

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 16th January 2024

Time: 2.00pm – 4.45pm

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

Present: Councillors D Ambrose Smith, M Atkins (Vice Chair), A Bradnam, A Bulat, A Costello, C Daunton, B Goodliffe (chair), A Hay, S Hoy, J King, A Sharp, P Slatter, S Taylor and F Thompson

Co-opted Members:

S Conant Church of England Diocese of Ely

Dr A Stone Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

186. Changes to Committee Membership

The Chair welcomed Councillor Costello as a returning member of the Committee and paid tribute to her predecessor, Councillor Mac McGuire. Councillor McGuire had been the Council's longest serving councillor having first been elected in 1985 and then again continuously from 1997. During that time he had held various key roles including Chair of Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport and Cabinet Member for Community Engagement. He had also served on the Children and Young People Committee during both the current and previous Administrations. Those present stood for a minute's silence to mark Councillor McGuire's passing.

The Chair placed on record the Committee's thanks to former member Canon Andrew Read. Canon Read had joined the Committee as a co-opted member in February 2017 representing the Church of England Diocese of Ely. His considered and insightful contributions had been much valued, and the Committee wished him every success in his new role.

Jonathan Lewis, Director of Education, would be leaving the Council in February and the Chair voiced the Committee's thanks for his outstanding leadership in this key area of the Council's responsibilities. His work developing and co-ordinating support to schools during the covid pandemic and in the time since was highlighted for special mention and had been greatly appreciated by local school leaders and singled out for praise by the Department for Education.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- i. note that Councillor A Costello succeeded Councillor M McGuire as a member of the Committee on 8 December 2023.
- ii. note that Councillor M Goldsack was appointed a substitute member of the Committee on 29 November 2023.
- iii. appoint Sarah Conant, interim Diocesan Director of Education, as a co-opted member of the Committee representing the Church of England Diocese of Ely.

187. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

There were no apologies for absence.

Councillor S Hoy had sought advice from the Monitoring Officer on whether she had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to Item 6: Children's Independent Advocacy Services for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in relation to her role as a paid Young Person's Advocate. The Monitoring Officer had advised that she did not.

188. Minutes – 28th November 2023 and Minutes Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

The minutes action log was noted.

189. Petitions and Public Questions

One public question was received from Mrs A James, a local resident. A copy of the question and written response was available to view on the [meeting web page](#).

Key Decisions

190. Schools and Early Years Revenue Funding Arrangements 2024-25

The report set out the proposed revenue funding arrangements for schools and early years settings for 2024/25. The Schools Forum had been consulted on and was supportive of the approach set out on paragraph 4.1. The appendices set out the funding rates to be applied to all schools, scaled down to meet affordability and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) requirements. Subject to Committee approval the budget proposals would be submitted to the Department for Education this week, but school budgets remained subject to change until final sign-off by the ESFA. Despite the increases and uplifts received this was not a good settlement for Cambridgeshire and schools would be under pressure to manage within these budgets.

The Chair noted the significant and complex work involved in producing these figures and thanked the Director of Education and Strategic Finance Business Partner for their work.

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

- asked how net increases and decreases in pupil numbers compared with other local authorities (LAs). Officers advised that all LAs saw blips in numbers from time to time. The number of early years children was currently increasing, so a bulge in pupil numbers in schools would follow. Significant variations in pupil numbers were seen across the county which officers managed as part of their place planning responsibilities.
- learned that the pupil numbers in the report were based on October school census data and would include any refugee children on roll at that date. There was a time lag until the funding based on those pupil numbers reached schools.

- asked the approximate value of the Special Education Needs (SEN) Inclusion Fund. Officers offered to confirm the figure outside of the meeting and advised that this had been uplifted by additional Government funding in-year of around 8-10p. This sum had been passed on in full. **Action required**

Co-opted members of the committee were eligible to vote on this item.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) approve the formula factors and draft unit values to be applied in the local Cambridgeshire funding formula, for primary and secondary mainstream schools as set out in Appendix A.
- b) approve the proposed hourly rates for Early Years settings as detailed in section 5.3.

191. Children's Independent Advocacy Services for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

The Committee was advised of the legislative duty placed on local authorities (LAs) to provide an independent advocacy service. The current service was provided by Voiceability through a subcontract with the National Youth Advocacy Service and the delivery of services had adapted and flexed over the seven year duration of the contract. The provider market in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough remained small due to the specialist nature of the service and economies of scale were achieved through joint procurement with Peterborough City Council (PCC). It was proposed that the new contract would be for three years with the option to extend for a further year. Every advocacy intervention with a child or young person was face to face unless they asked for it to be done virtually.

The Chair confirmed that no members wished to discuss the exempt appendix to the report.

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

- endorsed the principle of advocacy, but questioned whether the division of cost with PCC was proportionate to the services received. Officers confirmed that the calculations were correct and reflected the larger number of children's homes in Cambridgeshire and of children and young people in residential care.
- asked about the provision of advocacy services to children and young people placed out of county. Officers advised that the Council's providers would travel out of county to support them.
- questioned whether advocates could be considered truly independent when the LA commissioned their services, noting that some children's homes employed their own advocates. The Executive Director for Children, Education and Families stated that advocates could link in with Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and that although the IROs were also LA employees there was an independent channel for them to raise issues.

- suggested that it would be good in future to look at whether advocacy services were provided on an opt in or opt out basis. An opt out approach would see advocates making themselves available to children and young people rather than waiting to be asked which they felt supported relationship building through regular contact.

Co-opted members of the committee were not eligible to vote on this item

It was resolved unanimously to:

progress to notifications of award stage and approve awarding the Children's Independent Advocacy Service contract covering Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, on a three-year initial contract, extendable for up to a further 12 months from 5th February 2024. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Children's Independent Advocacy Lot will have a total contract value of £614,864 over 4 years. Peterborough City Council will contribute £35,368 annually towards this or £141,472 over 4 years.

192. Early Years Funded Entitlement and Wraparound Expansion

The Committee received a report setting out details of regional variations in sufficiency and access to the newly expanded Early Years (EY) funded entitlement and wraparound provision. Sufficient provision was available in the short term, but there were areas where provision would need to be developed. Only 18 schools in Cambridgeshire were not yet offering wraparound provision and officers would work with them and other local providers to grow their offer to make sure all families had access to wraparound provision. An application had been made to the Department for Education to be a pathfinder authority for this provision.

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

- highlighted the disparity between Government funding of around £4.80 per child against a service delivery cost of around £7.80, which was leading many providers to consider limiting the number of funded places on offer. Pressure on EY staff and low wages was leading to some leaving the sector and further reducing capacity. The Director of Education confirmed that officers were mindful of the shortage of EY staff and were working hard to achieve sustainability in the sector through growth. He commended the Family Information Service to councillors as the information provided helped inform planning around provision.
- asked whether local childcare providers had been surveyed about their future plans and willingness to expand. Officers confirmed that this engagement took place and that a work was done around financial sustainability with short-term funding made available to settings where appropriate. This combination of support and engagement had prevented a significant number of setting closures in recent years.
- noted that paragraph 3.6 in the report set out key areas in the county with gaps in provision. Officers confirmed that they were looking at the use of council assets where these were available, in discussion with schools and local providers in those areas.
- asked about oversight and quality assurance given the large number of providers. The Director of Education stated that there was a strong EY team within the Council and many strong providers locally, but where officers considered the quality of provision

was not sufficient they would intervene. Ofsted had oversight responsibilities for EY settings, but no influence on how the provision grew locally.

- commented that the administrative burden around child-minding could deter people from taking on this role and asked whether a buddy or mentoring system could offer support with this aspect. The Director of Education stated child-minders were a critical part of the expansion of EY provision and providing feedback to the DfE on potential barriers would be important. Support could be provided around administrative tasks if needed.
- asked that local members should be informed about plans for EY provision in their area as their local knowledge could identify opportunities that might otherwise be missed. The Director of Education suggested district-level briefings as the position emerged. **Action required**
- asked that an update be taken to the Spokes meeting in March on the six areas of concern identified in the report, in addition to the proposed district level briefings. **Action required**
- described Appendix 1 which set out eligibility for funded childcare as inaccessible. Officers undertook to review and simplify this. **Action required**

Co-opted members of the committee were eligible to vote on this item.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) note and comment on the information outlined in this report.
- b) delegate capital funding decisions to the Director of Education in consultation with CYP Spokes.
- c) delegate capacity funding and revenue decisions to the officer Programme Steering Group, chaired by the Director of Education.

Decisions

193. Business and Financial Plan 2024-29

The Committee received a report summarising the business and financial planning proposals for 2024-29 which fell within its areas of responsibility. This included proposals relating to the holiday voucher scheme, home to school transport, children in care placements and residential strategy, workforce structures, the schools capital programme and pressures on the high needs block of the dedicated schools grant

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

- asked about the phasing of the residential strategy. Officers advised this was a two year strategy to deliver two small children's home offering a total of four beds. Preparatory work was being done in house.
- asked if inflation assumptions might be revised downwards. The Section 151 Officer stated that a lot of contracts had been set based on the September Consumer Prices

Index (CPI). A strong market and shortage of places was driving up placement costs for children in care, but this would continue to be monitored.

- asked whether the proposed saving against the children in care placement budget and education transport budget were measured against 2022/23 costs and whether they were realistic or aspirational. Officers stated that children in care placement costs were reviewed each week to help drive down costs. Given the high costs associated with some placements it was judged that the savings set out in the report were achievable. Placement costs fluctuated frequently due to the changing needs of the child or young person as their needs changed.
- welcomed the proposed continuation of the holiday voucher scheme which they judged made a big difference to families in need.
- noted that overall investment in Children's Services would be increasing and included a small additional investment in tackling children's mental health needs which flowed from the findings of the Quality of Life survey. A request was made for an update on this work. **Action required**
- noted that Fenland already had a number of children's homes which created an additional pressure on local services, and asked that the Council should avoid locating any more children's homes in that part of the county. Officers confirmed that those pressures would form part of the analysis of the location of the planned new children's homes, but could not commit to their location at this stage. The analysis would be brought to the Committee for decision.
- noted that one year of funding from Reserves would be used to support the Children in Care Placements budget. Officers' view was that future years' costs could be managed by the savings set out in the report and future actions.
- welcomed the Council's decisions to treat care experience as a protected characteristic and the council tax exemption for care experienced young people.
- learned that some basic fixed costs associated with supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) could be reclaimed quickly from the Home Office, and that some additional payments were offered to encourage local authorities to accept UASC quickly. UASC represented a growing cohort of the Council's children and young people in care.
- noted that pressures on the cost of home to school transport was a national issue. The Council's education transport policy was kept under regular review by officers and the Committee's attention had been drawn previously to the discretionary elements of the current policy. Any proposals to change the policy would require Committee approval.
- noted that Committee members had not been provided with information about the confidential schemes included in the capital programme. A Member expressed concern that this could mean members voting on proposals for the removal of a capital scheme without knowing it. Confirmation was sought on whether any schemes had been removed from the programme. Officers stated that the data was not disclosed because the schemes were commercially confidential. The Executive Director for Finance and Resources clarified that no decisions would be taken before Full Council in February. He offered to share a redacted list of capital projects, and

further transparency would be provided to the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee meeting on 30th January. Officers confirmed that local members had been consulted on three projects which had been removed from the programme some time ago. Details of these could also be provided. The Chair stated that the proposed changes had been reported at Spokes. **Action required**

The Chair highlighted support for children's mental health, the school holiday voucher scheme and the council tax exemption for care leavers as key issues within the Committee's remit in relation to business planning.

The Executive Director for Finance summarised the debate to be reported to the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee, stating that

1. Clarity was sought and provided on a number of proposals and how they had been calculated:
 - i. The Residential Strategy
 - ii. The Children in Care placements saving
 - iii. Inflation
 - iv. The home to school transport budget
 - v. The 3.1m funding for children in care placements from Reserves. It was confirmed that one year of Reserves would be used to support this due to the view that future years costs could be managed by the savings set out in the report and future actions.
 - vi. Whether the residential care homes decision would be brought back to CYP. It was confirmed that it would.
 - vii. Home to school transport savings and in particular the policy. It was noted that there would not be any changes, but that there would be a continuing review both nationally and locally. Any proposed changes would be brought to CYP.
2. The level of detail that is able to be provided on 'confidential schemes' needs to be shared with local members to ensure that they are aware of any changes. Officers confirmed this had been done and was limited to a few areas that schools and local members were aware of, but more details will be provided at Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee and to local members.

The Chair sought confirmation from Committee members that this was an accurate summary of the debate. There was no dissent.

Co-opted members of the committee were not eligible to vote on this item

It was resolved by a majority to:

- a) consider and scrutinise the proposals relevant to this Committee within the Business and Financial plan put forward by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee, 19 December 2023.
- b) recommend changes and /or actions for consideration by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 30 January 2024 to enable a budget to be proposed to Full Council on 13 February 2024.

- c) Receive the fees and charges schedule for this Committee included at appendix 2.

194. Joint Procurement of All-Age Carer Services which includes Young Carer Services

An All-Age Carer Service which included young carer services was being recommissioned and procured to meet the Council's statutory obligations. The work was being led by the Adult Services Commissioning Team and would be considered by the Adults and Health Committee on 25th January 2024. The Council had a duty to assess how a child's caring responsibilities impacted their wellbeing, and to assess young carers needs before their eighteenth birthday. The transition to adult services was a key area of focus as this had been identified as a potentially difficult time by young carers. Cambridgeshire was named in the top five counties for identifying young carers by the school census in 2023, and the work of the current provider Centre 33 was acknowledged.

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

- noted the evidence of a lifelong impact on young carers' earnings and physical and mental health.
- learned that Centre 33 was a charity and that its work included capacity building and supporting school champions.
- asked to see the surveys about young carers' experiences which had been co-produced with young carers. **Action required**

The Chair spoke of the importance of supporting children and young people who were carers, and to facilitate links with other young carers

The Committee noted the update provided on the joint procurement of the All Age Carer Service, which included the Young Carer Service. No vote was required.

195. Determined Admissions Arrangements for the 2024-35 Academic Year

The Council had a statutory duty to consult annually on the admissions arrangements for all community and voluntary controlled schools in Cambridgeshire and to bring the outcomes to the Committee for determination. Consultation was required on any proposed decreases to a school's published admission number (PAN), its catchment area or to its over subscription criteria. No objections had been received to the proposed decreases in Pan at Duxford Primary School Linton Infants School or Harston and Newton Community Primary School. A consultation on proposed reductions to the PAN at Priory Park Infant School and Priory Park Junior School would close on 31st January 2024, but no objections were anticipated as the proposals were in line with catchment forecasts and were supported by both schools. There were no catchment changes proposed to schools for which the Local Authority was the admissions authority.

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

- received confirmation that the place planning implications of new developments were factored into the process and that schools were given advice on the implications of wider catchment growth or reductions.
- noted that the impact of cross boundary intake into schools would be picked up through the trend forecasts which took into account previous patterns of cross border activity. These were produced alongside the catchment forecasts. However, factors such as parental preference, inward migration to Cambridgeshire and the movement of children from independent schools to public sector schools due to cost of living pressures were less easy to predict.
- asked whether the proposed decrease in PAN of Harston and Newton Community Primary School would impact its viability. Officers stated that the PAN was one key indicator of the viability of small schools. Harston and Newton Community Primary School was considering various options and officers were supporting the school in this. A reduction in PAN was only proposed where there was a sustained reduction in pupil numbers and while it could be seen as a detrimental step it allowed a more accurate prediction of costs and incomes which could support resilience. An adjustment in PAN at Linton Infants School had created more flexibility which had enabled the school to better meet need and so improve its viability.
- received confirmation that families moving home could not apply for a place as a catchment family until they had completed their move. However, schools could informally factor in these potential new starters.
- asked how secondary schools coped with the variations in the size of year groups moving through the system. Officers stated that the previous year had seen the highest point of entry for a Year 7 bulge which meant that there was real pressure on places for that cohort, but as that group moved on the pressure would ease. However, factors like the arrival of Ukrainian guests could not be foreseen and impacted on demand for school places and education transport provision.

Co-opted members were eligible to vote on this item.

It was resolved unanimously to:

The Committee determines the co-ordinated qualifying scheme and admission arrangements for all schools for whom the Council, as the Local Authority, is the admission authority as published in the consultation documents for admission to school in 2025/26.

196. Provisional Education Outcomes 2023

Provisional education outcomes in Cambridgeshire in 2023 showed that the improvements achieved the previous year as the country emerged from covid had been sustained. The number of schools that were subject to intervention was decreasing, but officers would continue to intervene where this was needed. Some areas of challenge remained, with the County's disadvantaged children doing less well than in other local

authorities and writing skills being below the levels hoped. School leaders and schools were continuing to work hard in support of the County's children and young people.

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

- noted that persistent absence from school impacted outcomes and asked about attendance figures since covid. Officers stated that attendance figures in Cambridgeshire were continuing to recover and were above the national average, but were still lower than the figures seen prior to the pandemic. The attendance data could be shared outside of the meeting. **Action required**
- asked about the position for children and young people with English as an additional language, and the key ways of tackling disadvantage. Officers stated that the data was generally good for those with EAL, although there were some geographical disparities with stronger performance seen in Cambridge than in more northern parts of the county. EAL and a minority ethnic background were self-reported categories. Disadvantage was seen in the increasing number of children eligible for free school meals, and the Local Authority's focus was on accessing the pupil premium and encouraging parental engagement. Schools were responsible for publishing details of how they used pupil premium payments on their websites.
- noted the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils in relation to phonics, and that this was the area with the biggest gap between Cambridgeshire's figures and national figures. Officers advised that this remained an area of focus and offered a briefing note on a pilot project being run with a group of schools in East Cambridgeshire. **Action required**
- asked whether there was a structural reason behind the pattern of Cambridgeshire's children being broadly behind the national average at primary school and ahead of it at secondary school. Officers stated that children generally did better at the start of their education, had a dip and then recovered. This needed to be unpicked in more detail, but there was a need to improve writing outcomes as that was where there was a dip.

The Committee noted the findings of the paper and commented as appropriate. No vote was required.

197. Agenda Plan, Training Plan, Committee Appointment and LA Governor Nominations August to December 2023

The Chair placed on record the Committee's thanks for the contribution of those taking on the role of school governors.

Co-opted members of the Committee were not eligible to vote on this item.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note one change to the Committee agenda plan:
 - Working Together School Attendance deferred from 12th March 2024 to 25th June 2024.

- b) Note the committee training plan.
- c) Note that Councillor A Sharp succeeded Councillor M McGuire as a member of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on 8th December 2023.
- d) Appoint Councillor J Gowing to the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

(Chair)