

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2010 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Angie Gaywood (Chair), Cathy Kent, Wendy Curtis (Substituting for Sue Gray- arrived at 7.40pm),
Patricia Wilson, David Rollins, Steve Cray

Apologies: Councillor Sue Gray and Amanda Prevost

In attendance: Councillor Charles Curtis – Portfolio Holder for Children's Safeguarding (arrived at 7.40pm)
P. Griffiths - Headteacher, St. Clere's School
S. Cosgrow- North East Cluster Representative
R. Glasby – Excellence Cluster Representative
C. Stewart – Head of Business (Policy, Performance and Resources)
M. Boulter- Democratic Services Officer

21. ADDITIONAL ITEMS

The Committee agreed to invite members of SACRE to a future meeting to discuss the role of faith schools in the Borough.

The Chair also agreed to send an email out to the rest of the Committee to check that the 23rd November was a suitable date for all to visit the primary PRU.

The Committee agreed to invite a representative from the Schools Forum to join the committee as a co-opted member with no voting rights. Members also agreed to progress the appointment of a second parent governor representative.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

Mr Cray declared a personal interest by virtue that he is a governor at St. Clere's School and a member of the St. Clere's and East Tilbury Collaboration Group.

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, Grays Convent School and Grays Media Art College. She is also a governor at Grays Convent School.

The Reverend Rollins declared a personal interest by virtue that he is a governor at Corringham Primary School.

Councillor Gaywood declared a personal interest by virtue that she has children at Arthur Bugler Junior and Infant School and St. Clere's School; that she is a governor at Arthur Bugler School; she has a disabled son in receipt of special care and she is the chair of the East Tilbury schools and St. Clere's school Collaboration Group.

Councillor Curtis declared a personal interest by virtue that she has grandchildren at Bulphan School.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

23. MINUTES

The minutes were approved as a correct record subject to the addition of a child at Grays Media Arts College for Councillor Kent's interests and the substitution of 'termly' instead of 'monthly' in the second paragraph of item 19.

24. CAPITAL STRATEGY

The Committee was informed that the original draft of the Strategy had been sent to schools for consultation and had subsequently been re-drafted for September 2010 following those responses. Meetings had also been held with Primary and special school headteachers. In addition officers had attended numerous forums. In response to a query, officers stated that schools had received adequate time to consider the strategy, some two months or so. The draft in front of the Committee had set priorities in a much more definite order and would be sent to Cabinet in January following any amendments the committee proposed that night.

Officers highlighted the note from the Chief Executive which stated that all assets produced from the Capital Strategy were considered corporate assets and were not necessarily ring fenced for use on Children, Education and Families projects. Officers were confident that in cases where assets were being created to invest in projects such as new school builds, the money would be ring fenced for that purpose.

The North east cluster representative was invited to speak and highlighted the following issues the cluster felt needed to be considered:

- Headteachers and governors needed to be involved in the formation of the Strategy in future, rather than simply being consulted on the draft document.
- Parental choice had a big affect on the popularity and planning of schools and this needed to be appreciated by the Strategy in more detail.
- Areas of regeneration needed to be considered in the Strategy, for example, the building of the DP World Port in the north east of the borough and green belt development in East Tilbury.
- Were lessons on capacity building from Chafford Hundred and the Gateway Academy being learnt from and built into the Strategy.
- Was the provision of special education needs (SEN) services fully catered for in the Strategy.

Mr Griffiths followed this contribution by stating that the Local Development Framework consultation, which informed the Capital Strategy was difficult to understand and many headteachers were unable to access the online consultation. A debate followed on how the future planning of school places was calculated and officers responded that this prediction, although an inexact science, was based on projected housing development in areas of the borough. This had caused difficulties in the past in Chafford Hundred where the Council had taken into account the national average in relation to the number of pupils per new household. Reality had shown that pupil numbers per household were actually much higher in Chafford Hundred than the national average. This had caused a greater demand than expected.

A brief debate was had on the Gateway Academy where Mr Griffiths expressed his opinion that the school did not cater for local people and that local pupils found it difficult to enter the school because there was no catchment area applied. This was due to the School being an academy. Officers responded by stating that the school would still have difficulty accommodating all local pupils that wished to enter if it applied a catchment area because it had not been designed to take such numbers. The size of the school had originally been based on the number of pupils attending the surrounding Torrel's and St. Chad's schools. It had not been based on the actual capacity of surrounding schools. Mr. Griffiths felt that the expandability of the site should have been considered.

Mr Griffiths stated that headteachers were also keen to know how the new arrangement of a combined Development Corporation and Thurrock Council would affect the Strategy.

Mr Glasby highlighted three Capital Strategy projects that had proved troublesome in the past, namely the building of St. Clere's, the planning of Chafford Hundred provision and the capacity of the Gateway Academy. Due to these instances, Mr Glasby felt the quality of planning needed careful thought. He was also concerned about the independence and aspirations of the Ormiston Trust.

Following a question officers clarified that the demand for primary places was reducing and this could be demonstrated in the reduction of the number of forms of entry per school. In other words, schools were not closing but their entry numbers were getting smaller.

The Reverend Rollins felt that the Strategy document did not necessarily link up to the aspirations the Council had in terms of school performance improvement. Officers stated that the Strategy was designed to facilitate improvement by ensuring teachers were available in the right places and the right environment to deliver an improving service. The headteacher representatives felt that the Strategy should include more specific school improvement.

At this juncture officers highlighted that there was only a finite amount of resource and with the absence of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) funding, the Council would have to prioritise its improvement activity across all schools. With this in mind, officers confirmed that the Council would consult on the amalgamation of two good performing schools (a primary and a secondary for instance) as an option. In terms of the Council's BSF application, officers clarified that the vision in the document had been one of the application's strengths according to central government and not a weakness as a headteacher had suggested.

Mr Glasby, in relation to Chadwell St Mary and Tilbury, felt that the Strategy would create competition among schools, which he thought was not good. He also felt that the wording of the document had to be very careful so as to ensure that no school's reputation or future was cast in doubt as this could cause its demise through parents not wishing to send their children there.

Regeneration for the next ten years had been considered in the document but calculations were based on actual housing developments already given approval rather than other commercial developments such as the super port and Lakeside.

A debate was had on the adequacy of SEN provision within the Strategy. Officers explained that there were no further plans to extend SEN provision in the borough and that this decision was informed by the work of officers in the Council who analysed demographic and other data to arrive at this decision. The Chair felt that SEN demand was increasing rapidly within the borough, especially for conditions such as Autism. The Chair felt there needed to be more provision and

detail relating to SEN within the Strategy. Officers agreed to ask SEN colleagues again for their views on this issue.

The Chair continued the SEN debate by asking why new builds on existing schools were not given priority for SEN provision, rather than building a new premises entirely. Officers stated that these decisions relied on detailed information such as the cost of transporting children to provision outside the borough, which had yet to be collated. It was added that such issues were also covered in the Council's SEN Strategy.

The introduction of compulsory education up to 17 and then 18 in 2015 had been factored into the Strategy, although headteachers were concerned that diplomas would cease. They also felt this area needed more capital investment and that the role of academies did not help the planning of post 16 education. It was confirmed at this juncture that all failing or satisfactory schools would have the option to become academies, although the details of this were currently being clarified with central government.

In terms of land availability, the Committee was informed that the Council would be in a much stronger position to make land available for school buildings now that the powers from the Development Corporation had been returned to the Council. However, it was stressed that land had to be in the right place to build an effective school that responded to community needs. Therefore, acquisition of land was a real possibility. The Council aimed to keep land where schools had once been in case demand in that locality increased after 2025.

With regards to a question on the use of solar panels in new school builds, officers and the headteachers were not confident that funding would be available to provide this and the payback in terms of energy cost saving would take many years to reach.

Officers informed the Committee that a free school could be built within the borough at any time but there were no plans the Council was aware of at present. If it did occur, the impact on pupil numbers across Thurrock would most likely be minimal.

Councillor Cathy Kent stated that the aim of the Strategy was to ensure that every secondary school was performing well so that parents did not have to make choices based on performance issues.

The Committee returned to the quality of the consultation and were made aware that, depending on which school and geographical area you were from, viewpoints across Thurrock would be very different. A member of the Committee highlighted, for example, that the north and east of Thurrock were very well represented at the meeting, yet representatives from other areas had chosen not to attend and that this

could possibly be because they were satisfied with how the Strategy catered for them.

The Committee was informed that the Culver Centre was an asset of the directorate and would be added to the Strategy.

The Chair finished the debate by stating that she felt the number of dwellings estimated and planned for in the Local Development Framework were not taken into account within the Strategy. She was also concerned that the impact of developments at Lakeside and DP World Port had not been considered. Officers stated that these dwelling had been factored in and that these were the developments that informed the Strategy rather than commercial developments.

The Committee felt the Strategy had not heeded or included a number of issues that had been raised in the meeting; including detail on SEN and 14 – 19 Education Officers disagreed and gave assurance that all relevant issues had been properly considered.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the comments made by the Committee be used by officers and the Portfolio holder to amend the Strategy and that Members attend January's Cabinet meeting should they wish to make further comment.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The comments of the Committee be forwarded to the Portfolio Holder and relevant officers for consideration.**
- ii) An additional meeting of the Committee be convened before Cabinet in January to revisit the Capital Strategy.**

The meeting finished at 9.40pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Matthew Boulter, telephone (01375) 652082,
or alternatively e-mail mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk**

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