

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 12th March 2014



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

38. 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.

39. QUESTION TIME

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

40. MINUTES

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29th January 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

41. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – SCRUTINY REVIEW OF ENABLING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET) TO PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING – CONTINUATION OF THE REVIEW

INFORMATION: The Chairman welcomed the following invited speakers:

Dave Cope

Manager, Jobcentre Plus,
Braintree and Witham

Peter Cook

Head of Employability and Skills
Essex County Council

The invitees provided the following responses to questions from members:

- Jobcentre Plus accepted the Committee's findings from its earlier meetings that there are communication issues in its interactions with young people and that criticisms that it has not listened to young people are fair. To address this, Jobcentre Plus has recently changed the way it engages with young people. All Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) claimants under 25 are now seen weekly in Jobcentre Plus offices. Jobcentre Plus staff have moved away from a culture of being advisers to one of being work coaches. Jobcentre Plus recognises that its old approach was directive to young people and believes its new approach is more supportive in coaching them;
- Jobcentre Plus offices have discretion in the application of JSA sanctions but not in sanctions policies which are agreed national. Locally, Jobcentre Plus continuously reviews the application of national sanctions policies and only uses sanctions as a last resort. However, Jobcentre Plus recognises that the recipient of a sanction may not take the same view. In an attempt to avoid a formal appeal against a sanction, and to resolve matters early, locally, Jobcentre Plus uses a mandatory reconsideration process involving an independent person reviewing the case;
- Jobcentre Plus accepted the Committee's findings that the level of service provided to employers seeking new employees at its Witham centre had not been acceptable. Jobcentre Plus has recently changed its contact arrangements with employers and is confident that the previous failings will not happen again;
- The Committee had found young people being discouraged from taking up short term employment due to losing JSA which then takes some time to be re-instated at the end of the period of employment. Jobcentre Plus advised that young people are encouraged to reclaim their JSA online before the end of the period of employment in order that their JSA can be reinstated without delay. Young people are only required to confirm that their circumstances have not changed since they last claimed;
- Young carers are not considered directly in measures aimed at enabling young people into education, employment or training. However, they are considered indirectly in work with family solution approaches. This recognises that in helping one member of a family, the desired outcomes may not be achieved unless other members of the family also receive help;
- The total number of young people registered as being NEET in the Braintree district is currently at 4.5% which compares favourably to a level for Essex of 4.7%. The totals are thought to be close to record low levels although there is a recognition that further reductions will be increasingly more difficult to achieve. Groups remaining NEET include young carers and young people with multiple barriers and troubled backgrounds;
- The roles of Essex County Council (ECC) include helping businesses to grow through having a skilled workforce including employing apprentices. Other ECC roles include providing paid work experience for disadvantaged young people;

- Through the Essex Employment and Skills Board, ECC is looking for greater local determination of funding involving mainly EU funds to better direct those funds to where they are most needed. ECC is seeking European Social Funding for a 7 year programme in Essex to help people into employment;
- Through the Essex Employment and Skills Board, ECC is seeking to ensure that an increasing number of young people are being trained in the skills needed by employers. The system has been led by the desires of young people often uninformed on the job opportunities and by the ease of the training providers and colleges to provide training they are comfortable with. Such training can often be low cost with a stream of young people ready to take up the training regardless of whether there are job opportunities at the end of the training;
- Currently, there are over 1000 vacancies in computer programming in a range of employers across Essex. At the same time, suitably trained people are not available and there are no training providers in computer programming in Essex. This example clearly demonstrates the current mismatch in the training currently being provided and the requirements and skill shortages of employers;
- The Essex Employment and Skills Board is working to influence the funding and provision training in Essex in order that it meets the needs of employers and the Essex economy. This requires colleges and training providers to change their provision to areas where there is a clear need. The expected development of offshore wind farms in Essex and the region was cited as an example of where there is a need. The development will require engineers, technicians, designers, project managers etc. and nationally there are insufficient people with the necessary skills to take up the positions that will be created;
- There is a similar need to increase awareness of the new employment opportunities and skill needs of employers in schools and to young people more generally.

The Chairman thanked the invitees for attending the Committee's meeting and for their informative responses.

42. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – SCRUTINY REVIEW OF ENABLING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET) TO PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING – NEXT STEP**

INFORMATION: Members noted that a final report would be prepared for consideration by the Committee at its meeting in June identifying key issues and recommendations from all the meetings held in the scrutiny review.

Members agreed that the report should capture the need for greater liaison and exchange of information between the various organisations and agencies involved in enabling young people who are NEET to participate in education, employment or training.

Members also agreed that young people should be invited to the Committee's meeting in June to see if their experiences with Jobcentre Plus had improved in line with the changes the Jobcentre Plus Manager had outlined to the Committee.

Peter Smith, Head of Economic Development, advised the Committee of the intention of the Council to establish an Employment Skills Board for Braintree district similar to the one established for Essex. The Board would bring together a range of partners with the aim of addressing skills needs of employers in the district.

Member believed this scrutiny review is important and wished to review progress in the recommendations from its review in 12 months.

37. **DECISION PLANNER FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL 2014 TO 31ST JULY 2014**

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st April 2014 to 31st July 2014 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.58pm.

Dr R L Evans
Chairman