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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE,  
HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 2016 AT 7.30PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
COUNCIL OFFICES, WEELEY**

**Present:** Councillors Fairley (Chairman), Amos, Bennison, Bucke, Everett, Fowler,

**Also Present:** Councillor McWilliams (Well-being and Partnerships Portfolio Holder)

**In Attendance:** Executive Projects Manager (Keri Lawrence) and Democratic Services Officer (Janey Nice)

**Also In Attendance:** Essex County Council's (ECC) Missing Education and Child Employment Service Team Leaders (Kay Chapman and Rachel Anderson) and ECC's Lead Commissioner for Primary Schools (North East) (Graham Lancaster)

**23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Raby (with Councillor Everett substituting, Councillor Calver (with Councillor Fowler substituting) and Councillor Poonian.

**24. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee, held on 30 November 2015, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members at this time.

**26. PRESENTATION FROM ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND WELFARE SERVICE IN RELATION TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

The Chairman welcomed Kay Chapman and Rachel Anderson from Essex County Council's (ECC) Missing Education and Child Employment Service Team Leaders who had been invited to attend the meeting to provide Members with information and how to support parents and teachers with regard to school attendance.

Ms Chapman informed the Committee that the Education Welfare Service would now be known as Missing Education and Child Employment Service (MECES), that Local Authority Education Welfare Officers would now be known as Investigation Officers and the Senior Education Welfare Officers would now be known as Team Leaders. She added that she and Ms Anderson were based at County Hall in Chelmsford and that a small team of six covered the North East quadrant of Essex, including Colchester.

The Committee was informed by Ms Chapman that the role of MECES was committed to the principle that all children had the right to a suitable education and that regular school attendance was vital to enable young people to achieve their ambitions through education, training and life-long learning. She said that MECES only intervened in cases where the matter was so serious that the last resort would be that statutory legal intervention would be required to address the irregular school attendance patterns of a

pupil and that MECES would need to be contacted when school-based interventions had failed to secure regular attendance.

Ms Chapman explained to the Committee the role of MECES covered:

- Safeguarding Children's education – Enforcement service;
- Investigation if a crime was committed;
- Collation of evidence;
- Issuing of penalty notices if they met the code of conduct;
- Preparation of cases and their presentation in the Magistrates' Court;
- Education Supervision Orders;
- Safeguarding children in employment and entertainment (this included the issuing of an entertainment licence if children were involved in television, film, theatre, pantomimes etc and this would entail the team to make checks on those; and challenge illegal practice with regards to schools
- School Attendance Orders; and
- An advice duty line.

Councillor McWilliams asked if chaperones were used for children in the entertainments industry and was informed by Ms Anderson that this was in fact the case and that they would check that they had the right number of chaperones for the numbers of children involved.

Ms Anderson explained the process of when referrals to MECES for irregular school attendance were made which were:

- School Attendance Meeting (SAM);
- Legal Action Warning Letter;
- Issuing of a Penalty Notice (which followed the school issued warning letter) – this was being done from January 2016 onwards; and
- Below 70% attendance could take the matter straight to prosecution.

The Committee was informed of the Department for Education's (DfE) expectations and how the Schools were expected to work within those guidelines. Ms Chapman said that poor attendance impacted on overall grades and could also bring down the overall school grading. She added that the DfE said that every child was entitled to a full time education of 25 hours a week.

Ms Chapman and Ms Anderson said their team had shrunk significantly down from 14 officers to six plus themselves. They said that early intervention was key to achieving good attendance and named a top performing school which had such a good atmosphere that the pupils really enjoyed going to school. They said that building a good relationship with parents was important, knowing when to call a parent in, perhaps to see why a child was struggling, why the child was not attending regularly and for other relevant reasons.

Ms Chapman and Ms Anderson mentioned other agencies who supported families with regard to school attendance who included EXTRA who had a service in Broadlands in Jaywick which provided parenting sessions from early years to higher school years and also had drop-in sessions for parents struggling with teenagers' issues

The Committee was informed that all schools needed more money and support from local businesses who were helpful when it came to providing work experience and apprenticeship placements, it was also considered helpful if employers could come into school to promote their work and provide training. The two Team Leaders said that work experience could be helpful in not only providing students with what was available

but also could help them establish what sort of work they didn't want to do. Ms Chapman said that whilst children were required to stay in full time education until the age of 18, they could actually leave school to take up an apprenticeship placement or other recognised training scheme

Ms Anderson also mentioned the problem with missing children from education which of course would impact on their future life chances and choices. She said this could happen when a family moved from area to area without contacting either the relevant school or education authority. She also said that MECES had a statutory duty to ensure arrangements were in place to identify children who were not in education, this could be done by the schools informing them that children had left so that MECES could investigate if they had been enrolled at another school. Ms Anderson added that some families could move into a new area without any schools being aware they were there, so MECES could become aware of them via neighbours or other members of the public or other professional bodies, once they were aware of the children not attending school MECES would investigate.

Responses were given in relation to Members' questions on whether:

1. If there was any legislation to force parents to ensure their child(ren) attended school;
2. Right to home schooling and if checks were made to ensure the child was actually receiving education;
3. Did travel distance to school affect school attendance;
4. Movement of a child from school to school and ways of checking attendance at a school;
5. If school attendance dropped below 70% was this over a whole school year;
6. Information would be useful to the Committee if attendance and performance records could be broken down to cover the Tendring District; and
7. How could the Education and Skills Committee assist those children slipping through the school attendance net?

The Executive Projects Manager explained the importance of early intervention in spotting families with possible problems and she gave the example of neighbours spotting problems such as families in conflict and Ms Chapman added that she met with Family Solutions monthly who checked with her to see if she was aware of any absentees.

The Chairman suggested that at the next Education and Skills Committee meeting there could be a discussion on promoting how to encourage families to ensure their children attended school regularly. Ms Chapman said that Family Solutions were very supportive and she added that MECES was very much part of the MARAC Multi-agency group who in turn shared information with key agencies where absence from school may be due to domestic violence in the home..

There was further discussion amongst Members on working with other community leaders, including the Police and working with families and it was suggested that Councillor Ray Gooding, Essex County Council's Portfolio Holder for Education and also a member of the Locality Board, could be invited to a further meeting of this Committee.

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** that Councillor Ray Gooding from Essex County Council be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss whether there was a delivery plan which would focus on raising aware of children not in education or training.

The Chairman thanked Kay Chapman and Rachel Anderson for attending the meeting.

## 27. UPDATE ON THE KITEMARKING EVENT LAUNCHED IN 2015

The Chairman welcomed Mr Graham Lancaster, the ECC's Lead Commissioner for Primary Schools (North East) to the meeting.

Mr Lancaster said on the issue of taking the kitemarking event further, only one school had shown interest so the roll out of the kitemarking had now been put on hold until more schools took an active interest, although still available to schools as part of the trading arm of Essex County Council.

Mr Lancaster then talked about school Governor training and that instead of them having to make long journeys to a training location it was planned to hold three or four training events in local venues and this had been warmly received by Governors. He also spoke about intervention in governing bodies, how they should work with the school Headteachers and intervene where necessary. He said the ultimate intervention in a poorly performing school would be for the Secretary of State who would remove the governing body and put a paid board in place in order to improve the school's performance.

Members asked various questions on training for Governors and self-evaluation and Mr Lancaster answered these as he talked about school Governors. He also added further information on the Ofsted grading of school Governors and how they could gain the best possible grading for their schools.

Mr Lancaster then explained the Local Authority Priorities for 2015/16 which included:

- All schools good or outstanding;
- Narrowing the gap;
- School lead improvement system;
- Recruitment and retention; and
- SEN strategy.

He said that all of the Tendring primary schools were rated good or outstanding and while the figures were not as good as nationwide figures, there were improvements in early years right up to secondary level. Time was being spent, he added on building on robust terms and conditions. He added that he wanted all schools in Essex to be good or outstanding, not only the Tendring District.

Mr Lancaster told the Committee that recruitment and retention of teachers in Essex was a huge problem with the crisis deepening on a daily basis. He said that most schools had vacancies with Primary Schools being a key problem area and at secondary level, Science, English and Mathematics were also problematic. He informed the Committee that a huge campaign was being undertaken raising Essex's profile; informing neighbouring Local Authorities and other areas of the Country, where there was a surplus of teachers, by letting them know that Essex was a great place to work and live.

Mr Lancaster said that more teacher training needed to be done in Essex as once trained, teachers tended to stay where they were trained. He said that recruitment of teachers from Ireland was being considered as Ireland had a surplus of teachers. He added that teachers from outside the United Kingdom would need training in the summer ready for the new school year in September. He added that Essex did not give a lot of incentives for new teachers i.e. paying for accommodation or a rent deposit over the summer months and it would be helpful if there was a key worker scheme as there used to be which could be helpful and said that Norfolk County Council helped international teachers by providing accommodation. When a Member asked if Tendring

could provide teacher accommodation Mr Lancaster said that the would be able to send teachers immediately to the area.

When a Member commented that teachers could be scared of not being in control of pupils, Mr Lancaster replied by saying teachers were more scared of Ofsted inspections or the amount of paperwork and that after 2 - 3 years spending too much time on paperwork teachers would leave to use their skills elsewhere, which indicated that this was a problem that needed addressing and a change of perception of what work teachers were expected to do. A Member commented that if a school was ready for inspection then they had nothing to worry about. Mr Lancaster said that headteachers lived in fear of an Ofsted inspection on a daily basis and gave an example of a school that had made a procedural oversight which had them marked as being in special measures rather than being judged as a good school. This surprised the Committee that such a small mistake could affect a school's rating.

Mr Lancaster showed a slide which indicated the primary school 'gap' in Tendring in with writing, reading and mathematics combined and nationally there were 32% of disadvantaged children with Tendring higher at 39.5%, however Tendring was doing better than the rest of Essex as the gap was narrowing with the national level.

When Mr Lancaster talked about Ofsted inspections he said that since September 2015 only 13 schools had been inspected but gave the example that Great Bentley primary school had improved from 'requiring improvement' to 'outstanding'. He said that it was an excellent school.

Mr Lancaster then gave examples of Local School Priorities which were:

- Cluster working:
  - Peer review training;
  - Joint recruitment/training capacity;
  - Sharing expertise/resources
- New/acting headteachers;
- Challenging behaviour; and
- What would the new SAT's bring?

He said in Harwich primary schools were being rated as outstanding but the secondary school was not as good and he gave examples of the Secondary School Focus on Ofsted Grades.

Members then discussed and asked questions of Mr Lancaster concerning 11+ places, homework clubs, asking where the school places for children in the Local Plan were going to be as currently Essex County Council were not building schools, the point of building new schools if teachers were not available, the need for special needs teachers which was causing extra pressure. Mr Lancaster responded to those issues and thanked the Committee for its input.

The Chairman thanked Mr Lancaster for his attendance at the meeting and for the information he had given to the Committee and said that she would like him to return at a future date to inform the Committee of the progress of education in Tendring.

The Committee therefore **AGREED** that the issue of housing for teachers should be taken to the Locality Board for its comments.

The meeting was declared closed at 9.32 p.m.

Chairman