

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

Present: Councillors Diana Hale (Chair), Ian Harrison, Marion Canavon, John Everett and Lynn Worrall.

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

In attendance: Councillor Sue MacPherson – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
M. Vinall – Principal – Palmer's College
J. Hayles – Deputy Principal – South Essex College
C. Stewart – Head of Business (Policy, Performance and Resources)
J. Mercer- Head of Children, Youth and Family Services
L. Bostock –
J. Olsson- Corporate Director: Children, Education and Families
M. Boulter- Principal Democratic Services Officer

Councillor Hale was welcomed as the new Chair of the Committee by Councillor John Everett on behalf of the Committee.

58. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 February 2010 were approved as a correct record.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

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.

Councillor Worrall declared a personal interest in relation to Item 5 by virtue that she is a trustee at the Gateway Academy, she works with young people who are NEET on behalf of the Prince's Trust and she has children at Palmer's College. She also declared that her partner manages the skills and construction lorry, which also worked with young people in NEET.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

60. POST 16 AND ATTAINMENT

Officers introduced the report which outlined the national and local priorities for people aged 16 – 19. It was hoped the Committee's discussion would help inform the refresh of the Council's strategy relating to this age group. The Committee was informed that the Local Skills Council (LSC) was handing responsibility for post 16 education and apprenticeships to local authorities on 1st April 2010.

A major change in policy was to raise the age of participation in education. It was expected that this change would see more opportunities for young people to become apprentices and young people in Thurrock had shown great interest in apprenticeship schemes. The Council had a lot of work to do to reach the national target for the number of apprenticeships but were working with the National Apprenticeship Service to achieve this. It was stated that hairdressing and engineering were the two most popular apprenticeships.

The Council had beaten its target of the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) but NEET levels were still 6.6% and it was important to help these young people as it impacted upon their prospects and health.

In terms of post-16 destinations officers highlighted the increase in sixth forms at schools in the borough and the provision being facilitated at special schools. Money to fund this expansion in sixth forms would now not be available again until 2011-12. At this point officers also stated that the performance of young people in Thurrock at level 3 was improving, although work was still needed to improve the 'Mind the Gap' agenda.

It was expected that a rise in the need for places would increase to 800 by 2016 and that this number would be required to deliver the level of attainment the Council wanted. However, these places would include people in apprenticeships who would only require one day within a college/ sixth form.

Councillor Harrison noted that sixth forms required 200 plus students to be financially viable to a school and not detract from 11-16 resources. He asked whether this would be met for places like Gable Hall School. It was explained that the figure was a national benchmark and it could be the case that a school could fund less places without it affecting its 11-16 provision and that a shared service with other post 16 establishments could mean that the 200 need not be met by each sixth form. It was added that the Council would not be responsible for expanding any school to accommodate a sixth form and in the current

economic climate, there would likely be less money available for school expansions.

During this discussion it was clarified that Thurrock Adult Community College was part of the Council and that it did not directly compete with other education establishments in the area for 16 year olds. However, the adult college was useful for helping vulnerable young learners where a larger college atmosphere may not necessarily help them.

Councillor Everett asked whether there was any work progressing to encourage students to take other courses such as engineering rather than hairdressing and media. It was replied that there were priorities to shift emphasis and this was something managed nationally as much as it was locally.

A brief discussion took place on the quality of apprenticeships and it was stated that all apprenticeships went through a rigorous process that was nationally agreed and that all apprentices received at least £95 per week. It was hoped that from April the Council could work with partners to provide even more opportunities.

Councillor Hale noted that two connexions front line staff recently addressed an East of England meeting to show the good practice relating to NEET in Thurrock and she thought they did very well and were to be congratulated.

The Principal of Palmer's College outlined how the College worked throughout a young person's course to provide constant and quality advice and support to ensure they achieved. Mr Vinall stated that the process started with a pre-course interview to ascertain the student's aspirations, what their future plans were and what plans they should make should they not get the grades to enter Palmer's. Mr. Vinall proceeded to outline the methods and procedures that ensured good post 16 attainment. This included concentrating on transition from school to college, research skills, work to help at risk students, a study plus centre and attendance monitoring. The use of progress reports was stressed and close partnerships with parents were key.

Mr Hayles from South Essex College (SEC) stated that a rise in post 16 applications could be achieved through building an iconic centre of learning within a town centre with good transport links. This had happened in Southend and it was expected that the new learning campus in Grays could achieve the same effect. The majority of SEC's students were learning vocational courses and the college worked with national organisations to provide a range of apprenticeships. Learner support was key and encouraged students to reach their full potential.

Mr. Hayles stressed the importance of partnership working to provide a comprehensive and value added education options for people across Thurrock. The challenges to making the Grays campus a centre of

excellence was getting the curriculum right, securing funds to build and maintain the building and sustaining a good transport infrastructure.

The Committee were pleased that the colleges were working together to provide a complementary programme and the enthusiasm they were showing to encourage young people to stay in education, especially the work happening to support the transition from school to college.

The Committee asked Mr Vinall whether young people felt rejected if they did not get the grades to enter Palmer's due to its long held reputation. Mr Vinall replied that this was not the case and that every student was supported during the application process. In addition, Palmer's was an inclusive college that worked with other colleges, like SEC, to provide a complementary service.

He added that there was a potential for the school based sixth forms to provide low quality costly provision that did not compliment the wider work of the main colleges. Officers agreed that there were risks with stand alone sixth forms but it was central government policy to allow for a range of choices in post 16 education. In addition, officers stated that if the sixth forms worked in partnership with other organisations in the area, a good level of provision would be provided.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) **The Comments and discussion taken at the committee meeting be used by officers to inform the refresh of the 16-19 strategy.**
- ii) **The two principals who attended the meeting be thanked for their contributions and comments.**

61. BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE (BSF) UPDATE

The Council received a decision on their application for funding on 8th March. Thurrock did not secure the funding and were informed of the areas they needed to improve on to be successful. Officers stated that they identified with many comments that had been made, although there were a number of areas the council had been rated excellent in previously that had slipped because the Council had been informed by government to cease work on them.

The future was uncertain but the Council had been assured that the BSF programme would continue in some form regardless of who was in power. The next opportunity to apply would be October 2010. The Council would use this time to work in much greater depth with head teachers and their schools to develop their individual strategies for change. Therefore, the Council was still working on a strategy for change.

With regards to consultants officers explained that the consultants were being used to prepare for the next round of applications and also, project manage the new Ormiston Park development. It was added that the consultants were a good quality and the failure of Thurrock to be successful in the application was not to do with their involvement but rather a number of factors relating to central government.

RESOLVED:

- i) **That the committee note the progress of the BSF programme and that the recent bid was not successful.**
- ii) **That the Committee endorse the continuing work officers are undertaking to affect change in all schools in the borough.**

62. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN

RESOLVED:

That this item be deferred until April's meeting to allow more time for discussion.

63. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

The Children and Young People's Plan be added as the first item on April's agenda.

The meeting finished at 9.10pm.

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**