

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 January 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Elizabeth Rigby (Chair), Sara Muldowney (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Vikki Hartstean and Srikanth Panjala

Parent Governor Representative Nicola Cranch

Apologies: Church of England Representative Sarah Barlow

In attendance:

Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Michele Lucas, Assistant Director of Education and Skills
Priscilla Bruce-Annan, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Manager
Keeley Donati, Acting Principal of Thurrock Adult Community College
Sarah Williams, Head of Education Support Services
Andrea Winstone, Head of School Effectiveness and SEND
Rhiannon Whiteley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Youth Cabinet Representative
Angela Surrey, Participation and Engagement 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

Councillor Muldowney raised that on page 6 of the agenda she would like it included in the minutes that Councillor Carter stated that he had not visited the school's temporary classrooms to ensure they are satisfactory. Councillor Carter stated his intention to challenge this at Full Council.

Councillor Muldowney requested that at the Youth Cabinet item it should say Vice Chair and not Chair. Councillor Muldowney also noted the spelling of St Clere's school is incorrect.

Save for the above comments, the minutes were approved.

30. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business. The Scrutiny Officer introduced herself to the Committee. Councillor Muldowney raised that she had difficulty opening the appendices embedded in the reports and she had asked officers

for information, and she had not received this. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that she will look into this.

ACTION 1 - Support for the Overview and Scrutiny function to be reviewed with regard to timeliness of papers and accessibility of embedded reports.

31. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

32. Youth Cabinet Update

The Youth Cabinet representative presented the report to the Committee.

- Members thanked the Youth Cabinet representative for the report and stated that it was always informative.
- Members also commented that it was fantastic that Thurrock's Member of Youth Parliament got to speak in the House of Commons. Members stated that despite being the 6th richest country, 8000 children are living in poverty in England and cannot access free school meals.
- Members queried how many members they are looking to sign up for Thurrock SEND Youth Voice. The Participation and Engagement Officer confirmed that 3 have signed up but they have capacity for up to 12 and there is no reason why they could not expand on this. Events will be based at Grangewaters and will take place in February half term, July and October half term.

ACTION 2 - The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND can contact the CEO's of the 5 schools that don't have a Youth Cabinet Representative to highlight this as an opportunity

33. Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RACC) Update Report

The Head of Education Support Services presented the report to the Committee.

- The Head of Education Support Services confirmed that the remedial works for East Tilbury, Arthur Bugler and Thameside Primary Schools are planned to start this term and be completed in the Summer term.
- St Clere's are waiting for the Department of Education to provide an update regarding the longer term remedial works and they are expecting a response in the next week.
- Corringham's remedial works have been completed
- Members expressed concern regarding the temporary classrooms as the temperatures have dropped
- Members queried how disruptive the temporary accommodation is
- Members expressed concern that those children affected will experience disruption for a full school year

- Members queried if there had been any drops in attendance. The Assistant Director for Education and Skills confirmed this is not something that has been flagged with her.

ACTION 3 - A further briefing note on the programme of works for the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) will be provided to members.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Children’s Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the content of the report which provides an update in relation to Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RACC) within Thurrock Schools.**

The Head of Education Support Services left the meeting at 19.36

34. Educational Attainment Data 2022-2023

The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND introduced the report.

- The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND confirmed that in terms of attainment levels children are not quite back to where they were before the pandemic but Thurrock children are performing better than children nationally.
- Thurrock’s Looked After Children are doing better than Looked After Children nationally.
- The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND stated that schools are working hard to catch up on attendance. Attendance levels are in line with national levels but lower than before the pandemic.
- Members queried why there is a drop in how children are achieving at Key Stage 4 compared to Key Stage 2. The Assistant Director of Education and skills responded that they are looking into the transition between year 6 and year 7. Members expressed concern that there is good work going on at a primary school level which is not been translated into GCSE results and GCSE results could affect children’s life opportunities.
- Members requested the data on the difference in attainment levels for disadvantaged children (on free school meals). There is a need to look at how disadvantaged children can be supported more. The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND confirmed that schools do have to report what they are using the pupil premium money for so this can be looked at.
- The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND stated that Thurrock’s virtual school provides additional tutoring and support for LAC children to support them through year 10 and 11.
- The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND confirmed that all schools have target setting to improve results. All schools have an improvement plan to improve the quality of learning. The Local

Authority monitor this via their annual conversations with the Academies.

- Members queried how school attendance could be improved. The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND confirmed that the School Attendance Team meet with the schools each term regarding persistent absences. They check the policies and work with parents to try and improve attendance. Members were advised that talking to residents about attendance could help as there is a direct correlation between attendance and attainment.
- The meeting discussed Gable Hall which is currently rated by Ofsted as Inadequate. There are also two schools rated as requires improvement. From September 2024 Mossbourne will be the Trust for Gable Hall, Hassenbrook and Corringham Primary School.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Children's Overview & Scrutiny receive the provisional outcomes of the summer 2023 tests and examinations and commends early years' settings, schools, pupils, and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 1.2 Children's Overview & Scrutiny formally thank our early years, school and college settings for the work that has ensured a range of positive outcomes for our children and young people.**
- 1.3 Members requested a further piece of work is completed and a report provided regarding the drop in attainment between Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 2 and a report regarding the Pupil Premium.**

35. Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2023

The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND presented the report to the Committee.

The following key points were highlighted: -

- The report is a statutory report to help to see where settings are needed. The Government has extended entitlement to childcare and the department need to make sure that there are enough places for the increased entitlement.
- In Thurrock there is a lack of suitable buildings.
- Complaints have not been received from parents unable to find provision.
- The 0-5 population in Thurrock is decreasing. In Tilbury it is identified in the report that there is a high need for provisions in that area.
- Members queried how confident officers were that they would be able to meet the new Government targets. Officers confirmed they have meet with

colleagues in property to ensure they are aware of the Local Authority's duty to provide spaces when disposing of assets. Colleagues in planning are also aware and are always looking for private Landlords to support private businesses.

- Members queried how families are referred to the HAF programme (Holidays Activities and Food Programme) and how they ensure vulnerable groups are not missed. The Assistant Director of Education and Skills confirmed that HAF is run by Essex Activate who have a large website. Parents are made aware via Social Media and schools disseminate the information via their Newsletters. It is for children who are eligible for free school meals and the schools are good at making referrals.
- The Parent Governor representative queried the wraparound care for specialist provision schools. The Assistant Director of Education and Skills responded that they are trying to get it onsite but are also looking at transport methods such as the schools using their own minibuses.
- The Parent Governor representative queried whether Scout Halls or Village Halls could be used for nursery provision. The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND agreed they could and confirmed that they have a provision in a pub in East Tilbury.
- The Head of School Effectiveness and SEND stated more than half of Thurrock schools have nurseries and they are looking to encourage others to open a provision or have a provider on their premises.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023 and offer any additional comment or feedback.**

36. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership - Report to Follow

The Business Manager for the Thurrock Local Children Safeguarding Partnership presented the report to the Committee.

The following key points were highlighted: -

- Members queried what emerging risks were highlighted by the Walk Online Roadshow. The TLCSP Business Manager confirmed that children are being encouraged to engage in online pranks, taking nude pictures and divulging their address.
- The TLSCP stated that the Police have given a presentation on Right Care Right Person. The Executive Director of Children's Services confirmed that the Police remain a statutory partner in safeguarding, and they have the powers to get into a property and not social workers. They have been told if the police call-handler decides it is not something the police are going to respond to they can escalate the decision to refuse to help. The police have been asked to come back in 3-6 months to confirm the impact of this to the Health and Wellbeing Board and Safeguarding Board as the department do not want children to be falling through the net.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Committee note the update on the work of the TLSCP and the progress made on Thematic Review Action Plan to date.**

37. Update on Thurrock Adult Community College

The Acting Principal of Thurrock Adult Community College presented the report to the Committee.

The following key points were highlighted: -

- In May 2023 the College underwent an inspection from Ofsted and received an overall grading of 'requires improvement'. The Acting Principal set out the actions that they are taking to improve.

At 21.26 the Chair extended standing orders so the meeting could continue after 9.30pm

- Members queried if the Leadership were aware of the issues, why were they not addressed? The Acting Principal stated that they lost a lot of experienced staff during the pandemic and staff recruitment was very difficult. Salaries are much lower than in schools and colleges. Staff capacity did not allow the issues to be addressed all at once and certain areas were prioritised. The College is now fully staffed and they have created a new post to support the management team with the quality improvement.
- Members commended the Acting Principal for her transparency and honesty and noted how passionate she was about making the required improvements.
- Members queried if they planned to bring apprenticeships back. The Acting Principal confirmed that they probably would not apply to get back on the register to provide apprenticeships for the next couple of years but could consider this in the future.
- Members queried what drives teachers to work at the Adult Community College. The Acting Principal confirmed that many teachers are parents of school aged children. The classes run around school times to enable teachers to drop off and collect their children from schools. Unlike in schools teachers are not required to have a degree and cost is not a barrier to them getting a teacher qualification. It is possible to obtain a teaching qualification within 18 months and within a year if you have a degree.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Children's Overview & Scrutiny to gain an understanding of how the college's curriculum offer meets local need and priorities.**
- 1.2 Children's Overview & Scrutiny to gain an understanding of the funding streams the college uses to deliver provision to residents of Thurrock.**

- 1.3 **Children's Overview & Scrutiny to have an update on the college's actions and progress on the areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted inspection report published in June 2023.**

38. Work Programme

In relation to the March meeting the Senior Democratic Services officer confirmed the following reports would be removed.

- Update from Working Group on Mental Health, as the group is yet to meet
- Update from Working Group on Healthy Living (Childhood Obesity), as the group is yet to meet
- Items raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Board as it has been agreed these reports will be presented to the committee on alternate meetings.

Members requested in the next municipal year the following reports: -

- An update report from the Thurrock Adult Community College after the next Ofsted inspection
- A report on the drop in attainment between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4
- A report on the data regarding attainment and the pupil premium

The meeting finished at 9.51 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