

**MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held on 2 July 2013 at 7:00pm**

Present: Councillors D Hale (Chair), J Halden, S Little, C Curtis, M Healy

Revd D Barlow – Church of England Representative
Mrs P Wilson – Roman Catholic Church Representative

Apologies: Councillor C Kent
Councillor O Gerrish (substitute for Councillor C Kent)

In attendance: C Littleton – Director of Children's Services
R Harris – Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning
S Green – Strategic Lead, Early Years, Families and
Communities
V Cutler – Strategic Lead, School Improvement, Learning and
Skills
J Stuckey – Participation and Community Engagement Manager
E Sheridan – Clerk

The Chair informed those present that the meeting was Audio Recorded

The Chair informed members that Robert Hill from the Education Commission would observe part of the meeting.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor C Kent. Councillor Gerrish was nominated to attend as a substitute but subsequently sent apologies.

2 MINUTES

The Minutes of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 20 March 2013, were approved as a correct record.

Members queried

- that co-opted members were listed as in attendance, not present on the minutes. The clerk agreed to check the correct procedure and amend if required
- the listing of co-opted members on the agenda. Members were informed that appointments were made to the committee as co-opted members and this wording was contained within the constitution.

The Vice Chair discussed the briefing note circulated on 20 March 2013 on Children's Centres and the Early Offer of Help and clarified that he would wish for the same locality areas to be kept.

3 URGENT ITEMS

The Chair informed the Committee that they wished to discuss and note the Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP). The clerk informed the Chair that the document had been circulated to members by email and paper copies would be sent to members of the committee but it was not available at the meeting. The item was not on the agenda for discussion and reviewing and noting an item did not constitute an item of urgent business.

Members continued to discuss the CYPP plan and received comments about the Plan.

The following items were noted

- Priority 1.1, Action 1.1.8 – needs to measure the engagement of parents
- Monitoring young people's health – need to capture institutional knowledge and data – Hassenbrook was used as an example

The Director of Children's Services responded to the comments raised and stated that the engagement of parents was implicit within the priority. Members were assured that the Public health team were fully engaged with working in the schools. Members were offered a briefing note on the actions being undertaken.

The Chair encouraged members to review the plan and forward comments by email to the Director of Children's Services prior to the plan being formally reviewed at committee.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M Healy declared a non pecuniary interest in item 7 as he is a Governor at Palmers College and discussions have taken place on Post 16 Transport.

Councillor C Curtis declared that he has grandchildren attending Bulphan School and is 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.

Mrs P Wilson declared she is the Chair of Governors at St Thomas's Primary School and she is a member of the Diocese of Brentwood.

Councillor D Hale declared she is a member of South Essex College Corporation.

5 REPORT ON THURROCK EDUCATION COMMISSION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

The Strategic Lead for School Improvement, Learning and Skills introduced the report and highlighted the work of the Education Commission to date, referencing the focus group discussion taking place with members. Members were informed that the School Improvement Strategy was offered to maintained schools but the authority is working and developing relationships with academies and free schools to encourage them to take up the offer. Schools were aware of the strategy and had been involved in consultations but would not recognise the document in its current entirety.

Members discussed intervention in schools; the use of IEB's and measures of effectiveness. Members highlighted that IEBs had not been reviewed for a number of years and the Director of Children's Services invited members to consider how they would like to review the mechanism, suggesting that this be incorporated in a Governance discussion.

The Vice Chair welcomed the report and the strategy and commented on the school to school support. Particular reference was made to two-way commissioning of services and the Strategic Lead for School Improvement, Learning and Skills agreed to circulate a booklet on the services.

Members discussed the need to challenge and support schools but also the importance of recognising success. Reference was made to reports in the media suggesting that Grays Convent had received a downgraded Ofsted report which was misleading.

Members questioned the next steps regarding the report from the Education Commission and Overview and Scrutiny. The Director of Children's Services advised that the report was due early September. Following a review of the scheduled meeting dates, the Clerk advised that should an additional meeting be required in September, permission would be required from the Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED that

- a) the committee note the work of the Education Commission to date**
- b) the comments of the committee regarding the draft School Improvement Strategy are noted within the text of the minutes**

A discussion took place regarding invitations to the meeting and co-opted members to the Committee. The Clerk and the Chair agreed to discuss this outside of the meeting.

6 THURROCK YOUTH CABINET REPRESENTATION

The Chair invited the Strategic Leader for Early Years, Families and Communities to introduce the report which provided members with an overview of options to develop closer links between Children's Overview and Scrutiny and the Thurrock Youth Cabinet. The Strategic Leader confirmed that the Youth Cabinet and young people had been involved in consultation.

Members questioned the financial implications and sought assurances that payment of expenses would be made. The Strategic leader confirmed that Youth Cabinet members receive expenses and any additional payments would be contained within the existing budget.

Members commented that representatives from the Youth Cabinet would have been able to comment on the Post 16 transport agenda item if they had been present, and welcomed the report, highlighting the large number of responses on the health and well being consultation.

The recommendations contained within the report were agreed. The Chair proposed a fourth recommendation, which was seconded by the Vice-Chair and agreed by all members.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Chair extends an invitation to the Youth Cabinet to send representation when relevant items are included on the agenda for a meeting, in line with the agreed work plan of the Committee**
- 2) members nominate Councillor J Halden as Youth Voice Champion to act as the link elected member with the Youth Cabinet, and Councillor C Curtis as his substitute**
- 3) the Youth Cabinet present an annual report on activities and impact of their work to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
- 4) the programme for Democracy Week is agreed between appropriate officers, Chair and Vice Chair of Children's Overview and Scrutiny and the Chair of Youth Cabinet or a nominated representative.**

7 POST 16 EDUCATION TRANSPORT

The Chair invited the Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning to introduce the report which provided feedback on the consultation on the review of Post 16 education transport and provided members with the opportunity to consider recommendations being taken to Cabinet on 10 July regarding the future of Post 16 Transport based upon the results of the consultation.

Members questioned the Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning on the transport arrangements in Basildon and London Borough of Havering. The Director confirmed that Basildon would be governed by arrangements by Essex County Council and they had undergone recent cuts.

Members questioned the criteria for assessing individual cases for students in rural areas and not near a bus route. Officers were urged to consider a safe walking distance and judge the routes at night. The Director for Adults Health and Commissioning outlined that the number of affected students is very small but the eligibility criteria had not yet been agreed, there would be a need to look at a range of options which would make economic and viable sense.

Members questioned the contingency arrangements if Ensign no longer operated. The Director for Adults Health and Commissioning outlined that there is no formal contingency plan in place and the situation would be reviewed when necessary.

The provision of Post 16 Transport for faith schools was discussed and the Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning confirmed that post 16 students travelling to faith schools out of borough were already charged for transport. The proposed scheme and recommendations did not adversely discriminate against the faith students. Members also debated the placing of curriculum provision at specific sites and the need for some children to travel out of borough.

The Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning confirmed that travel for special needs children would be covered in a separate paper although there is no proposed change to the provision at present.

The recommendations in the report were agreed. Mrs P Wilson abstained from the vote.

RESOLVED that the comments of the committee detailed in the minutes are noted in relation to the recommendations below:

- a) to decommission Post 16 transport at the start of 2013 / 2014 academic year to in-borough colleges and encourage students to take up the offer of a discounted bus pass**
- b) for those students in rural areas and not near a bus route we will consider individual cases against an agreed eligibility criteria, where the lack of a commissioned service may prevent students from accessing college courses**
- c) for students who attend out of borough colleges and travel by train, the council will continue to negotiate with the train companies for the discounted ticket offer but students will be expected to pay the full banded cost**
- d) for students who use other commissioned transport to out of borough colleges, that will continue but again they will be charged the full banded cost**
- e) in all of the above, the council will continue to provide support to families / students on income support.**

The Chair invited the Director of Children's Services to introduce the report which provided the committee with an update on progress of the remaining schemes within the current school capital programme. The Director outlined the provision of demountables at several schools to account for a temporary bulge in pupil numbers and the identification of a site for a new school, located near to Belmont Castle Academy.

Members discussed the parking problems in Parker Road (near Belmont Castle Academy) and the Director of Children's Services confirmed that they are in discussion with the planning authorities to ensure that they can find a solution to the traffic issues.

Members discussed how the pupil numbers were forecast; the rationale for spending £25million and if this included everything. The Director of Children's Services agreed to circulate the Pupil Place Plan to new committee members.

In relation to the forecast of pupil numbers, members debated the issue of West Thurrock Primary School, the rise in popularity and if the use of demountables was cost effective.

The Director of Children's Services informed members that the Pupil Place Plan was now much improved with projections backed up by numerous data sets and consultations. It is recognised that the Plan will never be 100 % accurate but it represented a considerable improvement, demonstrated by the reduction in issues arising from placement of pupils in Chafford Hundred Schools.

The Vice-Chair questioned the shortfall in funding the £25 million, reminding the committee that £18 million was funded with a shortfall of £7 million. The member raised a concern that funding was outlined for Graham James School whilst it was still under consultation with no decision.

In response to the budget issues raised, the Director of Children's Services confirmed that the consultation for Graham James was not finalised and the money was earmarked for the scheme, subject to consultation. Members were informed that £18.7million had been identified and the £7million was subject to an application to the basic need fund. The outcome of the funding application is imminent and further information had been supplied in relation to questions. In addition, savings on contracts were being realised providing more funds and Cabinet had agreed that the remaining shortfall would be provided by borrowing from the Prudential. This would mean that no schemes would be put at risk.

Resolved that

- a) Overview and Scrutiny note the progress and current position with each of the schemes in Phase 2 (Appendix A), the 14-19 Partnership Grant and other capital schemes (Appendix B).**

- b) **Overview and Scrutiny note the contract award for the Manor School scheme.**
- c) **Overview and Scrutiny note the contract award for the programme/project management and a full multi-disciplinary team to take forward the proposed next school capital programme.**
- d) **Overview and Scrutiny note the temporary accommodation works that are planned in order to ensure sufficient pupil places for September 2013.**
- e) **Overview and Scrutiny note the proposed schemes within the affordability envelope of £18.4 million to form the next school capital programme and to agree remaining schemes with a balance totalling £7.4 million to be undertaken when additional funding is available (Appendix C).**
- f) **Overview and Scrutiny note Cabinet's agreement to delegate the authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Education, to make any changes to the schemes within the affordability envelope and scope of the school capital programme to deliver accommodation to provide sufficient pupil places for the start of both the 2013 and 2014 academic years.**

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The following items were discussed.

- request for an additional meeting in September 2013 to receive the draft report of the Education Commission
- October – add report on Governance and IEBs
- add CYP priorities to work programme and order according to meeting dates
- School Capital Programme will go to Cabinet in December, bring to Overview and Scrutiny in November.

RESOLVED:

That the draft work programme and the above items are noted

The meeting finished at 9.12pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk**