

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June 2010 at 7.00pm.**

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**Present:** Councillors Angie Gaywood (Chair), Sue MacPherson, Cathy Kent, Michael Stone (Substituting for Sue Gray), Amanda Wilton and Lynn Carr.

Patricia Wilson, Emma Woods

**Apologies:** Councillor Sue Gray

**In attendance:** C. Stewart – Head of Business (Policy, Performance and Resources)  
J. Olsson- Corporate Director: Children, Education and Families  
R. Epps – Principal Officer Pupil Achievement  
J. Mercer – Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes

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**1. ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

The Committee was reminded of the change of membership following the full council meeting the previous night.

**2. 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.

Councillor Kent declared a personal interest by virtue that she has children who attend St. Thomas of Canterbury School and the Grays Convent School.

Mrs Woods declared a personal interest by virtue that she has children at Stanford Le Hope Primary School.

Councillor MacPherson declared a personal interest by virtue that she has a child at Tudor Court Primary School and a child due to attend Chafford Hundred Campus in September.

Councillor Gaywood declared a personal interest by virtue that she has children at Arthur Bugler and St. Clare's School; that she is a governor at Arthur Bugler School; she is a Parent and Special Needs governor at St Clare's school and she has a son with special needs.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

**3. REPORT OF THE INSPECTION OF THE PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT (PRU)**

The Committee was informed that in February 2010 the PRU building had been confirmed as not fit for purpose and pupils had been moved to temporary accommodation in other schools. An Ofsted inspection was carried out during this transitional period and went some way in explaining the result of the inspection. It was confirmed that the secondary PRU was largely satisfactory but because both the primary and secondary PRUs were taken as one organisation, both were rated poorly.

One key issue of the inspection was the quality of learning and teaching. Short stay pupils were staying at the PRU for longer than expected and the curriculum was not secure. This had changed significantly with all children receiving their statutory hours of learning each week.

With regards to reintegrating pupils back into mainstream schools, the PRU had successfully reintegrated or were in the process of reintegrating five out of the eight short stay pupils. Two pupils had subsequently been identified as needing different services and were being moved from the PRU to more suitable environments.

Issues with the premises, namely no staff or girls toilets and small working spaces had been remedied by moving the PRU to the Corve Lane site. Although Corve Lane was a significant improvement, it was not perfect and therefore, it was only temporary accommodation.

Attendance was always a challenge at the PRU but it was being tackled through closer liaison with parents, outreach activities, focussing on reward schemes and working with counselling services. Pupils were rewarded for high attendance through a weekly visit to Grangewaters. Further improvements were being made by holding weekly team meetings which focussed on learning quality, improving the provision of ICT and introducing more creativity into the school programme.

A discussion was had on the curriculum of the PRU and officers confirmed that term and half term plans were beginning to be drawn up but teaching had to be highly personalised and for that reason, the curriculum was not planned further at present. Currently teaching was planned one week in advance.

Officers informed the committee that staff had been retrained regarding the restraining of pupils so that it was used appropriately and to best effect. It was added that PRU staff were trained on a weekly basis through regular meetings but they also benefitted from wider training with other primary school teachers at Tudor Court.

Following a question Officers outlined how pupils were referred to the PRU and it was explained that the behaviour support team helped schools work with difficult pupils and referred them to the PRU if necessary.

With regards to governance arrangement, the PRU was managed by a management committee who acted in an advisory role to the Council, who directly ran the PRU. Parent representatives were invited to join the committee but take up was often low due to a number of factors. Parents were encouraged to attend every Thursday afternoon and nearly every parent attended a progress meeting regarding their child.

There was an interim head teacher who covered both the secondary and primary PRU. The Council had considered many options relating to employing two head teachers but it was likely that both PRUs would continue as one organisation as this was recommended by the inspectors.

Officers stated that there were many outstanding PRUs in the country and Thurrock was working with the Redbridge PRU to share best practice. Likewise, Havering PRU had improved over the last few years and Thurrock was learning from them also. Officers added that nearly every pupil left the PRU with a qualification if they were in year 11.

**RESOLVED: That**

- i) An Update on the PRU return to committee as part of the inclusion strategy.**
- ii) The update to include the numbers of primary pupils successfully reintegrated into mainstream schools and whether there are any particular schools not taking children back once they have left the PRU.**

**5. CAPITAL STRATEGY 2010- 2013**

The Committee was informed that the capital strategy would be sent to a number of groups, including the Schools and Admissions Forums, for consultation. Officers stated that data used in the report was largely accurate although for some schools it might be out of date because the Council had yet to receive their latest figures. However, these discrepancies were expected and would be resolved with each

individual school. The Committee was reminded that some of the expenditure was indicative and might not actually be carried out.

The Committee was interested in how the Council predicted population figures for different parts of Thurrock. Officers explained that the data, although predictions, were reliable because they were compiled from a number of sources including housing plans, GP enrolment, birth rates and the use of early year providers.

Following a question officers confirmed that money would be a challenge for the oncoming years and the Council would have to make choices and prioritise the aims contained within the strategy. Officers also confirmed that the funding identified in the strategy would remain as this had already been received or was pending. However, they added that continued investment in schools from central government would not stop, it would simply be reduced.

A discussion was had on demountables and it was explained that the council felt only 25% of demountables could be replaced by fixed buildings due to the financial limitations. The decision as to which schools would benefit depended on the condition of each demountable. Those schools that would not benefit could well replace their own demountables using their own funding.

The Chair expressed her opinion that the tackling of school places at Chafford Hundred was a key priority, closely followed by the primary capital programme. She also stated that more detail on parental choice and out of catchment provision should be added to the strategy, as well as the potential investment in services from organisations such as DP World. 14-19 provision and early years provision were also considered as important parts to highlight in the strategy. Councillor MacPherson thought that improvement at Treetops and Beacon Hill were also of high priority.

The Chair asked officers how they intended to reconcile the increased need for special educational needs units with the decrease in funding. Officers replied that they were aware of this situation and were looking at ways to resolve it.

**RESOLVED: That:**

- i) The above comments be considered as part of the consultation on the Capital Strategy.**
- ii) Once the consultation has been completed, the Strategy return to the Committee for an update and school representatives be invited to attend.**

**6. WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee was informed of a possible budget overview and scrutiny meeting on 20 July. The following items were agreed to be added to the work programme:

- Pre-school/ Early years (October 2010)
- PRU Update (October 2010)
- Admissions Policy (August 2010)
- Looked After Children
- Thresholds for social care services and the subsequent risk management strategy (August 2010)

**The meeting finished at 8.46pm.**

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)**