

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 10 March 2020

Time: 2.00pm – 4.20pm

Venue: Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge

Present: Councillors S Bywater (Chairman), S Hoy (Vice Chairwoman), D Ambrose Smith, A Bradnam, P Downes, L Every, A Hay, M Howell, S Taylor and J Whitehead

Co-opted member: A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely

Apologies: Councillors L Nethsingha (substituted by A Bradnam) and J Wisson (substituted by M Howell)

Co-opted member: F Vettese, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

Also Present: Councillor L Nethsingha (until 3.10pm)

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

295. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman expressed his thanks and good wishes on behalf of the Committee to Councillor Joan Whitehead who was attending her last meeting of the Committee before stepping down as a councillor. Councillor Whitehead was a former chairwoman of the Children and Young People Committee.

The Chairman welcomed news that Thomas Clarkson Academy in Wisbech had received a rating of Good in its most recent Ofsted inspection. The Academy had faced a challenging few years and he offered his congratulations to the staff, students and their families on this recognition of the improvement which they had achieved.

296. CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP

The Committee noted the appointment of Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, in place of Councillor Anna Bradnam. Councillor Bradnam would become a substitute member, in place of Councillor Amanda Taylor. The Chairman thanked Councillor Bradnam for her contributions to the Committee's work and welcomed Councillor Nethsingha on her return to the Committee.

297. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were noted as recorded above. There were no declarations of interest.

298. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 21 JANUARY 2020

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

299. ACTION LOG

The action log was reviewed and the following update noted:

- Minute 293: Fostering Panel vacancy: Councillor Hay was no longer able to take up this appointment. A peer review of the Fostering Panel was taking place and the position would be held vacant pending the outcome of that review.

300. PETITIONS

The Committee received a petition from Councillors Claire Richards and Jocelynn Scutt containing 13 signatures which called on the Council to exempt care leavers from council tax. The full text can be viewed [here](#). There was no relevant report on the agenda so a written response would be sent within 10 working days of the committee meeting.

DECISIONS

301. FINANCE AND MONITORING REPORT: MARCH 2020

The report covered the period to the end of January 2020 and reported a slight improvement in the overall position with a projected overspend of around £1.6m compared to £1.7m in November 2019. A further improvement had been seen in the children in care budget with the projected overspend reduced by £75k and a corresponding decrease in associated legal costs. Increased pressures were evident on the home to school transport budget and on the dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and high needs block (HNB) which would be discussed in more detail later in the meeting (minute 299 refers). The savings tracker projected a small variance of £30k in unrealised savings.

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

- Noted that a balanced budget would not be achieved for the 2019/20 financial year for those services within the Children and Young People Committee's remit. This reflected the significant and continued pressure on demand-led services which they judged meant that an expectation of continued savings year on year was unrealistic. The Chairman stated that the overspend could have been much higher if the Committee had not supported fundamental changes to the delivery model for children's services which had been proposed by officers in recent years.
- Noted an overspend on direct payments to families by the Children's Disability Service and asked whether these payments were controlled. Officers stated that the management of short breaks would be transferring back to the local authority, as reported to the Committee in January 2020. The budget for the current financial year had not been profiled on this basis as this was a new position which had resulted in the reported overspend.
- Noted the high cost of placements in secure accommodation and asked for more information about their use. Officers stated that the high costs related to the bespoke nature of the accommodation provided and the high staff ratio required. An incident the previous year had required several young people to be placed in secure accommodation at short notice to separate them and keep them safe. The Chairman had been kept briefed on the situation and had offered challenge where

necessary. None of the young people involved remained in that type of provision at the current time.

It was resolved to review and comment on the report.

302. PERFORMANCE REPORT: QUARTER 3 2019/20

The report provided performance data to the end of December 2019. At that point three projects were rated as red (current performance is off target by more than 10%), seven were rated amber (current performance is off target by less than 10%), three were rated green (current performance is on target or better by up to 5%) and four were rated blue (current performance is exceeding the target by 5% or more). The Service Director for Education stated that the number of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments completed in accordance with statutory timescales had improved and was now above the national average. He commended the efforts of the officers involved.

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

- Welcomed the drop in the number of children subject to a child protection plan and asked for more information. Officers stated that the restructure of children's services had brought about a change in practice around child protection planning. Child protection plans remained a valuable tool in some cases and continued to be used where appropriate, but their use could make the relationship with families more adversarial. The focus now was on identifying how children could remain safely at home and much greater focus was placed on working collaboratively alongside families and building a constructive relationship. Historically, child protection plans had been used quite widely with older children and young people, but it was now generally accepted that this was not the best approach with that cohort.
- Noted that the number of pupils attending schools rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted had dropped and asked for more information. Officers stated that this was due to two schools having received ratings of Requires Improvement having previously been graded as Good. Officers were working closely with those schools to support their response.

It was resolved to note and comment on performance information and take remedial action as necessary.

303. SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA 2020/21

The Committee received a report setting out key developments since it met last on 21 January 2020 and agreed by a majority to transfer 1.8% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, subject to the agreement of the Secretary of State for Education. This request had been declined, so the Schools Forum had been consulted again on the proposal to transfer 0.5%. This recommendation had been rejected by a narrow margin so officers were now working on the basis of a 0% transfer. At its January meeting the Committee had also approved the officer recommendation that approval be sought to a reduction of £50 to be applied to minimum per pupil levels (MPPL) in 2020/21, but the Department for Education had subsequently advised that the MPPL would be mandatory. The budget allocation to the Schools Block for 2020/21 was £368.204m compared to £345.088m in 2019/20 and the High Needs Block Budget was £76.230m compared to £71.048m in 2019/20. These were significant increases and some schools would see a sizeable uplift, especially in the secondary sector' However,

in 2019/20 the Council would actually be spending in the region of £83m on the High Needs Block so a significant shortfall remained in this area.

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to schools funding:

- Sought confirmation of whether schools retained discretion over how their per pupil funding was used, including the flexibility to use this to support high needs provision. Officers confirmed that this was the case.
- Noted that small schools with falling rolls would be hit particularly hard and officers reported that requests for information about redundancies were becoming more prevalent, especially amongst schools with one form of entry or less.
- Commented that it would be useful to know the levels of reserves currently held by schools alongside their allocations. Officers stated that new information on reserves was just coming out and that a freedom of information request had been submitted to the Education and Skills Funding Agency regarding academy balances.
- Officers confirmed that pupil premium was paid in addition to the MPPL where applicable;
- Noted that multi-academy trusts (MATs) would be operating their own soft funding formula, so that the amount which a MAT received for a school was not necessarily the amount which it would allocate to that school. The MPPL did not apply to academies.
- Noted that the new funding arrangements would come into effect for maintained schools in April 2020 and for academies in September 2020.
- Asked whether the Committee could be confident that every governing body understood their position within wider context. Officers stated that provisional figures had been shared with schools since September 2019 and that extensive outreach had taken place since then to brief governors, heads and school business managers on the evolving position.
- Commented that a model responsive to cost base and need was required, but that the operating model of a MAT was not based on that.

The High Needs Recovery Plan which had been produced in consultation with the Schools Forum had been approved by the Secretary of State for Education. Officers had been given a clear mandate by the Schools Minister on how this should be delivered, which included cuts in the support to children with additional needs which was funded through the High Needs Block. A 10% reduction in support to children and young people with EHCPs was probable. Officers were looking at a banding system for funding to make the approach more formulaic. The existing budget deficit had been ring-fenced to the Education budget which meant there was no scope to address it from other parts of the Council's budget. It also resulted in a lost opportunity cost due to being unable to invest that balance. Amongst the other measures proposed for consultation were extending the amount of enhanced resource centre provision in Cambridgeshire, bringing the out of school tuition service in-house and incentivising schools to take children back into education. Current expenditure on alternative provision was higher than that of the county's statistical neighbours and a 10%

reduction was proposed. This would include looking at the viability of the BAIP model, but the likelihood was that this would lead to an increase in the number of permanent exclusions. Demand management and changing families' perception of non-statutory forms of support for those with additional needs would have a key role to play. Subject to the Committee's agreement, the consultation document would be drafted on the basis set out in the report. It was proposed to bring the results and recommendations to the Committee in July 2020 for decision with a view to implementation from September 2020. However, officers emphasised that even if all of the measures described were implemented in full, this would still not produce a fully balanced budget. It would though begin to reduce the deficit.

Officers sought the Committee's agreement to consult on the 12 work streams relating to high needs funding and services identified in the report which were designed to save around £3.8m if delivered in full.

Individual Members raised the following questions in relation to High Needs funding:

- Noted that challenging independent provider costs had delivered £225k of savings to date and asked how this had been achieved and how officers intended to achieve the target of saving around £1.3m from 2020/21. Officers stated that this had been achieved through reviewing how the provision specified in EHCPs was met whilst ensuring that it was still delivered in accordance with statutory requirements. Commercial specialists had been engaged to conduct the negotiations.
- Asked why the special educational needs and disability (SEND) strategy did not include funding for early intervention or early years support. Officers stated that this would be addressed through the proposed banding system.
- Noted that it had previously been agreed to conduct some research into the geographical spread of EHCPs to investigate the hypothesis that too few EHCPs were being put in place in the north of the county despite that being an area of greater deprivation and too many being agreed in more affluent areas in the south of the county.
- Commented that the Schools Forum had repeatedly rejected officer proposals regarding High Needs Block funding, but without proposing alternative models. Officers stated that the Schools Forum had supported the Council in lobbying Government and recognised the need to support children with special educational needs.
- The F40 were undertaking valuable work in this area and this would be shared with Committee members for information.
(**Action:** Service Director: Education)
- Asked that the published consultation document be set out in plain English and avoiding the use of jargon and clichés.
(**Action:** Service Director; Education)
- Commented that schools wanted more money devolved to their own budgets, but that this was not always being directed to support high needs. The Service Director for Education stated that there was simply not enough money in total to

meet all of the needs of schools. Head teachers had to balance the resources they had with the needs they faced as best they could.

Summing up, the Chairman stated that support for special educational needs was everybody's concern and it was important not to lose sight of this. The Council would be hosting the next meeting of the Eastern Regional Network for Children's Services and the issue of schools funding and funding of the High Needs Block would be top of the agenda. The Local Government Association was also in continuing dialogue with Government on this issue. He thanked the Service Director: Education and the Strategic Finance Business Partner for their hard work on this issue during a particularly challenging period.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note and comment on the contents of the report.
- b) Agree that Officers commence consultations on changes for high needs funding as outlined in the report.

INFORMATION AND MONITORING

304. CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee reminded the Committee that all elected Members were corporate parents to the children and young people placed in the Council's care and care leavers. As such, it was their responsibility to oversee the care these children received and to improve their life chances. The Children and Young People Committee retained responsibility for all policy decisions in this area whilst the Sub-Committee was responsible for monitoring policy implementation and operational activities. The Chairman of the Sub-Committee expressed her thanks to the officers involved in supporting the Sub-Committee's work and also to those elected Members appointed to the Sub-Committee for setting party political considerations aside in order to deliver the best possible support to children in care and care leavers. It would be important to ensure that all elected Members read and understood what the annual report meant for them personally and what they could do to help. She was in discussion with the Executive Director for People and Communities about how Members could all contribute to supporting the Council's children in care and care leavers. The report before the Committee had been produced by the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee with officer support and covered the period to March 2019. It had been designed to make it as accessible as possible and its content reflected the Sub-Committee's five key priorities:

- Being and feeling safe
- Being health and leading a healthy lifestyle
- Achieving stability and permanence
- Preparing for adulthood
- Hearing the voices of children and young people

These priorities also formed the basis for a thematic approach to meetings. The biggest challenge to date related to health assessments and the work being done to have these carried out within statutory timescales. The position was improving, but it remained an on-going area of challenge. Supporting the mental health and well-being of children in

care and care leavers also remained an area of focus as it had been identified as a key issue by the Sub-Committee's co-opted young people.

Individual members offered the following comments and questions in discussion of the report:

- Welcomed the use of plain English in the report. At the instigation of the two co-opted young people every Sub-Committee report contained a short summary of its content in plain English to improve its accessibility to young people. They considered this to be a valuable resource.
- Noted that the report stated that 84% of young people were in suitable accommodation and asked about the position of the remaining 16%. Officers stated that the Council's responsibilities to care leaver leavers now extended to the age of 25. It was probable that the 84% related to those young people who remained in contact with officers. Not all care leavers chose to do so, which meant it would not be possible to confirm the suitability of their accommodation.
- Asked about the gender differential for those identified as at risk of gang exploitation. Officers stated that any young person identified as at risk would be receiving support, but accepted that it would be helpful in future reports to include more narrative around this and what was being done to address it.
(Action: Head of Corporate Parenting Service)
- Welcomed the report which they found extremely helpful, but asked whether future iterations could sensitively explore the issue of obesity as part of its narrative around health given the recognised links between deprivation, poverty and obesity. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that the Best Start in Life programme (minute 302 above refers) had identified obesity as a key issue and that it would be explored in that context. Information on weight would be collected as part of individual health assessments and followed up with foster carers in the same way as any identified health issues, but it was not used to generate collective data. Given the personal and sensitive nature of the information and the small cohort of children and young people involved this was not considered appropriate. Training was made available to foster carers around promoting healthy lifestyles.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee for its work which was a crucial component of the delivery of services to the Council's children and young people in care and care leavers. He also expressed particular thanks to all of the young people who had engaged with its work, either as co-opted members or through Voices Matter.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the information within the Annual Report 2018-2019 that relates to the activity of the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee of the Children and Young People Committee.
- b) Note the information within the report relating to the performance of children's services and impact on children in care and care leavers.

- c) Note the continuing actions to secure improvements to service delivery and ensure that our response to meeting the needs of children and young people is proportionate and consistent.

305. SERVICE DIRECTOR'S REPORT: CHILDREN AND SAFEGUARDING AND DEMAND MANAGEMENT IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Children's Services had received a non-graded Focused Visit from Ofsted looking at outcomes for children in care on 11-12 February 2020. Focused visits generally happened about once a year and were designed to offer support to local authorities between full inspections. The inspectors had generally found the position to be moving in the right direction. Caseloads were reducing in most teams, the recruitment of more staff was continuing and the number of children in care was continuing to reduce, with numbers of children in care per 10,000 moving towards those of the county's statistical neighbours. The number of child protection plans had reduced and the number of child protection visits being carried out within the required timescales was continuing to improve. There was still more work to do around place planning and the number of children and young people accommodated outside of the county, but these were issues which the Inspectors recognised that officers had already identified and were working to address. A report would be brought to the Committee's next meeting in May 2020 proposing to slightly increase allowances to in-house foster carers to support the aim of sharing recruitment and training activity across the county council and Peterborough City Council. Proposals would also be brought around the delivery of mental health services to children in care, which had been an area of focus for the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee.

Individual members raised the following comments and questions in relation to the report:

- Noted that a spike in referrals would typically be expected after a high profile case involving children in care and asked whether this could be off-set by offering training around this. Officers confirmed that people became more risk averse in the aftermath of high profile cases. Discussions were taking place with neighbouring counties around social care thresholds and the ways in which the high volume of data coming into the council was sifted to identify those children who did require further investigation or the Council's support and those referrals which would be better directed to alternative support services. However, the relatively high numbers of children in care in Cambridgeshire had arisen mainly because they were staying in the system too long, rather than too many children entering the system. The changes made during the last year were beginning to address this.
- The Vice Chairwoman commented that it would be useful for Members to learn more about the work of foster carers and suggested that some training on this be offered. She further suggested that the marketing campaign to attract more in-house foster carers could be more forceful to enable it to compete effectively with that of independent fostering organisations and suggested looking again at social media advertising
(**Action:** Head of Corporate Parenting/ Communications Team)

The Chairman stated that Hertfordshire County Council were planning to carry out a fostering campaign following the success of the campaign run by Cambridgeshire

Officers stated that they were not aware of any in-house foster carers having left to work with independent providers during the period, but they did know of some foster carers from independent providers who had joined the Council's in-house team during the period.

- With regard to social worker caseload, the Vice Chairwoman noted that newly qualified social workers required supervision by an experienced social worker, but the caseload figures did not recognise this additional burden. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding acknowledged this, but stated that a standard method of recording caseloads was used which allowed comparison with other local authorities. The additional workload created was managed by spreading newly qualified social workers across the service. Overall, his judgement was that the position on caseloads was much improved from the position in January 2019.
- Asked about the impact of the Family Safeguarding model on educational outcomes and sought an assurance that education services and children's services worked together where this was appropriate. Officers stated that Hertfordshire County Council had done some work on this and had found that there was a positive on educational outcomes, but to track this for each child was very resource-intensive. The Service Directors for Children's Services and Education confirmed that their teams worked together wherever appropriate.
- Noted that Ofsted had raised the issue of the number of children and young people accommodated outside of Cambridgeshire and asked whether the marketing campaign to attract more in-house foster carers was continuing and whether the proposed increase in allowances was likely to attract more in-county carers. Officers confirmed that this was the case, but that it was not yet reducing the number of children placed out of county as settled placements would not be disrupted to move children back within the county's orders. Allowances were already broadly comparable with other local providers so the proposed increase was unlikely to have a significant impact on numbers.
- Noted that Essex County Council had been invited to conduct a peer review of the Fostering Service.
- Noted that there was a particular need for more in-house foster carers willing to care for slightly older children, but acknowledged a Member's comments around the need to be sensitive to foster carers' preferences in order to avoid alienating them.
- Noted that changes in the pattern of demand from the south of the county to the north as the new service delivery model bedded in and it became clear that the level of need in south Cambridgeshire was less than that which existed in the north of the county. To address this, an additional team manager had been added to the staffing team in the north of the county together with additional resources to meet assessed need.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the information within the report relating to the performance of children's services, including information about the Focused Visit into outcomes for children in care by Ofsted on 11th and 12th February 2020;
- b) Note the progress on implementation of the Family Safeguarding model;

- c) Note the continuing actions to secure improvements to service delivery and ensure that our response to meeting the needs of children and young people is proportionate and consistent.

306. BEST START IN LIFE PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Children and Young People Committee had approved the Best Start in Life (BSiL) Strategy on 10 September 2019 and had requested an update as work progressed. Significantly, the strategy had been generated by front-line staff from the services concerned rather than having been imposed from above by senior managers. This generated higher levels of buy-in to the proposals. The strategy had now been signed off by the chief executives of all of the organisations and agencies involved in its delivery, ensuring commitment at all levels of the organisations. Delivery would be via a multi-agency team and would follow a place-based approach. Work was on-going to identify which areas would be developed first, but it was anticipated that these were likely to be Fenland, north Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Next time an update report was brought before the Committee it was hoped to bring some practitioners along to share their experiences. This was likely to be in early 2021.

Individual members raised the following comments and questions in relation to the report:

- Asked whether the National Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey statement referenced in the report that one in three children in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were living in a household where an adult had a moderate or higher mental health issue was correct. Another member asked for clarification of what was considered to be a moderate mental health issue in this context. Officers undertook to report back.

(Action: Executive Director: People and Communities)

- Welcomed practitioners being empowered to identify what was needed.
- Commented that new towns were making provision for community hubs and suggested that libraries might also offer a resource.
- Welcomed the proposed creation of a website to provide advice to those without local or family support networks and asked who would be implementing this. Officers stated that Health colleagues were looking at this.
- Commented that this initiative would be of particular relevance to Opportunity Areas and suggested that it should formally be raised with them.

(Action: Executive Director: People and Communities)

It was resolved to note and comment progress in the design and implementation of a new countywide integrated delivery model.

DECISIONS

307. AGENDA PLAN, APPOINTMENTS AND TRAINING PLAN

The Chairman stated that the April reserve meeting date was not required and that the Committee would meet next on Tuesday 26 May 2020 in the Council Chamber at Fenland District Council. Councillor Downes voiced his continued opposition to the practice of

holding committee meetings at venues other than Shire Hall. He considered it a waste of officers' time and commented that very few members of the public attended these meetings. Should there be an item on the agenda of particular local interest he could see merit in holding that meeting in the local area, but only when this was the case. The Chairman disputed this, commenting that on more than one occasion meetings away from Shire Hall had attracted several members of the public. He had been assured by officers that there was no adverse impact on their time, and in some cases there was a benefit. The Council's Communications Team publicised all committee meetings away from Shire Hall to maximise public attendance.

Councillor Downes, seconded by Councillor Bradnam, proposed that:

All future meetings of the Children and Young People Committee should be held at Shire Hall, unless there was a specific reason for it to be held elsewhere.

On being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

It was resolved by a majority to:

a) note the following changes to the committee agenda plan:

May 2020:

- i. Children in Care Not in Education, Employment or Training: Defer to July 2020
- ii. SEND Transport and Transport to After School Clubs run by Area Special Schools – Outcome of public consultation: Merged into a single report
- iii. Northstowe Secondary Academy School: Age Range change from 11-16 to 11-18
- iv. New Item: Formalising Agreements Around Mental Health, including S75 Agreements
- v. New item: National Scorecards
- vi. Alconbury Weald Schools

July 2020:

- i. SEND Strategy Recovery Plan
- ii. New item: Schools Funding

- b) Hold one meeting of the Children and Young People Committee at East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council during 2020. The remaining meetings to be held at Shire Hall, Cambridge.
- c) To appoint Councillor Peter McDonald as the Council's representative to the Shepreth School Trust.
- d) note the Committee training plan.

Chairman
(date)