

**MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Monday 14 March 2011 (7.30pm – 9.20pm)
Havering Town Hall, Romford**

Present:

Councillors Sandra Binion (Chairman), Dennis Bull, Jeff Brace (substitute for Garry Pain), Gillian Ford (Vice-Chairman), Keith Darvill (substitute for Pat Murray), Robby Misir, Frederick Thompson, Lynden Thorpe (substitute for Billy Taylor) and John Wood.

Co-opted Members: Garry Dennis, Jack How and Anne Ling.

Also present were Councillors Paul McGeary and Paul Rochford.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Pat Murray, Garry Pain and Billy Taylor, co-opted members Phillip Grundy and Julie Lamb and non-voting members Margaret Cameron, Sue Kortlandt and Keith Passingham.

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

**25. INTEGRATED YOUTH SERVICES – CLOSURE OF SCHOOL BASED
YOUTH FACILITIES**

The Committee considered a requisition of Executive Decision 11/28, which had been made by the Cabinet Member for Children & Learning regarding the closure of Integrated Youth Services' school based youth facilities.

The decision had been called-in in accordance with paragraph 17 of the Overview and Scrutiny rules by Councillors Keith Darvill and Gillian Ford.

The decision was part of the Council's overall response to budgetary reductions as a consequence of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which had seen reductions of 7.1% in all council budgets. The Integrated Youth Service's commitment to Havering's reduction was £500,000 over the next four years.

As a result, the Cabinet Member had made the decision to make savings by discontinuing the following services:

- Petitts Youth Facility – £4880 of savings
- Weald Youth Facility - £9,039 (staff) and £554 (other)

- Jean Reed Youth Centre - £4,206 (staff) and £250 (other)

The reasons for the requisition were outlined in the report submitted to the Committee, but in general terms the reasons focused on concerns that the closure of the facilities would see a rise in youth crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as the negative impact upon young people and voluntary services.

Councillors were asked to consider whether the decision had carefully considered, and garnered the opinion of schools and voluntary services regarding the pros and cons of moving away from school based provision as well as carefully considering locality based provision. Members were asked to consider whether the decision had been taken with the appropriate level of consultation and debate.

The Committee began by clarifying the situation with regards the three facilities affected. Officers confirmed that Petitts Youth Centre was attached to Marshalls Park School and the facility would possibly continue running a service from the site. The centre was currently a part-time centre that the school used during the day.

It was confirmed that the Weald Youth Facility was currently closed as its centre formed part of the site of the old Kingswood School (now the Drapers Academy) that was being demolished. Talks were underway with the Headteacher of Drapers Academy about the possibility of re-provisioning the facility.

Members expressed concern that the expression “closure” with regards youth facilities was misleading, as it suggested a removal of a service. The detail of the decision (which was not available prior to the call-in) demonstrated that there were other ways of provisioning the service. However, there was still a wider concern that significant parts of the borough still had inadequate provision.

It was explained that the new services offered would appease members’ concerns; the move was towards targeted and detached street-based model, which was flexible and able to meet fluctuating needs. The service itself was not being reduced, merely the way in which it was being offered.

There were concerns that street-based provision *would* lead to a loss in provision, particularly in Romford and anecdotal evidence of street-based service in the Cranham ward had led to many young people having to discuss sensitive issues on the street. Officers explained that the street-based move was a starting point and that in the future the team could and would use fixed bases as appropriate.

In response to queries about why money provided through the MyPlace scheme had been used to build one, albeit impressive, facility and not on numerous facilities to increase access, it was explained that the

grant had specifically stipulated a requirement for one state-of-the-art facility.

Members explained that the requisition had been primarily about reassurance and the opportunity to debate youth services and the closure of the facilities. The main concern was around numbers; Romford had the greater risk and the key question was whether the mobile provision would be able to ensure a good service for Romford, given the large numbers.

In conclusion, it was explained that buildings would not cease to be used, simply the three sites listed in the decision; there was a need to be more nuanced in the way in which school sites were utilised, both to cut costs and respond to different levels of need.

The Chairman asked the Committee to vote on whether to uphold the requisition.

The Committee voted not to uphold the requisition by 9 votes to 1 with 2 abstentions.

The voting was as follows:

For: Councillor Darvill
 Against: Councillors Binion, Brace, Bull, Misir, Thorpe and Thompson. Co-opted Members Garry Dennis, Jack How and Anne Ling
 Abstain: Councillors Ford and Wood.

26. INTEGRATED YOUTH SERVICES - WITHDRAWAL FROM PREMISES AND CLOSURES OF YOUTH FACILITIES

The Committee considered a requisition of Executive Decision 11/29, which had been made by the Cabinet Member for Children & Learning regarding the withdrawal from premises and closure of youth facilities.

The decision had been called-in in accordance with paragraph 17 of the Overview and Scrutiny rules by Councillors Keith Darvill and Gillian Ford.

The decision was part of the Council's overall response to budgetary reductions as a consequence of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which had seen reductions of 7.1% in all council budgets. The Integrated Youth Service's commitment to Havering's reduction was £500,000 over the next four years.

As a result, the Cabinet Member had made the decision to withdraw from the intended Angel Way Youth Facility for Romford and close Century Youth House currently under Integrated Youth Services.

In detail, the decision meant that the service at Century Youth House, which had been intended to be re-provisioned at Angel Way, would be withdrawn, saving £123,420. Century Youth House would cease its activity as a daytime youth house provision.

The reasons for the requisition were outlined in the report submitted to the Committee, but in general terms the reasons focused on concerns that the closure of the facilities would see a rise in youth crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as the negative impact upon young people and voluntary services.

Councillors were asked to consider if other options had been robustly examined and to debate the merits of the strategic move towards targeted services rather than universal services.

The Committee clarified that youth services were withdrawing from Century Youth House, which was being occupied by the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

Members sought information as to what alternatives had been considered upon the grant funding for the re-provisioning of Angel Way having been withdrawn. There was concern that the withdrawal of this funding had meant that the idea of any fixed base for the service had been abandoned, when other affordable and viable options might exist, the temporary facility that had housed Central Library during its re-build was cited by way of example. It was explained that the decision not to re-provision in a fixed base had been carefully considered, the flexible, street-based service was both cost-effective and able to meet the needs of the service users. Whilst the library site mentioned may have been viable, there was a concern that the added cost of examining numerous sites for viability would render any savings impotent and would delay the re-provisioning.

Members were intrigued and reassured that there would be a pot of money made available by the Council, for use by the voluntary sector, aimed to assist them to start and run youth services. Members were keen to know the exact amount of funding, but it was explained that a specific allocation had not been put aside.

In response to concerns about the possible rise in anti-social behaviour, particularly in Romford, it was explained that street-based provision would be better placed to de-escalate anti-social behaviour by acting flexibly and meeting young people in their own environments. There would also be close cooperation with the voluntary sector and with organisations such as Connexions, which would encourage young people into productive activity.

Officers explained that the Angel Way development was no longer an option as the capital funding for the project no longer existed, though

the key was to focus upon services and not facilities, though members still expressed the importance of thoroughly searching for alternative sites.

The Chairman asked the Committee to vote on whether to uphold the requisition.

The Committee voted not to uphold the requisition by 7 votes to 3 with 2 abstentions.

The voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Darvill and Ford. Co-opted Member Garry Pain.
Against: Councillors Binion, Brace, Bull, Misir, Thorpe and Thompson. Co-opted Member Anne Ling.
Abstain: Councillor Wood. Co-opted Member Jack How.

The meeting was concluded.