

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 July 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors James Halden (Chair), Yash Gupta (MBE) (Vice-Chair), Leslie Gamester, Jane Pothecary and Joycelyn Redsell (substituting for Susan Little)

Reverend Darren Barlow, Church of England Representative
Patricia Wilson, Roman Catholic Church Representative
Myra Potter, Parent Governor Representative
Sarah Sanders, Parent Governor Representative

Apologies: Councillors Clare Baldwin, Susan Little

In attendance: Sonny Tipping, Youth Cabinet Representative
James Henderson, Youth Cabinet Representative
Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services
Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills
Jason Read, Team Leader (Operations & Performance) Youth Offending Service
Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer
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.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 10 March 2015, were approved as a correct record subject to:

- Patricia Wilson being marked as present at the meeting.
- Removing the Phrase (Child Sexual Exploitation) in paragraph 3 page 9.

2. Items of Urgent Business

The Chair informed the Committee that a member of the public Mr S. Crabbe was present at the meeting to ask a question, the question was as follows:

'What are the Council's plans for reviewing and updating the agreement that is in place between itself and Little Angels to enable East Tilbury Primary School and Nursery, which is now a part of the St Clere's Co-operative Trust, to also provide nursery places for children under the age of 4?'

The Chair briefed the Committee on background information regarding the question, and proposed that the topic of Nursery Provisions should be brought back to the next meeting on the 15 September 2015 for discussion. Mr. Crabbe was welcomed by the Chair to join in the debate at the next meeting. It was also highlighted that as a short term solution to Mr. Crabbe's issue in East Tilbury alternative nursery provision was available in Linford.

Mr Crabbe proposed a supplementary question to the Committee. 'Why is care in Linford provided if a nursery was already running in East Tilbury, why was it moved to Linford?'

The Chair informed Mr. Crabbe that solutions to these issues had to consider the wider community.

3. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Reverend Barlow declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the meeting, as his wife is a teacher at St Thomas's and has a child at St Thomas's, Convent School and Palmers College, He is also a trustee at Palmers College.

Councillor Redsell declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the meeting, as she has grandchildren at St Clere's Secondary School.

Myra Potter declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the meeting, as she has children at St Thomas's and Little Thurrock, and will be working at Palmers College in September.

Councillor Pothecary declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the meeting, as she works at the South Essex College, and has children at Purfleet Primary.

4. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference were noted.

5. Education Commission Update

Officers introduced the report which outlined the developments regarding the Education Commission and provided an update to the associated action plan. Key achievements to date included:

- Twenty six schools had participated in the Cultural Entitlement Project, Trailblazers, with the Royal Opera House
- 81% of pupils are attending good or better schools and academies in Thurrock which is 1% above national average.

Councillor Redsell questioned why only twenty-six schools participated in the Royal Opera House, and how the Council would get more involvement from other schools? Officers assured the Committee that the Local Authority was

involving all the schools although some schools had other priorities such as Ofsted and staff recruitment, but would be involved in the near future.

A Youth Cabinet Member suggested liaising with children and students when creating projects with the Thurrock Education Alliance, the Director of Children's Services thought this was a good idea and accepted an invitation to the Youth Cabinet to discuss.

Councillor Gupta referenced the financial implications and highlighted that the Council had committed £1 million to support the Education Commission, it was questioned where the money was sourced from. The Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that it was a pledge by the Leader and had come out of the Council's reserves. The Committee was informed that the spending was observed by a monthly budget monitoring team; the appendix explained where expenditure occurred. It was reported that the funding had already contributed to significant progress to date, which included:

- The introduction of the Cultural Entitlement for young people in Thurrock.
- The recruitment and retention of teachers.

Patricia Wilson questioned whether using the budget to match the salaries of teachers in London would encourage a better quality of education; the Director of Children's Services explained that in order to inspire teachers to work and live in the borough there were a number of initiatives including encouraging teachers to come back to work after breaks for pregnancy and other things, the service must also advertise the positive aspects of Thurrock. The Committee discussed whether figures were available regarding the number of students aspiring to pursue teaching careers. It was agreed that the Director of Children's Services would see whether this information was available and would follow this up and report back.

Councillor Gamester queried why the category recruitment and retention on the Thurrock Education Alliance project didn't state the expenditure agreed. He asked if it was overlapping with another project. Roger Edwardson explained that they had two separate items for external retention and recruitment, one for primary and one for secondary. The service wanted a cross phase approach so it was combined into one. It was also raised as to how Thurrock's retention rates compared to other Local Authorities. The Director explained that a recent telephone survey with Her Majesty's Inspector gave her information that retention was an issue across the country. Clarification was also given to the Committee regarding Tribal Inspection Training, which trained teachers to prepare schools for Ofsted inspections.

Reverend Barlow questioned how successful the work had been from the project and how it was communicated. The Director informed the Committee that the Thurrock Education Alliance was a long term project and updated on work completed so far. The relationship between academies and the Local

Authority was questioned further; Roger Edwardson explained that the Director of Children's Services had built good trust with the Academies

Councillor Halden felt that Officers concentrated on positive outcomes and that further work should be undertaken to identify areas that could be improved. He further suggested that a survey be circulated to the schools which took part in the work of the Education Commission.

The Director of Children's Services addressed 3 areas in need of improvement

- High achievers.
- Post 16 Results
- Attainment of children in care

Sonny Tipping, the Youth Cabinet representative responded by reminding the Committee of a service called the Youth Hub and suggested working with post 16 higher education pupils to improve employment and education. The Director of Children's Services felt it was a good idea and agreed to attend a future Youth Cabinet meeting to discuss.

A topic arose regarding children in Thurrock that were educated from home, it was estimated that there were around 250 cases. The Committee was informed that council officers have no right of entry into their home, but they do employ an Officer who visits the families on a regular basis and most families welcome this.

The Chair questioned why the same amount of funding was allocated to Cultural Entitlement as to Retention of staff, It was explained that the service were hoping to eventually stop funding Cultural Entitlement as schools and potentially business sponsors would fund the service themselves. Members agreed that Arts and Drama was important for students' confidence but highlighted that Maths and Science should also be prioritised. It was explained that the Cultural Entitlement project enabled pupils to experience a range of activities including musical performances and visits to the Tower of London.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Comments on the progress and achievements of Thurrock schools and partners above be noted**
- 2. That the currently funded activity and further developments that it would wish to be taken to further the education standards for all children and young people in Thurrock be noted.**
- 3. Science and Maths to be included in the Cultural Entitlement Work Plan.**
- 4. A potential for a survey to return to each school of the original questions that the education commission proposed.**

5. Organise briefing for December for members what's being done for each school to help the improvement journey.

6. Youth Offending Service function and performance

Jason Read the Team Leader (Operations & Performance) of the Youth Offending Service introduced the report to members and highlighted the following points:

- Thurrock Youth Offending Service (YOS) made considerable efficiency savings this year with further savings to be made next year.
- Thurrock was the smallest YOS in the country and generally achieved a lower re-offending rate than the national, regional and statistical family averages.
- YOS had successfully moved into Corringham's old police station. Health & Safety issues had arisen. A full health and safety inspection was in place. Essex Police agreed an extension until November 2016.
- One emerging issue locally was the migration of young people and their families, primarily from the London Boroughs.
- Knife crime accounted for less than 1% of offences committed in 2013/2014. However this year there was a small increase and what appears to be a number of firearms offences although these relate to a single incident with one offender.
- Last financial year Thurrock YOS worked with 68 young people as part of our prevention service, with 51 being subject to TRIAGE and 17 interventions via Youth Inclusion and Support Programmes.

Reverend Barlow showed a concern as to whether pressures on the service had risen due to a reduction of staff. The Youth Offending Service Team Leader assured Members that the dedication of the staff overcame the savings and results were positive, to raise their performance they would continue to stride and work with external companies to improve post 16 young people's opportunities.

Councillor Redsell thanked YOS for their excellent service and queried why young people re-offend. The Youth Offending Service Team Leader explained that by carrying out background checks of individuals they can indicate if young people were going to reoffend. It was explained that YOS support the young people to make sure that they are there to facilitate the change when they stop offending.

Discussions took place regarding the YOS Office; Members were informed that the layout of the building was good although there were issues regarding leaks in the roof and the presence of asbestos. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that the Council would invest into the building, but due to the short lease it would not be possible. The Youth Offending Service Team Leader raised a point that the location would be better suited if situated in Grays as this would enable better access via public transport when. It was

explained that there was a concern when the YOS moved to Corringham that Offenders would not turn up to their appointments due to a train station not being near, although this was not the case.

Councillor Potheary asked for clarification on the HMI report and stated that the record for the reoffending rate was 39.6% and that the YOS report stated that it was 27%. It was clarified that the HMI used statistics from national records which were 3 years old. A Member questioned where the youth offending service received their referrals from, the Youth Offending Service Team Leader explained that the core work is referred by the Courts and other youth offending services, which are young people who have been convicted and made subject to either community & custodial sentences or are remanded in custody pending a Court outcome. It was explained that some young people were referred by the police or multi Agency action groups which were young people on prevention programmes. Once a young person was referred; YOS would work as a triage and would closely work with the young person for 4-6 weeks.

The Chair questioned whether there was a relation between unemployment and reoffending. The Committee was informed that the number of young offenders engaged in education, employment or training had risen above 55%. It was explained that in previous years there has been a relationship between unemployment and reoffending, although this was no longer the case as the service was aware of many offenders currently in education. It was questioned how the service could stop reoffending, Youth Offending Service Team Leader explained that the service could not stop the youths reoffending as it was down to the individuals own life choices, but by working closely with offenders YOS make sure they are supportive to facilitate the change when they do decide to stop offending.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To note the Overview & Scrutiny Committee comment on the function and performance of the YOS and review plans to address the two areas of improvement as set out in the HMIP, Short Quality Screening Report dated 20th May 2015:**
- 2. To note that Intervention planning should genuinely involve children and young people and their parents/carers. The plans should be constructed in such a way that they are effective tools to drive successful interventions.**
- 3. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements need to be fully understood by all staff and managers.**
- 4. Chair and Director Children's Services to write to the Police and crime commissioner to extend the lease for a longer term on the old Corringham Police Station.**

7. Julia - SCR Action Plan Update

The Head of Children's Social Care advised Members of the process of the serious case review, following which the Business Manger reported that Regulation 5 of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board Regulations 2006 set out the requirement for a serious case review to be undertaken in instances where abuse or neglect of a child was known or suspected, and where either the child died or was seriously harmed and there was cause for concern as to how the Authority, their Board Partners or relevant people worked together to safeguard the child.

The Committee was advised that this case had been referred to the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board Serious Case Review Panel and they were satisfied that it met the specified criteria, following which a case review had been undertaken using the SCIE Learning Together Methodology.

Councillor Potheary highlighted some items from the Police, Probation and CCG were marked as red and orange (meaning progress was not on track or needed monitoring). A question was asked as to how the LSCB can encourage the organisations to speed up their process. The Head of Children's Social Care informed Members that the revised document had only one red item from the Police, and explained that the LSCB will drive and push forward organisations to speed up the process. The Head of Children Social Care reassured the Members that the case will come back to the committee.

The Chair of the Committee proposed a question as to what happened to the individual Social Workers who failed to act upon Julia's case. The Head of Children's Social Care advised Members that they looked across the board rather than at individuals, although they did look internally as to whether there were grounds to instigate disciplinary proceedings. The Social Workers involved had left the authority so subsequently an investigation to merit a referral to the HCPC (Healthcare & Care Professions Council) would take place, which would enable them to decide whether or not to instigate a fitness for practice review.

Members praised the service's good progress and asked if there was any cause for concern. The Committee was informed that acknowledgment of the system across the partnership needed to be embedded.

The Chair questioned whether it was possible to report an external agency if it was felt they did not respond to a serious case in the correct way. The Head of Children's Social Care reported that Officers looked into referring a GP during Julia's Case, although it was not possible as the incident was not a breach of the GP's code of conduct. It was confirmed by Officers that GPs are now a lot more engaged with safeguarding.

A Youth Council representative explained how youths could share their problems at the Youth Hub with other youths and volunteers. The Head of Children's Social Care agreed to support the service on conditions that the appropriate support would be offered for people taking on the new role.

RESOLVED:

To be noted that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee continues to monitor progress against the multi-agency action plan with a particular focus on Children's Services

8. Adoption and Permanence Services Partnership

Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care introduced the report which proposed that Thurrock enter into a partnership with Coram for a 3 year period. The following key points were made:

- The Coram Partnership had been given the rating 'outstanding' by Ofsted.
- There had been an increase in adoption in 2014/2015
- Member discuss that 507 days to complete an adoption was not as fast as it could be.

Councillor Gamester queried whether entering the partnership could cause pressure for Coram and reduce the standards of performance. Andrew Carter informed the Committee that Coram is a multi-agency company with experience and that the Local Authority will make the final decision as to whether adopters match children within Thurrock.

Reverend Barlow highlighted that adopters find the process very slow he questioned whether Coram would speed this procedure up. The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that by entering the Coram Partnership will enable Thurrock to meet the national targets.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The comments on the development of a partnership by way of a grant agreement to provide an integrated programme of activity to optimise adoption outcomes for children following the decision at Cabinet on 8 July 2015 to be noted.**
- 2. That it be recommended future reports are brought to the Children's Service's Overview and Scrutiny Committee before being referred to Cabinet for decision, and where this is not possible to convene an extraordinary meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny meeting to enhance the scrutiny process.**

9. Shaping the Council Budget Update

The Director of Children's Services introduced the report which set out the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the need to meet an estimated

budget gap of over £26 million for the four years between 2016/17 and 2019/20. Committee were advised of three key points:

- The cumulative effect of £83.2m savings over 6 years now visibly impacts on communities.
- Around 18 million in savings has been made although 8 million was awarded to the service for demographic growth.
- The government announced a £200m in-year national reduction to the Public Health Grant. This means a reduction of £0.614m to Thurrock. Which would be difficult to achieve as the full award of £8m has been fully committed with at least 75% contracted out for the full year with any contract requiring 6 months' notice to terminate.

The Director of Children's Services outlined to the Committee the savings proposals for October November and December. A Co-opted Member asked how the quality of service was affected by savings. The Committee was assured that officers are optimistic to provide a better service. It was discussed that keeping children out of care would enable further savings.

RESOLVED:

1. **To note the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS);**
2. **To note the approach to Shaping the Council and budget planning for 2016/17 and beyond including the establishment of a cross-party Budget Review Panel.**

10. Work Programme

The Committee discussed that there were nine items for the 15 September 2015 meeting and it was agreed that the Democratic Services Officer would liaise with the Chair, Vice Chair and Director of Children's Services regarding this.

The meeting finished at 9.33 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

