

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

Present: Councillors James Halden (Chair), Yash Gupta (MBE) (Vice-Chair), Leslie Gamester and Susan Little

Reverend Darren Barlow, Church of England Representative
Patricia Wilson, Roman Catholic Church Representative
Sarah Sanders, Parent Governor Representative

Apologies: Councillors Clare Baldwin, Martin Kerin and Myra Potter

In attendance: 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
Michelle Lucas, Learning and Skills Manager
James Waud, Strategic Lead, YOS, Adolescent Services, Troubled Families
Jessica Feeney, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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.

19. Minutes

The Minutes of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on the 15 September 2015, were approved as a correct record subject to:

- Patricia Wilson being referred as the Church of England Representative instead of the Roman Catholic Church Representative.
- Patricia Wilson being marked as present.
- That Item 14, paragraph 6 must read that St Clere's Trust legally could not open a nursery.

20. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

21. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Gamesters declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the meeting, because his Daughter worked at a Nursery in Ockendon.

Reverend Barlow declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the meeting, as his wife was a teacher at Thameside Primary School, and he has children

at the Convent School and Palmers College, He is also a vice chair of the William Palmer Trust.

22. Education Transport - Service update

The Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested an update on Education Transport and the progress made with respect to the various aspects of policy reviewed since October 2012 when an Education Transport Project Group was set-up around transport to post 16 facilities, transport for children aged 8-11 years, transport to faith schools, transport for children with SEND, the Travel Training programme and the establishment of the Exceptional Circumstances panel.

Reverend Barlow felt that there was no option for those seeking a Christian faith school in Thurrock; it was added that the annual cost of £1117 took the option out of families' hands. The Contracts and Performance Manager explained that other parents of other faiths also had no option of religious schools within Thurrock, it was clarified that the equality acts from 2010 stated that religion as characteristic was not covered under the heading of denominational transport and was not a statutory obligation to the Council.

Patricia Wilson informed the Committee that many parents sent their children to faith schools for the faith aspect not for teaching standards, it was questioned how parents would afford to transport more than two children to faith schools. The Contracts and Performance Manager explained that the Council may not be able to cater for families not receiving benefits.

Councillor Little questioned the expenses used for transporting looked after children to schools. The Contracts and Performance Manager explained that the Council had to make quick decisions at times and depending on some circumstances taxis were the only option. It was confirmed that £1633 had been spent on taxis in the current financial year. The Committee were informed that the taxi contracts had been revised and reviewed at Cabinet this year.

Councillor Little questioned if the budget had been affected by the Rural Bus Service discontinuing in Horndon and Fobbing. The Contracts and Performance Manager informed the Committee that a small number of children were being transported to schools by taxi.

Councillor Gupta questioned why the post commissioned transport service users had decreased to 108. It was explained to the Committee that more students were using other types of transport such as the discounted bus pass which was found more beneficial by students due to the flexibility of use at weekends and evenings.

The Chair of the Committee felt concerned that the Council had not investigated the 1.2 million expenditure gap for mainstream education. The Contract and Performance Manager explained that mainstream education

was consulted on last year and that Contract and Performance team would be looking further across the board in the future.

Resolved:

- 1. That Children's Overview and Scrutiny consider the aspects of transport reviewed in this report and comment upon the progress and/or recommend next steps.**

23. Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2015

Learning & Universal Outcomes Officer outlined Thurrock's Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2015, it was explained that the report broke down geographically early years places and identified areas where the council had both a surplus and deficit of places. The Committee were informed that the report was part of the statutory duty as set out in the Childcare Act 2006 which stated that Local Authorities need to ensure that the Council meet the requirements of early years entitlement with due regard to planning and growth across the Local Authority.

The Interim Strategic Lead on School Improvement, Learning and Skills Officer informed the Committee that there was currently sufficient nursery provision in Tilbury for two, three and four years olds, although it was added that with new housing developments the current provision would no longer be adequate, the Committee were enlightened that the Council would be working with outreach to resolve the problem. Councillor Little felt that the Council must encourage and make families aware of the benefits to fulfil nursery places.

The Chair explained that the Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2015 report was emailed to all members prior to the Committee, concerns were raised that no comments regarding nursery provisions in Thurrock were received.

Councillor Little questioned Officers regarding the number of Travellers currently in childcare. The Learning and Universal Outcomes Officer informed the Committee that the travellers support service would regularly visit traveller sites to encourage the take up of education across the board.

Reverend Barlow felt that the number of good or outstanding early education and childcare providers was good, however Members questioned what was in place to improve the remaining childcare providers who were not good or outstanding. The Learning and Universal Outcomes Officer explained that a number of the providers were awaiting Ofsted inspections and support packages had been put in place. The Chair requested that an update on addition childcare provision would be reported to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee later in the municipal year.

Councillor Gamester queried how the Aveley and Uplands ward was indicated as a high priority area, The Learning and Universal Outcomes Officer

explained that priorities were calculated around methodology and projections. Councillor Little informed Officers that there were 129 proposed housing developments for Orsett instead of 37. The Chair requested that Members should refer to the Director of Children's Services outside of the meeting for any further clarifications.

Resolved:

- 1. To support further early years & childcare development in Aveley & Tilbury recognising the deficit outlined in the sufficiency report.**
- 2. To promote and encourage more schools to consider eligible 2 year old intake.**
- 3. To support public village hall use for the increase of early education particularly related to costs associated with tenancy**
- 4. To consider early education future needs before decision are taken in relation to capital assets across the Local Authority**
- 5. That the Director of Children's Services would liaise with Communications Officers to publicise the encouragement of take up in early year's education.**
- 6. That the Learning and Universal Outcome Officer provides Councillor Little with information regarding traveller's education up take.**

24. Pupil Premium

The Committee were informed that the report compared the performance of children and young people in receipt of Pupil Premium funding in Thurrock schools and academies for the academic year 2014/15. It was explained that the Hathaway Academy and Harris Academy were examples of good practice. This was presented by detailed information on their use of pupil premium to raise standards and narrow the gap for young people in receipt of the additional funding.

The Interim Strategic Lead, on School Improvement, Learning and Skills Officer explained that final results would be available later in the year as the data used in the report remained non-validated by the DfE. It was also added that the report did not contain comparisons for GCSE results as the results were subject to a significant number of re-marks of tests specifically in English and Mathematics.

The Chair of the Committee questioned how the Council is ensuring that the practice shown by Hathaway Academy and the Harris Academy is being exercised across all schools. It was explained that narrowing the gap between pupil premium and non-pupil premium students was a key focus; Officers

added that the Council wish to take this across all ten secondary schools by demonstrating how affective the additional funding was.

Reverend Barlow questioned who the academies gave account to when evaluating and allocating the additional funding; the Committee was informed this would be determined by the leadership and governing body of the academy.

Resolved:

- 1. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the impact of pupil premium for the academic year 2014-15 in primary schools across the borough and seeks an update for secondary schools when the data is fully validated.**
- 2. Acknowledges the actions taken by The Hathaway Academy and Harris Academy Chafford Hundred**
- 3. That the Interim Strategic Lead, on School Improvement, Learning and Skills Officer organises a conference for all schools in Thurrock to discuss the Pupil Premiums best practice.**

25. School Results/School Performance

Interim Strategic Lead on School Improvement, Learning and Skills Officer explained that raising achievement in all areas of education remains a key priority and that the Council had seen considerable success in the last four years as attainment and progress had risen significantly, particularly in the primary sector. Further strategies had been put in place as a result of the recommendations from the Education Commission Report, the impact of which had been to place the local authority in a strong position when in comparison with other statistical neighbour local authorities. At primary level Thurrock had rapidly improved being just below the national average for good and outstanding schools nationally. Secondary schools remained well above the national average for good and outstanding schools. The Committee was enlightened that the data was still provisional, although an updated report would be submitted to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a later stage.

The Committee were informed that the key stage two data results were incorrect as a school was missed off during the calculation; Officers informed the Committee that this would be corrected in December. Reverend Barlow queried whether the missing data would increase or decrease the results; the Interim Strategic Lead on School Improvement, Learning and Skills Officer estimated that the missing data would increase the results.

The Chair questioned what the Council was undertaking for those students that did not receive a strong early year's education. The Director or Children's Services explained that this was aworking progress and informed the

Committee that the pupil premium children aged five achieved better results in 2015 than all children in 2014.

The Interim Strategic Lead on School Improvement, Learning and Skills Officer highlighted that the Council had not received all GCSE results for 2015 due to remarks. The Committee were informed that this was an issue nationally, but assured members that a report regarding this would return to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee later in the municipal year.

The Director of Children's Services predicted that Thurrock Councils GCSE's results would be lower than national average for the year 2015. The Committee was informed that there were factors within Thurrock schools regarding the Maths Edexcel and English IGCSE exams papers which are taken by many schools in the borough, but not by many nationally.

Councillor Little felt that a strong governing body was a contributing factor when looking to enhance schools academic achievements. The Interim Strategic Lead on School Improvement, Learning and Skills Officer informed the Committee that a team of Officers currently pursued vacancies for school governors and organised regular training sessions.

Councillor Gamester asked for clarification regarding the key stage two trend data graph that did not increase during 2013 and 2015. The Interim Strategic Lead on School Improvement, Learning and Skills Officer explained that the graph was an area for improvement, and that one of the priorities was to maximum the potential of able children. The Committee were informed that the assessment arrangements were changing and that levels were now being assessed in words, it was added that this would prove difficult when predicting the 2016 school results.

Councillor Gupta questioned what input the Officers had on Schools and Academies when working to enhance results. The Director of Children's Services explained that the Council had a duty to ensure good provision when schools were underperforming, it was added that academies had previously submitted self-evaluations which gave the Council a strong dialogue.

Councillor Little questioned how schools results varied between looked after children and non-looked after children. Members were informed that twenty-eight children sat GSCE exams and three achieved 5 A*-C grades, The Director of Children's Services assured the Committee that this was an area for improvement but asked Members to consider that some of the students were unaccompanied asylum seekers whom did not speak English. The Committee were informed that the Council currently ensure the following when working with looked after children;

- That the amount of school transfers were minimal
- Private tuition
- Educating foster parents on the importance of education.
- Post 16 education and career paths.

The Director of Children's Social Care informed the Committee that there would be a briefing in December which would give an update on all school's improvements.

Resolved:

- 1. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the provisional outcomes of the summer 2015 tests and examinations and commends pupils, schools and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 2. That the Committee recognises how the Education Commission recommendations and existing strategies have been best deployed to raise achievement and consider how these will raise still further across all key stages, especially at Key Stage 2.**
- 3. This report should be considered in conjunction with the Pupil Premium report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

26. Child Poverty - Opportunity for Every Child

The Child Poverty Strategy builds upon the work of the Councils previous strategy developed in 2011. The strategy and action plan builds on the work undertaken and looks to provide opportunities for all children recognising and looking to embed the concept of 'Child Poverty Every Body's responsibility'

It was explained that the Council works towards a place where every child has the same chance to achieve his or her potential; where no child lacks food or the basic necessities of family life, or lives in poor housing, or in families where parents are unable to work; where every child attends a good school; and where every child has ready access to a range of leisure, cultural and sporting opportunities.

The Chair of the Committee agreed that school attainment and education was the main route out of poverty, however it was recommended that the Council also considered work skills and local employment opportunities. The Learning and Universal Opportunities Officer explained that increasing apprenticeships and other local employment opportunity's was a key priority.

Councillor Gupta enquired what feedback had been received from families affected by poverty. The Learning and Universal Outcomes Officer explained that the Troubled Family's conference demonstrated how some the hard work and Councils procedures had made changes.

The Chair of the Committee felt that it would be beneficial to make a clear distinction between poverty and poverty crisis'. The Learning and Universal Outcomes Officer explained that this was something that the Council would look to capture through the action plan which included crisis intervention and the use of Thurrock food banks.

Resolved:

- 1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the Child Poverty Strategy 2015-2020 and endorses the strategy and action plan.**
- 2. That the progress made since the 2011-2014 strategy is recommended.**

27. Serious Youth Violence

This item was exempt to the public.

28. Work Programme

The Democratic Services Officer explained that there was a new agenda item and that the work programme would be amended then circulated electronically.

The meeting finished at 9.54 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**