

**Minutes** of the meeting of the **Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee** held on 11 September 2014 at 10.00 am in the Elisabeth, Endeavour House, Ipswich.

Present: Councillors Stephen Burroughes (Chairman), Helen Armitage, Nick Barber, Sonia Barker, Peter Beer, John Field, James Finch, Michael Gower, Patricia O'Brien and Bryony Rudkin

Statutory Co-opted Members present: Rachel Gooch, Chris Pamplin and Jane Sheat

Also present: Councillors Lisa Chambers and Gordon Jones

Supporting officers present: Paul Banjo, Scrutiny Officer and Susan Cassedy, Democratic Services Officer

1. **Public Participation Session**

There were no applications to speak in the Public Participation Session.

2. **Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mary Evans (substituted by Councillor Peter Beer), Paul McIntee, Councillor Penny Otton (substituted by Councillor John Field), Councillor Stephen Searle, Councillor Sarah Stamp (substituted by Councillor James Finch) and Councillor Andrew Stringer.

3. **Declarations of Interests and Dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations received.

4. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. **New Operating Model for Children's Services: 'Making Every Intervention Count'**

At Agenda Item 5, the committee considered the operating model for children's services, including the 'Making Every Intervention Count' transformation programme and how well the new arrangements were operating in practice.

Written input provided by Elizabeth Young, Director Research, Evaluation and Policy, Home-Start UK was circulated at the meeting.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services;  
Allan Cadzow, Assistant Director, Early Help and Specialist Service,  
Children and Young People's Services;  
Graham Beamish, Project Manager, Children and Young People's  
Services;  
Chris Lee, Programme Manager, Ormiston;  
Chris Abraham, Deputy Chief executive, Community Action Suffolk;  
Nicola Grayson, Liaison Officer, Suffolk Primary Heads Association;

The Chairman invited the officers to introduce the report after which the other witnesses were invited to add comment. Questions were then received from the Committee.

**Recommendations:** The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and to the Director, Children and Young People's Services, that:

1. With regard to building highly resilient communities, and multi-agency partnership support for achieving this, it would be helpful to:
  - (i) Promote and Highlight good practice within Suffolk and the successes where this has been applied.
  - (ii) Work with Community Action Suffolk and other partners to encourage 'Community Ambassadors' to step forward from the voluntary and community sector.
  - (iii) Engage with local Councillors in their communities as a local 'knowledge bank'.
2. Further examination and clarity be provided on potential innovative efficiency savings and how this will be achieved, in particular regarding where the report had indicated that, *'We want ... to enable families to create sustainable change for themselves. We will work more effectively and efficiently together to reduce duplication and ensure purposeful, focused work. .... We will have to give up some things we are used to doing'*.
3. A review be undertaken to simplify the Children and Young People's Services (CYP) organisation, to reduce complexity and simplify procedures and communication with stakeholders. Provide a business process statement explaining the relationships between the education & schools service, senior structures and staffing, and connectivity with the rest of the department.
4. Progress be accelerated on achieving tangible increases in staff contact time with families (*currently approximately 25%*).

5. Noting the feedback from the Suffolk Primary Heads Association, to review and sharpen the communication processes by which schools,
  - (i) are informed of the CYP strategic transformation programmes and their likely impact such as 'Making Every Intervention Count' (MEIC);
  - (ii) are fully engaged with the CYP strategic transformation programmes; and
  - (iii) at an operational level, receive accurate feedback regarding the progress of any pupil referrals.
6. Initiatives be progressed, possibly using mechanisms such as Suffolk InfoLink, to ensure that better use is made of existing multi-agency data, and that better data is obtained about the very many small voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.
7. Urgency and focus be given to the implementation of an effective IT transformation programme and provide staff with specific tools, eg. for input to the 'Central Performance & Intelligence Hub', and to achieve effective outcomes within the new ways envisaged by the MEIC programme.

**Reason for Recommendations:**

1. (i) The Committee heard that the effectiveness of community action groups varied across the county with some towns having good Community resilience teams set up already and others where such services were not available. The Committee was advised that it was Community Action Suffolk's role to support 'Community Ambassadors' and Chris Abraham, the Deputy Chief Executive from Community Action Suffolk, urged councillors to let her know of areas of good practice.
- (ii) After hearing that those areas which did not have good 'Community Ambassadors' were generally those areas with the highest demand on services, the Committee considered it necessary that CYP work closely with Community Action Suffolk and other partners to encourage people to step forward who wished to act as an Ambassador.
- (iii) The Committee recognised that local councillors knew which community action groups were already set up and working successfully in their Divisions. Therefore, the Committee stressed the importance of officers engaging with local councillors and using them as the 'local knowledge bank' in

order to identify these groups. This would allow the groups to come together to help build a local infrastructure of resilience.

2. Several of the Committee Members asked about the statement from the report and requested further clarification on what it meant and any implications on services. The Assistant Director, Early Help and Specialist Services advised the Committee that the department would not be able to save £12million without doing less and it would have to make efficiency savings in areas which would not impact on families. The Committee understood the role community action groups could play in making efficiency savings. Chris Abraham, the Deputy Chief Executive from Community Action Suffolk advised the Committee that Community action Suffolk was currently consulting on how to engage partners through voluntary sector networks in order for them to become part of the solution.

The Assistant Director, Early Help and Specialist Services stressed the importance of understanding the needs of families and listening to them better. He explained that the department needed to make sure when a referral was received that the right services were provided at the right time. Currently the department was spending money on sending social workers to assess families which did not require help. This was also unnecessarily painful for the families involved.

3. Officers described the CYP Directorate as immensely complex. The Committee was of the opinion that the service needed to look at how it could simplify its set up as it had concerns that complexity may lead to duplication and reduced efficiency. The Committee recommended to officers that they should undertake a review of the CYP organisation in order to simplify its procedures and its communication with its stakeholders. The Committee also requested a business process statement explaining the relationships between the education & schools service, senior structures and staffing, and connectivity with the rest of the department in order for people to understand the current arrangements better.
4. The Committee noted that staff were currently able to spend 25% of their working day with the families. The Committee wanted to know the impact, if any, that the MEIC programme would have on this figure. The Assistant Director, Early Help and Specialist Service, advised that the target was at least a 10% increase.
5. The Suffolk Primary Heads Association's Liaison Officer advised the Committee that on receiving the Committee Papers was the first time she had become aware of the transformation programme. She therefore had not had the opportunity to review the papers and was unable to provide a robust response. She did however ask the

of the CYP officers how the strategy would impact at school level and whether the schools would be informed of other key programmes in order to have a voice in the decision making. She stated that the strategy would be flagged up to other heads as she was sure they would want to engage in the process however, she questioned the influence they would be able to have at this stage.

The Assistant Director, Early Help and Specialist Service, stressed he was keen to involve schools and that messages had gone out to them with regard to the transformation programmes. In response the Suffolk Primary Heads Association's Liaison Officer pointed out the extremely high volume of 'communication' which was received from CYP and the need to identify a process where more critical information was highlighted to them.

The Suffolk Primary Heads Association's Liaison Officer also pointed out the lack of feedback the schools received after having made referrals. She asked officers if CYP could ensure schools received timely feedback in order that they could be advised of any concerns.

6. The Assistant Director, Early Help and Specialist Service, made reference to the 'Performance and Intelligence Hub' and that at recent Health and wellbeing Board meeting had also reiterated the need for better multi-agency use of the data already available.

The Programme Manager, Ormiston, welcomed the fact that VCS organisations had been mentioned in the report. He pointed out the large amount of VCS organisations in Suffolk and the really important role they had to play by using a bottom up approach and talking to both people who had influence in the community and also talking to the families.

7. The Committee noted that the subject of adequate IT equipment for staff had been an issue for some time which never seemed to be resolved. Officers advised that there had been significant roll out of the hardware allowing some members of staff to work effectively from home however mobile working was also dependent upon the development of suitable software to enable input to central systems. The roll out was also being hampered by patchy internet and mobile phone coverage.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

## 6. **The business case for the Suffolk Learning Partnership**

At Agenda Item 6, the Committee was provided with the opportunity to understand and comment on the business case for the Suffolk Learning Partnership (SLP) before it was given final approval.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services;  
Sue Cook, Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services;  
Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director, Resources and Support;  
Nikki Edwards, Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Services;  
Sean Connolly, Project Manager, Children and Young People's Services;  
Madeleine Vigar, Learning Partnership  
Chris Lee, Programme Manager, Ormiston;  
Nicola Grayson, Liaison Officer, Suffolk Primary Heads Association

The Chairman invited the officers to introduce the report after which the other witnesses were invited to add comment. Questions were then received from the Committee.

**Recommendations:** The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and to the Director, Children and Young People's Services, that:

1. Further clarity be provided around:
  - i) How the Governance framework will be put in place for the SLP, including financial oversight, upon the new Chief Executive taking up their post.
  - ii) The measures of success and added value that are attributable to the SLP itself (*eg. increase in number of 'system leaders' working in own, and across, schools*)
  - iii) What operational overlaps exist between the functions of the SLP and the previous/ongoing functions of the Learning & Improvement Service (LIS).
2. Consideration be given as to how to ensure that 'The Bridge' has comprehensive, accurate and objective data about the performance of the schools.
3. The Committee receives a progress report in 6-9 months and early data from the implementation of the SLP.

### **Reason for Recommendations:**

1. (i) The Committee questioned whether governance arrangements would be in place by January 2015. Officers advised that the SLP was part of Suffolk County Council and not a divested company. As such the governance arrangements would be primarily via the Schools Accountability Board which would include representation from schools. The Committee raised concern that the Board may be too self-regulating and more external input would be required. The Committee requested to receive further information on the governance arrangements once the Chief Executive was in post in order for it to have a better understanding of how the arrangements would work to ensure the necessary financial oversight.
  - (ii) The Committee was advised by officers that the success of the SLP would be measured by attainment targets and participation rates. The Committee wanted to understand how an increase in attainment targets could be clearly attributed to the SLP as opposed to the other areas of the School Improvement Strategy. This would enable schools to measure the value added and possibly encourage further schools to participate.
  - (iii) The Committee expressed concern about possible duplication in responsibilities of the SLP and the LIS and requested further clarity on the separation of their operational functions.
2. The Committee expressed concern regarding the current data held by “The Bridge” on the performance status of all schools in Suffolk and about the information which was currently provided by the schools. The Committee noted that this information was based on a school’s key performance data including self-evaluation data. The Committee recognised the need to up-skill school leaders in order for them to be able provide the transparent accurate data necessary in order to give an accurate performance status of their school.
  3. The Committee, in considering the information and highlighting areas of concern particularly around finance, governance and outcomes, agreed to receive an update on the implementation of the SLP in 6 – 9 months’ time.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

## 7. **Children's Centres – Consultation and Decision Process**

At Agenda Item 7, the Committee considered the Council's intended approach to consulting and arriving at a decision in relation to the Children's Centres.

Written input received from Adam Wilson, Barnardo's Assistant Director, Children's Services was circulated at the meeting.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services;  
Allan Cadzow, Assistant Director, Early Help and Specialist Service, Children and Young People's Services;  
Brenda McInerney, Integrated Services Manager, Ipswich North & East, Children and Young People's Services;  
Chris Lee, Programme Manager, Ormiston;  
Chris Abraham, Deputy Chief executive, Community Action Suffolk;

**Recommendations:** The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and to the Director, Children and Young People's Services, that:

1. The decision should not be based solely on the feedback from the current consultation survey, but to use additional sources of evidence/rationale including, evidence of apparent 'hidden' pockets of local need, other organisations (eg. VCS) that may be impacted by the building rationalisation and effective and targeted staff skill sets especially relating to mental health;
2. Milestones be provided of the timelines following the consultation, including any formal staff consultation requirements; and
3. In support of the 'push' to increase the response rate to the survey:
  - i) Checks and improvements be made to the survey accessibility, including ease of access to the paper survey form, and phone line response performance.
  - ii) Councillors be informed of where the response rate was low in order to encourage more responses within their Divisions.

### **Reason for Recommendations:**

1. A member of the Committee had asked officers if the Early Years Learning Alliance and other such voluntary bodies with skills in this area were involved with the consultation process. The Committee was advised that the council was working closely with the Play

Group Alliance, parish councils and the voluntary organisations in each town and village impacted by the building rationalisation. The Committee, in recognising the importance of consulting with those families and staff affected, considered it very important that the decision should be based on information collated from all sources and not just the responses from the consultation survey.

2. In noting the information set out in the report regarding the timelines prior to any decision being taken, the Committee expressed concern regarding the lack of information provided on timelines for implementation of any changes if agreed, including the arrangements for a formal staff consultation.
3. (i) Concerns were raised regarding the accessibility of the consultation survey to those without the use of the internet. The Committee was advised that every children's centre had printed copies of the consultation survey which also included copies in easy read format and multiple languages if required.

The Committee also raised concern regarding the performance of the phone line response team. Officers, on hearing that members of the public had experienced difficulties when phoning the Council in order to receive a hard copy of the consultation, agreed to look into this issue to improve the service provided.

- (ii) Officers agreed to send those councillors whose division would be affected by the building rationalisation, information on the response rates to the consultation in their areas to date. This would provide councillors with the opportunity to encourage their local community in those areas with a low response rate to get involved with the consultation process.

The Assistant Director, Early Help and Specialist Service, extended an open offer for councillors to visit any of their local children's centres.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

## 8. **Information Bulletin**

The Committee considered the Information Bulletin, which was for information only.

**Decision:** The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee resolved to enquire of Children and Young People's Service officers as to why:

- (i) The Ofsted Inspection data provided to the committee in the Information Bulletin was apparently not the most recent Ofsted Inspection data that had been referred to by a CYP officer in a recent radio interview.
- (ii) The summary narrative about recent GCSE results, provided to the Committee (and also to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet), was incomplete (based on an 85% return from schools at the time of writing) and hence unreliable and could be potentially misleading in asserting a 1% improvement in performance.

**Reason for Decision:** In order for the Committee to effectively carry out its scrutiny function the Committee wanted to ensure that in future it only received the most up to date and complete information from CYP officers.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

9. **Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Key Decision Forward Plan**

The Committee considered the items appearing on the Key Decision Forward Plan which related to Education and Children's Services and its own Forward Work Plan.

**Decision:** The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee resolved to approve its Forward Work Plan, as drafted by an informal workshop on 24 July 2014.

**Reason for Decision:** The Committee noted the feedback from the informal forward planning workshop.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

10. **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 1.00 pm.