

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE: MINUTES**

**Date:** Thursday 7 May 2020

**Time:** 2.00pm – 3.15pm

**Venue:** Meeting held remotely in accordance with The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020

**Present:** Councillors S Bywater (Chair), S Hoy (Vice Chair), D Ambrose Smith, P Downes (intermittently from 2.15pm), L Every, M Howell, L Nethsingha, S Taylor, J Whitehead and J Wisson

Co-opted members: A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely  
F Vettese, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

**Apologies:** Councillor A Hay, substituted by Councillor M Howell

### **CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS**

#### **308. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were noted as recorded above.

#### **309. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **310. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 10 MARCH 2020**

The minutes of the meeting were agreed as an accurate record. A paper copy would be signed by the Chairman when practicable.

The minutes recorded that it had been Councillor Whitehead's intention to step down as a county councillor at the May 2020 elections. These elections had subsequently been cancelled due to the coronavirus. Councillor Whitehead advised that she would now be remaining a county councillor and would travel to Cambridge to attend physical committee meetings when these were reinstated.

#### **311. ACTION LOG**

The Committee noted the updated action log which had been published on 5 May 2020. There were no questions.

#### **312. PETITIONS AND PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No petitions or public questions had been received.

## DECISION

### 313. CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Officers had been asked to bring a report on the Covid-19 response to date for those services for which the Children and Young People Committee was responsible. A similar report would be brought to each future meeting until further notice. Given the rapidly changing situation and the need to provide the committee and public with the most up to date information possible the Chairman had accepted this as a late report on the following grounds:

1. Reason for lateness: To allow the report to contain the most up to date information possible.
2. Reason for urgency: To enable the committee to be briefed on the current situation in relation to the Council's response to Covid-19 for those service for which it is responsible.

Officers stated that a local resilience forum had been set up by the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) to co-ordinate a multi-agency response to the pandemic. This had in turn established a number of sub-groups to focus on specific areas. One of these was the Community Reference Group (CRG) which spanned the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and was responsible for supporting the 15,000 people within the shielded category who were resident in the area, together with other vulnerable groups. Approximately a third of people within this group had no support networks of their own and were reliant on the support provided via the CRG. The CRG was also responsible for the redeployment of County Council and Peterborough City Council staff and local volunteers in response to the pandemic. Senior officers were holding a review meeting at 8.00am each day in addition to regular meetings with Committee Chairs and Group Leaders.

#### Education

In relation to Education, the report sought to capture the different phases of Covid-related activity to date. This included closing schools to the majority of pupils, operating during school holidays to offer services to vulnerable children and the children of key workers and now moving into the recovery phase. A provisional recovery framework for schools and early years settings had been published earlier in the week setting out the types of issues which schools should be addressing in their recovery planning. This would be refined as Government guidance was issued. The Service Director for Education stated his wish to place on record his thanks to all of the staff in Cambridgeshire's schools and early years settings for their phenomenal response to Covid-19 which went above and beyond anything which could have been expected of them. The Service Director for Children's Services also expressed his thanks to the staff in schools and early years settings for their invaluable work in supporting vulnerable children and young people during the lockdown.

#### Children's Services

Children's services had continued to provide a full range of support services to the county's children in care, care leavers and vulnerable children and young people throughout the period. Enhanced use had been made of virtual interactions where appropriate, but face to face contacts had continued with the necessary safety precautions in place where this was judged to be necessary. Officers anticipated that

the busiest period would come as the lockdown was eased and children began returning to school.

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

- Members expressed their thanks to the Executive Director for People and Communities, the Service Directors for Education and Children's Services and their teams for the extraordinary job which they were doing trying to keep everyone safe in unprecedented circumstances.

The meeting adjourned at 2.19pm due to technical difficulties and resumed at 2.28pm. All Members were confirmed as present with the exception of Councillor Downes who re-joined the meeting at 2.43pm.

- Sought clarification of the current position in relation to the special educational needs and disability (SEND) deficit. Officers stated that a cumulative deficit of around £17.5m was anticipated at year end. The position remained under review, but due to the current situation all consultations on changes relating to activities funded from the High Needs Block had been stopped. Representations continued to be made to Government around cashflow and these would continue. The support of local MPs had also been sought to make further representations. Another Member commented that the deficit on SEND budgets was a national issue and that as such it was in their view something which the Government needed to tackle. Officers stated that their understanding was that around half of local authorities were showing a deficit on their SEND budget and that Cambridgeshire would be in the top quartile of these.
- Expressed concern about the financial viability of early years settings. They understood that at the beginning of the lockdown early years settings had been told they could furlough all staff. However, they had subsequently been advised that they could only furlough the proportion of staff funded through private income and not those financed through the Government-funded element of their income which was a significant difference. Officers confirmed that this was correct. The initial Government guidance on the furlough process had subsequently been refined and settings could only furlough staff on the basis of their private income. Officers had made representations to the Department for Education about this, noting the Council's statutory duty around place sufficiency. The Council's business team was offering advice to early years settings.
- Welcomed the focus on providing support to care leavers as this group might otherwise find themselves particularly isolated at the present time. Officers were invited to let councillors know if there was anything which elected members could do in support of this.

**(Action: Assistant Director, Children's Services)**

- Noted that relatively small numbers of vulnerable children were taking up the option of attending school during the lockdown, both nationally and within Cambridgeshire. This was a key factor in wanting to see children return to school as soon as it was safe to do so, and for this reason a Member expressed concern at reports that initially only some year groups would return to school. Officers stated that vulnerable children were offered the opportunity to attend school under a voluntary arrangement and that around 12-15% were currently doing so. This equated to around 360 children in Cambridgeshire. However, there was a wide variety of ways

of staying in contact with these children in addition to through their attendance at school. This included proactive contact by both schools and children's services teams and face to face visits where this was judged necessary. It would be helpful if Government guidance on the return to school recognised the needs of vulnerable pupils, but equally a phased return would enable those requiring support to be identified in a phased way.

- The co-opted member for the Church of England Diocese of Ely stated that he wished to place on record his thanks to the Local Authority for the way it had led the response to Covid-19 in relation to education within the county and for its collaborative approach. He welcomed the pro-active work being done with schools and academies to encourage them to think about the process of re-opening. Whilst not seeking to second-guess Government advice on how this would look, it encouraged schools to begin looking now at the types of measures which might be needed.
- Noted reports that some teaching unions had expressed concerns about teachers being required to return to work and asked for more information. The Director of Education stated that officers were engaged in an open dialogue with teaching unions about the need to ensure that the workforce was supported. This included support now for those with health issues, recognising the possible mental health issues around Covid-19 and, moving forward, the possible worries and concerns around returning to work.
- Asked whether the need to accommodate some young people who had been released early from remand and had not returned home had created a new budget pressure. Officers stated that in Cambridgeshire there were three young people in this position. Two were accommodated in fairly low cost accommodation and one in higher cost accommodation. Records were being kept of all anticipated and additional expenditure incurred by the Council in relation to Covid-19 and these costs would be captured in that work.
- Commented that a number of residents in their Division within the shielded group had been in touch to say that they were not receiving any support, although some lived in villages which had local support groups in place. The Member asked whether there was a lack of information available to residents about the support available to them. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that there was a lot of information available on the Council's website about the support available to vulnerable people and how to access this. District councils had similar information on their own websites. She invited the Member to contact her direct if there was an issue in their Division so that officers could follow this up.
- Asked whether vulnerable children and young people in Cambridgeshire had been provided with laptops. Officers stated that a Government scheme to provide laptops to disadvantaged children in Year 10, vulnerable children and care leavers had been announced the previous week. Details of Cambridgeshire's needs were being collated now and the laptops were expected to arrive in June 2020. They would remain with their recipients for as long as needed to allow them to catch up. Officers had also been in discussion with other possible providers and would be happy to follow up any leads which committee members might have.

- The Vice Chairwoman commended the inclusive tone of the daily emails being sent to schools by the Service Director for Education which reflected the collaborative approach being taken. This close relationship represented a positive outcome of the current situation. Looking to the future, she expressed concern about the social and emotional impact on children and young people of this extended time away from school in addition to the impact on their learning and suggested that planning should start now around mental health support. Officers acknowledged this issue and stated that it was likely that those children and young people who were already experiencing disadvantage were likely to be the most affected. Consideration was needed now about how to gear up early help services in preparation for this anticipated need for support.
- Asked where the final decision rested on whether or not a child should return to school when schools re-opened and whether parents would be prosecuted if they chose to keep their children at home. Officers stated that they were expecting the ability to fine parents for failing to send their children to school would be removed for the remainder of the summer term. Headteachers would also have some discretion.
- Asked whether there was anything specific of which Members should be aware in their role as Corporate Parents to the county's children in care. The Service Director for Children's Services stated that children in care were included in the vulnerable children group and were treated accordingly, although many would not describe themselves in these terms. There had not been significant numbers of placements coming to an unplanned end during the lockdown and the vast majority of children and young people in care were continuing to do well.
- Noted that most social care referrals were made by schools and asked how officers were planning to cope with the anticipated spike in referral numbers as schools began to re-open. The Service Director for Children's Services stated that this would be closely monitored and contingency plans would be prepared. This might include moving staff around or seeking additional resources from Government.
- Commented that the number of Covid-19 cases in Cambridgeshire was relatively low with variations in different parts of the county. Some publicity around this might be needed which looked at risk factors in a more holistic way to enable people to feel more confident about returning to work and school as the lockdown eased. Officers confirmed that they were mindful of this. With reference to schools, draft template letters had been prepared which would contain the latest Public Health advice and schools would be re-engaging with parents and carers at an early stage. This would setting out the benefits to children of returning to school.
- Requested clarification on the position of those taking GCSEs and an update.  
(**Action:** Director of Education)

Summing up, the Chairman recognised the extraordinary journey which everyone was undertaking. He expressed his wholehearted thanks to the Executive Director for People and Communities and the Service Directors for Education and Childrens Services and Safeguarding and their teams for all their efforts. He further expressed his thanks to Mr Read for the support which he had provided to the local authority, to the Council's many partner organisations and stakeholders and to the county's schools, early years providers and social care settings for their outstanding efforts.

It was resolved to:

- (a) Note and comment on the progress made to date in responding to the impact of the Coronavirus;
- (b) Note the contributions being made to support children and especially those with additional vulnerabilities by members of staff in the Council and our partner organisations, including our schools and early years' settings.

#### **314. AGENDA PLAN AND APPOINTMENTS**

The Committee reviewed the agenda plan. The Chairman stated that Councillor Whitehead was stepping down as one of the Committee's three representatives on the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum so a replacement was needed. Councillor S Taylor confirmed that she would be willing to take on this role.

It was resolved to:

- (a) Note the committee agenda plan.
- (b) Appoint Councillor Simone Taylor as a representative to the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum.

#### **315. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The committee would meet next on Tuesday 26 May. It had been intended to hold that meeting at Fenland District Council, but in view of the current situation it would now be a virtual meeting.

Chairman  
(date)