

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 September 2015 at 7.00 pm**

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- Present:** Councillors James Halden (Chair), Yash Gupta (MBE) (Vice-Chair), Leslie Gamester, Martin Kerin and Susan Little
- Apologies:** Councillors Clare Baldwin, Reverend Darren Barlow, Myra Potter and Sarah Sanders
- In attendance:** Saania Ali, Youth Cabinet Representative  
James Henderson, Youth Cabinet Representative  
Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services  
Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care  
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills  
Temi Fawehinmi, Contract and Performance Manager  
Michele Lucas, Learning & Skills Manager  
Neil Woodbridge, Thurrock Coalition  
Jessica Feeney, 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.

### **11. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 14 July 2015, were approved as a correct record.

### **12. Items of Urgent Business**

The Chair informed the Committee that Healthwatch was an independent consumer champion that represented the views of the public on health services. Healthwatch requested a Co-Opted seat on the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was added that this would enable the public's voice at the heart of the decision making processes on services for children and young people. All members felt that a Healthwatch Co-Opted member was a good idea.

#### **Resolved:**

- 1. The committee agreed to extend an invitation to Thurrock Healthwatch for a non-voting Co-opted member to join the Committee.**

### **13. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests.

#### **14. Nursery Provision In East Tilbury**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider childcare provision in East Tilbury. The Interim Strategic Leader for School Improvement, Learning and Skills explained that there was sufficient provision in East Tilbury, but unfortunately there had been a breakdown in arrangements between East Tilbury Primary School (part of St. Clere's Academy Trust) and the Directors of Little Angel's Day Care who shared the school site. In addition, a new provider had been opened in Linford offering day care to families in the area.

The Committee was informed that the transfer of the landlords responsibilities was given to the Academy Trust; and that the local authority would continue to work to rebuild relationships recognising the responsibility for the land that no longer lies with the local authority. The Interim Strategic Leader explained that since the last committee he had been focusing on rebuilding relationships between the parties but shared how it was proving difficult through the school holidays. Meetings had taken place with the East Tilbury Governor, Chief Executive of the St Clere's Academy Trust, and the Director of Little Angels.

The chair welcomed two public representatives Mr Crabbe and Mrs Clarke to voice their opinion on the nursery provision in East Tilbury. The following points were made to the Committee.

- The 3pm- 6pm nursery timeslot was not appropriate for many parents, due to this some parents chose not to send their child to nursery this year.
- Parents felt that the East Tilbury Primary School Nursery would provide a greater education compared to private sector nurseries.

Councillor Little was disappointed how some children were not in education and stated that Tilbury was a location that should be focused on by the Council.

The Chair of the Committee questioned whether St Cleres Academy could open a nursery; The Director of Children's Services explained that St Cleres Trust could open a nursery however there were detailed arrangements for academy conversions.

Councillor Kerin inquired if there was anything that could be done as a Local Authority to resolve the situation; officers felt that there could be more power and demand from the community. The Chair requested that letters were sent from the Committee to Little Angels Day Care and East Tilbury Primary School to address to the situation.

The chair felt that the Council could reduce pressures on Little Angels Day Care by using East Tilbury School Nursery when the childcare allowances increase to 30 hours a week.

Councillor Gamester queried whether the 75 year lease could be challenged by the solicitors at St Clere's school, the Director of Children's Services said

that they will pass on the message to St Cleres and also look into the matter with lawyers at Thurrock Council.

**Resolved:**

- 1. The Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented upon the actions taken to date and any further actions which should be taken by the Council to resolve the current situation.**
- 2. That a letter is sent on behalf of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to St Cleres and Little Angles to encourage a relationship between the two parties.**
- 3. That a letter is sent to the Procurement team on behalf of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to urge that similar contracts are not signed in the future.**
- 4. An update at the next Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the current position and the views of Thurrock Councils Lawyers.**

**15. Inspire - Alternative models of delivery for Youth Related Activities**

Michele Lucas the Learning and Skills Manager explained that Inspire was an opportunity to both protect and provide a range of youth and community based opportunities for young people by removing the current services from Local Authority control and placing them into a staff mutual (charitable trust). It was explained that the report recognised the need to make further savings in council expenditure and provide opportunities to ensure that Thurrock's young people could access the regeneration opportunities that are planned over the next ten years as the Council move from implementation into delivery.

The Learning and Skills Manager informed the Committee of the following points:

- The Cabinet Office was very interested in Thurrock
- The Business Plan was created with the help and guidance of Cabinet Officers
- Thurrock Council liaised with Kensington and Chelsea who ran a similar project called 'EPIC'.

The Youth Cabinet Representatives told members that Inspire would be beneficial to many young people; they had also created a Twitter page advertising the great things that Inspire could offer to the community.

Councillor Kerin congratulated the officers on their good work and questioned if there was a sufficient plan in place to assist the Grangewaters handover. The Learning and Skills Manager ensured members that there was a risks and opportunity section incorporated in the business plan and that Thurrock Council would always be the parenting body of the project. The Director of

Children's Services added that detailed arrangements were still to come from Lawyers and the Finance department.

Councillor Gupta queried if the Inspire project had received any funding from the Cabinet Office, it was confirmed that funding was received for training, planning and also through the development of the business plan.

A concern was raised regarding the staffs negative views from the consultation; the Learning and Skills Manager explained that the consultation was carried out initially, and since then a meeting was held for all staff members which gave them a greater understanding. Members were insured that staff members now had positive views on inspire.

The Church of England representative questioned whether staff would receive the same job benefits once the handover was complete, it was confirmed that existing staff would receive the same benefits, however new employees would not receive a local government pension scheme.

The chair raised a concern regarding the governance and oversight of the project and requested that a report was brought back to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with further detail regarding the trustee.

Councillor Gamester questioned whether the Council would accept lower costing contracts from external companies. The Children's Services Director confirmed that there would be no competition from external companies until the contract expired which would be in four to five years.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That the Committee supports the development of a staff mutual (charitable trust) to deliver youth & community related activities across Thurrock Council.**
- 2. The Committee recommend to full Cabinet the 'spinning out' of youth & community related services from April 2016 or as soon after as due diligence is undertaken**
- 3. That the Committee supports the recommendation of a four year contract with a break clause in year three for renegotiation.**
- 4. The Committee recommend the funding model which will see a 5% reduction from year two of the contract until the fifth year recognising the need to reduce the overall budget by 20%, subject to budget constraints**
- 5. The Committee support the inclusion of Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre into the staff mutual.**
- 6. An elected member and The Section 151 Officer will form part of the trustee.**

**7. The Inspire report to return back to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee before final sign off at Cabinet.**

**16. Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan**

The Head of Children's Social Care introduced the revised (CSE) Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan 2015-16 and provided an update to the Committee on the CSE actions since the update report went to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11th March 2015. In doing so the following points were made:

- A review was completed with SET (Southend, Essex and Thurrock)
- A peer review had taken place between Southend Council and Thurrock Council, the outcome revealed that Southend was impressed with SERIC (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre).
- The Risk Assessment Group now sits under the LSCB (Local Safeguarding Children Board)
- A survey that was carried out highlighted Thurrock's ability to record information, since then a new database was introduced called Liquid Logic.
- Returning interviews were being commissioned from the organisation open door and all young people missing were referred for a returning interview; the Police also carried out safe and well checks.

The Chair questioned that with so many different bodies was there a risk that not everyone had the same information. The Head of Children's Social Care explained to the Committee that MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) enabled all parties and professionals to access the same information; he added that the Risk Assessment Group was operational. It was added that health professionals could access the GP's database up to level 1.

Councillor Little questioned how the link is maintained between the Council and young people during the school holidays. The Head of Children's Social Care assured the Committee that they had links with missing people, hotels within the borough and the police; it was added how important it was to have intelligence as to where young people were when contact with schools became challenging.

Councillor Gamester inquired if there was set timescales for external bodies when dealing with Serious Case Reviews. Andrew Carter explained that there is no set timescales, but agencies would be challenged by the authority. It was discussed how the Police had a sixty day timeframe to complete a DBS (Disclosure Baring Service) check. The Chair requested that the Director of Children's Services checked whether there would be implications and issues with initially completing the DBS check.

The chair of the Committee asked officers for an update on the GP, Police and Social workers involved in the Julia Serious Case Review. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee of the following:

- The GP was not referred to the General Medical Council as the case was not sufficient.
- Police followed their procedure appropriately and had no sufficient evidence.
- The Social Workers were referred to the HCPC, and the Council would be updated regarding their outcome.

**Resolved:**

1. **The committee endorsed the revised action plan and added to the committee's work plan for robust ongoing scrutiny.**

**17. Education Transport**

The Contract and Performance Manager introduced the report to the Committee. The key points to note were:

- Transport on denominational grounds other than for low income pupils attending secondary school, was not a statutory duty.
- In 2013 Cabinet exercised its discretion and decided to continue denominational transport, but charge for places.
- Pupils accessing the transport prior to the implementation of the changes were offered a 50% discount to reduce the financial impact of the charging regime.
- Once the charging regime had been implemented it became apparent that the number of pupils from families in receipt of benefit entitled to free transport or existing pupils eligible for the 50% discount had increased.
- The number of new pupils applying for a place at the full rate was minimal, which led to a reduction in the overall savings accrued.
- The Council was unlikely to generate income or break even using the current model of service delivery.
- There will be a Consultation in September to measure the impact on families.

Councillor Little felt that transporting children to school should not be determined by faith, it was confirmed by the Contract and Performance Manager that faith was not considered under transport in the equality act.

The Church of England Representative said that many parents may find the impact difficult, however all Committee members supported the consultation.

**Resolved:**

1. **The amount paid by new and existing pupils accessing denominational transport; £1,117.00 and £550.00 respectively, remain unchanged until September 2016.**
2. **That officers follow the Council protocol for the review of the service including a consultation with the option of discontinuing**

**denominational transport in September 2016, subject to Cabinet approval.**

**18. Work Programme**

The Democratic Services Officer explained that there were some new agenda items and that the work programme would be amended then circulated electronically.

The Chair informed members that there was a recommendation update table at the end of the work programme which enabled Members to view the outcomes of actions from previous meetings.

**The meeting finished at 9.31 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)**