

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: 12 March 2019

Time: 2.00pm – 4.05pm

Venue: Council Chamber, Fenland Hall, March PE15 8NQ

Present: Councillors S Bywater (Chairman), S Hoy (Vice Chairwoman), D Ambrose Smith, A Bradnam, P Downes, L Every, A Hay (from 2.35pm), M Howell and J Whitehead

Apologies: Councillor S Taylor
Councillor J Wisson (substituted by Councillor M Howell)
F Vettese
A Read

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

202. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received as recorded above. Councillor Bradnam declared an interest in Item 8: Free School Proposals as the local member for Fen Ditton Primary School.

203. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 15 JANUARY 2019

Councillor Whitehead clarified that her comment relating to the criterion relating to the children of school staff was that this should apply to all teachers (minute 197 refers). Subject to this comment the minutes were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

204. ACTION LOG

The Chairman stated that he was pleased to see that most actions on the log had been completed. The following verbal updates were noted:

- i. Minute 184: The Service Director for Children's Services and Safeguarding would circulate a briefing note to Committee members on the Mosaic project;
- ii. Minute 197: The Service Director for Education stated that home to school transport eligibility was included in all automated and main admission round letters, but undertook to clarify whether it was also included in those letters generated outside of these processes.
(**Action: Service Director for Education/ Strategic Admissions Manager**)

It was resolved to note the Action Log.

205. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

DECISION

206. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT: JANUARY 2019

The position as of the end of January 2019 included an increase of £4.83m in the projected overspend on those elements of the People and Communities budget within the remit of the Children and Young People Committee. This variance was mainly due to the under-achievement of expected vacancy savings within the Children's Services and Safeguarding budget, continued pressures on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Services (0-25 years) budget and an increased projected overspend on home to school and college transport. However, there were also improvements to report including a reduction in the projected overspend on the Children in Care placement budget from £3.0m to £2.9m despite the continuing pressure on numbers, which reflected good work around commissioning. The Children in Care transport budget was also now predicting a balanced position by year end.

Arising from the report, Members noted:

- The budget assumption of vacancy savings within Children's Services relating to staff turnover would be reviewed for future years as these were not judged to be achievable due to the need to use agency cover for safeguarding and priority roles when these fell vacant. A Member registered their concern about potential gaps in provision for children in need arising from vacancies. Officers stated that the figures reflected an assumption of a certain level of vacancies based on experience and did not imply the creation of vacancies;
- A pressure of around £8m remained on the SEND Specialist Services (0-25 years) budget despite additional funding of £1.4m from the Department for Education (DfE) announced in December 2018. This pressure would be carried forward to 2019/20 as part of the overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit. Detailed work on developing options to reduce expenditure and produce a sustainable system within the available High Needs Block funding was continuing with the Schools Forum. A recovery plan would be submitted to the DfE when this work was completed;

The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that a new Executive Board had been established around SEND together with a partnership group to drive delivery against an agreed action plan and a wider stakeholder delivery group.

- The Service Director for Education stated that the growth in demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) could not be absorbed within the existing budget. A report would be brought to a future meeting on what needed to be done to meet the Council's statutory obligations in this area;
- A Member asked about the market research basis carried out in relation to home to school and college transport in view of the projected overspend. Officers stated that large numbers of routes were tendered each year. Variations in costs reflected a range of factors including changes in fuel costs and challenges around routes including the A14 where some contractors did not currently wish to tender. This was kept under close review and the market was encouraged to bid;
- Due to the statutory duty to deliver EHCPs Educational Psychologists were focusing on this duty and did not currently have capacity to deliver additional traded services;

- The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee offered congratulations that the Children in Care transport budget now forecast a balanced position at year-end and commended the hard work and negotiations which had delivered this position. She further commended the work taking place in relation to the Local Offer and welcomed the significant funds being spent on the Staying Put initiative. However, this did create a financial pressure and she sought more information on how this could best be managed to continue to support this valuable initiative.

The Service Director for Children's Services and Safeguarding stated that good progress was being made with the current drive to recruit more in-house foster carers. As well as providing the best model of foster care provision this would deliver savings which could support other aspects of the Council's work with its Children in Care. Foster Carers providing post-18 support via the Staying Put initiative continued to receive an allowance at a reduced rate. Government was currently reviewing spend on children's services in relation to the increased demand nationally and representations had been made regarding the position in Cambridgeshire;

- A Member commented that in numerous places within the report the language was opaque and asked that the position should be stated in clear terms for the benefit of the Committee and the public. They welcomed the inclusion of factual data, but commented that the narrative which accompanied it should be clearer. The Executive Director for People and Communities agreed on the need for clarity and stated that Service Directors and the Finance team were already working together to streamline the finance and performance reports for the next financial year to make them more accessible;
- A Member asked for more information about the assertion that foster placement capacity both locally and nationally was being overwhelmed and the risk that this might lead to greater use being made of residential provision. The Service Director for Children's Services and Safeguarding stated that whilst there was relatively little the Council could do to increase the overall number of foster care placements available it could endeavour to move children through the care system more quickly;
- A Member asked for confirmation that the overall projected shortfall for 2018/19 was £9.4m. Officers confirmed that this was correct;

(Councillor Hay joined the meeting at 2.35pm)

- A Member asked if officers could provide a summary of the report to be shared with Parish Councils. The Chairman stated that it was crucial for Members to be able to articulate the position clearly to their Parish Councils and local residents. Officers undertook to take these comments away.
(**Action: Strategic Finance Business Partner**)

It was resolved to review and comment on the report.

207. SERVICE DIRECTOR'S REPORT MARCH 2019: CHILDREN AND SAFEGUARDING

The Service Director for Children's Services and Safeguarding stated that the unannounced Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) which

took place between 7-18 January 2019 had identified a number of areas for improvement. These were areas which had already been identified by officers which gave Inspectors confidence in senior managers' knowledge of the service. The recruitment issues being faced in parts of the county was already known to the Committee, but the Inspector's recognition of the calibre of existing staff was most welcome. The Inspector had also expressed confidence that the changes being made to the Multi-Agency Hub (MASH) would deliver positive outcomes going forward. Officers were devising an action plan in response to the key findings in the report.

The following comments arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions:

- A Member noted that the previous Inspection in 2014 had also found that the experience and progress of children who needed help and protection required improvement. They asked whether officers were confident that once the current changes to services were fully implemented this provision would meet the requirement to be judged 'Good' by Ofsted.

The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that officers had been open with the Committee about the need for improvement. The Inspection criteria used in 2019 was very different to that used 2014 and placed far greater emphasis on children's experience, so the two Inspection ratings were not directly comparable.

- The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee commented that she felt there had been a significant change during the past two years. It was very unusual for an Ofsted Inspection to endorse leadership when improvement was still required in other areas which demonstrated the Inspector's confidence in senior officers. She endorsed the Service Director's commendation of staff in the Children's Services and Safeguarding teams and welcomed the Inspector's recognition of their calibre and contribution. The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee stood ready to support the continuing work to further improve the services provided to Cambridgeshire's Children in Care, including in relation to the post-Inspection Action Plan. A key aspect of this would relate to health assessments.
- A Member commented that going from an overall judgement of 'Good' in 2014 to 'Requires Improvement to be Good' in 2019 was not good. The different Inspection framework used in 2019 might go some way to explaining this, but they asked whether a similar outcome had been seen in other Local Authorities which had been subject to the new Inspection criteria. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that the quality of service delivered probably had deteriorated a little following the 2014 Inspection, but that it was improving again now and was well placed to move back to a rating of Good;
- A Member noted that the Inspectors had spent most of their time in Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire which were both experiencing difficulties with recruitment and asked whether they would have found a different picture had they spent more time in the north of the county. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that they could have seen a more balanced picture outside of Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire, but that overall he judged the Inspectors' findings to be fair;
The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that the situation and needs in 2019 were different to those which had existed in 2014. Wider work was now being done around child sexual exploitation and there were more unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the Council's care. There was a clear

recognition that there were still things to do to move the services to a rating of Good. The money being spent on Children's Services had not decreased, although it was being spent in different ways. A note on these figures would be provided;
(Action: Executive Director for People and Communities/ Strategic Finance Business Partner)

- A Member noted that the ILACS Inspection report stated that '...while there are systems in place to identify, and follow up on, children who go missing from education altogether, the proportion of pupils whose whereabouts are unknown is relatively high'. The Service Director for Education stated that the Council had a statutory duty to track children missing from education. A clear process for reporting and monitoring each case was in place and children who came to notice in this way were kept on the list for as long as possible. It had been explained to the Inspectors that this was a considered decision by senior officers to ensure that these children were actively monitored by the Council over time. It had not yet proved possible to reconcile the figures for children missing from education contained in the Inspection report with the Council's own figures and officers had written to the Regional Inspector seeking to clarify the figures;
- A Member expressed disquiet at the tone of the press release which had accompanied the publication of the ILACS Inspection report which they felt glossed over the challenges which the Council faced. The Chairman stated that the comments attributed to him reflected his opinion;
- A Member commended social work and psychology teams for the great work they were doing to support children and young people with significant and complex needs, but expressed concern about social worker caseloads which they felt meant that staff were constantly fire-fighting rather than carrying out regular work. The Service Director for Children's Services and Safeguarding acknowledged that there remained more to do on this. The shortage of social workers was a national issue, but the recruitment of additional case holding practitioners and dedicated team managers was having a positive impact on the flow of work, particularly in relation to Child in Need cases;
- Paragraph 2.5: A Member commented that they took strong exception to the implication that the 2014 Inspection may have been less thorough. They had been a member of the Committee at that time and that absolutely was not the case. Prior to 2014 the Council's Children's Services had been found to require improvement and bi-monthly meetings had been held by Committee members and senior officers to address this. During the 2014 Inspection great attention had been paid to casework as that was the area which had previously been judged as inadequate. Following the most recent Inspection they suggested it would be a good idea to re-introduce a framework of similar bi-monthly meetings with representation from both the Committee and senior officers.

The Service Director for Children's Services and Safeguarding stated that there was no intention to impugn the thoroughness of previous Inspections or the response of Members and officers; rather, the intention had been to highlight that the format of previous Inspections differed significantly from current practice.

- A Member questioned why shortfalls in service provision identified by senior officers prior to the Inspection had not already been addressed. The Service Director for Children's Services and Safeguarding stated that recognition of the need to improve had driven the changes to the delivery of Children's Services which had been

implemented during the past 12 months following the review commissioned from Oxford Brookes University. Those changes had been supported unanimously by the Children and Young People Committee and delivered through additional funding approved by the General Purposes Committee. On the basis of this the Ofsted Inspector had found the impact of leaders on social work practice to be Good, whilst recognising that it was too soon to see the results of the changes which had been implemented from November 2019. Work was already underway to produce an Action Plan to address the findings of the Inspection and this would be brought to a future Committee meeting as part of the Service Director's regular update report.

The Chairman stated that both he and Councillor Count, the Leader of the Council, sat on the Performance Board which met termly to scrutinise and challenge performance. He expressed his thanks to all staff within Children's Services and Safeguarding teams for their work during the Inspection period and stated that the Action Plan responding to Ofsted's findings would be a key issue going forward.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the content of the report and the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection, recognising that this was in line with our self-assessment;
- b) Record thanks to all staff in Children's Services for their continuing commitment and dedication to securing the best outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families;
- c) Agree in principle to exploring ways in which we can improve recruitment and retention of particular roles in certain areas, in partnership with Adult Services;
- d) Agree in principle to continuing exploration of developing the Family Safeguarding approach in Cambridgeshire, including seeking transformation funding if necessary;
- e) Request that the Ofsted Action Plan be brought to a future Committee meeting as part of the Service Director's regular update report.

INFORMATION AND MONITORING

208. PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – SIX MONTH UPDATE

The Service Director for Children's Services and Safeguarding provided an update on progress following the approval of the placement Sufficiency Strategy and HUB model which included a focus on increasing the number of Local Authority fostering placements.

The following comments arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions:

- A key priority was to move Children in Care through the system more quickly to a settled placement. This required action by social workers, so where vacancies existed this process slowed down and children spent more time in care;
- The impact of the changes made to the delivery of Children's Services from November 2018 should be seen from now onwards;
- The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee commended the passion displayed by members of the Committee with regard to the delivery of Children's Services. Given the continued pressures on the Children's Services budget she suggested it might be timely to remind all county councillors of their responsibilities as corporate parents. The Chairman endorsed this suggestion and stated that he would be pleased to chair a Members' Seminar on corporate parenting. He would also raise the importance of considering the impact of Council decisions on Children in Care at his regular meetings with the Chairs of the Council's other Committees; **(Action: Service Director for Children and Safeguarding/ Democratic Services Officer)**
- Officers confirmed that the majority of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) were between 16-17 years old. They were placed mainly in supported accommodation with young people with similar backgrounds and life experiences which was found to be the most supportive environment for them. Agreement had been reached with other Local Authorities in the Eastern Region that Cambridgeshire would not take any more UASC in the current financial year due to the high numbers already accommodated. As care leavers, UASC were not permitted to work or have access to public funds whilst their asylum claims were considered so the cost of supporting them fell to the Local Authority. Some funds were provided by Government, but not enough to meet the full cost of supporting these young people. Officers were lobbying the Home Office about the time take to make decisions on the asylum claims of UASC and the financing of their support and a report on this was awaited.

The Chairman welcomed the successful campaign which was continuing to attract more foster carers to work with the Council, including efforts to gain more foster carers from within the LGBT+ community.

It was resolved to note progress against the priorities of the Placement Sufficiency Statement.

209. FREE SCHOOL PROPOSALS

The Committee received an update on the latest position regarding Wave 11, 12 and 13 Free Schools and notice of the launch of Wave 14 of the Department for Education (DfE) central free school programme. Wave 12 remained the most contentious from the Council's perspective as it was felt that Godmanchester Secondary Academy and St Bede's Interchurch School were not needed and would have an adverse impact on existing schools in the area. Following the success of the previous event held for potential sponsors a similar event would be run in relation to Wave 14. This would make clear the Council's views on where basic need did and did not need exist. Some discussions had taken place with the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia in relation to Voluntary Aided Schools. 90% of the capital costs of these schools would be funded centrally with the proposer providing the remaining 10%.

Arising from the report, Members:

- Noted that proposals to merge the Cambridge Academic Partnership Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) with a larger MAT was causing concern amongst some parents and that a petition containing over 300 signatures being generated. The Service Director for Education stated that responsibility for mergers of academy Trusts rested with the DfE on the advice of the Regional Schools' Commissioner (RSC). The Council would not be consulted, but its views had and would continue to be shared with the RSC via the usual channels of communication. A Member suggested that the Council might wish to lobby the RSC to ask that the Council should be consulted on MAT mergers. The Chairman stated that he would be happy to discuss this further outside of the meeting;
- A report on faith-based education might be brought to a future meeting;
- The local Member for Fen Ditton Primary School expressed concern that the Wave 12 Wing Primary School application could have a big impact on pupil numbers at Fen Ditton Primary and potentially lead to its temporary closure. The Service Director for Education stated that the Local Authority could not provide additional financial support to Fen Ditton Primary, but that as both schools were part of the same MAT the Council could encourage the management of numbers to support the viability of both schools. He would be happy to take this up with the Trust;
(Action: Service Director for Education)
- Asked to what extent the Council's concerns about St Bede's Inter-Church School would impact on the DfE's decision. The Service Director for Education stated that he had written to the RSC in September 2018 to explain why, in the Council's view, the school was not needed. Officers continued to work closely with existing schools in the area;
- Asked about the governance arrangements for stand-alone Post-16 provision. The Service Director for Education stated that this was a complex area. Sixth form colleges were established under Further Education legislation, but could convert to Academy status;
- Commented that opening faith-based schools did not necessarily increase parental choice if there were no alternative types of school in the local area. Officers stated that both the Church of England Diocese of Ely and the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia only considered opening faith-based schools in locations with multiple schools;
- Noted that the Wave 13 application for Waterbeach Primary Academy had been dismissed.

The Chairman endorsed the principle of engaging early with potential sponsors and expressed his willingness to attend the proposed event.

It was resolved to note:

- a) The latest position regarding Wave 11 and Wave 12 free schools in Cambridgeshire;

- b) The applications to establish new free schools in Cambridgeshire under Wave 13 of the Department for Education's (DfE) central free school programme;
- c) The launch of Wave 14 of the DfE's central free school programme;
- d) The launch of a capital fund to support the establishment of new Voluntary Aided Schools and the known level of interest shown in this in Cambridgeshire.

DECISIONS

210. AGENDA PLAN, APPOINTMENTS AND TRAINING PLAN

The Committee reviewed the agenda plan and requested that the report on Children in Care: Educational Performance be submitted via the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee. The provisional meeting date on 16 April 2019 would be cancelled unless any urgent business arose. The meeting on 21 May 2019 would be held at Huntingdonshire District Council if a suitable meeting room was available.

(Action: Democratic Services Officer)

The Chairman stated that following the last meeting and at the Committee's request, the three local Members for March had been made aware of a vacancy for a Trustee of the March Educational Foundation. Councillor John Gowing, Member for March South and Rural, was seeking the Committee's support to taking on this appointment. Those present were content to recommend the appointment of Councillor Gowing.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the Committee agenda plan;
- b) Recommend the appointment of Councillor John Gowing, Member for March South and Rural, as a Trustee of the March Educational Foundation;
- c) note the Committee training plan.

Chairman
(date)