

**Report to Overview & Scrutiny
Committee
Date of meeting: 18th October 2011**

Portfolio: Leisure & Wellbeing

Subject: Children's Services Task & Finish Review

Officer contact for further information: Julie Chandler Extn. 4214

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry Extn. 4246



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the Essex County Council responses to the respective recommendations of the Children's Services Task & Finish Review Panel and to decide on the best form of response to these.

Report:

The Children's Services Task & Finish Review Panel was instigated in 2010 and was chaired by Cllr. Mrs Wagland. The Panel included; Cllr. Rose Brookes – Vice Chair, Cllr. Pat Brooks, Cllr. Tessa Cochrane, Cllr. Ricky Gadsby, Cllr. Janet Hedges and Cllr. John Knapman supported by the Assistant Director Community Services & Customer Relations.

Throughout the review which took place from September 2010 to April 2011, the Panel sought to investigate the effectiveness of children's and young people's services and safeguarding arrangements, provided through Essex County Council; the Council's own services and local partners. To accomplish this a range of methods were utilized, including receiving presentations from council officers, site visits to various activity sessions, attendance at Epping Forest Children's Partnership meetings, one to one interviews with staff and a Question and Answer session with representatives from Essex County Council.

At the end of the Children's Services Review, the Task and Finish Panel identified 10 x key recommendations for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and half of these related specifically to Essex County Council. Therefore, following presentation of the final report of the Children's Services Review to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2011, it was agreed that these recommendations be forwarded to the Director of Children's Services Commissioning (Wendi Ogle-Welbourn) at Essex County Council for her comments.

The following information sets out these recommendations, reasons why these were made and responses received from Wendi Ogle-Welbourn.

Findings and Recommendations:

1. The Panel identified that West Essex Statutory and Voluntary partners were confident that better, more cost effective services could be delivered to meet the needs of local residents, as opposed to Essex County Council centrally commissioned services. The recommendation made in light of this was:

That the Council formally recommends to Essex County Council that Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford District Council's are in a position to and prepared to undertake commissioning of activities and programmes for children, young people and families, in order to improve health and well

being.

The response received from Wendi Ogle-Welbourn stated "Essex County Council has devolved substantial funding to Local Children's Commissioning and Delivery Boards, including West Essex Children's Partnership, to ensure that the services commissioned for children, young people and families match the local needs identified by partners through the needs assessment process. This includes the commissioning of the Early Intervention fund and Tier 2 Child and adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Board members have the opportunity to be involved in the commissioning process where there is no conflict or interest".

2. The review highlighted the fact that Essex had announced 50% savings from its' Youth Services budget and that there was a real concern amongst statutory and non-statutory partners across the District in respect of the potential impact of this on anti-social behaviour and youth nuisance. The panel therefore recommended that:

That the Council formally approaches Essex County Council with an offer to undertake management of local Youth Services in Epping Forest, following the redundancy of Youth Service Managers in July 2011. And, that the Council formally tenders for delivery of the service from March 2012.

Wendi Ogle-Welbourn responded to this recommendation by saying that "Partners around the West Essex Children's Partnership table, including Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford District Councils, have identified the resources they invest in services for children, young people and families through the 'resource envelope'. In the absence of formal joint commissioning, the intention is that all partners will align resources around shared priorities and agreed commissioning intentions, in order to address local needs and improve health and wellbeing for children, young people and families in West Essex.

Essex County Council is currently refocusing and remodeling the Integrated Youth Service to target vulnerable young people across the County. There is no opportunity currently available to separate the management of an individual District's services. However, local partners, including Epping Forest District council, will have the opportunity to influence local provision through the Epping Forest Children's Partnership and West Essex Children's Partnership.

Essex County Council has no immediate plans to undertake a procurement exercise in relation to the Youth service. We will inform Epping Forest District Council, along with any other potential providers of any future opportunity to tender for the management and provision of the Youth Service.

3. One of the particular areas looked at as part of the review focused on vulnerable children and young people, including those 'Looked After'. The Panel agreed that the Council needed more information regarding issues and data in this area and this led to the following recommendation:

That Essex County Council is asked to provide regular statistics and data to the district council on numbers of children and young people 'Looked After' (in care) and other vulnerable children including those with disabilities living within Epping Forest District, and details of children from the district who have been placed 'in care' outside of the district.

Wendi Ogle-Welbourn's response stated that "Data on Looked After and other vulnerable children and young people at West Essex and District level are provided, through the Essex Safeguarding Children Board performance report, on a quarterly basis to the West Essex Children's Partnership Stay Safe group. It is suggested that Epping Forest District

Council reviews the information provided and highlights any gaps in the data. Essex County Council will endeavour to provide any additional information requested, subject to its availability and information sharing protocols.

4. The review also highlighted the fact that Councillors experiences of working with Essex County Council in regard to vulnerable families and child protection issues had been varied and on several occasions very negative. It was agreed that there was need for guidance on the role that Councillors can play to support constituents; the processes in place to ensure that the right professional support is acquired and details of the expected communication exchange between Essex County Council and individual Councillors. The panel therefore recommended that:

i) That Essex County Council is formally asked to develop a ‘guidance note’ for elected members, to assist them in dealing effectively and appropriately with potential safeguarding and social care issues in relation to families within their constituency.

ii) That the County Council Social Care Service is asked to acknowledge a) its accountability to District Elected Members in regard to effective Corporate Parenting and b) that Councillors can be used as a resource to articulate on behalf of constituents.

Wendi Ogle-Welbourn agreed to discuss this request with the Director of Children’s Social care and return to the Council with a detailed response to this recommendation.

5. The Panel agreed that there was a need to further strengthen the ongoing working relationship between the Council and Essex County Council and enable the opportunity to highlight any areas of best practice or concern. The Panel therefore recommended that:

That Essex County Council be requested to commit to meet with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the District Council in respect of Children’s Services on an annual basis, with attendance of the Director of Children’s Commissioning.

Wendi Ogle-Welbourn agreed to fulfill this request without question.

Summary

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the Essex County Council responses to the respective recommendations of the Children’s Services Task & Finish Review Panel and to decide whether it wishes the Chairman of the Panel to enter into a further dialogue with Essex County Council on these matters.

Reason for decision:

For Overview and Scrutiny Committee to agree on whether to pursue any course of action to with Essex County Council, following it’s response to the findings and recommendations of the Children’s Services Task & Finish Review.

Options considered and rejected:

To accept Essex County Council’s response, without considering potential options.

Consultation undertaken:

Previous consultation undertaken with internal and external partners, as part of the Children’s Services Review process.

Resource implications:

Budget provision: NIL

Personnel: Member & Officer time
Land: N/a

Community Plan/BVPP reference: Our Partnership Approach; On the Horizon – The Local Response

Relevant statutory powers:N/a

Background papers: Children’s Services Task & Finish Review final report.
Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:
Key Decision reference: (if required)