

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 November 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors James Halden (Chair), Yash Gupta (MBE) (Vice-Chair), Leslie Gamester and Martin Kerin

Reverend Canon Darren Barlow, Church of England Representative
Patricia Wilson, Roman Catholic Church Representative

Apologies: Councillors Clare Baldwin, Susan Little, Myra Potter and Sarah Sanders

In attendance: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills
Jessica Feeney, 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.

29. Minutes

The Minutes of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on the 15 October 2015, were approved as a correct record subject to:

- Adding that the Committee commended the Grays Convent School on their GCSE results.
- Including that Patricia Wilson felt that standards were just as important as faith in item 22 Education Transport.
- Specifying that in item 22 Education Transport Reverend Barlow felt that there was no option for children seeking a Christian secondary education in Thurrock.

30. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

31. Declaration of Interests

Reverend Barlow declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the meeting, as his wife was a teacher at Thameside Primary School, and he has children at the Convent School and Palmers College, He is also a vice chair of the William Palmer Trust.

Councillor Kerin declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the meeting, as he was a teacher at the Harris Academy and his wife worked at the Harris Federation Teaching School Alliance.

32. School improvement in Thurrock- the Impact of School to School Support

The Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement Officer explained to the Committee that the Council set up the Education Commission to review education provision and to consider how progress and performance could be accelerated in Thurrock. The success of recent years and the opportunities presented in the area by regeneration and the arts encouraged all involved in education to work collaboratively and raise standards. It was added that the report provided evidence of the whole education community working together to shape a better future for children and young people across Thurrock.

The Director of Children's Services felt that the next report on the agenda accompanied the School improvement in Thurrock report. The Committee agreed to scrutinise both reports together.

Resolved:

- 1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the innovative and effective working relationships between schools, academies and the local authority and the positive impact on school improvement.**
- 2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report in conjunction with the Multi-Academy Trust Relationship report of the same date.**

33. Multi Academy Trust Relationships

The Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement Learning and Skills Officer introduced the report and highlighted the following key points;

- Thurrock schools had been forward thinking and proactive when converting to Academies, with 70% converted, and twenty-seven of those academies are in Multi Academy Trusts.
- No schools were currently in the process of converting into academies.
- The Children's Business and Improvement Team in Children's Services provided a service to schools to support them through the conversion into an academy efficiently and professionally.
- Multi Academy Trusts had responsibility for the performance of all the academies within the group, and that the board of directors oversees the operation of the individual schools.

The Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement Learning and Skills explained to the Committee that a Multi Academy Trust was formed when a

number of schools who wish to convert or had already converted to a academy status, come together as one legal entity, either in a cluster or as part of a bigger existing organisation. The Multi Academy Trust is a single legal entirety with two layers of governance; an overarching academy trust governed by foundation members and a board of directors or governors.

The Committee was informed that there were ten Multi-Academy Trusts as well as 8 academies that were either part of an 'empty Multi Academy Trust' or are stand alone. The Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement Learning and Skills Officer explained that an 'empty Multi Academy Trust' had yet to recruit academies to join, either because the Multi Academy Trust founder school decides it is not yet ready to support another school or have not yet approached.

The Committee discussed recruitment and retention in Thurrock schools and academies and the following points were made;

- The Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement Learning and Skills explained that a Strategy on recruitment and retention was currently being prepared for publication.
- Councillor Gupta questioned the steps that had been taken in the past six years; the Director of Children's Services explained that a large recruitment drive had taken place to minimise the number of contracted staff, which attracted many more Teachers and Head Teachers to Thurrock schools.
- The Director of Children's services explained that the Multi-Academy Trusts had enabled Schools to offer support when senior members of staff were absent.

Councillor Gamester questioned if there were any disadvantages in Multi Academy Trust Relationships. The Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement Learning and Skills Officer informed the Committee that it was very important that the lead schools in the Multi Academy Trust continued to improve whilst helping to improve partnering academies. Councillor Kerin enquired if the title of academy could be taken away if a school was no longer performing; Officers confirmed that academies legally could not revert back to a mainstream school.

. Councillor Kerin queried if there was any legislation that bounded Multi Academy Trusts to work with local authorities, Members were informed that there was no legislation although the Director of Children Services assured the Committee that they would continue to work and build on relationships. Dr Asong assured the Committee that Multi Academy Trust Relationships had been more proactive since the legislation was repealed.

Councillor Gupta enquired what financial incentive academies received from the Government. The Director of Children's Services highlighted that early academies had received quite significant financial incentives but underlined that this was no longer the case as academies received no additional

incentive other than having the funding which would otherwise be used by the local authority to run certain support functions delegated to them directly.

Dr Asong the Head Teacher of Gable Hall was invited to the Committee to share her personal views and experiences of Multi Academy Trust Relationships; the Committee was made aware of the following points;

- That Multi Academy Trusts can set a strong, shared strategic vision across all the schools in the partnership.
- Multi Academy Trust were accountable for the outcomes for all pupils in the partnership which was an excellent mechanism for ensuring that support and challenge was directed to where it was needed most.
- The Multi Academy Trusts had flexibility about how much or how little power it delegates to individual schools. This enabled tailoring to the individual circumstances of the partnership.
- Multi Academy Trusts were the employer of all staff. This made it easier to flexibly deploy staff, draw on a wider pool of opportunities for CPD, and develop a trust-wide approach to staff development and succession planning.
- Multi Academy Trusts have enabled gifted KS2 students to experience classroom resources at Gable Hall School, which rapidly improved assessment results.
- The central funding agreement has made it easier to pull resources and achieve economies of scale in contracting.

Councillor Gupta commended the work undertaken and expressed his confidence in academies. Dr Asong informed the Committee that Gable Hall was looking to gradually expand their Multi Academy Trust in the future.

Resolved:

- 1. Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the current organisation of schools and the contribution of the multi academy trusts to raising standards across the borough.**

34. Pathways For Youth Employment And Work Experience

The Chair of the Committee introduced the report explaining that the Task and Finish Group was primarily concerned with the 11-16 age bracket which is prior to 6th form / college education and the common age of taking on part time work. The group took evidence from local businesses, educational providers, and included the Thurrock Youth Cabinet in all meetings of the group. The group was comprised of Cllr James Halden (Conservative, Homesteads) as Chair, Cllr Graham Snell (UKIP, Stifford Clays), and Cllr Steve Liddiard (Labour, Tilbury St Chads).

The Chair of Committee explained that the purpose of this group, set up as a Task and Finish Group under the Children's Service's Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to try and disseminate best practice across Thurrock and create the right to environment to ensure that quality work experience was actively contributing to the future prospects of our students.

Councillor Kerin informed the Committee that work experience was important for young people; all Members agreed that work experience was a good opportunity for young people and that it could potentially lead to full time employment for some students. Councillor Gupta added that the previous Trident scheme and the current Duke of Edinburgh Scheme also offered work experience opportunities for young people.

Councillor Gamester questioned why the business feedback to the review panel was disappointing. The Chair of the Committee explained that there was a strong degree of links with businesses in the borough and others not so strong; the Committee was informed that letters were sent to certain business partners to gather evidence regarding local provision but unfortunately no one responded formally.

The Committee highlighted that Health and Safety was an issue for many companies when considering young people for work experience. The Director of Children's Services explained that the government had released a webpage called Myth Busting, which ruled out health and safety myths that companies considered a problem when allowing children into the workplace.

All Members of the Committee commended the report.

Resolved

- 1. That work experience offers became a part of the published admissions information given to parents and students when deciding upon a school.**
- 2. Work experience quality to become a part of the education awards and the business awards.**
- 3. Thurrock Council offers a small amount of premium provision work experience places as a part of a Borough wide award for young people's community service.**
- 4. Youth Cabinet and Thurrock Youth Services to support schools and young people who wish to shape their own work experience offer.**
- 5. Thurrock Council continues to work with Ensign Buses and C2C regarding the associated travel costs of work experience.**

35. Work Programme

The Director of Children's Services explained that a report on secondary school results would be added to the work programme for the beginning 2016 depending on when they were received.

The Chair of the Committee informed Members that various letters were sent to the Police and local government partners regarding serious youth violence in Thurrock. It was explained all the responses would be circulated to the Committee. The Chair of the Committee also requested an extraordinary meeting to discuss the serious youth crime feedback.

The meeting finished at 9.07 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**