

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

11 JANUARY 2011

- Present :-* Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman, Mark Cory, Bill Frame,
Theresa Higgins, Nigel Offen, Gerard Oxford and
Dennis Willetts
- Substitute Members :-* Councillor Pauline Hazell for Councillor Andrew Ellis
Councillor Dave Harris for Councillor Julie Young
- Also in Attendance :-* Councillor Tina Dopson
Councillor Beverley Oxford

30. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2010 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment. Under minute 28, The Review of the work off the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Diversity, the third sentence of the final paragraph to read "By way of information, Councillor T. Higgins said at Kent County Council, all Councillors submit annual reports outlining the work and achievements within their respective wards".

31. Decisions taken under special urgency provisions

The Chairman confirmed to the Panel that he had agreed to approve the following decision taken under special urgency provisions, "Purchase of the Old Police Station, Queen Street, Colchester", reference PLA-005-10.

Councillor Arnold explained that any delay due to call-in could prejudice the legal and/or financial position of the Council, in this case, the need for the external funding by the East of England Development Agency and Haven Gateway Partnership to be spent by 31 December 2010.

Councillor Bill Frame (in respect of being an Associate Hospital Manager at the North East Essex Mental Health Care Trust) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Theresa Higgins (in respect of her membership of Essex County Council, and Liberal Democratic Spokesperson on the Children's Panel) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

32. North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board

North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board

Ms. Donna Telfer. Chair of the North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board and Assistant Director, Public Health at NHS North East Essex, Councillor Tina Dopson, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Vice Chair of the North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board and Mr. Gareth Mitchell, Head of Life Opportunities and the Council's officer representative on the North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board attended the meeting for this item.

Introductions from the Head of Life Opportunities and the Portfolio Holder for Communities

Mr. Mitchell introduced the item and gave some context for the discussion. In 2009 the Essex Children's Trust arrangements were reviewed and revised on both a county-wide and district basis, resulting in the replacement of the Colchester Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) with a North East Essex Children's Trust Board, covering both Colchester and Tendring districts. In 2010 the Coalition government set out its intention to remove the statutory framework around Children's Trusts, and as a result the children's partnership arrangements in Essex were revised again, resulting in the local partnership body being renamed the North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board (NEE CCDB).

Mr. Mitchell explained that there was a variety of different services provided to children and young people in the Borough by the partners within NEE CCDB including social care, probation, sport, recreation and health care. Whilst the partners delivered on a set of key services to children and their families, the Council's role was one of a combination of community leadership and a provider of services. Whilst the Council's service provider role was smaller than that of many of the partner organisations, it still had a statutory role to co-operate and an important role to play in the safeguarding agenda.

Councillor Tina Dopson said this review had come as a result of her request to the Panel in 2009 to review the local Young People's Strategic Partnership, though the dynamics were now very different, with a board with responsibility across the whole of North East Essex. The new partnership had a strategic objective of trying to find a way of providing added value to the work of those partners and agencies already in existence.

Presentation from Chair of the North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board

Ms. Telfer thanked the Panel for inviting her to attend the meeting, to discuss and share young people and children's needs, and hopefully through this review, get a sense of 'shared passion'.

Ms. Telfer took on the role of Chair of the Local Children's Trust Board one year ago, having been active in this field of work locally for over thirty years, and this review would consider the achievements of the Trust Board in the last year. Ms. Telfer said the

CCDB had a strategic vision and an aim to ‘make a difference to local children, young people, their families and carers’, a mission statement that Councillor Frame, later in the debate, suggested should somewhere also include the aim to improve. Ms. Telfer explained in a little more detail the targets, actions and progress of the five main priorities within the CCDB Action Plan, those of Child Protection – Safeguarding, Emotional Health and Wellbeing, Parenting Support, Children in Poverty- vulnerable groups and NEET (Not in Education Employment Training). The number of priorities had purposely been kept to a minimum, a realistic and pragmatic approach.

The main challenging task from the outset was to determine the cumulative resource available from within all the partner organisations. A ‘resource envelope’ had now been completed across all organisations, and this has enabled a better understanding of the overall picture, and how the work of the CCDB will be supported, through a more efficient, coordinated approach.

A ‘safeguarding’ group has now been formed, providing day to day support, with a primary objective of ‘working to keep children safe’.

Ms. Telfer spoke about the complexity of needs for individuals, and that in terms of interventions and preventions, a Business Case is currently being developed for the whole of North Essex. Early interventions and preventions is critical for achieving individual success and keeping the cost of supporting complex cases to a minimum. The Family Intervention Programme (FIP) focused on specifically identified families who need support from a variety of local agencies. Early interventions have been shown nationally to reduce the cost of support to these families. Ms. Telfer said “Families with Complex Needs” was a new national project, in which North East Essex was one of sixteen areas nationally, to be invited to participate. Ms. Telfer would lead locally, on this project.

General discussions

Ms. Telfer responded to Councillor Arnold concerning “what has been the added value” as a result of the CCDB, saying that without the CCDB the work of the individual partner organisation would still go on, but the CCDB provided a coordinated approach with shared skills, knowledge and best practice, enabling an enhanced, more efficient service that brings added value. The Local Priority Fund (LPF), managed by Essex County Council was in place, and all projects operating from within this fund are monitored and are all achieving their intended targets. Where the funds provide Commissioned Contracts, the Governance arrangements for individual contracts will be specified within the contract(s). The LPF is managed by a group of officers at County Hall, who are responsible for monitoring the progress and spend of each individual project, over and above any work undertaken by the individual partner or agency.

In response to Councillor Willetts, who asked whether one sole organisation responsible for all services provided to children would be more cohesive and advantageous in all aspects of work, to the current complexity of so many partner organisations and agencies working together, Mr. Mitchell said all the CCDB partners are signed up to a collective Memorandum of Agreement, though each partner retains their own sovereignty and governance arrangements, and as later explained to

Councillor Frame, many of the partners also have their own scrutiny arrangements in place. Mr. Mitchell also confirmed to Councillor T. Higgins each statutory organisation is independently responsible for its role in safeguarding children, and in this respect Colchester Borough Council has been judged as being 'effective'. Ms. Telfer said the ambition of the CCDB is to reduce bureaucracy, keeping the work simple, but ensuring the needs and outcomes for children and young people are best met. The Partnership does not have a dedicated budget, with the resources that are available brought to the table by the Members of the CCDB. Ms. Telfer said it would be easier if all the work within the CCDB was undertaken by one organisation, but we are not, therefore we need to work to improve what we have. The Strategic Joint Commissioning Group was now meeting, providing an opportunity to focus on how we bring all the resources together.

Ms. Telfer agreed with members that the Action Plan and Achievements report was over reliant on acronyms, the phraseology was difficult to understand in places and the progress against the actions in some cases not very clear, a need for Plain English e.g. 'Parenting Platforms' (later explained as a forum for parents to engage with local partners). This was a learning process, and the documents are work in progress, and will be changed following these comments. Ms. Telfer said she was confident these comments would be addressed within any documents presented at a future review. In response to Councillor Offen, Ms. Telfer said whilst the documentation appeared to provide little reference to education and schools, schools are very much involved within the CCDB partnership, with formal representation on the Board from secondary and primary school head teachers. Ms. Telfer clarified that whilst the achievements noted within the Action Plan are not all clear, behind the Action Plan there are many separate targets and indicators, of which more detail is available on request.

Councillor Hazell said she believed there remained a concern in regards to the inappropriate qualifications and/or skills of individuals who through their work are in direct contact with children and young people, especially in the field of 'emotional needs', and asked for clarification on how the appropriateness of the training and proper scrutiny of those individuals is monitored. Councillor Offen said he understood that all public sector counsellors have to be qualified and should be actively supervised. Ms. Telfer said all the projects delivered by organisations and agencies through the CCDB are done so, with trained consultants and qualified practitioners e.g. all the services provided by Mind and Barnardos are by trained consultants. Ms. Telfer said any concerns someone may have within a school should be taken up with the local education authority, that whilst the local education authority is represented on the CCDB, the CCDB are not privy to details on individual cases, though they do have access to anonymised data gathered on strategic countywide work.

In response to Councillor Harris, Mr. Mitchell said that the previous government established four specific measures for determining whether a child is living in poverty and the current Government are currently reviewing the definition of Child Poverty.

Ms. Telfer understood Councillor G. Oxford's dismay that political interference is often seen as hindering progress for these type of national issues, but believed that despite constant change, there is still a need to deliver on the local agenda, and the relationships between all the partners and the way in which they work is not effected,

and the overall position is one of moving forward.

Ms. Telfer, in response to Councillor Chapman asking what would she like to see as the biggest achievement when looking back in one year's time said most importantly, that children can say that through our direct involvement a difference has been made in their lives and that the local CCDB can get national recognition for these achievements. Ms. Telfer agreed that arranging to meet some of these children at the next review would be an opportunity not to be missed.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Telfer, Mr. Mitchell and Councillor Dopson for attending the meeting and responding to questions from Members of the Panel.

RESOLVED that the Panel;

- i) Noted the effectiveness of the work of the North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board.
- ii) Requested a further review of the North East Essex Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board in twelve months time.
- iii) Agreed for the future review to provide more detail on outcomes on 'Child Protection - Safeguarding'

Councillor Christopher Arnold (in respect of his membership of Great Horkesley Parish Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

33. Review of the work of the Portfolio Holder for Communities.

Councillor Tina Dopson, Portfolio Holder for Communities, gave an overview of her work over the last twelve months. Councillor Dopson said that regrettably, a number of budget related decisions had been made that had upset a number of local groups e.g. Early Riser Swimmers, Beach Hut owners and changes to the Highway Verge Maintenance Policy. These service changes had to be made and will impact on the groups.

Councillor Dopson said she hoped that she provided strong strategic leadership to the Heads of Service who had responsibilities for services within her portfolio and said she and officers work very hard within voluntary sector partnerships in an ever changing environment due to funding arrangements. The Council still jointly funds the Joint Community Health Post and still retains a dedicated Welfare Rights Team, both providing valuable support to the voluntary sector. Later in the discussions, Councillor G. Oxford thanked the Welfare Rights team for their excellent work, believing them to be more helpful than the other agencies dealing with this work.

Councillor Dopson said she had lobbied Essex County Council hard to minimise the reduction in funding to the Children's partnerships and felt her efforts had reduced the

impact of change. Councillor Dopson said she had reviewed the way in which the service areas for which she was responsible, responded to requests from Councillors in an effort to find a more coherent and efficient way forward.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Councillor Dopson explained her actions leading to the decision taken to reduce the Revenue Grants to Town and Parish Councils (TPC) for 2011-12, saying Colchester had consulted with the TPC as early as June 2010, forewarning them of the level of grants they would expect to receive, allowing time for them to consider mitigation against the level of grant reduction, and allowing them the opportunity to change the manner in which the grant was distributed to each Council. Councillor Dopson accepted there would be an impact on the services provided by the TPC as there would be for Colchester Borough Council. It was widely accepted that the biggest impact on the TPC would be in retaining services such as play equipment, and the maintenance of playing fields and village halls, and the Portfolio Holder said the Council would wherever possible, help through capacity, but not financial resources.

Councillor Dopson responded to Councillor Frame by saying the one area that she felt that for all the work done, more could have been done and achieved was the overall performance around 'safeguarding children', an issue she feels very strongly about. Also, the ongoing concerns around increasing numbers of fund holders for health and social care providers and the challenge to keep a hold on such matters affecting children's services, agree strategic decisions and monitor the impact on the work undertaken.

In view of the disappearance of the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the likelihood of public health matters residing with the County's Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB), Councillor Dopson, in response to Councillor Offen, who asked how this would effect Colchester, said Colchester had for many years had a very good relationship with the PCT, which was fortunate, given these relationships are often down to personalities. Colchester has jointly invested with the PCT on a Community Health Officer (an employee of the NHS) and both organisations value the service links between one another. Councillor Dopson was hopeful the same relationship will be formed with the HWB. Councillor Offen explained that public health was primarily about the prevention and control of communicable disease(s) and the promotion of good health.

In response to Councillor Chapman, enquiring about what was been done to address significant rural issues, Councillor Dopson said the Council has formed the 'Older People's Forum', formed of all the relevant local agencies, with the remit to find ways of tackling rural isolation for older people. Councillor Dopson said the forum was open to suggestions.

Councillor T. Higgins voiced concern over the removal of damaged fences forming the perimeter fence of children's play areas, saying these areas then became accessible to dogs and subsequently, the risks to public health from dog-fouling. Councillor Dopson said the replacement of fences was very costly, so the policy was now for damaged fences to be removed at larger playing areas, and for fences to be repaired or replaced at small play areas. Play areas are covered by the dog-fouling act, and enforcement by Dog Wardens is ongoing. Councillor Dopson confirmed that the children's play area at Colchester Park now provided play facilities for children with

disabilities.

Councillor Dopson concurred with Councillor Harris in respect of the significant problems with funding the landscaping of public open spaces especially when the funding is not forthcoming e.g. when a developer goes into receivership. Areas of land earmarked for 'open space' go untended as a result of this. Councillor Dopson said Officers are looking to develop a three year forward plan on 'open spaces', which will hopefully go some way to addressing this issue. Councillor Dopson concurred with Councillor G. Oxford in regards to the excellent work undertaken by the voluntary workers at High Woods Country Park. Councillor Dopson said work undertaken by the voluntary sector should be admired, and the new Localism Bill will encourage agencies and organisations to work more closely with the voluntary sector. But this work will still need coordinating, the more volunteers the greater facilitation needed, and this should be encouraged where possible, but without jeopardising jobs.

Councillor Arnold thanked Councillor Dopson for attending the meeting and responding to questions from the Panel.

34. Work Programme

The Panel noted an unchanged Work Programme.