

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 April 2010 at 7.00pm.

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

Patricia Wilson, David Rollins

Apologies: Councillors Marion Canavon, John Everett and Danny Nicklen

In attendance: C. Stewart – Head of Business (Policy, Performance and Support)
J. Olsson- Corporate Director: Children, Education and Families
R. Smart – Graphic Designer: Smart Associates
M. Boulter- Principal Democratic Services Officer

In their absence Councillor Hale thanked Councillors Canavon and Everett for their work on the committee and wished them well for the future.

64. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 March 2010 were approved as a correct Record subsequent to the following amendments:

- i) Paragraph 3 on page 5 be corrected to show that Councillor Everett supported engineering courses in Thurrock and questioned the over use of hairdressing and media qualifications.
- ii) Paragraph 5 on page 5 reflects connexions staff and not young people.

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

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

Revd. Rollins declared a personal interest by virtue that he sits on the governing body of Corringham Primary School.

Councillor Worrall declared a personal interest by virtue that she sits on the governing body of the Gateway Academy.

Councillor Kent declared a personal interest by virtue that he sits on the governing body of St. Thomas of Canterbury School.

Councillor Hale declared a personal interest by virtue that she sits on the South Essex College Corporation.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

66. THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN

It was explained to the Committee that the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) was a set of documents of varying detail that set out the work for the Council for the next three years (up to 2013). The document on the agenda tonight was the high level overview of the entire plan and that more detailed action plans sat underneath it. The Youth Cabinet had already been consulted on it and asked how they wished to participate in its delivery.

There were four key aims of the plan which were to improve quality of services, ensure every child had the opportunity to succeed, provide protection when needed and undertake a number of strategic actions to ensure the service was fit for the future. During the course of this discussion it was highlighted that not all children who were entitled to free school meals claimed for them. As a result, the proportion of people officially classed as being in poverty in the borough could not be accurately represented through the take up of free school meals alone. The Council was developing a Child Poverty Strategy to tackle this issue.

Having clarified that poverty could also be measured through basic household income, Councillor Kent asked whether educational poverty should be stressed more in the document. The Director for Children, Education and Families replied that she did not want to highlight this negative aspect of the current Thurrock context in the document as the over-riding intention of the document was to be positive, forward-looking and aspirational for residents.

A brief discussion took place on the action plan for improving school attainment and it was shown that the Council's internal restructure of Children's Services and the starting of a project for improving the Primary Sector had already begun to address this issue.

The Committee discussed the public approach to education in Thurrock and some members felt that education was undervalued, which was reinforced by people who had succeeded financially without

qualifications and that it was the same areas within Thurrock that had education, social and other challenges. As part of the response, officers stated that the plan would not change the income or social class of particular areas but provide children from across Thurrock with equal opportunities to do well. The challenge for the Council was to change attitudes in Thurrock so that people knew that they could succeed and that education was a worthwhile exercise.

As part of this changing of attitudes, the Council had commissioned some artwork which would encourage debate around issues of identity, regeneration and education. The art would be publicised through traditional avenues such as posters as well as more innovative ways, such as screen savers. It was expected that the artwork would cause young people to think about the plan and how they fit in the community, in school and with others. The Committee received a presentation from the art designer and were pleased with this innovative use of art to engage with the community.

With regards to improving school services, officers explained that the term 'settings' would be replaced in the final document with 'childcare'. Councillor Kent asked whether the document should deliver the tough and possibly unpopular message that the location of primary schools may well need to be changed to improve primary education across the borough. It was replied that this issue was being dealt with through the variety of amalgamations and federations of schools across Thurrock. It was added that the Capital Strategy projected the pupil numbers and population growth to plan for where school places were needed and that this strategy would set out where the Council would review issues such as over-capacity of pupil places. This would be brought to the Committee in the new municipal year.

The role of good leadership in primary schools was discussed and the Committee felt that stronger working with governors, the use of innovative services and federations could help attract quality candidates.

There was some debate on individual federations and officers explained the technicalities of hard and soft federations, as well as the role of the council in encouraging a federating partner to join with another school.

Councillor Worrall raised the issue of returning funding for Level 2 qualifications and officers stated they would investigate this further and provide a response outside the meeting. Councillor Kent requested that the third paragraph on page 29 be re-worked to stress the challenge and need to further reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training in Thurrock, when they leave school.

A question was asked regarding school exclusions and officers clarified that the Council was expected to attain Quartile 1 in permanent

exclusions but not necessarily temporary exclusions. Officers also predicted that the proportion of sexually transmitted diseases might be an important indicator for the future. During this conversation it was also highlighted that childhood obesity was a significant challenge for the Council and could possibly be a good topic for overview and scrutiny next year.

A discussion on the use of new technology in bullying led the committee to note the good work of the South Essex Rape and Incest Centre and also, to note that the number of interims and agency social workers had reduced significantly. There were no interim managers in the service except the interim head of service, who was undertaking an organisational assessment to ensure that the service was focussing on the right cases. The Committee agreed that Councillors needed to raise the profile of their role as corporate parents and also welcomed the issuing of new guidance on controlling bullying through new technology.

The Committee was informed that the Council was revising its Commissioning Strategy to ensure it was effective, as well as revising the role of the Children's Trust and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) so that these groups drove the agenda rather than reviewing and commenting on the work the Council was undertaking. Although all partners were still involved in the Trust, the Executive of that organisation would be reduced to the three key partners of Health, the Council and Schools. All major decisions and operational plans would be discussed at these meetings and would involve all partners from the outset.

In relation to the resources to fund the Plan officers stated that this section would be re-worked to improve presentation. Funding would shrink over the oncoming years due to a number of major funds ceasing. The Committee noted the drop in funding would be around £12 million, although this figure was slightly misrepresentative because some of the capital funding was front loaded into 2009-10.

Following a question on the Building Schools for the Future programme, officers stated that the next stage of how this programme might operate would only become clear after the election. At this stage however, officers were working on the assumption that if it did continue it was likely to change in both process and possibly scope and scale of ambition within it in the future.

RESOLVED:

That the comments made during the discussion be used by officers to amend and revise the Children and Young People's Plan.

67. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee suggested the SEN strategy, autistic children's services, role of faith schools (diversity), and dispersal orders in conjunction with the youth service as viable issues to be investigated next year.

The meeting finished at 9.05pm.

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**