat loneliness.

Councillor Morris-Cook made the following key points during the course of the discussion:

- That the service should begin with a 'blank sheet of paper' in order to fully examine what Thurrock wanted from a library service rather than making piecemeal cuts which would dilute the resource.

- That she would like to see a 21st Century library service which was fit for purpose.
- She felt that community hubs were beneficial to the community and the proposals could affect the viability of hub development.
- She recognised that the mobile library had been off the road for a long time and questioned whether savings could be made in this area.
- She felt that Thurrock should offer library users an 'Amazon' style service so that books could be requested and delivered to their homes.
- Whether the service could be delivered differently and other options considered, for example by sharing a mobile library service with another authority in order to retain this benefit for residents.
- That if libraries needed to be closed it was preferable to close a library that was nearby to another, as Blackshots Library was close to Grays.
- She was concerned about closing libraries in communities such as East Tilbury, as the residents would need to travel further for this service and could become isolated.
- She questioned whether areas of excellence could be created in different locations with specialist libraries in different subjects.
- She felt that it was important the main Grays Library should be open 7 days a week and questioned whether the library could be moved into another council building to improve efficiency.
- Whether the use of kindles could be supported to reduce pressures.

The Director of Children's Services welcomed the comments made by Members and advised that the library service did loan kindles and were expanding the way residents could use the library service. She acknowledged that this was a particularly emotive issue and that library provision in Thurrock was valued.

The Committee were advised that Thurrock already operated an 'Amazon' style service through the Homelink programme.

Revered Barlow recognised that there was a danger that the most unhelpful outcome would be to only open a library for a few hours each week.

Members questioned what would be an acceptable response rate to the consultation as there needed to be a decent measurement to evaluate the options against.

Members were concerned that with gradual cuts to the libraries year on year there was potential for Thurrock to be left with an unviable service.

All Members were in agreement that a consultation needed to take place but that it needed to be a wide ranging consultation in order to for the public to explain how the service added value to their lives.

The Director of Children's Services outlined some of the questions that had been included in the draft consultation document, and following the Committee's request, confirmed that additional questions would be added to the consultation document to seek the public's views on the three proposed options and an open ended question to allow for other ideas to be put forward.

The Committee were in agreement that each option should be fully detailed within the consultation document and that a further 'Mobile Library' option should be included within options 2 and 3 so that residents could note their preference. All members felt that this additional option of a mobile library as part of the service proposed in options 2 and 3 should be included.

Councillor Halden was concerned that the consultation was going out to reduce the library service but the savings figure had no approval.

The Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that the higher savings figure of £569,000 had already been approved in principle by Cabinet and advised that the outcomes of the consultation would be reported to both Council in February and Cabinet in March 2015.

Members had a discussion on the savings figure, during which it was emphasised that the level of savings was not a question for the Committee as it was beyond their remit (as the Committee had no decision making authority), rather it was the role of the Committee to add value to how the savings could be realised.

Following the debate Democratic Services reworded recommendation 1.2 in the printed agenda until it was agreed by the Committee.

Members were in agreement that the outcomes of the consultation should be reported back to the Committee in the form of a briefing note as soon as possible for comments which could then be incorporated in any future report to Council and or Cabinet, to which officers agreed.

Councillor Morris-Cook added that the consultation should be widely accessible and available in schools, sheltered accommodation and libraries.

The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that this would be the case and that the consultation was expected to close on 19 February 2015.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the concerns and comments of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the options put forward be referred to Cabinet.**
- 2. That it be recommended a broad public consultation takes place, to include full details on the options as outlined within the report including mobile library provision, and that the outcomes be**

**reported back to the Committee in the form of a briefing note before being referred to the appropriate decision making body.**

## **21. Early Offer of Help Commissioned Services**

The Strategic Lead for Service Transformation and Children's Commissioning introduced the report which was a good news story, and reported on the quarterly outputs and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) of Commissioned Services and their impact.

*Councillor Ojetola left the meeting at 8.19pm and rejoined the meeting at 8.20pm.*

Councillor Morris-Cook requested that, in future, the numbers of total respondents be included within the report in addition to percentages, as it was difficult to evaluate the performance of the service without this figure.

This was echoed by Reverend Barlow who acknowledged that percentages can be skewed without the figure of the total number of respondents.

The Children's Commissioning Officer agreed and assured Members that in future this detail would be included.

Councillor Ojetola commended the good work of the service but questioned why it had taken so long for the report to be referred to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the results had been available in February 2014. In response officers explained that this was a new area of work that had not been scheduled on the work programme.

Members requested that officers provide a regular update to the Committee so that impact of the Early Offer of Help Commissioned Services could be monitored.

Democratic Services questioned whether the regular update should be provided in the form of an informal briefing note with one formal report being referred to the Committee for review annually, to which Members indicated that an update should be provided but that officers should determine the appropriate format and that a financial impact analysis be included as part of the future reporting process.

### **RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the outcomes being achieved through the current commissioned services be noted.**
- 2. That officers be requested to provide a regular update to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to monitor the impact of the Early Offer of Help Commissioned Services.**

## **22. Emotional Well Being and Mental Health Services – Project Update**

The Strategic Lead for Service Transformation and Children's Commissioning briefly introduced the report which outlined that the service had worked hard to provide greater value for money whilst also ensuring one holistic pathway that aimed to deliver more services in schools and the community in order to improve accessibility.

Members agreed that it was a positive report although it was questioned whether data and intelligence was being shared in a positive and swift way where there were many Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) and Public Health working across Essex.

It was clarified that the Clinical Commissioning Group came together to Commission the service and that officers worked hard to ensure that the contract worked for Thurrock.

Members recognised that the age of 14 was a crucial time for Mental Health in Young People and questioned what was being done to identify the triggers to ensure intervention and support was available.

Officers explained that Emotional First Aid training had been provided for all schools and that specialist services would also be delivered within schools to offer support for young people. It was further reported that the Social Care team delivered a number of programmes to complement this work, which included a support for young people affected by Cyber Bullying.

The Committee were in agreement that the importance of reducing the stigma of Mental Health was crucial in approving accessibility, and questioned what was being done to help more difficult to reach individuals. Officers explained that providers were expected to think about access and engagement as it was crucial to the Commissioning process, and that a key part of the model was to move away from a clinic based approach and offer more help within schools.

The Youth Cabinet Representative felt that more training should be offered within schools so that peers could help spot the signs of Mental Health needs and that young people could offer support to one another, particularly as teachers may not have the time or dedicated role to offer individual support.

Reverend Barlow felt that Secondary Schools and Further Education offered good services but was also concerned about the stigma in society, despite the fact that mental health illness was commonplace and should not be something to be ashamed of.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the work that had been undertaken to commence the procurement of the redesigned service, and its progress to date, be noted.**

## **23. Work Programme**

Councillor Morris-Cook requested a report on Cultural Entitlement be referred to the Committee in February 2015.

Councillor Ojetola requested than a report on the Admissions Forum be referred to the Committee in February or March 2015.

Democratic Services advised that a report on the Early Officer of Help Commissioned Services be added to the Work Programme of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny for the 2015/16 Municipal Year, following Members request during the earlier item.

Democratic Services recommended that a number of to be confirmed items be supplied in the form of a briefing note to Members, as there was only two meetings left in the current municipal year and a number of outstanding items.

In response Councillor Ojetola requested that the Grangewaters item be brought to the Committee in the form of a formal report as it was an important issue.

Councillor Halden sought clarification regarding the budget item and questioned whether the budget report on the previous agenda, which had been deferred due to the purdah period, was now defunct or whether a further budget update report would be provided.

The Director of Children's Services explained that the report which had been deferred was now out of date and the report had already been referred to Cabinet. Members were advised that the a more up-to-date budget proposal had been presented to the Committee this evening on the Libraries savings proposals and a further budget report would be presented to the Committee in February 2015 specifically focusing on Nurseries.

Democratic Services clarified that a standing budget update and savings proposals item was included on the work programme for each meeting, however that this would be themed appropriately nearer to the time of each meeting depending on the nature of proposals. As a result a general budget update would not be provided but detailed savings proposals on particular relevant issues, for example the library service or nursery provision.

The Director of Children's Services confirmed a number of amendments to the work programme which included:

- That the Grangewaters Alternative Delivery Model be brought to the Committee in March 2015.
- That the Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Youth Cabinet Report be brought to the Committee in February or March 2015.



- An update on the YOS annual report be supplied to the Committee in the form of a briefing note before the end of the current municipal year.
- That the Local Government Ombudsman report had been completed at the previous meeting.
- That the report of the next SCIE review be paired with the Jay Report and an update report be referred to the Committee in February 2015.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That an additional item on Cultural Entitlement be added to the work programme for February 2015.**
- 2. That an additional item regarding the Admissions Forum be added to the work programme for February or March 2015.**
- 3. That a report on the Early Officer of Help Commissioned Services be added to the work programme for the 2015/16 Municipal Year.**
- 4. That the work programme be noted, subject to the amendments detailed above.**

Councillor Morris-Cook sought an update from the Director of Children's Services regarding a number of issues raised at the previous meeting, including any old cases of child exploitation and children missing from education.

In response, the Director of Children's Services explained that a recent audit of schools had so far not highlighted any cases which had not been brought to children's social care attention previously and that the service was regularly monitoring any cases where children were missing from school and following these up with other services and departments.

Reverend Barlow commended the success of the Education Awards and congratulated all staff and professionals involved which was echoed by Members. Reverend Barlow added that he would have liked to have seen more Further Education categories or entrants given the growth in this sector in Thurrock.

The Director of Children's Services highlighted that there had been one Further Education winner and agreed that it had been an excellent evening in bringing the community together.

**The meeting finished at 9.13 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**