

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2014 at 7.00 pm**

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- Present:** Councillors Val Morris-Cook (Chair), Tunde Ojetola (from 7.50pm) and Martin Kerin
- Patricia Wilson, Roman Catholic Church Representative  
Reverend Darren Barlow, Church of England Representative
- In attendance:** Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services  
Andrew Carter, Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes  
Michele Lucas, Learning & Skills Manager  
Ruth Brock, School Improvement Manager  
Harminster Dhillon, Statutory Complaints & Engagement Manager  
James Henderson, Youth Cabinet Representative  
Kenna-Victoria Martin, 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.

### **8. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence declared.

### **9. Minutes**

The Minutes of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 15 July 2014, were approved as a correct record.

### **10. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business, however the Chair asked Members to note the Minutes from the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees meeting which took place on Monday 27th October 2014.

The Chair also informed Members that item 5 was to be withdrawn from the agenda.

### **11. 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.

Councillor Kerin declared a non-pecuniary interest in the general business of the meeting as he was a Governor at St. Marys R.C Primary School.

## **12. Children's Social Care Complaints and Representations Annual Report 2013-14**

The Statutory Complaints and Engagement Manager introduced the report to the Committee explaining that the process for complaints was slightly different from the council's general complaints procedure in that it was a statutory requirement to produce an annual complaints report on children social care complaints.

Members were informed that during 2013/2014 a total of 203 representations were received and broken into the following categories:

- 62 Compliments
- 62 Stage 1 complaints received
- 3 Stage 2 complaints received
- 1 Stage 3 complaint received
- 34 Concerns and issues received
- 19 MP enquiries
- 20 Member enquiries
- 2 Ombudsman enquiries

The Committee were further notified that there had been a 26% decrease in stage 1 complaints received by the department compared to the number of complaints received in 2012/2013. Members were advised that a contributing factor could be that families are now provided with information on Children's Social Care processes and are more familiar with what to expect when their family are working with a social worker, the team also worked responsively to solve concerns and queries in an informal way before they escalate

It was explained to the Committee that an Ombudsman enquiry could be submitted during any part of the complaints process. During such time the Ombudsman would verify that the council had followed its complaint procedure.

Members of the Committee enquired as to whether officers had carried out any benchmarking with other Local Authorities. Officers informed the Committee that at the time the report was written, unfortunately officers didn't have that data to hand, however it should now be available.

The Chair of the Committee praised officers for the report and that the council was learning from previous errors. She queried as to how the team had improved. Officers explained that minor issues were being recorded as complaints, when in actual fact they were concerns being processed incorrectly.

Members of the Committee queried as to how Member and MP enquires were processed. The Committee were advised that Member Services were usually

the first point of contact for Members queries, the query would then be passed on the team for a response. It was explained to Members that occasionally enquiries were raised directly with the director who would work with the team to solve the issues raised.

It was raised by Members that of the Ombudsman cases, case one the Ombudsman found fault casing injustice, it was further enquired as to whether the case had been looked into by officers. The Committee were advised that the case had been looked into thoroughly and that there continued to be support to the family taking into account lessons learned.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That Scrutiny Committee consider and note the report.**
- 2. That Scrutiny Committee note the Ombudsman report.**

**13. Work Experience - Supporting Pathways into Work for Young People**

The Learning & Skills Manager introduced the report to Members explaining that plenty of employers enjoy assisting with work experience and evidence could be seen by the number of work experience placements and apprenticeships taking place.

It was explained to the Committee that the Council had been approached by local schools and academies regarding the processes in place for work experience placements. Members were notified that all schools within the borough were engaging with work experience placements and forming partnerships with Thurrock Council.

Members were advised that the key achievement of the scheme was to ensure that young people had high quality and safe work experience placements. As it developed, it would fund itself as schools were buying into the council's scheme. It was also noted that employers who employed young people for work experience placements were impressed and the scheme was encouraged not only at a local government level but also nationally.

The Youth Cabinet Representative addressed the Committee, expressing that in his opinion work experience was fundamental for young people within Thurrock. He continued to inform Members that it gave young people the opportunity to try out career choices. It was also explained that should work experience take place within the retail sector for example, it was easier for those young people to find work as it enabled them to have experience of the working environment.

The Chair of the Committee explained that she was in agreement with the recommendations to hold a Task and Finish Group, regarding work experience. She continued to inform the Committee that she felt that there should be two representatives from the Youth Cabinet sitting on the Task and Finish panel.

Through discussions Members agreed that the Task and Finished Group should be made up of five elected Members and two representatives from the Youth Cabinet. It was also agreed there was a lot for Thurrock to offer young people in the way of work experience from experience of hands on work to working within different teams at Council and even the Royal Opera House.

Members were informed that as part of the scheme officers and schools were working with young people offering them information, advice and guidance as well as speaking with young people to find out what they wanted to achieve. It was queried as to how many work experience placements were currently undertaken by Thurrock Council. Officers advised the Committee that the council currently had approximately 65 work placements per year. These roles could be with a variety of the directorates.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the work already undertaken and the achievements over the last year in the development of a traded offer, supporting both employers and educational institutions, be noted.**
  - 2. That a Task and Finish group be established to identify further opportunities to support pathways into work for young people – with a view to addressing some of the sector specific opportunities locally.**
  - 3. That the Task and Finish group consist of five Members, appointed in accordance with political proportionality.**
  - 4. That the scope and terms of reference of the Task and Finish group be agreed, as outlined in draft in appendix 1.**
- 14. Child Sexual Exploitation and the Jay report – implications for Thurrock**

The Director of Children's Services addressed the Committee explaining that following the shocking findings of the Jay Report in Rotherham it was important that all local authorities repeatedly revisit the arrangements they had in place to address Child Sexual Exploitation. The report was being presented in many different forums in the council, including the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children's Partnership Board to ensure that all were aware of the importance of the subject and could hold officers effectively to account.

The Head of Children's Social Care, informed the Committee that the remit of the Jay Report covered the period 1997- 2013 and it was believed that during this period 1400 children and young people had been sexually exploited in Rotherham. He explained that in 2008 the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People developed a definition (2.2.2 of the report), which was commonly used in government guidance and policy.

The findings of the Jay Report and failings across agencies and political processes were summarised. Members were encouraged to read the Jay Report if they had not already done so. The need for child sexual exploitation to be tackled across all the functions of the Council was stressed and steps already taken in relation to licencing and taxi cab operators.

Members were notified that the Council was working in partnership with Southend-on-Sea Council and Essex County Council as part of the SET (Southend, Essex and Thurrock) arrangements to develop strategies to address child sexual exploitation and support the needs of children not only within Thurrock but across Greater Essex.

It was explained that officers were exploring different ways to engage with communities to raise the awareness of sexual exploitation and to assist them in identify the signs. Within this the need to work with all communities was stressed and to avoid the dangers identified in Rotherham of failing to work effectively in relation to culture and diversity.

It was queried by the Committee as to how the Council was working with schools and academies in general to tackle child sexual exploitation and specifically to support children who had changed schools or were missing school.

Members were informed that in relation to any child or young person that the Council was aware that there is a potential risk of child sexual exploitation, that officers would be in contact with the school as part of safeguarding procedures. It was also advised that officers were working with schools and academies to assist them in identifying the potential signs of child sexual exploitation and referring to Children's Social Care.

Specifically in relation to children and young people who are missing from home, care or education, Members were advised that revised processes had been and were being put in place to ensure that this group of children could be identified, risk assessed and risk managed.

Members stressed, based on their reading of the Jay report, their concerns regarding children who are disengaged and underachieving within education and how this heightens the potential risk of sexual exploitation. Officers agreed with Members concerns and advised that training and risk assessment tools continue to be rolled out across Children's Social Care and partner agencies, which highlight the risks associated with disengagement.

Following discussions, it was enquired as to if secondary schools and academies were providing sexual awareness to pupils and how was the Council engaging with schools to provide support. Officers explained that such information would have to be included within the policies of the schools and academies.

Members debated the complexities of providing appropriate sex education and at what ages, while being mindful of the risks of sexual exploitation. The

need for those providing sexual education and health advice, to provide age appropriate services, while working across agencies to tackle exploitation was highlighted.

It was further acknowledged that the provision of sex education alone was not enough and that vulnerable young people needed to be assisted in recognising exploitation and being able to make appropriate choices regarding online safety and other aspects of their lives. Officers reported that the Council continues to work with schools, partner agencies, parents and young people to raise awareness regarding Internet Safety and the potential for children and young people to be groomed and sexually exploited online. Officers cited the Walk Online Roadshows which reached 5000 pupils and briefings rolled out to Head Teachers, as models of good practice which form part of the programme of work to raise awareness and building resilience in children about child sexual exploitation.

Members noted that the report mentioned whistle blowing and enquired as to how that it worked. Officers advised of the need for all agencies to have clear whistle blowing procedures and that the Local Safeguarding Children Board website had a page which gave advice on what to do if anyone had any concerns regarding the welfare of children and young people.

Members asked for clarification regarding the case audits within the CSE Action Plan and Officers confirmed the progression of a review / audits of all current cases and going back over a 5 year period (in conjunction with Southend-on-Sea Council and Essex Council) where potential concerns regarding child sexual exploitation are identified. The aim of the audits it was explained by Officers is to ensure that children and young people are safe and to ensure appropriate standards of practice.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the overview and scrutiny committee to note the contents of the report.**
- 2. To recall the action plan to future O&S meetings for updates on implementation and to scrutinise the work in this area.**

#### **15. Report on Headline Key Stage Results Report on Headline Key Stage Results**

The Interim School Improvement Manager introduced the report explaining that Officers noted good progress in the results across key stages 1- 4. Ofsted judgements for primary schools now shows a considerable increase in the % of good or better judgements from 34% 5 years ago to 78% to date.

Members were notified that following support and training for early years teaching, Key Stage One and GCSEs, results were above national levels. There was also an apparent love for learning within nurseries but there is a

gap between achievement for boys and girls. However, by Key Stage Two this gap is reduced considerably narrowing with national level by 1.5%.

The Committee were advised that although nationally all Key Stage Four results dipped the results for Thurrock schools and academies were still above average for the second year running, increasing the percentage of students attaining the benchmark measure of 5A\*-C passes at GCSE including English and maths.

Officers informed the Committee that the council was looking forward to the inaugural Educational Awards ceremony this month to celebrate all achievement and individuals' good practice.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the provisional outcomes of the summer 2014 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, and key stage 5.**

**16. Work Programme**

Members noted the current work programme for the Committee.

**The meeting finished at 9.15 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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