

## ***Report to Council***

***Date of meeting: 1 November 2011***

**Subject: Overview and Scrutiny**

**Chairman: Councillor Richard Bassett**



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### **Recommendation:**

**That the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman be noted.**

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### **Review of Education in the District**

At our meeting last Tuesday, 18 October, we received a lively and passionate presentation from Geoff Mangan, the Epping Forest 14-19 Co-ordinator for Epping Forest Secondary Schools and also the West Essex Secondary Schools Facilitator with the West Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board for Essex County Council.

He spoke of the changing status of Epping Forest schools and the impact this would have and if any of our schools were in danger of falling below the 'floor targets'. He also spoke on how our schools coped with 'vulnerable' pupils and how they were affected by funding changes.

There are 35 Primary, 6 Secondary and 1 College in our District. It was noted that schools were collaborating and sharing good practice and currently 2, Debden Park and King Harold, were academy but by January, 60% would be academy schools. The College had improved enormously over the last three years improving retention levels from 82% to 93% since 2007; course completions up from 50% to 85%; and 'A' level success rising from 67% to 75%. He had concerns that schools were just doing enough to get their pupils through the exams with 'C' grades, thus ensuring they get and keep their funding and improve their standing in the league tables. However, 'C' grades were not enough to enable the children to go for 'A' level courses.

We noted that Epping Forest had the best NEET, (16-18 year olds not in education or full time training), figures in the county at 2.4 against the next best in Essex of 3%. We are good at keeping children inside the system and it is important that we continue to do this as once people are outside of the education system they seldom make it back.

However, the educational system in general was struggling with all the government changes in recent years. He also had concerns that if schools became academies and stand alone schools they would lose the vulnerable pupils as they would only be interested in improving their results. There were also other challenges ahead for schools and students since the loss of Connections, work experience placements and the EMA.

The meeting was then opened out to a long question and answer session from the committee and other members present which proved very useful for all members to understand the issues and problems facing our children.

## **Forward Plan**

We next considered the Cabinet's Forward Plan, scrutinising the Cabinet's corporate priorities for 2011-12; going through their forward plan and asking questions where appropriate.

## **Merger of Hospitals**

We then received an information item from Councillor Chana on his recent meeting on the proposed merger of Barts and the London, Whipps Cross and Newham NHS Trusts. We noted that this would definitely be going ahead, with the three hospitals each specialising in different areas on medicine (which had not been decided as yet). They were meeting again on 20 October to discuss the financial implications and then again two weeks after that to discuss the clinical implications and we will try to have representatives at both.

## **Children's Task and Finish Panel**

Next we received a report on Essex County Council's response to the recommendations made by the recent Children Services Task and Finish Panel. The Committee thought that their response was a little too vague and unhelpful. We noted that the Committee were scheduled to meet with the relevant ECC Children's Officer in early 2012 and asked that the relevant Portfolio Holder also be asked to attend as well.

In connection to this we also wanted to review the mental health services in the district as there are concerns that there are some problems in this area. We will review how this can be added to our work programme.

## **Remuneration Panel and review of Polling Districts and Places**

The Committee went on to receive two reports from the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel, one concerning the Remuneration Panel which proposed small changes to the constitution, which we approved; and the other on the review of polling districts and stations, which we noted and recommended to Council.

## **Cabinet Agenda**

Finally we reviewed the Cabinet agenda for this meeting but there were no specific items that our committee wanted to be brought to your attention, except to note our concern about the unnecessary expense to be incurred by holding separate elections, in November, for the Police and Crime Commissioner.