

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 February 2010 at 7.00pm.**

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**Present:** Councillors Marion Canavon, Diana Hale and Lynn Worrall.

Patricia Wilson, David Rollins (Chair) and Emma Woods.

**Apologies:** Councillors John Everett and Ian Harrison

**In attendance:** C. Stewart – Head of Business (Policy, Performance and Resources)

C. Tinkler – Head of School Improvement

J. Olsson- Corporate Director: Children, Education and Families

M. Boulter- Principal Democratic Services Officer

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*In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, Mrs Wilson nominated the Revd. David Rollins as Chair, which was seconded by Councillor Hale.*

**54. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 and 28 January were approved as a correct record.

**55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

a) Interests

Mrs Wilson declared a personal interest in relation to Item 5 by virtue that she sits on the governing body of St. Thomas of Canterbury School.

Mrs Woods declared a personal interest in relation to Item 5 by virtue that she is a parent governor at Stanford Le Hope Primary School.

Councillor Hale declared a personal interest in relation to item 5 by virtue that she is a member of the corporate board for South Essex College.

Revd. Rollins declared a personal interest in relation to Item 5 by virtue that he is a governor at Corringham Primary School.

Councillor Worrall declared a personal interest in relation to Item 5 by virtue that she is a trustee at the Gateway Academy.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

**56. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The options for improving schools in Thurrock were outlined to the Committee. The council was already improving its internal arrangements and the option of outsourcing the service was not viable because strong leadership was the key to success and outsourcing might not necessarily provide this. Thurrock also looked at working in a partnership with Southend, Luton and Havering but because the visions for the service did not match with each of the council's, a shared service was not possible.

As a result, Officers were recommending that Cabinet accept the option of radically revising internal arrangements to increase coherence and effectiveness. These radical arrangements would include reducing the number of heads of service from 4 to 3, appointing a head of School Improvement and investing funds to accelerate progress across the year.

There was some discussion as to why Key Stage 4 results were much better than primary results and whether the inclusion of academies into the figures affected them significantly. It was responded that the inclusion of the academies did not change the results widely, only by a few percent. Officers felt that the disparity in results was due to strong leadership in secondary schools. Head teachers in Thurrock Primary schools were either new to the job or were interim appointments. It was added that if the core requirements of English and Maths were added to the results then even key stage 4 would be challenged to achieve excellent results.

Councillor Canavon expressed her view that the spending of £330,000 on improvement, including a super-head teacher/ Head of School Improvement, seemed excessive considering the Council's recent budget setting. She asked whether the money would be well spent and that those people employed would be able to achieve marked improvements within a year for the money spent on them.

Officers stated that they had originally requested more funds for the project and the £330,000 represented a much more modest sum than previously requested. They agreed that it would be very difficult for anyone to affect vast and lasting improvements within a year but the purpose of the super head teacher role was to build capacity within the Council for long-term improvement. It was hoped that the post would

be funded through the Local Area Agreement Reward Grant. It was added that the money offered was the market rate and Thurrock needed to offer this sum if it was to attract a high calibre candidate.

Discussion progressed onto the qualities of the super-head teacher and it was explained that the person would not be employed for their knowledge of the secondary or primary sector but rather, they would be employed for their knowledge of how schools work, how improvement in them works and how to manage the improvement process from a Council perspective.

Councillor Worrall felt the money would be well spent but wondered whether the money spent on training could be well attended and value for money. It was replied that the training would take place in schools to encourage staff to attend. Furthermore, the Council was working closely with head teachers in order to tailor the training to individual school needs. The Committee was assured that there was willingness from head teachers to improve their schools. In response to a question on school budgets, it was explained that the Council was able to make schools spend available funds on school improvement if there was a clear need for them to improve.

Mrs Woods asked whether school improvement officers could report directly to governing bodies on school improvement matters. It was replied that school improvement officers liaised with the chair of the governing body and the head teacher over improvement issues and that the chair of the governing body should be reporting issues to the body itself. The governing body was able to request a school improvement officer to attend its meeting.

Following a query as to whether the super head teacher would be audited, the Committee were informed that the work of that person would be checked by senior officers in the Council, as well as this committee.

A brief discussion took place on the state of pre-school education and whether investment was needed in this area. Officers stated that in the new municipal year, the committee would be asked to help officers much more in deciding models for school leadership, amalgamations and planning Thurrock schools for the future.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report is noted and the above comments are incorporated into the consultation work currently taking place on school improvement.**

**57. SEX AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION REVIEW**

Councillor Worrall expressed her gratitude to the Principal Democratic Services Officer for his support and hard work on the review. She also stated that she had learnt a lot about the topic and was surprised at how much and the quality of work the Council did in this area.

Councillor Hale suggested that another review could focus on how different partners worked together to tackle anti-social behaviour but also, incorporate children's safeguarding issues and the general culture of children in the Borough.

The Committee briefly discussed school dinner options and it was discovered that school dinner menus had been changed recently to provide more choice and to avoid the same meals on continuous days.

**58. WORK PROGRAMME**

**Resolved:**

**That the work programme be noted.**

**The meeting finished at 8.20pm.**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIRMAN**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
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or alternatively e-mail [mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk)**