

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 September 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Elizabeth Rigby (Chair), Sara Muldowney (Vice-Chair), Vikki Hartstean, Paul Arnold (Substitute) (substitute for Qaisar Abbas) and Aaron Green (Substitute) (substitute for Srikanth Panjala)

Apologies: Councillors Maureen Pearce and Qaisar Abbas
Sarah Barlow, Parent Governor Representative

In attendance: Priscilla Bruce-Annan, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Manager
Lee Henley, Head of Information Management
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead - YOS and Prevention
Elizabeth Shields, Service Manager, Social Care Service Managers
Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help
Sarah Williams, Service Manager, Education Support Service
Angela Surrey, Youth Worker, Children's Service Youth Cabinet
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

12. Minutes

The minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 June 2023 were approved as a true and correct record.

In regard to ACTIONS, it was agreed that an officer's name should be included to identify who the owner of each action would be.

The apologies given by the two co-opted members need to be included in the minutes.

13. Items of Urgent Business

The Chair agreed one urgent item of business.

Sarah Williams provided members a reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) update, following work with the Department of Education and survey works undertaken during the summer.

The following points were raised:

- Five confirmed schools had RAAC present in their building which were St Cleres, Arthur Bugler, East Tilbury, Thameside and Corringham.
- Awaiting the outcome of Aveley Primary School.
- Additional surveys will be undertaken on the 14 September, on four Catholic schools in Thurrock.
- Outcome was still awaited on the Grays Convent sports hall roof.
- Work will continue with the Department of Education and Schools.
- Members will be kept up to date by Briefing Notes via Councillor Carter.
- The Department of Education were sharing information on a regular basis.
- No RAAC incidents in regard to danger to those in school had been reported.
- Members agreed an item should be added to the work programme for the next meeting.

ACTION:

Action 1: Add RAAC to the work programme for the next meeting (Democratic Services)

At 7.14pm, Sarah Williams left the meeting.

14. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

15. Youth Cabinet Update

The Youth Cabinet Representation presented an update to the Committee on the Essex Wildlife Trust, the Local Plan, the British Youth Council Events, their meeting with Dr Dave Smith and Work on the Horizon.

The Committee thanked the Youth Cabinet Representative for their presentation and the excellent work they had undertaken.

Following the presentation the following were raised:

- A request will be made for the feedback collected from the Local Plan workshops to be shared with members.
- Local Plan had been made accessible to the Youth Cabinet and the knowledge of their own areas had been helpful.
- Stated it would be nice to see more trees and shrubs in areas.
- Youth Cabinet representative had enjoyed their three years as chairperson developing their skills, making an impact on the community and making changes to the environment within Thurrock.
- Potentially contacting Open Door to undertake some joint work on recruitment for future members.
- Work on the Horizon would be discussed at the next meeting.

- Members requested the date for the next Youth Cabinet meeting when Dr Dave Smith would be attending so that members could also attend.

Councillor Muldowney referenced Councillor Carter's attendance at this meeting and stated that he, as portfolio holder, had his platform where overview and scrutiny was for backbencher members to have their say.

At 7.28pm the Youth Cabinet representatives left the meeting.

16. 2022/23 Annual Complaints and Representations Report - Children's Social Care

The annual report presented covered the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and set out the number of representations received in the year including the number of complaints, key issues arising from complaints and learning from complaints.

The following points were raised:

- The Chair thanked officers for the report and noted it was good that the number of complaints had gone down.
- It was noted that complaints also helped improve services going forward.
- The co-opted member raised her concern on the lack of information on some of the complaints. Reassurance was given by officers that these complaints were being looked into and the right management structure was in place. There was more information behind each complaint, however each complaint provides a summary.
- Agreed that each complaint had been looked into and appropriate action had been taken.
- Discussed the Disabled Children complaints and whether this was a theme/issue arising, to which assurance was given that the service had improved.
- It was noted that staff vacancies were not a contributable factor to the complaints.

RESOLVED

The Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the report.

At 7.51pm, Lee Henley left the meeting.

17. Fostering Recruitment - Verbal Update

Officers provided members with a very informative verbal update on the current position of foster carer recruitment to which Members thanked officers and made the following comments:

- There was not an average retention period for how long someone was a foster carer.

- A Thurrock foster carer had recently celebrated being a foster carer for 40 years.
- Members agreed the foster carer recruitment events were most enjoyable.
- Members also acknowledged the dedication of Thurrock foster carers.
- There had been an increase in enquiries, each enquiry was responded to appropriately and support offered.
- The website was very informative.
- The age group demographic of foster carers was shifting to young families.
- Three households had been taken up this year.
- Timescale from initial enquiry to approval the target was four months.

18. Family Hubs and the Start for Life Programme Report

The report presented provided members with information on the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme.

The following points were raised:

- Members acknowledged the good response so far.
- Members noted their interest in how the obesity and oral hygiene services would develop.
- Member questioned whether the Delivery Plan was accessible for viewing. Members were advised this was a very big non-public document, but officers agreed to seek advice whether it could be shared.
- Work was already on going between the family hubs and community hubs as there were some overlapping of services.
- Members requested dates and times of coffee mornings so that they could participate.
- Members were informed that specific training sessions such as Weight Management and Oral Health were in place and would be delivered.
- Members were referred to the specific program for children ages 0-2 called "Henry".
- A training offer for staff was in place offering 18 places this would enable those members of staff to assist in the delivery of those training sessions.
- Members were assured the services being funded did not exceed the council's current budgets.

ACTIONS:

ACTION 2: Delivery Plan – request a copy be sent to members (Clare Moore)

ACTION 3: Dates and times for coffee mornings (Clare Moore)

Councillor Muldowney commented that reports presented to overview and scrutiny committees should not be "to note". Those to note reports should be presented as Briefing Notes outside of this meeting.

RESOLVED

Members received the report for information and noted the progress of the requirements and responsibilities of local authority areas engaged in the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme.

19. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership

This report presented to Members provided an update on the Thematic Review into Serious Youth Violence and Gang Related Crime Review action plan.

The following points were raised:

- The action plan was devised by a multi-agency task and finish group which included representatives from the Community Safety Partnership.
- As part of the plan, there were workers who sat on the youth offending team that worked specifically with targeted groups of children who were identified as at risk or vulnerable. Part of their role was to undertake school-based work with groups of children within schools.
- Work was being undertaken with adult teachers in school to incorporate the learning knowledge and understanding into some of the work that was carried out for children in schools.
- Referred to the Thematic Review Appendix it was good to see progress was being made.
- Going forward once foundations had been made and more children and young people were talking about their experiences and identifying areas or hotspots, to look at how incidents are reported. To understand where the intelligence was so that services and interventions be put in place to mitigate some of those incidents.
- Discussion on the programme and funding available for the training, support and advice being undertaken by Olive Academy.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the progress made on Thematic Review Action Plan to date.

20. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme.

Members agreed that an update item on RAAC be added to the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

The Chair requested a meeting with Officers and Democratic Services outside of the meeting to discuss the work programme.

ACTION:

ACTION 4: Democratic Services to organise (Democratic Services).

The full recording of the meeting can be viewed from the following link:
[Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 12 September 2023, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 8.49 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**