

The Children and Young People's Plan

2010 – 2013

Review and Refresh 2011

01.04.11

Letter from the Leader and Portfolio Lead Members.



**Councillor John Kent
Leader of the Council**



**Councillor Charles Curtis
Lead Member for Safeguarding**



**Councillor Diana Hale
Lead Member for Education**

We are delighted to present this review and refresh of Thurrock's Children and Young People's Plan 2010-2013 (CYPP). One of the first tasks of the Administration was to adopt the CYPP. We were heartened to be invited to endorse a plan that enjoyed universal political support.

This year has been a watershed. The public sector has faced an unprecedented savings challenge but all partners have maintained an unwavering focus on transforming the life chances of our children and young people. The review shows just how much we have achieved; the refresh shows that our ambition for children is undiminished in the harsher economic climate we have now entered.

We hope that you share our pride and pleasure in all that has been achieved, while never forgetting all that is still to be done. We have made children and young people our top political priority. We trust that you will share our unwavering belief in the children and young people of Thurrock.

Review and refresh of Children and Young People's Plan 2010 – 2013

“Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward” (*Søren Aaby Kierkegaard*)

The review and refresh is in two parts. The first part is all about what we have learned. The second part sets out the 2011/12 action plans that are designed to deliver the further improvement we want to secure to achieve the ambitions in our original plan.

The CYPP was built upon four pillars.

- Excellent childcare, schools, colleges and services
- Everyone succeeding
- Protection when needed
- Lean and fit for the future

The review is simple, under each pillar, we asked ourselves three questions:

- What went well?
- Even better if?
- How do we know?

The tables of outcome evidence appended, Ofsted inspection reports (which can be found on their website), and feedback from a wide range of partners and service users, are the key sources of evidence to answer the third question. In the text below we focus on the first two questions.

Excellent childcare, schools, colleges and services

What went well?

In the last year, Thurrock secondary school pupils attained higher grades at GCSE than ever before. For the first time, the number of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and Maths exceeded the national average. One of our schools, Chafford Hundred, came in the top 3 in the country for the most progress made by pupils between the ages of 11 and 16, and Thurrock is in the top 3 boroughs in the country for improvement at GCSEs over the last 3 years. The efforts by heads, governors, parents, pupils and support services are now paying real dividends and there is much to be proud of. There has also been an increase in the number of secondary schools judged outstanding, and both our special schools are outstanding. The focus on improving leadership in primary schools has seen some success and the number of permanent headships has increased significantly; this continues to be a priority. Attainment at 16 has improved and there is now a broad range of education and training opportunities for young people. Attainment at 19 also has shown a significant improvement. Thurrock continues to benefit from an outstanding 6th Form College and new 6th form provision (including within recently established academies). Apprenticeship take-up amongst 16-18 year olds increased by 17% and Thurrock is now well above the national average for retaining apprentices. Currently 74% of apprentices are kept on at the end of their engagement.

The Youth and Connexions service has fully reflected the spirit and resilience of Thurrock. Frontline staff, young people and managers responded to the savings agenda with a clever proposal to explore alternative delivery models. This bottom-up initiative has been endorsed by Cabinet and we plan that this will be in place in 2012.

In Health, the 0 to 19 pathway teams have been developed and rolled out, maternity bookings through children's centres are increasing and we are poised to accelerate integration of Health and Council services. 90% of local schools are signed up to the Healthy Schools Programme.

Even Better If?

Attainment across the early years and primary phase is not yet high enough. There are no primary or secondary schools judged inadequate by Ofsted, nevertheless, the proportion of settings which are good or better is too low. Turning every setting into a good one is a priority. Although some individual primary schools and early years settings do well, pupil attainment needs to improve from the early years and foundation stage through primary school where attainment is still too low in too many schools. We will review children's centre provision to ensure that young children, and especially the most vulnerable, get off to a flying start. We want to increase breastfeeding rates so that infants have the best start.

Leadership of primary schools has improved. Last year 30% of primary schools had temporary, acting or interim leadership. We have halved that this year. Many of our primary schools have strengthened significantly. We want every school to be good or better. Last year 35% of our primaries were judged good or better (60% of secondaries). Our Key Stage Two results (tests at the end of primary school) are improving but, on average, they are still not giving pupils the basis for an excellent start at secondary school.

We will ensure our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) strategy is fit for purpose, strengthening commissioning, outcome focus and performance management.

Everyone Succeeding

What went well?

The performance of some of our community groups in Thurrock was at the highest level in the country. While performance across the borough was greatly improved at GCSE and for the first time rose above the national average, the performance of white pupils, black pupils, Chinese pupils, and Asian pupils were all in the top half of the scores. Two of the groups did exceptionally well and **outstripped their peers across the country**.

School attendance for our children who are looked after was good and compared very well with the picture across similar local authorities and nationally. The take up of school meals in Thurrock secondary schools is high and this gives pupils a healthy boost in the afternoon.

We have invested in programmes designed to accelerate the progress of vulnerable groups, but we are not satisfied that we have got 'quality first teaching' solidly embedded yet; this must be a priority as interventions cannot substitute for this.

We have successfully implemented the pilot project for two year olds to access early education. 65 places are now offered to two year olds who will benefit most from the places alongside support for the whole family. Using Playbuilder and partnership funding, we have developed play spaces across the borough; these have quickly become very popular facilities.

More of our young people are staying on in education employment or training, (currently 93.3%). Young people took part in many productive and accredited activities. Over the last year, 15,000 young people aged 8 – 18 engaged with our youth and extended services in our youth provision.

Even Better If?

The Pupil Referral Unit was judged inadequate last year and, although recently judged to be making satisfactory progress, needs to make accelerated progress. We will ensure that effective provision is commissioned following a review of arrangements for pupils excluded from school. We will prioritise improving the attainment of children from lower income families as they do not yet do as well as comparable groups across the country or as well as higher income groups in Thurrock. The Child Poverty Strategy and Action Plan will help to address this. Similarly, we will target improving the achievement of children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to reduce the gap with those without SEN. Transition from one school to another or moving on from school to college or training can be challenging for pupils, particularly those with additional or special needs. We will meet the need of pupils with SEN more effectively through better management of these transitions. To ensure that each pupil with SEN is making good progress we will use nationally accredited 'Progression Guidance Materials'.

Permanent and fixed term exclusions from school are too high and we need to ensure that the highest standards are expected of pupils and they are supported where necessary to achieve these. We will review provision in Thurrock to ensure it is responsive to meet the needs of pupils who are at risk of exclusion or who have been excluded. Persistent absence, particularly from primary schools, remains a priority. We will also ensure that tackling obesity is a priority as it is a pressing need for too many children in Thurrock.

Earlier good reductions in the rate of teenage conceptions (1996/2006) have not been sustained and we recognise the need to deal with a fluctuating pattern. We intend to build on the good services for young women that we already have in place. Alongside this we need to target and reduce alcohol misuse in some groups.

Protection When Needed

What went well?

We have a strong base of third sector resources to support children and families; in particular those affected by domestic violence (prevalence rates are high in Thurrock, as we have supported reporting). Work, led by the third sector, is underway on a local strategy to combat violence against women and girls. The Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) opened; this will transform the quality of our response to women and children who experience rape and sexual assault. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has strengthened its scrutiny role and challenged Health colleagues in relation to the quality of the paediatric response to children who experience sexual abuse.

Commissioners in Health responded immediately and effectively to challenge the providers to deliver the expected level of service. Our Family Intervention Project has brought partners together to focus on the top 40 families in the borough where we believe, if we can intervene intensively and comprehensively, we can make a real and sustained difference in the lives of children now and in the future.

We commissioned a Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) peer review of safeguarding services in Thurrock and received strong endorsement of the quality of the services and the action plans we have developed to further strengthen safeguarding. Ofsted's inspection of the Council's contact, referral and assessment service was very positive. A lot of work across the Children's Partnership has been done to ensure effective risk management is supported outside of social care, ensuring that families are not subjected to inappropriate interventions. The data is beginning to show Thurrock more closely aligned to the national pattern. The Council committed further investment to secure the quality of service for Thurrock's most vulnerable children.

Services for disabled children in Thurrock go from strength to strength. Strong leadership and investment in a wide range of services developed in a strong partnership of professionals, parents and young people account for the success. Local new build is planned to increase service provision. Our data shows strong performance for children in care in most areas; but there is more to be done to secure, for every single child in care, what we would want for our own child. We need to be satisfied that

every child in care has a place in a good school and is supported to achieve his/her full potential. We intend to further strengthen placement stability as this is critical to the achievement of good outcomes for children in care.

Our Youth Offending Service (YOS) continues to perform well, with a low custody and re-offending rate. The plan to move the court from Grays Town Centre represents a very real risk for young people. We firmly believe that relationships and confidence built over many years are the keys to understanding the success of Thurrock's YOS.

Even Better If?

Managing risk outside of the statutory social care service is not yet embedded in Thurrock. This was explored in depth in our peer review and recognised in our Ofsted Unannounced Inspection. The data shows that, compared to other local authorities, in Thurrock we intervene more in families at every threshold. There is nothing in our population profile to indicate that needs or risks are unique here or more acute than in other similar communities. Progress has been made in social care to secure manageable caseloads for staff and this must become established practice. The common assessment framework is very well embedded in school practice locally, less so in Health. The lead professional role is less well developed (this is in line with the national picture). Our early intervention model needs to be re-examined, in line with national policy and investment. We do not want to create a culture of helplessness and dependence. We expect that families will encounter challenges and difficulties; that is in the nature of life. We expect that, in most cases, families will have the resources and resilience to resolve the problems they encounter. We will ensure targeted services are available when needed and intervene proportionately in the lives of families; we will focus on strengthening parents and parenting.

Within the Council, we intend to strengthen our child protection and children in care quality assurance systems. We are not yet satisfied that all of our interventions and care plans are built upon good or better assessments. We recognise that this is a national challenge and we welcome the Munro Review as an important step in the development of social work practice quality.

Lean and Fit for the Future

What went well?

The key strategic Partnership is in place and beginning to work effectively. Relationships across the Partnership are maturing well, albeit from a very low base. There is clarity in the respective roles and responsibilities of the Partnership and the LSCB, warmly endorsed by the LGID peer review. Simpler and clearer governance is in place for the work-streams to deliver the CYPP. Workforce development has been a real strength, recognised as such in the Ofsted Unannounced Inspection and in our being shortlisted for a national award; Thurrock Therapeutic Foster Care Partnership was a finalist in the annual Skills for Care Accolades. This has made a major contribution to recruitment and retention which is critical to achieving excellence. Vacancies for school leaders halved and the vacancy rate for social workers and team managers reduced by 10%. Leadership in primary schools has been enhanced by school amalgamation, one completed and three in train.

We have strengthened strategic planning for capital investment. This has ensured that current decisions are transparent and communicated well. Good progress has been made on all schemes in the capital programme. We now have an agreed set of priorities that enable flexible responsiveness to exploit capital investment and funding opportunities. Our commissioned services have embraced cultural change and are in a good position to respond to the direction of travel in the Local Authority, which is to provide less and commission more. Performance management and a strong outcome focus are increasingly firmly embedded in managers and staff at the frontline.

Stronger leadership has been secured in the Council which has enabled us to sustain and improve services during a time of unprecedented public sector cuts requiring severe measures to eliminate overspending and secure in-year savings. Thurrock is a low spending council with very low reserves, and, as a small unitary authority, economies of scale are not easily realised. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, in response to government funding reductions, is strong. In year one (2011/12) the savings can only be delivered through service cuts and Children's Services has been disproportionately impacted by grant reductions. The Council is

implementing a transformation programme to enable savings to be secured in future years.

Leadership across the children's sector has demonstrated resourcefulness and resilience. Hard times can often bring out the best in a borough like Thurrock. The spirit of the community and its people has been highlighted in the response to the cuts.

Even better if?

The profile of leadership in schools has been enhanced; there is still more to be done. Collegiate relationships across schools is strong in places but not yet embedded; the hubs and clusters that are in place have developed differentially and there is no doubt the rewards are based upon the investment of time commitment and energy. These are critical if we are to realise the 'by schools, for schools' agenda to deliver real and sustained school improvement. In response to the national policy shift, we have already embarked on excellent partnership work with schools on 'intelligent accountability'.

We want to accelerate commissioning to realise the strengths in all sectors of the community; we need to strengthen commissioning practice across the economy but particularly in schools, where there are opportunities to maximise resource management through clever commissioning.

The Lead Member and Director invited the head and chair of governors of every primary school to a mutual accountability conversation. As part of the conversation, schools were invited to identify the key issues that, if the Council were to accelerate improvement, would make the biggest difference in supporting schools to raise standards. The top three were strengthening governance, asset management and behaviour support. We have an opportunity to get an accurate picture of the condition and suitability of all of our assets as well as clarifying roles and responsibilities between partners. Asset management has been a source of real frustration and we want to ensure precious school time that should be on raising standards is not frittered away on trying, with limited success, to resolve buildings problems.