

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 October 2016 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Angela Sheridan (Vice-Chair), John Allen, Joycelyn Redsell and Aaron Watkins

Myra Potter, Parent Governor Representative
Anne Sentance, Church of England Representative

Apologies: Councillor Martin Kerin
Kim James, Heathwatch

In attendance: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills
Kay Goodacre, Corporate Finance
Anas Matin, Statutory Complaints & Engagement Manager
Sonny Tipping, Youth Cabinet Representative
Sarah Williams, School Capital and Planning Project Manager
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

9. Minutes

The Minutes of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on the 6 July 2016, were approved as a correct record.

10. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

11. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Sheridan declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was a member on the William Palmer Committee and had a child at St Cleres School.

Anne Sentance declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was a Governing Body on the Horndon on the Hill Primary School.

The Parent Governor Representative, Myra Potter, declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was a member of staff at Palmer's College and had children attending Little Thurrock Primary School and St Thames of Canterbury Primary School.

Councillor Redsell declared a non-pecuniary interest as she had two grandchildren at Orsett Primary School.

12. Update from Youth Cabinet

Sonny Tipping from the Thurrock Youth Cabinet provided Members with an update on items that had taken place.

This week had been Democracy Week and that the Youth Cabinet had been pushing out to young people in Thurrock Schools with Councillors being invited to discuss and debate real time issues.

The “Curriculum for Life” Campaign was underway which concentrated on the young people’s growth and development as they taught young people the vital life skills and to engage young people in political life.

The tackling of racism and discrimination was also being undertaken within the Youth Cabinet.

The Big Event had been organised and ran by young people for young people at secondary schools to participate in debates, find out what further education and activities such as Duke of Edinburgh were available.

A short film entitled “Make Your Mark” based around mental health had been shown at secondary schools to identify how this affects young people and what support would be available.

A short film on “Transport” was in the making following discussions with C2C and Ensign Buses. To look at how drivers could gain more confidence around young people.

Head Teacher meetings were being held to bring schools and Youth Cabinet members together.

The Chair thanked Sonny Tipping for the update and having attended a school debate on Wednesday with Councillor Halden and Redsell she stated how impressed she was.

Councillor Redsell stated that good discussions had taken place and how the Councillors were sometimes able to change the minds of some of the Youth Cabinet. Councillor Redsell encouraged the Youth Cabinet to invite Councillors to future meetings. With some of the Youth Cabinet being future budding politicians it was good practice to have lively debate.

Roger Edwardson also stated that he had attended a school debate and was very impressed with the quality of the debate and the interesting topics.

Myra Potter asked Sonny Tipping how young people can find about more about the activities and events held by the Youth Cabinet. Sonny Tipping stated that each college had a Youth Cabinet representative who should be

pushing the message through to students. He stated that more could be done on the advertising of these events.

Rory Patterson stated that the Make Your Mark event was important and that it was fantastic that the Youth Cabinet were being involved and that Inspire could help with the design and publicity of future events.

Councillor Redsell stated that hand-outs could be distributed at December Full Council.

13. School Capital Programme 2017/18

Sarah Williams presented the report and sought approval for up to £7 million funding to implement the next schools capital programme to include the secondary school expansions and possible expansion of a further two primary schools. One in Aveley/Ockendon area and other in the North East to meet the increased predicted demand for pupil places from September 2017.

The School Capital Expansion Programme had a current estimated provisional value of £7 million to be funded from the Department of Education capital basic needs grant, underspends would come from the current capital programme and S.106 education funding and would require Council approval.

The Chair stated that the report was for the committee to consider and not approve as recommendation 1 stated.

Councillor Watkins stated that he was confused by the forecast figures and asked how figures could be based on developments that had not yet gone through the planning application process. Sarah Williams stated that the forecast figures were predicated based on the applications that had been received so far and that all applications would need to be addressed for demands to be met.

Roger Edwardson stated that the problem was trying to anticipate the demand and looking at projected increases in the population. He stated that part of the high demand and the success of Thurrock was the good reputation of the schools and that there was an identified gap in secondary and primary schools.

Councillor Redsell asked the Officers if the demand by parents to place their children in a certain school had increased and had this stopped children in that area getting into this school. Roger Edwardson stated that there were no longer catchment areas.

A discussion took place between Members and Officers on the clarification of catchment areas and how this was still being advertised on local housing developments and on the council web site. Roger Edwardson and Rory Patterson stated that the school admission process was being reviewed and would check the Council web site tomorrow to ensure that the correct information was being displayed.

Councillor Allen stated that with the increase of individuals, communities and businesses into the borough he had concerns that the number of school places would not match these increases.

Roger Edwardson stated that the Council were seeking additional 5-6 free schools under the free school programme at unknown locations at this present time. This would form part of the build programme over the next 5 years.

Councillor Redsell stated that a large number of children were being home tutored and asked Officers if these numbers were included in the forecasts. Roger Edwardson stated that home tutoring should be discouraged and that there were a large proportion of children home tutored not known to the council.

RESOLVED

- 1. That a provisional School capital Programme budget of £7 million as set out in this report be recommended.**
- 2. That authority subject to the Council's procurement rules delegate to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and Head of Legal, to commence, negotiate and award any contracts/agreements or documents incidental to the School Capital Programme within the budget as set out in this report.**

Sarah Williams left the committee room at 7.53pm.

14. Council Spending Review Update

Kay Goodacre, Corporate Finance Officer, presented the report that summarised the main changes to the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period 2017/18 through to 2019/20 and the governance structure for the Council Spending Review and Transformation Programme, including the budget planning table enabling agreement of the budget in February 2017.

The report updated the committee on the proposals currently being considered and what would affect the Children's Services budget.

The Officer briefed members on the strategy to close the budget gap which had been set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and would focus on 3 key areas:

- Income generation – increases to the Council's commercial trading base.
- Achieving more/same for less – further transformational projects and contract reviews.

- Demand management/early intervention – example given included the Local Area Co-ordinators.

A discussion between Members and Officer took place on the children's social care system due to the high of demand and how the reduction in the proportion of agency staff could reduce costs.

Councillor Redsell thanked the Officer for the report and stated that money was being spent by placing Looked After Children out of the borough and that the Council had to work smarter and intervention should take place earlier to ensure such savings.

Councillor Sheridan stated that the criteria for the recruitment of foster carers should remain strict and ensure that the right people were recruited. Rory Patterson agreed with Councillor Sheridan's comments and stated it was a crucial part of ensuring foster carers and potential carers were interested and motivated to do undertake the role.

Councillor Watkins asked when the proposed programme of change would happen. Rory Patterson stated that they were in the implement phase now with staff and partner with iMPower commissioned until December 2016.

Anne Sentance stated that it was good that the word was getting out and that best practices should be shared with those areas that have good foster carers and asked Officers what interaction there had been with these areas. Rory Patterson stated that Thurrock was part of the Eastern Region Group who meet regularly and were working together with Councils and regularly peer reviews were held.

RESOLVED

- 1. The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised Medium Term financial Strategy position and the Council Spending Review approach and timetable.**
- 2. That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**

15. Educational Attainments

Roger Edwardson, presented the report and stated that raising achievements in all areas of education remained a key priority and that the Council had seen a considerable success in the last four years as attainment and progress had risen significantly. Roger Edwardson briefly took Members through each of the Good Level of Development figures and charts.

A new curriculum was introduced in 2014 and a new assessment procedure had been introduced in 2015 which had resulted in the national curriculum

levels being abandoned and a new system with more rigorous tests being introduced.

The Officer reminded the Members all data in the report was provisional and stated that result comparisons could not be made between the previous year's data and the last academic year.

The Officer stated that there were concerns with the Good Level of Development between girls and boys.

The Chair asked the Officer what the abbreviation STA stood for. The Officer stated that this stood for Standards Testing Agency.

Councillor Watkins thanked the Officer for the report and praise should be given to all the schools concerned but stated that there was always room for improvement.

Councillor Watkins asked the Officer that the internal projections were for Children Looked After. The Officer stated that each Looked after Child had a Pupil Education Plan which was updated on a six monthly basis, the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children had increased in this age bracket.

The Chair asked the Officer what reassurances were in place for those Looked after Children in out of borough schools to ensure that they were not being disadvantaged. The Officer confirmed that there was a restructure of virtual schools, the tracking of data and outcomes would be used and that social workers and colleges should be working better together.

Councillor Watkins asked why Looked after Children were going to out of borough schools. The Officer stated this was due to the lack of foster carers in the borough.

Councillor Watkins asked Officers what was in place going forward for the pupils entering into the Year 7 new curriculum. Roger Edwardson stated that many Year 7 pupils will know their KS3 teacher who will offer the recognition deserved.

Councillor Redsell thanked Officers for a very comprehensive report but did not agree with Roger Edwardson's concern regarding the good level of development for boys and that feedback received was that 15-16 year olds were not being told enough about career opportunities. Roger Edwardson stated that the internet could be used more to seek more career opportunities with adult support.

Sonny Tipping stated that Colourful Success was a large database of job opportunities, work experiences and apprenticeships which could be used for those looking for job opportunities.

Anne Sentance stated that parents played a crucial part of a young person's start in life but there was only so much a parent could do.

Anne Sentence stated that the nursery in Horndon on the Hill had closed due to the increase in rent set by Thurrock Council and asked Officer why no information and help had been offered to the nursery by the Council. Roger Edwardson stated he would look into this matter and report back to Members.

Councillor Redsell stated that this was happening a lot in the borough and concern seemed to be around protecting the building rather than protecting what's in the building.

It was also recommended by Roger Edwardson that he would write out to all schools to commend and thank them for their achievements.

Councillor Allen asked if bullying had been addressed at main stream schools. The Chair reminded Councillor Allen that reports on the Anti-Bullying Policy and Anti-Bullying Prevention at Primary Schools were already on the work programme.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the provisional outcomes of the summer 2016 tests and examinations and commends schools, pupils and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 2. That the Committee recognised that data could not be compared to previous years due to a change in curriculum and assessments.**
- 3. That the Committee recommended that Roger Edwardson write to all schools to thank them for their contributions.**

16. Children's Social Care Complaints and Representations Annual Report 2015/16

The Officer presented the annual report for Thurrock Council on the operation of the Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure covering the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. The Officer stated that it was a statutory requirement to produce an annual complaints report on children's social care complaints.

The report set out the 289 representations received in the year which included the number of complaints, compliments, the key concerns and issues arisen from complaints, MP and members enquiries and enquiries made by the ombudsman. The Officer stated that many of the complaints were being resolved quickly and responsibly at Stage 1 and that Thurrock Council had a good escalation process.

Anas Matin, the Statutory Complaints and Engagement Manager, stated that case studies were now being used for learning purposes to try and understand themes and provide the appropriate training where necessary.

Myra Potter left the committee room at 9.00pm.

Councillor Redsell stated that it was good that a large number of complaints had been resolved.

The Chair stated that it was good to have compliments and thanked all officers involved.

Anas Matin left the committee room at 9.03pm.

RESOLVED

The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the report.

17. Ofsted Inspection Report and Action Plan

Rory Patterson apologised that Andrew Carter was unwell and that he would be presenting the report.

Rory Patterson presented the report that provided members with information on the outcomes of the recent Ofsted Inspection where Thurrock had been judged as "Require Improvement" by Ofsted and that Thurrock had fallen back from the previous judgement of "Good" in 2012. The report was encouraging that it identified that children and young people were found to be safe in Thurrock during the time of the inspection. There were 16 recommendations from the inspection which related to the practice improvements required in Thurrock. The following areas of concern were brought to member's attention:

- Thurrock was dependant on a high proportion of agency social workers.
- The service for children looked after was not consistent.
- Too many children had become looked after on an emergency basis.
- An increase in the number of in-house foster carers was needed.
- Management oversight needed to be improved with supervision regularly undertaken.
- Training for social workers to ensure permanence work with children started earlier.

Rory Patterson referred Members to the draft Action Plan and stated that a structure would be in place to oversee the quality of the process. Ofsted would undertake a one day inspection to look at the action plan and follow the progress made.

Proposed changes would include:

- Annual self-valuations
- Judge on what Thurrock say about ourselves
- What could trigger an inspection

- Modular inspections
Councillor Watkins thanked the Officer for bringing the report back and highlighting the steps to be taken forward.

RESOLVED

1. **That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the outcomes of the recent Ofsted Inspection, recommendations and draft action plan to address the recommendations.**
2. **That the Board received assurance that the action plan will deliver the required improvements.**

18. Work Programme

Members agreed the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2016/17.

The Chair announced that the next Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee clashed with the Staff Award Ceremony on the 8 December 2016 and recommended that the date for this committee be changed. Members agreed for Democratic Service Officer to look at suitable dates and advise Members accordingly.

The meeting finished at 9.15 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**