

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 March 2016 at 7.00 pm**

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**Present:** Councillors James Halden (Chair), Yash Gupta (MBE) (Vice-Chair), Leslie Gamester, Martin Kerin (arrived 7.09) and Susan Little

Reverend Canon Darren Barlow, Church of England Representative (arrived 7.04)  
Patricia Wilson, Roman Catholic Church Representative  
Myra Potter, Parent Governor Representative

**In attendance:** Titilayo Adebayo, Volunteer - Children's Centre  
Saania Ali, Youth Cabinet Representative  
Sonny Tipping, Youth Cabinet Representative  
Sam Bradbrook, School Representative  
Faith Stow, Child & Young Person Lead for HealthWatch  
David Archibald, Interim Director of Children's Services  
Janet Clark, Strategic Lead Operational, Resources and Libraries Unit  
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills  
Temi Fawehinmi, Contract and Performance Manager  
Michelle Lucas, Learning and Skills Manager  
Jenny Shade, 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.

### **59. Minutes**

The Minutes of Children's Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 9 February 2016, were approved as a correct record.

Patricia Wilson commented that Co-Optee Members should appear in the Present section rather than In Attendance section as currently shown on the minutes.

The Parent Governor Representative stated that her declaration of interest was incorrect and that she had 2 children, 1 attended Little Thurrock Primary School and the other one attended St Thomas of Canterbury School.

The Chair agreed to these changes to the minutes.

## 60. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

The Chair updated the Committee on the following items:

1. A Briefing Note on the commissioning out of the Local Authority day nurseries in Tilbury had been circulated to Members prior to the Committee. The Chair asked Roger Edwardson to provide Members with an update as it appeared that this was a complete reversal of the position already made to Cabinet.

Roger Edwardson stated that consideration was being sought from the Council to reconsider the position of commissioning out the Little Pirates and Neptune Nurseries in Tilbury. Roger Edwardson confirmed that this was not the right time to outsource the nurseries but to get the buildings into a better shape and then outsource. It was confirmed that for now the premises met the needs of those children in the ward and provided a high quality of childcare with both nurseries having waiting lists.

It was confirmed that consultations would take place with parents and discussions would take place with Unions around the changes to staffing.

The Chair recommended that no further reports go to Cabinet before a report was presented to the Children's Services Committee.

2. The Chair brought to the attention of the Committee the current media item on Essex Police re-opening historic cases of sexual abuse. The Chair stated that Serious Case Reviews had been agenda items on this Committee and that robust questions had been asked of Andrew Carter regarding internal agencies and where partnerships had failed in the past and what was being done to hold them to account.

The Chair will write to the Chief Constable to request that he attends the next Children's Services Committee when an item on the Serious Case Review was on the agenda.

3. The Chair stated an outstanding action from the last meeting on how consideration could be given to support a NEET provision amongst Looked After Children. The Chair confirmed that discussions between the Learning and Skills Manager and Councillor Little, Chair to the Corporate Parenting Committee, had taken place and agreement that an informal working group between the two committees be set up to decide what action needs should be put to the INSPIRE body. The Chair stated that Thurrock had a target of 70 per cent of Looked After Children due to leave care compared to the national rate of 48 per cent.

4. As this was Councillor Gupta's last Children's Services Committee, the Chair thanked him for his support and wished him and his family all the best for the future. Councillor Gupta thanked the Chair and the Committee for their contributions made to the committee and wished everyone well.

## **61. Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Kerin declared a non-pecuniary interest on Item 7, Pupil Place Plan (2016-2020) interest as he was awaiting news on a primary school placement for his child.

Reverend Canon 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 Palmer's College, he was also a vice chair of the William Palmer Trust.

The Parent Governor Representative declared a non-pecuniary interest in the general business of the meeting as she was a member of staff at Palmer's College and had children attending Little Thurrock and St Thomas of Canterbury Primary Schools.

Councillor Halden declared a non-pecuniary interest as he would be interviewed as Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Looked After Children's Ofsted Inspection.

Councillor Little declared a non-pecuniary interest as she would be interviewed as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee as part of the Looked After Children's Ofsted Inspection.

## **62. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board**

There were no matters raised for discussion by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board.

## **63. Youth Cabinet Activity and Impact 2015/2016**

Youth Cabinet Members presented the report that set out the activities and events carried out by the Youth Cabinet in the past year and highlighted the following outcomes:

- 2015 UK Youth Parliament "Make your Mark" Ballot – with a target of 8000 Young People voting.
- Supporting Pathways Group – Preparing Young People for employment.
- The Fairness Commission – Addressed issues of fairness in Thurrock.
- C2C Youth Panel – Regarding crime rates and safety and fares for Young People.
- Thurrock Peer Review – Youth Cabinet Members will be interviewed about their involvement with the Council.

- Planning Group – Set up in relation with the Council Planning department and have contributions on planning applications such as Lakeside.
- Staff Recruitment – Involved in the recruitment of Council staff.
- Thurrock Youth Conference 2015 – Running an event at 18 different schools, holding debates and organising workshops.
- Inspire Youth Charity – Developed a Youth Board who met monthly to discuss future plans and working the council.

Councillor Kerin thanked the Youth Cabinet Members for their report and stated how crucial work experience was to ensure young people get every opportunity of gaining employment. The Committee agreed to bring this item back to committee to hear the Youth Cabinet's feedback and how they think the Committee can help further.

Councillor Gamester asked how the Youth Cabinet Members monitored what was happening in the Council. The Youth Cabinet Member stated that they were very involved and heads of departments visited the Youth Cabinet regularly to give updates. All feedback given from Youth Cabinet members were then fed back to the Council.

Councillor Little asked what involvement did the Youth Cabinet have with the staff recruitment panel. The Youth Cabinet Member stated that they had recently sat on 2 interview panels asking different questions to get the most out of candidates. The questions were also aimed around the candidate's knowledge of Youth Cabinet and what they could offer.

Councillor Gupta stated that over the last 10 years the Youth Cabinet had developed and displayed good ground for future leaders. He thanked the Youth Cabinet Members for their contributions and wished them well for the future.

Reverend Canon Barlow asked what more could be done to connect with all Young People across the borough. The Youth Cabinet Member stated that they hoped to connect with more young people in the Democracy Week and to encourage more schools to get involved.

Councillor Halden thanked the Youth Cabinet Members for an excellent report but stated that the older style Democracy Week be returned that would encourage proper outreach to all schools and the youth population.

Michele Lucas recommended that the Youth Cabinet Members be tasked to come up with a plan on how this would work and what it would look like and further recommended that, when appropriate, the Youth Cabinet share this plan with a selection of Members.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1.1 To continue to support the work undertaken by the Youth Cabinet this enabling young people to remain at the heart of decision making regarding youth related activities.**
- 1.2 To continue to support members of the Youth Cabinet in the development of an alternative vehicle for delivering youth related activities recognising the need to ensure savings going forward, whilst ensuring young people remain at the heart of the regeneration agenda.**
- 1.3 That the Youth Cabinet prepared a plan on how to encourage proper outreach to all schools and the youth population.**

### **64. Pupil Place Plan (2016-2020)**

The Officer presented the report that provided Members with information on the supply of school places in the authority and forecasted pupil numbers for the next five years, setting the context of the provision of school places in the authority.

A Pupil Place Planning Sub-Group will remain in its current form and make recommendations on the pupil placing planning across the authority.

The Officer stated that Thurrock had a good working relationship with schools and academies in the borough.

Expansion to meet demands was essential with 16,500 children currently in primary schools across the borough and only 9,500 secondary school places available. To meet this demand a forecast of a further 2 new secondary schools would be required over the next 5 years. These could cost in the region of 50 million pounds; detailed conversation with the Department of Education and the Educational Funding Agency had taken place and were aware of the pressures being faced.

The Officer stated the biggest concern was the increase in numbers of children coming in mid-year outside the normal school rounds. Figures quoted from the Officer for the primary sector on children that moved from outside of the borough and out of the country into Thurrock:

2013/14	775 children
2014/15	940 children
4 months into 2015/16	568 children

The Project Group, with representatives from the school admissions team, finance, benefits, transport and planning meet every 2 weeks to monitor this situation.

Councillor Little asked what active checks were in place to ensure all children go to school.

David Archibald commented that Thurrock had the most thorough and robust system that he had ever before that ensured the appropriate checks were carried out on every child that may have fallen out of the system. David Archibald assured Members that the system was very good and comprehensive.

Councillor Little asked the number of children who were privately educated or travelled out of the borough to be educated. The Officer stated this figure was not to hand but could confirm the transfer rate between primary and secondary school was 92 per cent. Therefore the other 8 per cent would either go out of the borough or be privately educated.

The Officer stated the number of children educated at home or home tutored was currently 119. There were concerns for 5 of those as to the quality of their tutoring and if needs were being met.

Councillor Little asked Officers if 106 monies from large developments were being used to support educational needs.

The Officer stated she attended all Planning Committees and requests for information were made with regards to the impact on educational needs if a development goes ahead.

Councillor Kerin stated his concern with the number of secondary schools that were required to be built and how reliant was the Council on the sponsorship from free-schools agreeing to build a school in an area. The Officer stated that works were currently being undertaken with the sponsor and the sponsorship process had to be followed. It would also be in the authority's interest to work alongside the department of education.

Councillor Kerin raised concern with the number of new developments proposed for Grays and Lakeside and that the potential of an extra 21,000 children to place in schools and what plans were in place. The Officer confirmed that a 5 year plan had already commenced with insight into outlines of developments and planning applications with education as a forefront need.

Roger Edwardson stated that there was a problem of recruiting quality teachers to smaller schools as larger schools offered better opportunities.

Councillor Gamester asked Officers to recalculate the figures for the historical uptake factor for 2003-04 and 2004-05 as there appeared to be a discrepancy. The Officer agreed to take this away and feedback.

Councillor Gupta asked Officers how long it would take to place a child mid-term. The Officer confirmed that this depended on different factors but ideally within 20 days of notification to place a child mid-term. Work would be

undertaken with parents and that non-attendance at school would be addressed.

Reverend Canon Barlow stated the typographical error on Page 33 of the report that the Improvements to the M25 at junctions 30/31 instead of 30/3.

Councillor Halden asked for a full feasibility study with a footprint of all schools in the borough provided to the Committee, the Officer agreed to take this action point forward and feedback when appropriate.

Councillor Little requested that the recommendation be changed to read discussed rather than noted. The Chair agreed to this amendment.

RESOLVED

- 1.1 That the comments of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Pupil Place Plan and the draft forecasts were discussed.**
- 1.2 A footprint of all schools within the borough will be brought back to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

*Janet Clark left the committee room at 8.20pm*

## **65. Child Poverty - Opportunity for Every Child - Action Plan Update**

Michele Lucas referred Members to Wishes that was an adult learning programme to support parents into work and introduced Titilayo Adebayo, a volunteer from the Tilbury Children Centre, to speak to Members.

Titilayo praised Wishes for giving her the opportunity to volunteer, having young children of her own she had been out of work for nearly 2 and a half years. The programme had given her the opportunity to engage with others, to develop her skills and confidence and the positive impact this has had on her and how this spurred her on to encourage others to join the programme.

Michele Lucas stated that this was first hand evidence of the benefits made by the Council to keep programmes like Wishes going.

Councillor Gupta stated how shocked he was that the level of child poverty remained at much the same level since 2008 and was concerned that some projects and offers of help were not working.

Michele Lucas stated that figures were similar nationally and this would be due to a range of factors but the ambition was to move forward, taking small steps to build the community resilience.

All Members and Officers agreed that child poverty was everyone business and this had been embedded in to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Councillor Little stated that Thurrock were fortunate to have an ambassador like Michele Lucas fighting the case for Thurrock.

Councillor Halden agreed that the report was excellent and that the project Wishes were what certain areas of the borough needed and what efforts were being made to engage all, especially those areas that were not taking up the offer.

Michele Lucas commented that the figure of 71.2 per cent of those engaging was not high enough and more in-depth conversations would need to be held to find out the reasons why and will also be using the volunteer programme to promote.

Councillor Halden stated his concern over the increase from 15 to 30 hours free childcare and what challenges this may cause. Michele Lucas stated that planning for this was already in hand and was mindful of the impact.

The Parent Governor Representative asked if the children's centres targeted all those children that should be there. Roger Edwardson stated that with 9 children centres in the borough it was critical to reach out to as many as possible and even those that were harder to engage, once engaged they became involved very quickly.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1.1 To support the work undertaken in the Child Poverty Action Plan and identify other ways in which we can promote the child poverty agenda across the Council and external partners.**
- 1.2 To actively promote volunteering opportunities in local wards thus promoting and encouraging more community engagement and discussion around child poverty and ways of addressing it.**

*Titilayo Adebayo and Faith Stow left the committee room at 8.42pm*

### **66. Proposal to deliver Denominational Transport within the Statutory minimum**

The Officer presented the report which identified the means by which Thurrock Council would deliver denominational transport in accordance with its statutory duty. The Officer explained that denominational transport offered to any pupil other than pupils on benefit that attended a faith secondary school on the grounds of faith, was not a statutory duty and Thurrock Council were entitled to use its discretion with respect to such transport. To comply with these statutory duties, Thurrock Council must:

- Promote the use of sustainable travel and transport
- Make transport arrangements for all eligible children



An Exceptional Circumstances policy would also be in place to support those families whose income level is low, yet above the benefits threshold.

The report was brought back to Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny following the agreement by Cabinet to undertake further consultation on the future of the services. The purpose of the report was now to consider the results of those consultations, the impact of the proposals, what the commission of the service will have on Thurrock families and to determine the most financially viable way forward.

The Officer stated that the noticeable difference in consultations was the number of families that had made direct contact with the council.

The Council were wary of the impact and the importance to supporting families, the Officer stated that conversations had already taken place with the providers of the denominational transport and should the decommissioning of the service take place would act as facilitators between the providers and parents should they still wish to continue to use the service.

Councillor Kerin stated that potentially in 7 years' time he may have a child who may take advantage of these bus services.

Councillor Kerin was happy to support the recommendations on the grounds that the exceptional circumstances remain and were monitored but had concerns with those families who could not afford the transport to enable them to educate their children in their faith.

Reverend Canon Barlow echoed comments previously made at Committee on that the reducing number of children using the service would have a direct consequence of the high cost that were being put to families who wished to use it.

Reverend Canon Barlow asked what the process would be for those children already at that school and would this be honoured for the child's remaining duration.

The Officer stated that when transport was started in Thurrock extreme care was taken that all correspondence sent out stated that transport would be reviewed on a year by year basis with parents having to re-apply.

Reverend Barlow questioned the Officer again that families with children who rely on transport to secondary school who had not paid before will now have to start paying. The Officer confirmed that generally the answer would be yes but the Exceptional Circumstances Policy would make provision for certain cases.

Councillor Little asked the Officer to explain what the cycling allowance was. The Officer confirmed that the suitability of all additional options had to be looked at going forward including travel training for children.

Patricia Wilson stated it this was not right and would not be supporting these recommendations.

The Officer confirmed that all viable options will be looked to assure parents that no child will be left without a school place and very effort would be given to support parents.

Councillor Gamester asked for clarification that no child who cannot afford transport should not be denied transport. The Officer explained the statutory duty of the Council and explained the Exceptional Circumstances Policy further.

Reverend Canon Barlow stated he would not be supporting these recommendations based on the direct consequences of the decision will see a significant reduction in the number children in Thurrock attending secondary schools out of borough as many families would not qualify for the free transport. Therefore the choice of which school their child would attend would be taken out of their hands.

Councillor Halden stated that he respected Reverend Canon Barlow's decision and commented that his responsibility as an elected member would be to ensure that every child had a safe school to go to. Councillor Halden stated that the Council could not cater for every variation and must cater for everyone.

The Chair called a vote on recommendations 1.1 and 1.2, the result of which:

For	:	Councillors Halden, Gupta, Gamester, Little and Kerin (5)
Against	:	Patricia Wilson, Reverend Canon Barlow and Myra Potter (3)
Abstain	:	(0)

## **RESOLVED**

- 1.1 That the comments of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the proposal being referred to Cabinet to deliver denominational transport within the statutory minimum and discontinue all services outside of its legal duty at the end of the 2015/16 academic be noted.**
- 1.2 That it be recognised that Thurrock Council will continue to transport pupils in receipt of benefit who meet the criteria stipulated within the Education Act. An Exceptional Circumstances policy would also be in place to support families whose income level was low, yet above the benefits threshold.**

*Standing Orders were called at 9.15pm and agreed by all members*

## **67. Report on Entry into Higher Education in Thurrock**

The Officer presented the report that provided Members with an overview of the current entry of Thurrock young people into Higher Education. The report provided statistical information on entry to high education nationally and locally which gave Members the opportunity to consider how working in partnership with all interested parties can increase the entry into high education from Thurrock young people.

The Officer stated that there were 11 Looked After Children at University undertaking a range of subjects.

The Committee were asked to note that 260 young people attend education outside of the borough and the aim would be to track and record what establishment they attend.

Reverend Canon Barlow questioned the 0 per cent figures in the report of Local Picture for Oxbridge. Michele Lucas stated that the figures were correct as this was a small cohort specialising in offer of helps, re-sits and provide any further support.

Councillor Halden asked what evidence that the Thurrock Top Achievers Programme was progressing well. Michele Lucas stated it was a 2 year programme and it was too early to tell by results available but confirmed that this will be well monitored. The Committee agreed that this item should return to Committee with evidence of the impact.

Councillor Kerin stated how good it was that the Council were putting a programme together for young people and asked if specific ward reports could be produced. The Officer agreed that this information could be brought back to committee.

The Parent Governor Representative stated that other initiatives were still out there and that everyone had the opportunity.

Reverend Canon Barlow asked for data on what percentage of Thurrock students attended Palmers and South Essex College. Officers agreed to provide this information to the committee.

Reverend Canon Barlow stated that 49 per cent of young people from Stanford and Corringham sixth form going into higher education were encouraging.

Councillor Halden asked Officers for data on the 50 per cent of young people from Palmers not going into higher education to identify if this was because they had apprenticeships or that they had fallen out of the system.

Roger Edwardson agreed to take away Councillor Gamester's question on the difference between the 60 per cent and 40 per cent funding by Russell Group.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1.1 That the development of a strategy to raise entry into High Education for Thurrock Young People be endorsed.**
- 1.2 That the progress of the TAP (Thurrock Top Achievers Programme) in Thurrock be monitored.**
- 1.3 That a partnership approach involving London Universities, Essex University, colleges, primary and secondary schools and Thurrock Careers be support in order to identify innovative ways in which the uptake of Higher education could be increased in Thurrock.**

## **68. Work Programme**

Councillor Halden referred Members to the Continuity of Work in the municipal year 2016/17 and added the following items:

- A footprint of every school in the borough be provided
- An update on the Commissioning Out of Nurseries in Tilbury
- Inviting Chief Constable to attend Children's Services Committee regarding Essex Police re-opening historic cases of sexual abuse
- Look at the impact of the increase from 15 to 30 hours free childcare will have
- How would the Council support schools with offering work experience opportunities

Councillor Gupta left the committee room at 9.38pm

Councillor Halden thanked Reverend Canon Barlow for his contributions to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and wished him well.

Reverend Canon Barlow thanked the Chair and stated that his replacement would be Anne Sentence.

Councillor Halden thanked the Committee for all their hard work and contributions.

**The meeting finished at 9.42 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**