

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 March 2014 at 7:00pm

- Present:** Councillors Charles Curtis (Chair), Cathy Kent, Tunde Ojetola, Joy Redsell (substitute for Andrew Roast), Sue Shinnick.
- Rev D Barlow – Church of England Representative (left at 8:05pm)
- Apologies:** Councillor Andrew Roast
Mrs P. Wilson – Roman Catholic Church Representative
- In attendance:** P. Kielty – Participation Officer
C. Littleton – Director of Children's Services
M. Peters – Strategic Lead, School Improvement, Learning and Skills (left after item 5)
J. Read – Acting Service Manager, Youth Offending Service (left after item 6)
J. Waud – Strategic Lead, YOS, Adolescent Services, Troubled Families (left after item 6)
Saania Ali – Youth Cabinet Representative
M. Jameison – Youth Cabinet Representative
S. Young – Senior Democratic Services Officer
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The Chair informed those present that the meeting was being recorded and that the recording would be made available on the Council's website.

44. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 January 2013 were approved as a correct record.

45. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

Councillor Kent declared a non-pecuniary interest in the business of the meeting by virtue that she had children attending St Thomas Primary School, Hathaway Academy, and Palmer's

Sixth Form College. She was also a Parent Governor at Grays Convent School.

Councillor Shinnick declared a non-pecuniary interest in the business of the meeting by virtue that she had a grandchild attending Belmont Castle Academy.

Reverend Darren Barlow declared a non-pecuniary interest in the general business of the meeting by virtue that he had children attending St Thomas Primary School, Grays Convent and Palmer's College. He was also a trustee and corporation member at Palmer's College

Councillor Ojetola declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to the general business of the meeting as he had children attending the Gateway Academy, Belmont Castle Academy and was a Governor at Palmer's College and Gateway Academy. A further non-pecuniary interest was declared in relation to item 8 Alternative Delivery Model for Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre, as he was a local authority representative for Impulse Leisure.

Councillor Redsell declared a non-pecuniary interest in the business of the meeting as she had a grandchild at Deneholm Primary School and in relation to Item 6, the Youth Offending Service Function and Performance, as she had been involved with the work of the team.

Councillor Curtis declared a non-pecuniary interest in the general business of the meeting by virtue that he had grandchildren attending Bulphan School and was a Governor at the Ockendon Academy. He also declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Item 8, Alternative Delivery Model – Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre, as he had frequent involvement with the centre which was based in his ward.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

47. EDUCATION COMMISSION ACTION PLAN

Officers introduced the report which provided an update on the Thurrock Education Commission and set out the action plan.

Councillor Ojetola requested an update in relation to the recent Ofsted inspection. The Director of Children's Services provided an update, and made the following key points:

- That the Education Commission report had been commissioned in order to drive forward improvements and accelerate progress of Thurrock schools, this had been in response to the historic issue that Thurrock Primary Schools were in the bottom three of schools nationally in terms of the number of schools that were 'good' or 'outstanding.'
- It was reported that over the past 4 years significant improvements had been achieved. The number of primary schools that were 'good' or 'outstanding' in Thurrock had risen from 33% in 2010 to 60% currently.
- It was recognised that more needed to be done to ensure that more Thurrock Primary Schools achieved 'good' or 'outstanding' in order to reach the national figure of 78%.
- That secondary schools presented a different picture, as 88% of Thurrock secondary schools were 'good' or 'outstanding.'
- That Ofsted selected a number of authorities to inspect who were on the pathway to achieve 'good' or 'outstanding' status, and that the inspections are conducted at very little notice.
- That Ofsted are interested in building positive relationships with the local authority.
- Members were informed that Ofsted inspected 7 Thurrock Schools and it was expected that the results would be publicly available in 2 weeks time.
- That Ofsted in addition conducted a telephone survey with a further 9 schools, to ask 4 questions regarding local authority support.
- It was clarified to Members that the recent inspection was not a full inspection of the local authority school improvement function.

Members further questioned whether the Education Commission was flexible enough to be able to respond to any of the action points that were raised from the Ofsted inspection, to which officers confirmed that they were confident that the Commission would be able to respond as required. Officers further noted that the flexibility of the action plan and the ability of the Commission to respond to inspections would be highlighted in the next update report that would be brought back to the Committee.

A Member sought reassurance that the financial support to introduce any recommendations made by Ofsted was available, to which officers confirmed that £1 million had been earmarked for the Education Commission and that this would be stewarded by the Thurrock Education Alliance.

A Member wanted to see the number of primary schools in Thurrock that were 'good' or 'outstanding' to rise much higher than 60%, as she felt that children needed to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to enter and succeed at secondary school.

The Committee were informed that the recent Ofsted inspection was a “themed inspection” and that a telephone survey was conducted with a variety of different types of schools that were good or better. This included academies, grant maintained schools, Church of England and Roman Catholic schools.

A Member sought assurances that schools that were not moving towards academies would not be left behind in terms of support and funding opportunities. Officers stated that schools which were not academies would not lose out, and that they received support from the local authority.

The Committee felt that the significant difference between schools and academies was that academies had more resources and greater opportunities to access external funding. Members were concerned that this led to inequities. Officers observed that when academies were a new feature, schools which crossed over to academies were rewarded generously. However, they felt that this was now not the case although academies did historically have greater access to external funding.

Members asked for an update on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection before the Council entered the pre-election period. Officers confirmed that an update would be provided by a briefing note once the results had been released into the public domain and the letter of summary had been received from Ofsted.

The Committee were keen to receive regular updates on the Education Commission Action Plan and progress, to which officers recommended that a report should be brought back to the Committee every 6 months.

A Member remarked that a lot was expected of Governing Bodies and asked whether schools could work in partnership to assist one another. Officers explained that a governors support service existed and that this was one of the recommendations from the Education Commission. It was reported that governors received training to help them manage the expectations of their role, and that governors had an important role to play.

The Director of Children’s Services assured the Committee that there was no lack of ambition from school governors and that this had been demonstrated at a recent governors’ conference. It was observed that Thurrock had a unique community of different types of schools who were all keen to work together.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the contents of the report.

48. YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE FUNCTION AND PERFORMANCE

Officers introduced the report, which provided an update on the Youth Offending Service.

A Member felt that that the Youth Offending Team should raise the profile of their good work and inform other Members of their achievements more often. She felt that there were some Elected Members who did not know about the excellent work of the Youth Offending Team and that the team should work with Youth Cabinet and others to highlight their achievements.

A Member asked whether the successful applicant for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) post had successfully taken up their new role yet, and it was confirmed that the person had started their employment.

Officers were asked to clarify whether it was good that Thurrock was a low spending authority, to which it was confirmed that it was a positive because Thurrock was low spending but delivered high results.

Members made reference to the perception that there was a large movement of people who transferred to Thurrock from London Boroughs which increased pressure to the service. Officers remarked that this issue had been identified for a number of years and that the demographic was changing in Thurrock and therefore the service was required to adapt to address this problem and mitigate risk.

Officers further reported that work was being undertaken to address this issue and that a Senior Youth Offending Service officer had been appointed who worked alongside education establishments and the Police.

The Committee were advised that it was a problem when London Boroughs moved troubled young people to Thurrock without first notifying the Council or the Police; however a lot of intelligence was gathered by the Youth Offending Service who proactively mitigated the risk for Thurrock and informed Essex Police of any new cases. The Committee praised the good work of the team.

A Member raised concerns regarding the common perception amongst residents that Anti Social Behaviour had increased in some neighbourhoods. Officers reported that there had only been 3 offences last year and that Thurrock was maintaining performance to ensure a low level of crime.

Members asked for clarification as to why there was a dramatic cost difference between remand beds for over 15 year olds and under 15

year olds. Officers explained that the difference was because under 15 year olds were remanded to secure training centres, which had a higher ratio of staff to young people, whereas over 15 year olds were remanded to a young offenders institution.

The Committee were advised that progress was being made regarding office provision for the service.

A Youth Cabinet Representative asked how young offenders were affected by the consequences of their actions and how this impacted on their education. Officers explained that every young person commits an offence for a different reason; however there were a number of interventions in place in order to reduce the risk of reoffending, which included behaviour management, restorative justice conferences and that it was of utmost importance that young offenders continued in their education as this dramatically reduced the risk of reoffending.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the contents of the report.

49. YOUTH CABINET ACTIVITY AND IMPACT 2013/14

Officers introduced the report which outlined the activity that had been undertaken by Youth Cabinet and the impact that this had on young people in Thurrock, both as members of Youth Cabinet and those in the wider community.

The Youth Cabinet representatives highlighted some of the key pieces of work that had been undertaken, which included the 'Make Your Mark' ballot and the 'No Regrets' course which took place at Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre.

The Committee welcomed the report and the engagement that had been undertaken with young people in Thurrock. Members were particularly impressed with a Youth Cabinet member's achievements, which had been recognised at the Civic Awards.

A Member asked for clarification regarding the funding that Youth Cabinet required for the forthcoming year. The Committee were informed that the Youth Cabinet budget was £4,000 per annum and that this was included within the planned budget for the year 2014/15.

A Member felt that Youth Cabinet should raise their profile further, and advised that school visits should be conducted in order to inform others of their work and get more young people involved. A Member was particularly keen for Youth Cabinet to undertake more scheduled debates with Councillors.

Members asked for clarity as to what support Youth Cabinet requested from the Committee. The Committee recognised that there was already an appointed Youth Voice Champion, Councillor Roast, who linked in with the activities of Youth Cabinet. This was in addition to Councillor C. Curtis who worked with Youth Cabinet in his position of Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Officers clarified that they sought a Member from the Committee to attend Youth Cabinet as and when requested and to work alongside the Chair and Vice-Chair of Youth Cabinet. The Committee were in agreement that the Councillor Roast and Councillor C. Curtis would both continue to work alongside and support Youth Cabinet, and to provide feedback to Members when required.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1. Recommend that funding for Youth Cabinet continues in order to enable a youth voice and influence.**
- 2. Agree to support the work of Youth Cabinet.**

50. ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY MODEL – GRANGEWATERS OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE

The Chair invited Reverend Barlow to speak prior to leaving the meeting for another commitment. Reverend Barlow felt that Grangewaters was an important part of the community but recognised that the Council did not have sufficient funds in order to help Grangewaters reach its full potential. Following visits to the site, he felt that the recommendations were sensible and that the options for a semi-independent organisation needed to be explored.

Reverend D. Barlow left the meeting at 8.05pm.

Officers introduced the report which provided an update on the results of the consultation on an alternative delivery model for Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre, prior to a report being submitted to Cabinet. It was stated that the centre could not be resourced at weekends and that the proposals to create a semi-independent organisation would be advantageous. It was recommended that a charitable trust be included in the list of potential options and also a model that was similar to the Impulse Leisure Centre model where the local authority could retain a degree of control.

A Member felt that lessons could be learned if the model similar to Impulse Leisure was agreed.

The Committee were in agreement that any proceeds generated from Grangewaters should be invested back into the Centre to undertake the required improvements.

Members also raised the following key points:

- That Grangewaters should become semi-independent in order to access external funds and grant schemes.
- That to become a viable concern Grangewaters needed to generate an income stream in order invest the money back into the centre, and thereby become less reliant on funds from the local authority.
- A Member was concerned regarding the Capital Structure and wanted to see further details regarding this.
- That Grangewaters needed to operate as a business otherwise it could not be sustained.
- Members were concerned with the centre becoming a charity, as it was felt that this would be an expensive option, instead it was felt that the council should retain a degree of control and influence.

A Youth Cabinet representative praised the work of the staff from her recent experience of undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh course and first aid training at the centre. Officers were pleased to receive good feedback and assured the Committee that the investment could be used to install new shower and toilet block facilities.

A Member felt that the Grangewaters options proposal was not yet ready to be referred to Cabinet and requested that a further update be brought back to the Committee following the pre-election period once further explorations had been made.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1. Agree that the option to manage and operate Grangewaters through an existing local charitable organisation be included for consideration alongside the option to create a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation.**
- 2. Agree that the aspects highlighted in paragraph 3.10 be agreed to be included in the recommendations to Cabinet subject to full consideration of legal, HR and procurement and property implications.**
- 3. Agree that upon completion of the further explorations, the recommendations made by the working group be presented to Cabinet.**

51. CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY

Officers introduced the report which provided an update on the results of the analysis of early education and childcare sufficiency in the Borough and detailed the priorities for future development. Officers stated that further targets were expected to be announced, following the Children and Families Bill.

A Member asked how the work was being linked into schools and how the team worked to resolve parking issues outside already busy school premises when expanding child care places. In response officers stated:

- That the service worked closely alongside schools, GP services and all aspects of the community to identify and support disadvantaged two year olds. A marketing campaign to increase take up of the vulnerable places had been commended nationally.
- Officers recognised that there was an ongoing issue with relation to parking and traffic congestion around school grounds. Members were assured that parking provision was taken into account when identifying suitable places to expand places, but that this in itself was a challenge as the local authority was required to generate 1000 additional places by September 2014 in order to meet its target.

A Member informed the Committee that she had worked with a local school in order to develop a drop off zone for parents. The Committee and officers recognised that parking and traffic congestion was a problem for schools across the Borough.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1. Note the findings of the report and the challenges that are faced.**
- 2. Note the significant increases in early education places for two year olds.**
- 3. Agree to this information being used as part of the pupil place planning process.**

52. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers noted that a number of briefing notes had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting and that 3 items had been included on the work programme for the next municipal year. Following

discussions at the meeting it was further agreed that the following items be included on the work programme:

- A briefing note on the latest Ofsted inspection results to be circulated before the Council entered the pre-election period.
- To receive an update on the progress of other educational bodies, such as Thurrock Admissions Forum and Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), by briefing note.
- An update on Grangewaters Alternative Delivery Model, upon completion of further explorations.
- To receive regular updates on the progress of the Education Commission.

The Committee thanked the Youth Cabinet representatives for their involvement and contributions, and were pleased that other members of Youth Cabinet would continue their participation in the Committee going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note and agree the work programme subject to the above amendments.

The meeting finished at 8.37pm.

Approved as a true and correct record.

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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