

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 4th April, 2016 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor Rhoda Bailey (Chairman)

Councillors B Dooley, D Flude, L Jeuda, G Merry, A Moran and J Saunders

Apologies

Councillors L Wardlaw

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor L Durham – Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Councillor G Hayes – Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Councillor S Corcoran – visiting member

OFFICERS PRESENT

Kath O'Dwyer – Executive Director of Children Services

Nigel Moorhouse – Director of Children's Social Care

Jacky Forster – Director of Education and 14-19 Skills

Jonathon Potter – Head of Preventative Services

Andrew North – Corporate Manager for Audit, Risk and Business Improvement

James Morley – Scrutiny Officer

18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of party whip

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

21 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME

There were 12 members of the public who wished to speak, all of whom spoke in relation to a decision by Cabinet at its meeting on 23 February 2016 regarding Children's Centre. The Chairman allowed each speaker 90 seconds.

Sue Helliwell, a Town Councillor from Alsager, suggested that funding from Section 106 Agreements might be used to supplement the funding of children's centres to remove the need to save £0.5m from the Children's budget. She suggested that the Cabinet decision should be reconsidered by Full Council.

Amelia Helliwell, a member of the Youth Parliament, spoke to suggest that there was no evidence included in the consultation, which the Council undertook in relation to children's centre, regarding the quality of mobile services compared to services delivered from a physical building. She requested that the Scrutiny Committee review the Cabinet decision and refer the matter to Full Council for reconsideration.

Several representatives of a public interest group 'Friends of Cheshire East Children's Sure Start Centres' spoke on various issues in relations to children's centres and the decision by Cabinet.

Maeve Kelly referred to building costs in relation to children's centre and suggested that if some services are removed from centre this would increase costs to other services using those buildings, including partner organisations. She suggested that increased costs may lead to partners moving services out of buildings and suggested a recent decision by NHS bodies to move midwifery services from children's centres to GP practices was an example of this.

Paula Eaton suggested that the mental health of mothers in the postnatal phase of birth was a major issue that services delivered by children's centres helped to cope with. She suggested that mother with mental health issues were often reluctant to self refer through fear of having their child taken away and that the support provided by other mothers and children's centre staff in physical locations was important and would be less effective if delivered by a mobile service.

Ted Wall suggested that there was no time line or details available in relation to the implementation of the Cabinet decision and suggested that full consideration had not been given to the issue which would risk a budget overspend.

Debbie Jamison referred to a discussion regarding children's centre consultation which had recently taken place at Knutsford Town Council. She suggested that the Cabinet decision on children's centres was not in keeping with the Council's 'Residents First' philosophy and suggested that the consultation process had not been carried out appropriately.

Carol Bulman, a teacher at Sandbach Boys School, suggested that due to the number of new homes currently being built in the area there would be a large number of new residents who were unfamiliar with the town. She suggested that Sure Start Centres played a vital role in supporting new residents' integration into the community and that there would be an increase in demand for services in future.

Carol Jones suggested that the Council had not done enough to promote Sure Start Centres and a lack of information and a low profile had led to the low footfall which she suggested the Council used as justification for some of its decision

making. She also suggested that physical centres were much better than mobile centres.

Andrew Mawhood suggested that the consultation process which the Council had undertaken was not appropriate. He also suggested that Councillors could have been better informed during the decision making process.

Sally Handley spoke regarding breastfeeding support services (Cherubs) and the importance of them to mothers. She suggested that children's centres were an important place for breastfeeding groups where mothers could socialise and support each other.

Sue Munro suggested that to help people in rural areas access services the Council should try to access EU and Rural Funding to provide more effective transport to the current children's centre locations.

Ethel Ranson suggested that the Council's strategy of redirecting funding to increase support to people living in rural areas was having a detrimental impact on services to people in urban areas and that funding needed to be rebalanced to provide equity.

During their speaking time each representative of Friends of Cheshire East Children's Sure Start Centres concluded with a request that the Committee review the Cabinet decision and refer it to Full Council for reconsideration.

22 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee agreed to consider the Work Programme following Item 4 to discuss the statements made by the members of the public who had spoken during public speaking time. Members agreed that an item on Children's Centre should be added to the work programme as it was an important issue.

Members agreed to arrange an additional informal meeting of the Committee in May 2016 to request a briefing from the Executive Director of Children Services and Cabinet Member for Children and Families regarding the decision that was taken by Cabinet on 23 February 2016 in relation to Children's Centres.

It was anticipated that following the briefing, the Committee would add an item to the work programme to monitor the progress of the decision to de-designate four children's centres.

The Committee considered existing items in its work programme. The Chairman informed the Committee about a meeting she had attended with the Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider a possible joint review of Children's Mental Health. It had been agreed that a select committee style review similar to the Ambulance Services Review which the Health and Adults Committee recently undertook would take place in the near future.

The Committee agreed to hold a formal meeting on 27 June 2016 to consider an Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding, as well as consider an item on Corporate Parenting, and hold an informal meeting in July to meet with care leavers.

Members referred to the recent announcement from Government that all schools would become academies by 2020 and agreed to add an item to the work programme to discuss the potential implications of this policy to the Council.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Work Programme be updated as discussed.
- (b) That an informal meeting of the Committee be arranged in May 2016 and that the Executive Director of Children's Services be requested to provide a briefing on the Cabinet decision on 23 February in relation to Children's Centres.

23 EDUCATION PERFORMANCE 14/15

Jacky Forster, Director of Education and 14-19 Skills, provided an overview of the Annual Education Report 2014/15. During the presentation the following points arose:

- 92.7% of Cheshire East schools were judged as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and the Borough was third in the country for schools judged at least Good.
- At Primary School level Cheshire East was doing well across all outcome areas in relation to its statistical neighbours.
- At Secondary School level Cheshire East was at least as good as its statistical neighbours in all areas and better in some.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those receiving free school meals were slightly lower than the national average in most areas but higher in some.
- Special Education Needs (SEN) pupils outcomes were mostly better than national average but were lower at key stage 2.
- For pupils for whom English was not their first language (English Alternative Language [EAL]) Cheshire East was performing below the national average in all areas. It was suggested that part of the issue may be that the numbers of EAL pupils in Cheshire East were very small so statistics could vary with each individual pupil.
- Cared for Children were performing below the national average at key stage 1 and 2 but above the national average at key stage 4.

The presentation also outlined the Council's priorities and actions for 2015-2016 which included:

- Improvements in outcomes in Maths at secondary school
- Measures to further close the gaps in achievement for disadvantaged learners
- Establishment of a dedicated programme to directly support the learning outcomes for SEN pupils.

During members questions and discussion the following points arose:

- Schools should be aiming to achieve even higher than the National average and look to the higher standards set by some European countries.
- EAL was a particular issue in Crewe where there was large inward migration of families with low standards of English for whom local schools were working hard to offer support.

- As well as ensuring there was a school place for every child it was suggested that the Council should ensure that there was sufficient choice for parents. Large scale development in local towns had created some issues for parents trying to access their closest school.
- The Council had less influence over academies regarding their intake and who they accepted. However the Council could refer academies to the Secretary of State if they are not taking sufficient pupils. The Council was encouraging academies to develop Fair Access Protocols which had not been agreed yet.
- The Council needed to encourage the local academies to work together to improve services. Members suggested that groups of academies worked well when they operated in the same locality but some academies were part of fragmented groups of academies from a variety of boroughs. There were lots of different models of Multi Academy Trusts (MAT) and local academies would need to consider which model worked best for the area. Officers suggested that the Council needed to bring all schools together to develop a vision for a Cheshire East families of schools. Although the Council had no direct control over academies as it did with maintained schools, it could try to influence academies.

RESOLVED – That the Annual Education Report 2014-15 be noted.

24 CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE) TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Members of the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Task and Finish Group provided an oral update on the progress of the Group's Review. Councillor Dorothy Flude had visited the Social Workers Team in Crewe to discuss two CSE case studies and had had a briefing on how the team's systems operated. Councillor Flude stated that the team was doing some very good work with parents of children who were at risk and that the new computer systems they used were working well to help them tackle CSE. Councillor Gill Merry had had to re-schedule and a similar visit in Macclesfield. The Chairman requested that a further meeting of the Task and Finish Group be arranged in the near future.

RESOLVED – That the oral update be noted

25 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan and noted that there were three items going to Cabinet on 12 April related to the Committee's remit. The Committee agreed to monitor these for potential inclusion in the Committee's work programme in future.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 2.02 pm and concluded at 4.15 pm

Councillor Rhoda Bailey (Chairman)