

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25th September 2013



Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P R Barlow	Yes	F Ricci	Yes
C A Cadman	Yes	W J Rose	Apologies
Dr R L Evans (Chairman)	Yes	A F Shelton	Apologies
P Horner	Yes	J S Sutton	Yes
S A Howell	Yes	J R Swift	Apologies
R P Ramage	Yes		

15. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, all councillors remained in the meeting for all items and took part in the debate and decision thereon.

16. **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

17. **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10th July 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

It was brought to the Committee's attention that there was a small factual error on page 8, paragraph 2. The correct reference should read, 'the participation strand will involve young people staying in education or training until they are aged 18 years from 2015.'

18. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – SCRUTINY REVIEW OF MOVING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET) INTO EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING**

INFORMATION: The Chairman welcomed the following invited speakers:

Andy Wright

Corporate Director, Braintree District Council

Peter Smith

Head of Economic Development and Regeneration

Cathryn Henry	National Apprenticeship Service
Samantha Hampshire	Housing Support Worker, Bramble Court Witham
Melanie Nash	Housing Support Worker, Bramble Court Witham
Daisy Shauna	Residents at Bramble Court
Anthony	Resident at Braintree Foyer
Wesley	Green team Graduate
Bradley	Braintree District Council Apprentice

The young people in attendance outlined several issues they had faced when trying to secure education, employment or training including;

- Zero hour contracts are leaving young people to struggle as work hours can vary and hours are not guaranteed. These contracts can cause problems with benefit payments to young people.
- Young people who live in supported housing receive no support once they are in full time employment. Housing benefit is adjusted and rent is significantly increased. This can be a disincentive to young people taking up employment.
- Support should still be available for young people once they have entered work.
- It was suggested that a 'run-on' of housing benefit be looked at, so that when young people do start work, their housing benefit is covered for the first 4 weeks. This would enable their rent to be covered up until they receive their first wage packet.
- The young people felt that Job centres are dismissive of them and are encouraging them to take up work rather than training or participating in courses of their desired career choice.
- The young people believe that there has been an increase in sanctions given out by the job centre without valid explanation. This is leaving young people without any source of income for weeks.
- The young people believe that Job centres seem reluctant to care about young people and do not offer individual help or support.
- One young speaker was given the opportunity to travel to Poland to take part in the Homeless FA as part of the Woman's England team. During this time, the Jobcentre stopped her job seekers allowance as she was unable to actively look for work. This took over 3 weeks to resolve which left this individual without any income for this period of time as well as causing her to fall in to rent arrears.

- Many of the jobs provided by the job centre are short term placements which leave young people returning to the job centre a few months after their placement.
- The Green Team programme was very beneficial for those who took part and more of these schemes should be encouraged.
- Those in education were advised by support services/careers advisors to go to university and not to look at other options including work.
- Employers initially show an interest in candidates, but then fail to contact the applicant with further information.
- Employers should be more upfront and honest with applicants.
- Support and advice services (e.g. the former connexions service) should be made more readily available for young people.
- Apprenticeships are an excellent entry route in to employment, and should be encouraged and advertised on a wider scale.

Cathryn Henry outlined the strategy and roles of the National Apprenticeship Service. She highlighted several points including:

- The role of the National Apprenticeship Service is essentially to increase the number and quality of Apprenticeships that are currently being carried out in England.
- The National Apprenticeship Service has been in existence since 2009. In 2009 there were 170,000 Apprenticeships, which by 2011/12 had risen to 520,000. This has been achieved by increasing the number of employers who are willing to make an Apprenticeship available.
- As examples, nationally, Microsoft has committed to 1000 Apprenticeships and Easy jet have committed to 4000 Apprenticeships.
- It is believed that for every £1 the government invest in a level 2 apprenticeship, there is a return on their investment to the wider UK economy of £16. For level 3, this increases to £21 and level 4 a further increase of £31.
- A main aim of the National Apprenticeship Service is to improve the pathways in to apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are now being made available from levels 4 to 8 (post-graduate degree level).
- The Law Society/Skills for Justice is developing apprenticeships for these levels within their sector. This will mean that within the next 5 years, people will be able to become fully qualified Solicitors without having ever gone through academic education after school.
- There has been an increasing number of graduates applying for apprenticeships.

Samantha Hampshire and Melanie Nash, Housing Support Workers, Bramble Court raised the following issues:

- There are cases where before getting young people in to employment, education or training their mental health needs to be considered urgently. By the time their mental health issues have been considered, the young people are finding other issues (e.g. drugs, alcohol) preventing them from taking up employment.
- There should be better services for self-harm groups, young people who have come from abusive backgrounds as well as those with drug and alcohol issues.
- Jobcentre are failing under 18's and policies for this age group should be reviewed.
- Under 18's have great difficulty claiming any benefits, and can go for months without any income. During such time those living in supporting housing fall in to rent arrears, are unable to eat or live which in turn will have an effect on their mental health.
- To be eligible for the 4 week run-on of housing benefit, claimants have to be in receipt of housing benefit for 26 weeks. This encourages young people to sit on job seekers allowance for the full 26 weeks so that they are entitled to the 4 week housing benefit run on. They believe this is unfair for those who have been on housing benefit for 12+ weeks.
- Jobcentre encourages temporary/zero hour contract work, which as a result causes people to fall in to rent arrears, and puts them in a worse off position.
- Bursaries for apprenticeships or for those who are NEET should be individualised.
- Bursaries for Apprenticeships and those starting work do not cover travel costs, which causes young people to receive less than what they would if claiming job seekers allowance. This gives young people no incentive to start work.

In discussion members noted the following:

- The views expressed by the young people were in conflict with the information presented by the Jobcentre and believed it would be useful to talk further with the Jobcentre on the issues raised.
- The examples of the young people were in conflict with the Government's efforts in relation to "work pays".
- There may value in looking at the Local Services Support Framework.
- Costs of training in areas of the careers choice of young people is a barrier and consideration should be given to a loan system
- Consideration should be given trying to establish a dedicated service to support young people, possibly seeking funding support from large employers.
- Colleges have funding support through Additional Learning Support and Additional Learner Support which may be helpful to supporting young people with training.

- Travel to work was an issue in taking up employment. The young people thought that providing them with a free bus pass would be very beneficial in helping them in to employment.

In considering the next steps in the NEETs scrutiny review, Members agreed that the Jobcentre should be invited back to a future meeting of the Committee. This will enable the comments of the young people to be considered with the Jobcentres.

DECISION: That progress in the Committee's scrutiny review of moving young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) into Education, Employment or Training be noted and the next steps in the review be agreed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To agree actions in support the Committee's scrutiny review.

19. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP - AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

INFORMATION: Councillor Barlow, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, Affordable Housing, presented the report and proposed the following amendments to the report which was seconded:

Executive Summary, Under third bullet point add: "Despite this "track" record there is still a significant shortage of units and the number of people in 'housing need' on the Council's Housing Register consistently remains at over 1,000 households and thus demand for affordable housing in the district is still high".

Additional Recommendation

12. That Cabinet considers meeting Saffron Building Society in order to gauge interest from that local building society in partnering the Council in offering different and more flexible mortgages.

Members agree to the inclusion of these points in the report.

DECISION:

1. That the report, the work of the Task and Finish Group and the recommendations be noted.
2. That subject to the inclusion of the following amendments the report be referred to Council and to Cabinet:

Executive Summary

Additional bullet point:

"Despite this "track" record there is still a significant shortage of units and the number of people in 'housing need' on the Council's Housing Register consistently remains at over 1,000 households and thus demand for affordable housing in the district is still high".

Additional Recommendation

12. That Cabinet considers meeting Saffron Building Society in order to gauge interest from that local building society in partnering the Council in offering different and more flexible mortgages.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider the Task and Finish report reviewing affordable housing in the district.

20. **TASK AND FINISH GROUPS – OPERATION OF THE COUNCIL’S COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

DECISION:

That the following Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish group reviewing the Operation of the Council’s Council Tax Support Scheme be agreed:

To review the first six months of the operation of the Council Tax Support Scheme covering:-

- Details of the scheme introduced and comparison with other Essex authorities schemes;
- the impact on and the number of people affected by minority grouping;
- the cost of the scheme and the impact on the Council Tax collection rate;
- use of the Exceptional Hardship Fund;
- public feedback on the changes;
- funding of the scheme in the future.

REASON FOR DECISION: To agree the Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish group reviewing of the Operation of the Council’s Council Tax Support Scheme:

21. **DECISION PLANNER FOR THE PERIOD 1ST SEPTEMBER 2013 TO 31ST JANUARY 2014**

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st September 2013 to 31st January 2014 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.57pm.

Dr R L Evans
Chairman