

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 December 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Alex Anderson (Chair), Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Abbie Akinbohun, Sara Muldowney, Elizabeth Rigby and Steve Liddiard (Substitute) (substitute for Bukky Okunade)

Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative
Sally Khawaja, Parent Governor Representative

Apologies: Councillors Bukky Okunade
Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative

In attendance: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Michele Lucas, Assistant Director of Education and Skills
Joseph Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services
Priscilla Bruce-Annan, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Manager
Roberta Fontaine, Youth Worker
Lucia Lucioni, Youth Cabinet Member
Alicia Jones, Youth Cabinet Member
Adam Shea, Youth Cabinet Member
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

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

35. Minutes

Regarding page 7 of the Agenda, Councillor Muldowney said that she had agreed that the NEET figure was low but that the figure of 12% referred to Thurrock's youth unemployment rate.

Subject to this amendment, the minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 October 2020 was approved as a true and correct record.

The exempt and public minutes of the Extraordinary Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 October 2020 was approved as a true and correct record.

36. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

37. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Liddiard declared that he was a foster carer.

38. Youth Cabinet Update (verbal)

The Youth Cabinet had provided a Briefing Note and said that:

- They had been working on Make Your Mark and figures were not as well receive this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- They had been working with mental health services on creating a questionnaire on young people accessing mental health services.
- A member of the Youth Cabinet now sat on the Music Hub Board to provide youth representation.
- They were developing the Curriculum For Life programme to introduce to schools and was working on a website for this. This had been discussed with head teachers who had provided positive feedback with some schools planning to take the programme on board.
- They had helped Brighter Futures' strategy by providing young people's views of impacts to their health and wellbeing.

The Committee were pleased to hear the projects that had been undertaken particularly with music as arts subjects had fallen in the curriculum. The Youth Cabinet were asked to consider the issues that a young person would face as a result of the pandemic and what young people's thoughts were of the future following on from this. The Youth Cabinet would provide feedback on this at the next Committee meeting.

(Clerk's note – the Youth Cabinet Update Briefing Note can be found via <https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=131&MId=5892&Ver=4>)

39. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (verbal)

As the new Thurrock LSCP Manager, Priscilla Bruce-Annan gave an introduction of her working background and how she had come into her current role. The Committee welcomed her into the role and was pleased to hear the passion she had for her work.

40. SEND Inspection Outcome - Written Statement of Action Update

The report on pages 23 – 64 of the Agenda was presented by Michele Lucas. She also updated the Committee on the Parent Carer Forum concerns which had been raised by Members at the last Committee meeting. She said that the service had hosted a number of engagement events with support from a national organisation called Contact. A range of different times for the events were set up to enable as many people to engage as possible and it was identified that the local offer needed refreshing which was covered in the

report. There were also five parents who were keen to start a new parent carer forum and it would take some time to set the Forum up.

The Chair was pleased to see that there were no outstanding 'red' actions from October 2020 and noted that there had been several actions that had been 'amber' throughout the plan. He noted the one outstanding red action due for completion in January 2021 and questioned the process of outstanding actions. Michele Lucas explained that the service had been working hard to turn 'amber' actions into 'green' and that there were component parts attached to some of these actions. She gave the example of the Data Integration Project where the data systems had been brought together but the Portal Project would take longer as it involved a whole system change. She went on to say that the service would see in January 2021 what actions would be completed to move into 'green'.

Councillor Muldowney was pleased to see the progress made in regards to a parent carer forum and she had attended the events and thought they were well structured. She noted the 'amber' actions but thought the service had made good progress.

RESOLVED:

O&S scrutinised the work that had been undertaken during the period outlined in the report and offered support and challenge.

41. Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2021/22

The report on pages 65 – 78 of the Agenda was presented by Michele Lucas.

Noting the three main categories outlined in the report, the Chair questioned how Thurrock compared to other Local Authorities (LAs) on pricing. Michele Lucas answered that Grangewaters's pricing was deliberately charged lower than competitors as the service aimed to support families instead of just trying to recover costs. Nurseries were priced in line with competitors as it linked to the national funding formula and Thurrock's nurseries did not attract fee paying parents which was why the service had the nurseries in Tilbury to support parents on low income. The TACC had come into the service last year and prices had been kept at a reasonable level as small community groups preferred to use council owned spaces so the service wished to continue to support the community to ensure costs were covered.

The Committee commented that the increase in fees were needed and that they were small and fair. Councillor Muldowney sought more detail in regards to paragraph 3.5 and the operation hours of the 30 hours of childcare which she expressed concern about. She sought reassurance that parents who needed this provision would still have this. She also noted that although the increases were small in this service, there were increases across all services in the Council which would add up and raised concerns of financial hardships for some people who would be affected by the increases overall. Michele Lucas said that the nurseries in Tilbury and Grays were targeted towards

single parents and the service liaised with employers to ensure that the 30 hours provision covered hours outside the core hours of 9am to 5pm particularly for jobs that were worked in shift patterns. The service intended to ensure that there was a strong Early Years provision to support parents who wanted to get back into work.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees and charges proposals including those no longer applicable.

1.2 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees & Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to commercial requirements.

42. Children's Social Care Performance

The report on pages 79 – 92 of the Agenda was presented by Joe Tynan.

The Chair commented that it was important to highlight Missing Episodes of Children Looked After (CLA) and that it was good to see that there was a downward trend occurring. He hoped that it would continue.

Referring to paragraph 5.3, Councillor Muldowney noted the good progress that was being made on Child Protection Plans (CPP). She noted that the chart showed that the service was at a higher percentage than two years ago and she questioned what factors had contributed to this and sought more detail into the assessment of this. Joe Tynan said that Repeat CPP was currently a key focus for the service and where a Repeat CPP was being considered, this was discussed with a Senior Manager. He went on to give examples of where an identified risk would be reduced so that it no longer met the criteria or need for a CPP but could come back several months later due to a change in circumstances. This would highlight a concern that advice had been given at the time to the family but had not worked and the service would then look to escalate and a Repeat CPP would then be needed which would imply the first CPP had not been as effective. The service would look to see if another strategy was needed to support the family to make the needs changes to reduce the risk. The Repeat CPP were often reviewed to look at whether there was any learning from the Child Protection Chairs and the decisions making which had been found to be consistent. The guidance was that the service should support families on CPPs for a minimum of three months but the service had made the decision to support families for six months. Where the same concern came back to the service or increased, the service would look to undertake a Repeat CPP or seek legal advice depending on the level of risk involved.

RESOLVED:

That Members reviewed the areas of improvement in Children’s Social Care and work undertaken to date to manage demand for statutory social care services.

43. LSCP Independent Peer Review

The report (found via <https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=131&MId=5892&Ver=4>) was presented by Sheila Murphy.

The Chair welcomed the review and questioned when the action plan would be presented to Committee. He also questioned what the feedback from the statutory partners were in relation to the review. Sheila Murphy answered that the team had already started on the action plan and this would be ready for the next meeting. She said that the report was a multi agency report which had been shared with the statutory partners who formed the LSCP and that they had been pleased with the review. The action plan would highlight the actions taken against the recommendations from the review of which most were easily resolved but some would require more time such as looking for an Independent Chair/Scrutineer and the issue of getting equal funds across the three statutory partners. Councillor Muldowney also welcomed the review and looked forward to seeing the action plan come back to Committee.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 O&S commented on the independent review of the LSCP and support acting upon the recommendations of the independent review.**
- 1.2 O&S supported the establishment of an Independent Chair to help further the partnerships work and provide the critical friend function to all partners.**

O&S requested a year’s review to ensure that the partnership has the capacity to proactively review relevant cases of concern, and not just formal SCR’s/LPR’s.

44. Work Programme

Democratic Services informed the Committee that an additional report, Emotional Health and Wellbeing had been added to 2 February 2021.

The LSCP Action Plan was added to the 2 February 2021 meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.09 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