

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: Tuesday 8th March 2023

Time: 2.00pm –5.20pm

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald PE28 4YE

Present: Councillors D Ambrose Smith, A Bradnam, A Bulat, C Daunton, B Goodliffe (Chair), A Hay, J King, M King (Vice Chair), M McGuire, K Reynolds (to 3.15pm), A Sharp, P Slatter, S Taylor and F Thompson.

Co-opted Members:

Canon A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely
Dr A Stone, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

Also present: Councillors S Bywater and I Gardener (to Item 6)

132. Change to the order of business

The Chair stated that Item 7: Finance Monitoring Report January 2023 would be considered after Item 10: Strengthening Services Board, to enable the Committee to debate the substantive proposals around strengthening services before considering whether to make a recommendation to the Strategy and Resources Committee on funding.

133. Change to membership

Councillor Kevin Reynolds was appointed a substitute member of the Committee on 9th February 2023.

134. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Hoy, substituted by Councillor K Reynolds.

Councillor A Bradnam declared an interest in Item 9: Education Contracts. Minute 142 below refers.

135. Minutes – 17 January 2023 and minutes action log

The minutes of the meeting on 17 January 2023 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair. The minutes action log was noted.

136. Petitions

A petition was received from Emma Bharmra, titled [Save Great Gidding Church of England School from being closed](#). The petition was heard under Item 6: Great Gidding Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School Consultation Update. Minute 138 below refers.

137. Public questions

Requests to speak were received from Huntingdonshire District Councillor Tim Alban; Christopher Jakins, parent of a child at Great Gidding Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School; Joanne Taylor, ex-Chair of Governors at Great Gidding Church of England VC Primary School; and Dr Julie Byard, local resident. All of the requests related to Item 6: Great Gidding Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School Consultation Update. The questions and comments submitted in advance of the meeting are attached at Appendix 1.

138. Great Gidding Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School Consultation Update

The Committee considered a second report on Great Gidding Primary School, following its decision in January to publicly consult on the potential closure of the school. Since then, an extensive consultation process had taken place which had included an online consultation portal and four public consultation events. 86% of respondents disagreed with closing the school, but no viable alternatives had been suggested.

The Director of Education emphasised that the move to consult on the future of the school had not been taken lightly. The Department for Education (DfE) presumption was against the closure of small rural primary schools. This did not mean that this could not happen, but that there must be a strong case for closure. Appendix 4 of the report responded to this requirement in detail, including looking at the impact on education, the community, transport and journey time and capacity at other local schools.

Due to the current size and capacity of the school there were limitations to the provision available to pupils, and it was the shared view of officers and the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT) that a move to a two-class structure would lead to a further decline in the quality of education on offer. The interim headteacher had outlined the problems this would create, and their assessment was included in the meeting documents. For this reason, officers recommended moving to the next stage of the statutory process and consulting publicly on the potential closure of the school. If this was approved, information about transition arrangements and potential support in relation to school uniform and home to school transport costs would be included when the Committee met in April to make a final decision.

The Committee received a petition from Emma Bhamra, presented by Christopher Jakins, titled 'Save Great Gidding Church of England School from being closed'. The Constitution stated that certain petitions were not covered by the Council's petitions scheme. This included petitions in response to consultations on a specific issue or proposal. However, the Chair had decided exceptionally to exercise her discretion to accept the petition to ensure that the voices of those signing it were heard. She

thanked the petition organiser for including a link to the Council's consultation portal on the petition webpage and encouraging those signing the petition to submit their views in more detail.

Mr Jakins said that parents had been shocked to learn that the future of Great Gidding Primary was being questioned and had started a campaign to save the school. The on-line petition had been set up on 11th January 2023 and currently had 884 signatures. These were mainly from local people, and demonstrated the reach and influence of the school. Families had distributed leaflets around the local area and the widely shared opinion was that closing the school was too easy and that it would be followed by a period of long regret. He asked that pupil unit costs should not be considered in isolation and that the school's wider outcomes should be taken into account.

Four requests to speak on this issue had been received from members of the public. These were heard in the order in which they were received. Copies of the comments submitted were published on the meeting webpage in advance of the meeting and circulated electronically to Committee members for information.

Councillor Tim Alban, District Councillor for Stilton, Folksworth and Washingley, commented that this was not just a decision which would impact on the school, its families and staff. It had the potential to impact the whole community. If the school closed other local amenities could be put at risk too. It was clear that the school was greatly valued and that this was in part due to its small size. This included those families of children with special educational needs who might not be catered for as well in a larger school. In Councillor Alban's view, keeping Great Gidding open would demonstrate that the County Council still believed that every child matters.

The Director of Education stated that a community impact assessment had been conducted which looked at the impact of potential closure on local businesses and groups.

Christopher Jakins addressed the Committee in a personal capacity as the parent of a child attending Great Gidding. Mr Jakins recognised the need to take account of all perspectives, but felt that the children were the most important factor and the least represented. The viability of Great Gidding was in question, but he questioned the viability of the system and expressed the view that funding for education was in crisis. In this case, local cuts were being proposed which he felt were in danger of discriminating against rural schools. In his view, alternative options had been dismissed before consultation and he felt there was a presumption for closure. He felt there was a need to be careful not to present the families now leaving the school as a justification for its closure. Mr Jakins commented from personal experience that the long-term effects of changing school must not be under-estimated and created life-long memories.

The Director of Education acknowledged the benefits of small schools articulated by Mr Jakins, which were recognised and understood by officers. He also acknowledged that small schools were the preference of some families. However, there must be enough children on roll to make a school viable as this impacted on the quality of education. Officers' advice was based on the 44 children on roll at Great Gidding at the time the consultation was launched. Based on that figure, there would need to be a move to a two-class structure in September 2023. Should the school close, officers were confident that there were other small schools which could accommodate the Great Gidding children. If a decision was taken to close Great Gidding officers would take all steps to

support children moving to new schools. All of Cambridgeshire's schools had the same duty of care to pupils, including supporting those with additional needs.

Joanne Taylor, ex-Chair of Governors at Great Gidding, commented that Great Gidding had never set a negative budget and had always had a carry-forward. There had been a spike in pupil numbers to 70 children some years ago, and the school averaged between 45-50 children with an optimum number in her view of 60. The governing body had spoken to the local authority (LA) about catchment, but the LA had been reluctant to change this. Parents living outside of the catchment area chose Great Gidding because of its size and the benefits offered by mixed classes. The relationship with the LA had in her view been poor over a number of years and when support had been sought this had not been forthcoming. Her experience was that the school was outstanding and that its children thrived.

Clarification was sought around the assertion at the previous meeting that the school's governing body had resigned due to the difficulties finding a permanent headteacher. Mrs Taylor stated that a previous headteacher had decided to take time away from education. One person had applied for the role who was deemed not to be suitable. When a decision was being taken to close the school an exceptional headteacher had been put in place.

The Director of Education acknowledged the dedication of the governors at Great Gidding, and confirmed that the school had not yet set a deficit budget. Officers' concern was around the ability to deliver good quality education within the resources available. Additional Government funding had been available when Great Gidding had previously operated a two-class structure in 2011/12 and at that time an increase in pupil numbers was forecast. That was not the case now. He acknowledged the concerns expressed around support provided by the LA, but stated his belief that the LA did support schools. The interim headteacher currently at Great Gidding had been appointed prior to the consultation being undertaken and was doing a very good job. He thanked Mrs Taylor for her work and her commitment in supporting the school.

Dr Julie Byard, a local resident, said that her family had primarily moved to the village because they wanted a small faith-based rural school for their child. A new school had been planned but had failed to materialise due in her view to financial mismanagement. Families continued to move into the school, some specifically for the school. The village shop was a lifeline for the village and the current proprietors would be retiring soon. The school's possible closure had cast doubt on the shop's future as potential buyers had withdrawn when the consultation was announced. The proprietors of the shop had not been approached by anyone and felt ignored. The Rt Hon Ed Davey MP had said there was a need to tackle the challenges faced by rural communities.

The Director of Education stated that an equality impact assessment had been included in the review and that planning applications in train had been included in officers' demographic calculations. Dialogue would be taking place with district councils longer term and officers would be bringing forward a policy on small schools for the Committee's consideration. Officers' focus was on the impact on education.

The Chair stated that the questions raised by the public speakers in the meeting had been answered, and that the petition organiser would receive a written response within 10 working days of the meeting.

Councillor Gardener addressed the Committee as the local member for Alconbury and Kimbolton. He urged the Committee to do all it could to keep Great Gidding school open. Rural communities were losing services at an alarming rate, and the decision taken would have an impact on Great Gidding and surrounding hamlets for years to come. Huntingdonshire District Council was updating its Local Plan, and closing Great Gidding would mean pupils travelling further to school which was contrary to the Council's climate policy. In his view, the way the process had been undertaken pointed to a decision having already been taken, and it was becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Parents would look at alternative schools when there was the prospect of closure. The Government urged that the closure of small schools should be a matter of last resort. In Councillor Gardener's view, meetings should have happened 18 months ago to look at all the options to keep the school viable and in future he felt this consultation should happen much earlier. He asked that the Committee delay its decision and visit the school to see the pride staff and pupils had in their school. The possibility of closure had caused much anxiety, and he questioned why Great Gidding could not remain open until the new school at Sawtry was available. He thanked the acting headteacher and staff at Great Gidding for the sensitive way they had dealt with this difficult situation.

The Director of Education stated that section 10.8.6 of the Committee report set out the climate impact of the proposals, including a net reduction in the amount of home to school travel as the 30+ out of catchment children currently attending Great Gidding could transfer to schools closer to home. Officers had followed the Department for Education's (DfE) guidance around the process for consulting on a possible school closure, but the Council had last done this in 1992 so he acknowledged that there was learning to be taken and valued the comments shared around the process. In relation to the new school at Sawtry, the feedback was that this would not necessarily be the natural choice for families currently at Great Gidding.

Councillor Bywater addressed the Committee as the local member for Sawtry and Stilton. Great Gidding Primary was not in his division, but 20 children from Sawtry currently attended the school. In his view the consultation process was a sham. He understood that the chair and vice chair of the Committee would have taken the decision behind closed doors if this had not been challenged by Councillor Hoy. He asked whether the £42k grant would have to be repaid through clawback. The Council had installed a new heat pump at a cost of £63k, and if the school was closed that money would be lost. In his view, details of concerns around the school's viability should have been shared much earlier. He accepted that the school faced challenges, but in his judgement work to look at a federation had not been pursued enough. He also asked why consideration had not been given to making Great Gidding a school for children with special educational needs. Councillor Bywater felt that the consultation had been the death knell for Great Gidding. He was not sure that all the children would get to attend their family's preferred school if Great Gidding was to close. He called on Committee members to think about the decision they would make if this school was in their division, and not to take the easy decision.

The Director of Education stated that the £46k grant was non-repayable.

The Chair refuted any suggestion that the decision around the future of Great Gidding school had been predetermined. The decision before the Committee on whether or not to proceed to Stage 2 of the statutory process and to give notice of a formal proposal to close Great Gidding could have been taken outside of a public meeting, but she and the

Vice Chair had chosen to take that decision in public. She thanked the petition organiser, public speakers and local members for their contributions.

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- Welcomed the comprehensive report and thanked all those who had responded to the public consultation.
- Noted that a large majority of those responding to the public consultation opposed the closure of Great Gidding.
- Referenced the concerns expressed around uniform and home to school transport costs if Great Gidding pupils moved to alternative schools, and asked about the position for pupils receiving free school meals. Officers stated that if a decision was made to close Great Gidding all pupils on roll on the day the consultation was launched would receive an ex-gratia contribution to uniform costs, outside of the Council's existing policy. Home to school transport costs would be considered if the Committee decided to proceed to the next stage of the consultation as part of wider work around transition support to families.
- Noted many comments in the consultation responses suggesting the LA could have done more to promote Great Gidding. Officers reiterated the statement in the report that the LA was not permitted to do this. It could have a negative impact on other schools and would not be appropriate. Officers had hoped that alternative options might be suggested during the consultation period to support Great Giddings' future viability, but this had not happened.
- Asked whether it really was not possible to find additional funding for Great Gidding. Officers confirmed they had done all they could to maximise funding for Great Gidding and acknowledged that its finances were well-managed. It was funded through the dedicated schools grant which used a national formula and the LA could not allocate extra funds.
- Commented that the national funding formula (NFF) seemed to disadvantage small schools and asked what could be done in future to further lobby Government on this issue. Officers stated that the NFF had some flaws which did not help small schools. The lump sum was fixed, and the LA did not have flexibility on that to support small schools. Minimum funding considerations did not take account of school size. This had been raised previously with Government, but the Committee might want to do so again.
- Asked for reassurance that there would be sufficient places for children locally if Great Gidding was to close. The Director of Education stated that the number of children living within Great Gidding's catchment area was quite small and there was sufficient space locally to accommodate them.
- Asked about aligning the potential closure of Great Gidding with the opening of a new primary in Sawtry, and whether an exception could be made to accept different year groups into that school if needed. The Director of Education stated that it was the Council's practice to open new schools from the bottom up if they judged there was sufficient capacity in existing schools. Some discussions had

taken place with the Trust which would operate the new school in Sawtry, but it would not be open in September 2023.

- Asked whether officers were satisfied that all had been done to look at alternative governance models. The Assistant Director for Education Capital and Place Planning stated that there had been a tireless exploration of those options alongside DEMAT, but that none had progressed. She was satisfied that every available option had been explored.
- Commented that they were struggling to understand how closing Great Gidding could be considered to be in the best interests of educational provision when it had received a good rating from Ofsted, had never set a negative budget and the DfE presumption was against closing rural schools. The Director of Education stated that officers' view was that the educational provision offered by a two class structure was unacceptable. The headteacher would need to be the midday supervisor, there would be no special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), no teaching assistants and a reduced curriculum offer. The report from the interim headteacher was clear on the detriment to children of a two class structure, and anecdotal information suggested that some families would leave the school when this structure was introduced.
- Asked about capacity in the local area. Officers stated that they had met with the headteachers of all local schools as part of the consultation exercise. They were engaged and willing to help, and if the Committee decided to progress with the consultation process they would work with those schools to try to match available places with parental preference.
- Spoke of the early warning signs around the school's viability and asked whether the governing body had been made aware of this. The Assistant Director for Education Capital and Place Planning stated that conversations had been on-going with the governing body for a number of years. The fact that the recommendation to consult on the future arrangements for the school had come as a shock to the community spoke to the discretion of DEMAT and the governing body. The Director of Education noted that some families had left Great Gidding since the consultation process began. He judged that the same thing would have happened if concerns had been voiced earlier around the school's viability, and that this could have led to an extended period of uncertainty which was in itself detrimental. It was though a difficult balance to strike, and learning would be taken.
- Questioned why smaller classes would lead to worse educational outcomes. Officers acknowledged that the school had been rated Good by Ofsted on its last visit, but that a further visit was planned because there was doubt that the rating would remain Good if a full two day inspection was carried out. A two class structure would have implications for the breadth of the curriculum which could be delivered, and if the school remained open a new substantive headteacher would need to be found. In practical terms, it would mean teaching seven to eleven year olds in the same class. No national evidence was available on the impact on educational outcomes of a two class structure, but officers had spoken to experienced headteachers, and the impact was acknowledged by them. Great Gidding had the lowest educational outcomes in the county the previous year. When a two class structure had been introduced previously at Great Gidding in

2011/12 this had been a temporary measure as pupil numbers had been forecast to increase in the short-term. In addition, educational standards had moved on since then, and greater and more complex needs were being seen.

- Asked what was being done to support pupil wellbeing during this difficult time. Officers stated that there was an absolute commitment to support pupil well-being. This included lending a SENCO to the school to support those children with additional needs, but without an education, health and care plan (EHCP). The interim headteacher was working with pupils on a daily basis to support their well-being and was putting support mechanisms in place.
- Asked where Great Gidding's current pupils came from. Officers stated that 20 travelled from Sawtry and others came from surrounding villages. A note with the exact figures was offered outside of the meeting. **Action required**
- Commented that this was a difficult issue, and that closing a school was not an easy decision but a hard one. In their judgement, two classes was not the best way to proceed, and the Government funding mechanism would not resource a higher number of classes. The Diocese of Ely did not recognise any lack of support from the LA now or previously. Closing a school was regrettable, but the process appeared fair and followed the DfE guidance and it was necessary to give access to high quality education within settings with adequate resourcing.
- Commented that they did not believe schools should be closed based on numbers and forecasts. In the previous meeting they had given an example where a reliance on forecast demographics would have suggested a new school would not be viable, but when it was built it was viable because it attracted children from outside of its catchment area.
- Challenged the language used in the report which made reference to the views of the Council, rather than making clear that these were officer views. It was important to be clear that the Council comprised its elected members, and those elected members had not yet taken a view on the matter. They further challenged the reference in the report to there being four other denominational schools within six miles of Great Gidding 'as the crow flies', as the relevant information would have been how far away these schools were by road. They would not be supporting moving to Stage 2 of the consultation process.
- Noted the impact on the local community which had been reported by public speakers and that the school was well-managed financially. They judged that if smaller classes created difficulties the school should be supported, not closed.
- Welcomed the thorough consultation and engagement which had taken place with the parish council and the local community. Their focus was on the standard of education provided to the children. If the school stayed open there would be no teaching assistants and extra duties and responsibilities would fall to the remaining staff. In their judgement the school would not be financially viable going forward.
- Commented that the school was currently financially viable and that in their view the report and consultation was biased towards closure.

- Commented that the situation in September 2023 would be fundamentally different with a move from three classes to two classes or even a single class, and no teaching assistants. Schools were funded by the DfE and the Council must deal with the system as it was. They challenged the suggestion that this was a political decision, and described the situation as heart-breaking.
- Commented that they felt that the Committee's decision in January to move to a consultation had become a self-fulfilling prophecy with 14 children having already left the school and more families considering it. They called on all members to vote in accordance with their conscience.
- Referenced the future viability of the school accommodation, noting that all of the teaching spaces were currently in temporary accommodation.

Summing up, the Chair stated that she had spent many hours at Great Gidding primary school, and that this was not an easy situation. However, the decision before the Committee now was whether or not to proceed to the second stage of the statutory consultation process.

On being proposed by Councillor Goodliffe, seconded by Councillor M King, it was resolved by a majority to:

- a) note and consider the responses to the consultation on the future of Gt Gidding Primary CE VC Primary School.
- b) consider the evidence presented in relation to the viability of Gt Gidding Church of England (CE) Voluntary Controlled (VC) Primary School remaining open after the end of the current academic year 2022/23.
- c) proceed to Stage 2 of the statutory process and publish a statutory notice and formal proposal for the closure of Gt Gidding Primary CE VC Primary School on 31 August 2023

139. Strengthening Services Board

The Committee reviewed the proposed arrangements for a new Strengthening Services Board. Nationally, similar partnership boards with an independent chair had produced positive outcomes in relation to the delivery of children's services and this board would seek to address issues brought to the Committee's attention in the Deep Dive into Children's Services and Social Care presentation at the previous meeting. It would aim to secure greater workforce retention and improved outcomes for children affected by issues of increasing complexity with pace and purpose. Officers judged that provision might still be judged as requiring improvement if an inspection took place during the summer which could draw a level of intervention, and that improvements could be delayed if the proposed board was not established.

In response to the report, individual members:

- Sought more information around the recruitment of social workers. The Interim Executive Director of Children's Services stated that individuals were being recruited into social work through the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment and

through international recruitment. An internationally recruited social worker would typically work alongside an established practitioner for six months to ensure they were working to the same standards and practice. This extended support period was also expected to enhance retention levels.

- Noted that the independent chair could be appointed by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of Council and Lead Members. The Interim Executive Director of Children's Services was confident that a strong appointment could be made. As part of the uncoupling work from shared services with Peterborough City Council she had been working with an experienced children's commissioner and was believed that this resource could be secured.
- Noted that the previous Ofsted inspection had identified the need for improvement and asked why this work had not been done sooner. The Interim Executive Director of Children's Services stated that she had only been in post since November 2022, and that improvement work was now being progressed with pace and purpose.. Strengthening services boards were successful at ensuring rigour and accountability and she emphasised the importance of self-assessment work. It was not unusual for local authorities deemed to require improvement to get the same judgement again. .
- Described the proposed timetable for the establishment of the new board as challenging. Officers acknowledged this, but stated that preparatory work had already begun.
- Noted that the proposal for the Strengthening Services Board had not been included in the budget proposals considered by Council in February because it was being proposed in response to the outcome of self-assessment work which had not been concluded by the budget deadline.
- Welcomed the proposed new board as a sensible way forward.

It was resolved unanimously to approve:

- a) The establishment of a Strengthening Services Board for Cambridgeshire, with Independent Chair, working with partners.
- b) Development of a clear, costed improvement programme and business case for Children's Services by the end of March 2023.

140. Finance Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed the financial position for expenditure within its remit to the end of January 2023. This had a net overspend of £3.9m, excluding the dedicated schools' grant. There was an increasing pressure on children in care placements budget due to a relatively small number of individuals with highly complex needs resulting in increased provider costs. The forecast had been revised to reflect this from £650k to £1.2m. The position was expected to worsen to around £1.6m by year end, although mitigations were being sought. The Committee's attention was drawn to Appendix C, which set out the initial areas of investment proposed in relation to the establishment of the new Strengthening Service Board endorsed earlier in the meeting (minute 139 above refers). It was recommended that the Committee request that the Strategy and Resources Committee allocate £1.7m of new money to fund this.

The Chair asked whether the budget for children in care placements for the next year was sufficient. Officers stated that this was currently being reviewed. In June and July, the Finance Team would look at potential budget pressures and how these might be offset from savings elsewhere.

In discussion of the report, individual members:

- Noted that the Education Transport Strategy approved by the Committee sought to mitigate the impact of contract cost inflation and the turbulence caused when a number of routes were handed back by contractors. The savings strategy was focused on cost mitigation, rather than budget savings. A report on transport policies would be brought to the next meeting.
- Were informed that the overall numbers of children in care in secure or supported accommodation had increased. A lack of this type of provision locally meant children needed to be placed further afield and that placement costs were higher. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee emphasised the importance that these children and young people were well supported and that their lives were happy.
- Clarified that the service hoped to de-escalate complex cases which would reduce the need for high-cost provision. The budget for this was monitored through a budget reset and review of current high-cost commitments against the allocated budget.
- Learned that the closure of school accounts was scheduled for 24 March 2023 to align with the earlier Easter holidays. The impact of this earlier date was not anticipated to be significant as schools' budgets were subject to carry forward and schools could continue to spend during this period.
- Thanked officers for clearer data reporting and noted that presentation of the Children and Young People Committee Finance Monitoring Report was scheduled for review in order that additional improvements could be made. It was anticipated that this would include the removal of data relating to adult services and reviewing how the phased spend of trading accounts was presented to make it more meaningful.
- Queried whether bookings for all outdoor education centres remained low. Officers understood that bookings for Graffham Water and Burwell had returned to pre-Covid levels, but undertook to confirm this outside of the meeting. **Action required**
- Requested data on the previous international social worker intake including how many of those individuals were still working for the Council, and on-going data for the new cohort. **Action required**
- Members understood that the service was looking to recruit fifteen new international social workers, although this number could be increased for exceptional candidates. It was believed that using international workers rather than agency workers would improve retention rates and children's continuity of care, as well as making long term savings. Staff retention would be aided by supporting travel, accommodation and transport needs and by providing extended support in the workplace. Officers judged that the proposals would offer significant benefits to the Council even with the increased costs of sponsorship and Home Office processing fees. A member expressed the view that local authorities should be exempt from paying these fees to

central Government. The Executive Director of Children's Services stated that the contract was robust in terms of delivery and quality and included an induction programme to familiarise staff with Council practice and the local area. She would be happy to share more information on this with Committee members outside of the meeting. Action required

- Noted that the proposals had been considered by an officer workforce programme board. If approved, a recommendation around new money would go forward to the Strategy and Resources Committee for decision. No funding had been agreed at this point.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Review and comment on the report.
- b) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee allocate £1,070k of additional funding, in order to enable the strengthening services activities set out in Appendix C, delegating authority to the Section 151 Officer to agree drawdown of those funds.

141. Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme 2023/24

This key decision was added to the Forward Plan under general exception arrangements on 21 February 2023.

The Committee reviewed the proposed Holiday Voucher Scheme resourced by the fourth round of the Household Support Fund and would equate to a rate of £180 per eligible child. Funding of £4m had been earmarked for this purpose by Full Council and the contract for the provision of vouchers would need to be re-procured. Cambridgeshire's practice in this area was seen as exemplary.

The Chair welcomed the positive impact of the voucher scheme.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree the scope and operation of the Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme (CHVS).
- b) Agree to utilise up to £4m earmarked for this purpose by Full Council in order to fund the CHVS during 2023/24.
- c) Delegate responsibility for awarding and executing a contract for the provision of the holiday vouchers starting from the 1st April 2023 and extension periods to the Service Director Education.

142. Education Contracts

Council Bradnam declared an interest in this item as the member for Waterbeach.

The Director of Education sought approval from the Committee to award contracts for the delivery of early years provision through the second round of the pseudo dynamic purchasing system (PDPS). The Council had a statutory duty with regard to the provision for early years childcare and worked with the market to meet this. The PDPD had been approved by the Committee in October 2022 and eleven approved childcare providers were currently included, although it was hoped to increase this number through an application window for new providers. The report also sought approval for the delegation of the award and execution of education transport contracts to the Director of Education. The proposed contracts met statutory transport requirements and would cover mainstream, special school and social care contracts.

In response to the report, individual members:

- Asked whether full-time or wraparound early years provision was being considered for Northstowe. Officers stated that the Trust had been approached to see if it would consider offering full-time early years provision and that it was likely that a survey of local residents would be carried out.
- Expressed concerns about the health hazards and the environmental impact associated with the use of non-electric vehicles for home to school transport, particularly in circumstances when taxis waited with their engines left on. Officers stated that contracts included an option for the future transition to electric and hybrid vehicles, but that the Council was reliant on the district councils which licensed taxis. Operators had been advised that engines should not be left running while waiting, and this would be re-iterated. **Action required.**
- Highlighted the focus on active travel access options for the new school at Waterbeach and the limited drop-off facilities available, and the need to make sure potential operators were aware of this. Officers stated that a site plan and details of any parking restrictions would be included as part of the tender documents.

It was resolved unanimously:

In relation to Round 2 of the Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System (PDPS) to:

- a) Delegate responsibility for awarding and executing the contracts for the provision of early years and childcare starting April 2023 – April 2024 to the Director of Education. These are listed below:
 - Early Years (EY) provision at the new primary school in Sawtry
 - EY provision at the new primary school in Waterbeach
 - EY provision at second primary school in Northstowe
 - EY provision at St John's Primary School, Huntingdon
 - EY provision at Growing Places Children's Centre, Sutton

In relation to Education Transport Contracts, to:

- b) Delegate responsibility for awarding and executing a contract for the provision of special, mainstream and child social care transport contracts for implementation in September 2023, to the Director of Education.

143. Establishment of a new primary school at Darwin Green

The Committee was advised that a competition had been run in accordance with the Council's established process for setting up a new free school. Additional elements had been added to the Department for Education's (DfE) process to attract the right multi-academy trusts for the area to apply. The new school would open around 2025, but officers would keep this date under review and work with other local primary schools so that it would open at the right time. The Committee was invited to endorse the assessment panel's recommendation that Discovery Schools Academy Trust (DSAT) should be the Council's preferred sponsor for the new primary school at Darwin Green. The final decision would rest with the DfE.

Councillor Rae, the local member for Castle division, had submitted written comments in relation to this item in advance of the meeting in support of the Discovery Schools Academy Trust being the Council's preferred sponsor for the new primary school at Darwin Green. These were read out on her behalf as she was unable to attend. A copy is attached at Appendix 2.

In discussion of the report, individual members:

- Noted that DSAT's schools were based mainly in Leicestershire. Officers stated that the ability of the trust to work locally and collaboratively was a key area of focus. Its representatives had impressed the assessment panel and also on visits to its existing schools and had scored higher on its understanding of the local area than other trusts already operating locally. Clear feedback had been given that officers would want to work with the trust from the start in order to establish a relationship.
- Asked whether the new school would serve Darwin Green Phase 1, or also Darwin Green Phases 2 and 3. Officers stated it would serve Darwin Green Phase 1. The expectation was that a second new primary school would be established to serve Darwin Green Phases 2 and 3.
- Emphasised the importance of early community engagement. Officers stated that a community engagement evening had taken place.
- Asked whether the composition of the assessment panel was defined in statute and whether an independent person could be included. Officers stated that the panel's composition was based on DfE guidance. The DfE observed the panel to ensure fairness and transparency, and a school improvement representative had also been involved.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Endorse Discovery Schools Academy Trust as the Council's preferred sponsor for the new primary school at Darwin Green.

144. Adoption of the 2023-2028 Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education

The Committee welcomed Julia Ewans, Chair of Cambridgeshire's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and Amanda Fitton, Religious Education (RE) Adviser for Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and Rutland County Councils.

Religious education was a statutory part of the curriculum for all schools, but there was no national syllabus. The expectation was for the local authority (LA) to develop its own syllabus, and the current syllabus was due to expire. The Director of Education thanked the chair and members of SACRE for their work in collaboration with faith groups those representing other world views.

The Chair of SACRE placed on record her thanks to the members of SACRE and the Agreed Syllabus Conference for their work, and to the Religious Education Adviser for her support.

In response the report, individual members:

- Expressed thanks on behalf of the Diocese of Ely for SACRE's work in developing the Agreed Syllabus.
- Commented that it was not entirely apparent that the statutory amount of religious education teaching was being delivered. The Religious Education Adviser stated that this was something which both Ofsted and SACRE looked at and that their impression was that this was something which was being taken increasingly seriously. The Chair of SACRE stated that there was an issue in relation to schools having a specialist RE teacher as the approach to teaching RE was changing.
- Welcomed the clear commitment to the introduction of world views to the classroom, in support of wider community cohesion.
- Welcomed the input on collective worship, which was to be the next focus for work.
- Welcomed the detail and guidance contained in this iteration of the Agreed Syllabus.
- Expressed their thanks to the Chair and members of SACRE and to the RE Adviser as one of the Council's appointed representatives to SACRE. They welcomed the localised approach and inclusive framing of the new syllabus in the context of world views.

The Chair expressed the Committee's thanks to the chair and members of SACRE for their work.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (RE) 2023 – 2028.

145. Children and Young People Committee agenda plan, training plan and appointments

A member asked why the full membership of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee was not included in the list of Committee appointments. **Action required**

Councillor Taylor had stepped down as one of the Committee's two representatives on the Cambridgeshire Music Hub. On being proposed by Councillor Goodliffe, seconded by Councillor M King, it was resolved unanimously to:

Appoint Councillor F Thompson to the Cambridgeshire Music Hub

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the agenda plan.
- b) Note the training plan.
- c) Appoint Councillor F Thompson as the Committee's second representative on the Cambridgeshire Music Hub.

(Chair)

Public questions on Item 4: Great Gidding Church of England Primary School

	Question from:	Question:
1.	Councillor Tim Alban District Councillor for Stilton, Folksworth and Washingley	I am one of the ward District Councillors and although the County Council have consulted me and I have responded to the online consultation, I would like to emphasise my comments concerning the future of the school.
2.	Christopher Jakins Parent of child at Great Gidding	I would like to briefly provide further insight into our personal experience of the consultation process at the school since the last meeting in January. I would like to ask a couple of questions to try to clarify for me and my daughter, who attends the school, why it is that we have arrived at this point. I would like to ask about how the decision is being made, where the heart of the matter lies and whether forecasted enrolment figures are enough to make such an important and permanent change to a rural village such as Gidding. As always I want to emphasise the long term impact of this on the children at the school.
3.	Joanne Taylor Ex-Chair of Governors, Great Gidding	I am the ex-chair of governors of Great Gidding School and I would like to give my feedback in relation to the proposed closure of Great Gidding C.E Primary School. The key points I would like to focus on are. Financial position Children numbers Governors' Relationship with the Local Authority.
4.	Dr Julie Byard Local resident	To convey concerns on the negative impact of closing the village school will have, on the community of the Giddings and surrounding rural areas.

Item 11: New Primary School at Darwin Green

Written comments from Councillor C Rae, member for Castle division

I was part of the interview panel that assessed the three shortlisted bids to run the new primary school at Darwin Green. I fully support the recommendation of the review panel that Discovery Schools Academy Trust (DSAT) be given the opportunity to establish and run this new school. We were all very impressed with the enthusiasm, energy and child-centred approach of DSAT and look forward very much to working with them to establish Darwin Green Primary School.