

**MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held on 20 March 2013 at 7:00pm**

Present: Councillors J Halden (Chair), S Little, C Curtis, W Curtis
(substitute for D Hale), C Kent and C Baldwin

Apologies: Councillor D Hale and Mrs P Wilson

In attendance: Mr S Cray – Parent Governor Representative
Mr A McPherson – Parent Governor Representative
Revd D Barlow – Church of England Representative
John Hayles – Deputy Principal,
Angela O'Donoghue - Principal
Simon Brindley – young person and volunteer
Daniel May – young person and apprentice

C Littleton – Director of Children's Services
B Foster – Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes
S Green – Strategic Lead, Early Years, Families and
Communities
V Cutler – Interim Strategic Lead, School Improvement, Learning
and Skills
E Sheridan – Clerk

The Chair informed those present that the meeting was Audio Recorded

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Hale and from Mrs P Wilson.

20 MINUTES

The Minutes of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 29 January 2013, were approved as a correct record subject to the inclusion of declarations from Councillor C Kent. The declarations were

Councillor Cathy Kent has children attending St Thomas Primary School, Grays Convent School and Grays Media & Arts School. She is a Parent Governor at Grays Convent School.

Action: Clerk

21 URGENT ITEMS

The Chair informed the Committee that

- he had tabled a briefing note on visits to Children's Centres
- members would receive a verbal update on the recent fire at Treetops School and
- he would discuss with Councillor Hale the provision of information to the Committee regarding Manor School and report back

The Chair informed members that he wished to change the order of the agenda and take item 5 followed by item 8 and then revert to the order as published. The verbal updates would be received at the end of the meeting.

The Chair congratulated C Littleton on her appointment as Director of Children's Services and congratulated B Foster with regard to the recent fostering inspection.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C Kent declared she has children attending St Thomas Primary School, Grays Convent School and Grays Media & Arts School. She is a Parent Governor at Grays Convent School.

Councillor W Curtis declared that she has grandchildren attending Bulphan School and is trustee of the South Ockendon Community Forum and of Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre.

Councillor C Curtis declared that he has grandchildren attending Bulphan School and is a trustee of the South Ockendon Community Forum and of Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre. He is also a Governor at Ockendon School.

Reverend Barlow declared that he has children attending St Thomas Primary School and the Grays Convent and his wife is an employee of St Thomas Primary School.

23 TROUBLED FAMILIES AND EARLY OFFER OF HELP

The Strategic Lead, Early Years, Families and Communities introduced the report and informed members of the progress made, how the phased implementation is working in Phase One and the Commissioning exercise. The services on offer were outlined as per the report and the structure process was highlighted to Members. The work of the Locality Teams was outlined and how it integrates with services and the Troubled Families Programme. Members were informed that integration is key.

The Strategic Lead, Early Years, Families and Communities outlined phase two of the project and the development of links to the Community Hub Project.

Members questioned the Strategic Leader to understand the number of families within the project and the feedback received. The committee heard that over 100 families had been approached as part of the Troubled Families Initiative and feedback was positive.

In response to a question about funding for the Troubled Families Initiative, the Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes confirmed the funding structure (a grant per family) and outlined how the money is spent.

Members questioned the involvement of Health Professionals. The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes confirmed they were included in the training and outlined who would take the roles of lead professional. The Officer particularly thanked the schools for the work they had undertaken.

Members explored the provision of Parenting Skill Classes and were informed of the range of accredited programmes on offer and the provision in children centres and locality teams.

The funding and financial implications were explored in depth and members were keen to understand the recharge scheme and how success can be judged. The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes outlined the funding process and confirmed it was through payment by results. The success measures were set out by Government and officers thought they were realistic.

The Chair requested information on the Performance Management of tenders, financial information and timescales for the provision of this information. The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes outlined that future inspections will question evidence to ensure that the Service has provided early help to local families and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board has a duty to collect and monitor this information. Members were assured that Officers will look in depth at contract monitoring, evaluation and build on lessons learnt. The timescale for the provision of information was within six months.

RESOLVED that the committee note the progress made on Troubled Families and Early Offer of Help

24 REPORT ON THURROCK RAISING PARTICIPATION ACTION PLAN

The Chair invited Daniel May and Simon Brindley to report on their recent experiences at college and since leaving college. Members asked questions of the young people to understand their experiences, the advice they had received at college and secondary school and how they thought improvements could be made. Members noted that the young people felt that colleges focused on attending a university as the norm and did not focus on other options.

Members and officers thanked Daniel and Simon for sharing their experiences and admired the options that they had chosen.

The Principal of South Essex College addressed members to acknowledge the problems raised by students not wishing to attend university. Members were informed that next year they would work with a recruitment agency on site and provide a direct link to employers.

The Interim Strategic Lead, School Improvement, Learning and Skills outlined the report on raising participation and the actions taken in response to the change in legislation. The Officer outlined the work being undertaken with colleges and schools and the awareness of different routes that students may take. It was emphasised there was a need to understand the reasons why there was a high drop out rate at the end of the first year of post-16 education and to identify young people who may become NEET (not in education, employment or training) and steer them towards appropriate support. The Officer acknowledged the developments in Thurrock which placed the borough as an obvious choice for courses in areas such as logistics but there was a need to advertise the wider impact and range of appropriate qualifications and skills that would be involved.

Members questioned the report and the statement regarding impact on LLDD (Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities). The Officer responded that access to appropriate courses is difficult at 16. Courses are available at specialist schools and at colleges but these are not sufficient, of the right level or interest to meet the needs of all the young people. The Principal of South Essex College confirmed that programmes for Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities had decreased in number, outlined the reasons why especially if the young person was not statemented, but confirmed that they are now working to meet the needs of these young people.

The Chair asked the young people present how prepared they were at school for going to college or working. The young people responded that there was not a great awareness of what was available to them apart from retail and work at Lakeside Shopping centre.

Members questioned why Trident courses were being phased out and were informed this was due to the removal of funding by the Secretary of State.

Members raised a concern regarding vulnerable young people in training. The Director of Children's Services responded that she was not aware of particular issues in Thurrock and all trainers would be approved.

RESOLVED that the committee comment on the Plan and suggest ways in which it might wish to contribute to monitoring the impact of its implementation

Barbara Foster left the meeting at 8.05pm

John Hayles, Angela O'Donoghue, Simon Brindley and Daniel May left the meeting at 8.30pm

25 COMMUNITY HUBS

The Chair invited the Director of Children's Services to introduce the report. The Officer outlined the report and highlighted that the South Ockendon Centre would open on 25 March 2013 with a formal opening on 20 April 2013. Members noted that the former Belhus Library would retain a presence in the Centre along with a Housing Office and other services. The consultation undertaken was outlined and the extensive volunteer program attached to the Centre was acknowledged and praised.

The Chair informed members that the Portfolio Holder had sent apologies to the meeting and had requested that Members note that the South Ockendon Centre is not a pro-forma model and future hubs will be developed individually according to the needs of the area and the community it is serving.

Councillor W Curtis informed the committee of the progress of the Centre from her perspective and commended the work of and the number of the volunteers involved in the project.

Members questioned the appointment and salary of the Centre Manager. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that she would respond to the Member regarding the salary but assured the committee that this is a secondment that would not be backfilled and the experience of the Manager is important and crucial to the success of the Centre.

Referring to the Key Outcomes document, members questioned the Key Client Group focus and that it was restricted. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that this group was very flexible, everyone was welcome and the document shown was a draft document. Members were assured that colleges were involved and had worked with the volunteers. Members also noted the involvement of faith groups within the Ockendon Centre and Reverend Barlow confirmed that Thurrock Faith Matters would be keen to be involved.

Members were informed of the Centre opening hours and heard that the hours and volunteers involved would increase the access to the library.

RESOLVED that the committee note the contents of the report in the context of reshaping council services in collaboration with communities

Action: Director of Children's Services – details of appointment of Centre Manager for Councillor Little

Standing Orders were suspended at 9.00pm

26 ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY MODEL – GRANGEWATERS OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE

The Chair invited the Strategic Leader Early Years, Families and Communities to introduce the report. The Strategic Leader outlined that the Centre is now in a more stable financial position and is now able to explore alternative delivery models. The Officer outlined the groups that the Centre has been working with over the previous 12 months and confirmed that a clear fee structure is now in place. The alternative delivery models as outlined in the report were explained to Members and the two favoured options (Social Enterprise/ Community Interest Company or a Charitable Trust) were detailed.

Members discussed previous requests for full accounts of Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre and received assurance from the Strategic Leader that they had confidence in the accounts. The officer outlined that Councillor Revell has requested a visit to the Centre and Councillor Little requested to attend when arranged.

Members questioned the funding received from fee generation and were informed of the mix of groups who attended the centre.

Members enquired about Stubbers Outdoor Centre located nearby but within Havering. The Committee were informed that this Centre is run by a Trust. Members debated that the challenge for Grangewaters is that Stubbers is on its doorstep and this raised the issue of long term viability for Grangewaters especially as it is the smaller venue. Responding to the issue of viability, officers outlined that the alternative delivery models would permit the Centre to attract capital investment and one of the current challenges for Grangewaters is that Stubbers looks smarter as a result of investment. Members were informed that fees would be set through a benchmarking exercise and the fee structure is broadly similar to Stubbers.

Members questioned public access to Grangewaters especially as the gates are kept shut. The Director of Children's Services noted this was a valid point and extended an invitation to the whole Committee to visit Grangewaters.

The Chair referred to the membership of the proposed Task and Finish group and outlined the rules of the constitution as to the appointment of members. Subject to this the recommendations were approved.

RESOLVED that

- a) **A detailed appraisal of alternative delivery models to run Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre is completed**
- b) **A Task and Finish group is established including members of Overview and Scrutiny committee to consider the options contained within the report**
- c) **Full recommendations be presented to the committee in September 2013 prior to proceeding to Cabinet approval.**

Action: *Strategic Lead, Early Years, Families and Communities -*

- 1) *Councillor Little to be invited to attend visits to Outdoor Centres with Councillor Revell*
- 2) *Establish a Task and Finish Group in accordance with the constitution*
- 3) *Invitation for the Committee to visit Grangewaters*

27 VERBAL UPDATES

The Director of Children's Services updated the Committee with regard to a recent fire at Treetops School. The Committee were informed that there were no injuries and the well practised fire drill had worked well. The Head Teacher, staff, pupils and neighbours of the school were praised for their actions and behaviour. Members were informed that the school was re-opened on 20 March and the school had felt well supported.

The Chair introduced a briefing note tabled at the meeting. The briefing detailed findings of visits to Children's Centres by himself and Councillor Hale.

28 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the work programme and members noted that the programme for the year was complete and thanked officers for their contributions. The following items were noted for inclusion in the future work programme:

- Manor School (if appropriate)
- Education Summit
- Refresh of School Transport
- Statutory items as required
- Raising participation and further feedback from the young people
- A update be sent to members to reassure that the benefits of locality working, found in Cllr Hale and Cllr Halden's report, would not be lost.

Action: Director of Children's Services and Senior Management – establish the draft work programme for municipal year 2013/14.

RESOLVED:

That the completed work programme was noted and items discussed for the future programme.

The meeting finished at 9.15pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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