

MINUTES of the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 December 2010 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Angie Gaywood (Chair), Cathy Kent, Wendy Curtis (Substituting for Sue Gray), Lynn Carr and Sue MacPherson

Steve Cray and Alistair MacPherson

Apologies: Councillor Sue Gray, Amanda Prevost, Revd. David Rollins and Mrs Pat Wilson

In attendance: Councillor Charles Curtis – Portfolio Holder for Children's Safeguarding
Councillor Diana Hale – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
B. Foster – Head of Safeguarding Children
D. Watts – LSCB Officer
J. Waud – Interim Head of the Youth Offending Service
M. Boulter- Democratic Services Officer
B. King – Schools Form Representative

25. 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.

Mr MacPherson declared a personal interest by virtue that he has a child at Aveley Primary School and is a parent governor at Aveley Primary 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; she is a member of the Fire Authority.

Councillor Gaywood declared a personal interest by virtue that she has children at Arthur Bugler Junior School, St. Clere's School and Palmer's College; that she is a governor at Arthur Bugler Infant 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;

she is an SEN Parent Governor at St. Clere's School; that she is a member of Thurrock CVS and a member of the Corporate Parenting Group

Both Councillors Curtis declared a personal interest by virtue that they have grandchildren at Bulphan School.

Councillor MacPherson declared a personal interest by virtue that she has children at Chafford Hundred Campus and Tudor Court; she hires facilities to William Edward's School; she is a member of the Fire Authority.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

26. MINUTES

The minutes were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- A paragraph be added at minute number 24 to state that the Committee wished to see more detail of SEN and 14-19 education in the Capital Strategy.
- Paragraph 4 on page 8 replace the word Chair with Committee.

The Chair also raised that the 23rd November for a Pupil Referral Unit visit had not been possible due to staff illness.

27. CHILDREN'S SERVICES SAFEGUARDING PEER REVIEW

The Peer Review was invited by the Council to improve processes. Actions following the review included the production of an action plan, which had already been considered by the Local Children's Safeguarding Board and other partners. The review found that not all elected Members had received safeguarding training and it was suggested senior Members could visit frontline services more to boost morale and show support. Councillor Curtis had already visited and Councillor Hale was due to visit in the New Year. The review felt Overview and Scrutiny had engaged well with safeguarding issues and if desired, they could undertake more work into complaints.

In addition to the Peer Review there was also an annual unannounced inspection which found the Council's safeguarding services to be very good with no interventions and visible managers. The inspection did suggest a number of areas for development:

- A better recording of ethnicity which then informed service development (this had now been rectified)

- Reduce unnecessary referrals and utilise the common referral assessment network more.
- Improve the data quality of referral information from partners (the police were already improving their recording).
- Make more time to analyse case audits.

The Committee congratulated the good results and the officers who helped achieve this.

Following a question on how thresholds for referral would be tackled, officers explained that the final thresholds would be launched in April 2011 and that training would be provided to everyone at the same time. It was added that MAGS panels within schools would be expected to tackle lower threshold cases.

The Committee noted that there was an absence of headteacher input into the Peer Review and it was clarified that the review was undertaken on the first week of September, which was an incredibly busy and difficult time for headteachers and schools in general. This had been addressed more pointedly in the action plan as well. Difficulties had also been had with communicating with health partners but this was due to outdated contact lists the Council held, which had now been updated.

The Committee learnt that the local doctor assigned to the service was to retire but a successor had been identified and officers were meeting with the Health Service's Head of Commissioning to discuss a more integrated service.

Domestic violence was briefly discussed and Members were assured that a range of services were being commissioned to tackle this particular issue. Members were also assured that quality assurance was a strength of the Council and mechanisms were in place to ensure quality across all partners.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) **The Committee note the findings of the Peer Review and congratulate all staff involved in achieving a very good result.**
- ii) **A press release be produced to explain the reasons why schools found it difficult to take part in the review.**

28. CHILD PROTECTION PERFORMANCE MEASURING 2009/10

Officers explained that the statistics presented were a requirement of national government and the Committee was taken through each indicator. With regards to the number of Section 47 investigations started, (which were thorough assessments of a child's safety following

serious concerns), the Chair asked whether there was any way these cases could be reduced. Officers replied that family friendly approaches needed to be maximised and that social workers needed to collect as much family information with the co-operation of the family and only resort to Section 47 when absolutely necessary. Following the Baby P case there had been an increase in Section 47 across the country due to departments being extra vigilant.

With regards to the fluctuating figures of re-registration with social workers, officers explained this was largely due to the number of large families of ten or more children Thurrock had.

There was quality assurance for children who had been on the register for over a year as the Council undertook a major review of any child's case who had been on the register for thirteen months.

RESOLVED: that the statistics be noted.

29. LOCAL CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING BOARD (LCSB) ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee noted that Amy Weir, the independent chair of the LSCB, was not able to attend the meeting due to having to chair another meeting. It was explained that the annual report assessed how effective the service for safeguarding was in the local area.

The annual report this year identified the following:

- Thurrock had improved its safeguarding of children,
- There was a better working relationship between the Children's Partnership and the LSCB,
- There were no serious case reviews.

There were a number of challenges:

- Changes of personnel across the partners had been challenging,
- There was a clear need to address domestic abuse,
- There was a need to better communicate safeguarding issues to the community.

Cllr MacPherson stated that all partners were subject to savings measures and felt it was important for the Council to know how the general partnership was going to develop under these circumstances.

There was a discussion on how to encourage the Primary Heads Association and the East of England Ambulance Service to take part in committee meetings of the LSCB. It was confirmed that the Ambulance Service had now appointed a representative to attend and although a head teacher representative did attend the more specialised sub-

groups of the board, officers agreed to invite the group to attend. The main committee. It was also recommended that more training and support be provided to participants as many were not skilled in working with safeguarding issues.

It was clarified following a question that the category of 'potentially preventable' when coding child deaths was a misleading one. Most child deaths under this category involved clinical issues of very young children dying from infections or other medical conditions. The category was generally used for deaths that did not fit into either the 'preventable' or 'not preventable' categories and for that reason, was being withdrawn in future reports.

Private Fostering was debated and the view of the Committee was to publicise the reporting of such arrangements in a positive light so that the community did not feel that the Council would interfere to take the child into care.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report be noted

30. YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE FUNCTION AND PERFORMANCE

The Committee was informed of the role of the Youth Offending Service (YOS), learning that it was a largely unseen service that produced very high results at a very low cost. The Service was multi-agency and had a duty to liaise with every young offender.

It was explained that if a child under 15 years old was held in custody the Council was responsible for paying for their time there until a decision was made by the court. This was very expensive and encouraged the Council to reduce the number of under-15s being arrested for offences. There had been no such costs for this year.

The Committee heard that the closure of Grays Magistrates Court would negatively impact upon those under judicial process as they would be required to travel to Basildon which would, in turn, cause them more cost in travel and parking. It was also difficult for Council officers who would have to spend much longer periods at the court waiting for cases to be considered as they could no longer shuttle back and forth to the Court and Office due to the distances involved. There was a potential for non-appearances to increase. However, officers were liaising with court staff to ensure a smooth transition.

The Committee discussed whether the YOS could help parents who felt their child was potentially undertaking criminal activity but had not been arrested and taken to court. Officers responded by stating that there were a number of agencies to help parents in this situation and could be picked up at a number of points, including at school and Police Liaison Officers. YOS had a team called the Youth Inclusion Support Service which also went into schools to undertake prevention

work. The YOS had also developed its own schemes which took young people to prisons to see what it was like and to discourage them from wanting to commit crime.

The committee congratulated staff on creating one of the lowest re-offending areas regionally and nationally while Councillor Wendy Curtis personally thanked officers for the community payback work in her ward.

31. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was asked by the Chair to respond to Matthew Boulter if they were able to attend a parents' day on 5th January at the secondary pupil referral unit.

The Committee also agreed to invite the director, heads of service and finance officers to the budget meeting in January.

The meeting finished at 9.21pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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