

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 16 February 2011 (7.30pm – 9.30pm)
Havering Town Hall, Romford**

Present: Councillors Sandra Binion (Chairman), Dennis Bull, Wendy Brice Thompson (substitute for Billy Taylor) Gillian Ford (Vice-Chairman), Robby Misir, Pat Murray, Garry Pain, Frederick Thompson and John Wood.

Co-opted Members: Phillip Grundy, Jack How and Anne Ling.

Non-voting Member: Margaret Cameron and Sue Kortlandt.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Billy Taylor, co-opted member Julie Lamb and non-voting member Keith Passingham.

The Chairman advised those present of action to be taken in the event of an emergency evacuation of the building becoming necessary.

20. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. The Minutes of the special joint OSC held on 20 January 2011 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- That co-opted member Anne Ling be included in the list of those present.
- That on the second line of the second paragraph on page 3M, under Section 6 "Other key matters", the words "Adult Social Care" be altered to "Children's Social Care".

21. EDUCATION COMPLAINTS

The Committee considered a report providing information regarding the numbers and types of complaints handled by the Learning and Achievement Department and Schools for the Future during 2010 and how they were dealt with to minimise the impact of justifiable concerns and to reduce the likelihood of future complaints.

Members noted that the information gathered was a non-statutory requirement and that the complaints listed were pre-stage 1 complaints.

The report excluded data on school admission and exclusion appeals as well as maintained schools. Maintained schools sat outside of the Corporate Complaints mechanism, owing to the status of governing bodies, however the LA did have a role in influencing and persuading schools as well as having a conciliatory function where necessary. Governing bodies had their own complaints mechanism and where these escalated then resolution came from the Secretary of State.

The key issues arising from 2010 were as follows:

- All corporate complaints are captured on the Customer Relations Management System (CRM)
- Matters raised through councillor or MP routes were now being monitored through new processes
- The Pre-Stage 1 was a process used within Children & Young People's Services and Adults Social Care who have been using a Pre Stage 1 enquiries system since 2005 and continues to be very successful. The process was being used to capture education enquiries.
- 1 complaint had been submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and this was an on-going investigation.
- The majority of complaints related to the quality of service.
- A number of future actions had been identified as a result of producing the report.

The Committee noted that the Council currently had a corporate complaints model that captured non-social care complaints, principally education, Children's services activity. Attached to that are separate regulated processes, for the Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care (including health aspects) Service. These complaints systems are statutory and have separate defined and differing regulated processes. A review was currently assessing how the current arrangements could be more effectively structured and managed for the future within the Social Care and Learning Directorate. There was an intention to explore the possibility of a more comprehensive single reporting process for the directorate.

The Committee noted and welcomed the intention to in future receive a joint-complaint report from both education and social care.

Members noted the number of enquiries received from MPs and councillors and officers explained that a large proportion of these related to letters responding to refused school places. Often parents would go to elected members seeking support for their application/appeal for a school place. Members wished to see a briefing take place for all members on the school admissions process to assist them in supporting constituents.

In response to questions officers explained that vexatious or repeated complaints were dealt with through Legal Services, whereby the complainant in question would be written to and the issue would be dealt with centrally.

The Committee congratulated the service on the relatively low number of complaints, but sought to see the figures broken down by locality.

The Committee **noted** the report.

22. CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

The Committee received a report, presented by the Service Manager of the Foundation Years & Independent Advice Service, regarding the borough's second Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, which is required to be completed and published by April 2011.

The Committee noted that under Section 6 (1) of the Childcare Act 2006, local authorities have a duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare in their areas. The findings from the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) will enable the Local Authority to draw up an Action Plan aiming to narrow the gaps in childcare provision as highlighted. The LA, in line with good practice has produced annual reviews of its first CSA and made these available to the public to clearly show that priorities are being met. Havering's reviews were published in April 2009 and in April 2010.

The Committee was informed that the CSA was a statutory duty which analyses childcare needs for children and young people aged up to 14 years old or 18 years old if the child is disabled. The report sought to clarify:

- how many childcare places are available;
- how many childcare places are needed for the future;
- where in the borough childcare places are needed, and;
- the potential backgrounds of children in the borough and their specific needs.

The key findings from the report were summarised as follows:

- Havering's Childcare Sufficiency Review 2011 reports that on the whole the LA is maintaining its commitment to high quality services and its local vision of "Havering: a place where every child and young person matters".
- The quality of childcare provision available in the Borough continues to be higher than the national average in relation to Ofsted inspection outcomes. An increasing number, of

providers have successfully achieved Basic Skills Quality Assurance status. This allowed for childminders to offer Early Education Entitlement (EEE) creating additional flexibility for families accessing childcare.

- The LA is meeting its sufficiency duty as; the availability of childcare on a Borough wide basis continues to outstrip the number of 3 and 4 year olds in Havering.
- In terms of inclusive access to childcare, the LA has made available a variety of funding opportunities to provisions to ensure that children can access suitable childcare. By April 2011 the LA will have supported a number of settings to become Disability Access Champions and will have completed works to ensure these settings are able to be accessed by disabled children and their parents/carers.
- The re-accredited Family Information Service provides an impartial and consistent quality service to local families and childcare providers and promotes and reports an increase in the take-up local families accessing Working Tax Credit to help with their childcare needs.

The Committee discussed some of the issues arising from the CSA, noting that there was an identified 8% gap in the provision, with gaps in specific localities such as Cranham, Hylands and Mawney. Members noted that the biggest issue for provision was the rise in birth-rates, there had been a 6.8% increase in 0-5 cohort since 2006.

Members discussed the importance of reaching hard to reach groups; Members felt that Children's Centres offered the ideal solution to fill the gap in provision, especially in key areas such as Upminster and Cranham, where the service operation had been reduced to just 1 day per week.

The Committee requested a report on Children's Centres and their future in the borough.

The Committee **noted** the CSA.

23. LEARNING VILLAGE TOPIC GROUP FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the final report of the Learning Village Topic Group, which had been formed by the Committee's predecessor, the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in 2008.

The Topic Group had been formed to examine the process by which the then Kingswood School in Harold Hill was to become an Academy, sponsored by the Drapers Company and Queen Mary's University.

The Group sought to undertake the following:

- To review and monitor the progress of the Drapers Academy building project;
- To scrutinise and analyse the educational vision of the Academy, and;
- To scrutinise the process of securing future prospects for Kingswood staff.

The group's report summarised its work and site visits and listed the recommendations, for the consideration of the Drapers Academy Governing Body.

Members thanked officers involved for their work and members asked what prospect there was for the learning village concept. Officers explained that no funding for the other projects was to commence.

Members noted that a visit was to be arranged for the entire Committee to visit the Academy both before and after the building work had taken place.

The Committee **agreed** the recommendations in the report.

24. FUTURE AGENDAS

The Committee **agreed** to move its next meeting from 5 April 2011 to 10 May 2011.

The Committee requested the following for its future agendas:

- Special Educational Needs Review
- Corporate Parenting Panel update
- Surestart Children's Centres Across the Borough