

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 27th June 2023

Time: 2.00pm – 16.55pm

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

Present: Councillors D Ambrose Smith, M Atkins (Vice Chair), A Bradnam, A Bulat, C Daunton, B Goodliffe (Chair), J Gowing, A Hay, K Prentice (to 3.40pm), A Sharp, P Slatter, S Taylor and F Thompson

Co-opted Member:

Dr A Stone, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

154. Notification of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee 2023/24

The committee noted the appointment of Councillor Bryony Goodliffe as Chair of the committee and Councillor Michael Atkins as Vice Chair for 2023/24. These appointments were made by Council on 16th May 2023.

155. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Hoy, substituted by Councillor J Gowing, Councillors J King and M McGuire, and Canon A Read, the co-opted member representing the Church of England Diocese of Ely.

There were no declarations of interest.

156. Minutes – 25th April 2023 and Minutes Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th April 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

Officers advised that the Regional Schools Commissioner was provisionally scheduled to attend the meeting on 28th November 2023. The minutes action log was noted.

157. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

Key decisions

158. Implementation of a Post 16 Provision Framework [KD2023/072]

The proposed dynamic purchasing system (DPS) for a Post 16 Framework of Alternative Education Providers was designed to form part of the response to the Post 16 commissioning reviews in 2020 and 2021, alongside the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) strategy and the Safety Valve. Alternative provision for young people with SEND who were unable to access standard provision was currently spot purchased from a variety of Post 16 providers. The establishment of a framework would give more control and consistency over the provision and the process and ensure good value for money. The specification had been co-produced with PinPoint, the local parent and carer forum for children and young people with SEND. Current outcomes were perceived to be fairly low.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- explained that a digital badge was an electronic record of accomplishments and qualifications.
- acknowledged the need to explain acronyms and technical terms in public reports.
Action required
- stated that officers in the Commissioning team would work with colleagues in the Procurement team to make sure that the opportunity to join the framework was advertised widely and made available to a wide range of potential providers. New providers would also be able to join the framework after it was set up.
- confirmed that the Commissioning team would work with officers in the Transport team and in other local authorities to ensure that transport provision was aligned with further education (FE) opportunities. Access to transport would be a factor in looking at placements, and there was an opportunity to reduce transport needs and costs by having provision available more locally.
- stated that it was expected that the framework would help reduce the number of young people with additional needs who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) by providing more choice and a wider range of FE options.
- stated that a rigorous evaluation and monitoring process would be followed for those joining the DPS, which would include periodic reviews. The contractual arrangements would provide a means to remove providers if required and a robust provider risk tool was already in place.
- confirmed that alternative Post 16 provision for young people with SEND was already provided, but that this was managed on a more ad hoc basis. The DPS would offer a broader range of providers.

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

- welcomed the combination of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) with vocational routes, and asked whether officers were working with the Combined Authority on this, for example in relation to the Multiply programme.
- asked whether driving down costs could impact on providers' viability, particularly voluntary and third sector providers. Officers stated that the pricing schedule would be informed by existing rates and would offer a sustainable rate. Officers provided

support as part of the quality assurance process to make sure that providers' offer was sustainable. Some providers operated at cost, and there was no intention to penalise them.

- Asked whether an annual report would be produced, and whether it would be possible in a year's time to stop the expenditure. Officer stated that they could report back in a year's time if that was members' wish. The expenditure related to statutory provision so it could not be stopped, but the framework could be ended with a return to the current spot purchasing process. **Action required**

The Chair welcomed the link to the adult framework, which she felt would work well.

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

It was resolved by a majority to:

- a) Approve Cambridgeshire County Council tendering a Post 16 Alternative Education Framework, and thereafter to make calloffs from this framework.
- b) Delegate responsibility for awarding and executing contracts for the provision of Post 16 Alternative Education; starting on the 23rd August 2023 and ending on the 31st March 2024 and has extension periods of 2+ 2 + 1 with a value over 5 years of £10.2 million to align with the Children's External Placement Dynamic Purchasing System to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee.

159. Draft Residential Services Strategy [KD2023/065]

The draft residential services strategy had been produced in response to the increased demand for residential places for children and young people in the County Council's care. This pattern reflected the national position where demand outstripped supply, with research indicating that these sufficiency challenges were unlikely to disappear. The Council had a small number of young people whose complex needs could not be met locally or in a family setting. This could result in them being placed in settings which were not regulated by Ofsted where no suitable provision was offered by the usual providers. Where suitable places could be found these were often outside of the county. The proposal was designed to create the capacity to support these young people safely within Cambridgeshire. The draft residential services strategy sought committee endorsement of this approach. If approved, a costed options report would be developed for consideration at a future meeting.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- acknowledged that the number of young people in residential care homes was going up while the overall number of children in care in the county was going down. This was due to an increase in those children's complexity of need, and also the increase in numbers of young people coming into care Post 13 as it could be harder to find foster carers for this age group. It remained the Council's aim to place children in care in a home environment wherever possible, but for a small number care in a residential setting was more suited to their needs. Staying in a local care home

would make it easier for them to maintain local links and to transition back home or to local foster care if this became possible.

The Executive Director for Children, Education and Families highlighted the context of the national pressure on residential places, the reduction in Tier 4 placements and the number of experienced foster carers available. Officers saw part of the solution as creating additional residential places closer to home and where Cambridgeshire's children would have first call on available spaces. Alongside this, the county was always looking to recruit new foster carers.

- stated that residential children's homes operated by the private sector were mainly located in areas where property prices were lower and there was a workforce available locally. In Cambridgeshire, this had led to a number of providers locating in Fenland. If the proposed strategy was approved an options appraisal would be carried out to identify the best place to locate services within the county, including looking at where the cohort accessing services was located.
- explained that a decision had been taken around 2016/17 to close council-owned residential children's home due to lack of demand. Since then, the market had changed significantly and competition for places had become a national issue due to scarcity of supply.

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

- asked how long children and young people in the County's care were spending in residential homes. **Action required**
- welcomed moves to bring more services in-house, but expressed concern about the national context.
- commented that they would want to see sufficient funds allocated to the purchase or management of properties to provide good quality, well maintained homes.
- expressed the hope that learning would be taken from the experience of other local authorities.
- suggested that the use of S106 money or charitable giving might be explored.
- endorsed the strategy, describing their wish to avoid the use of unregistered providers. The previous decommissioning of the Council's residential children's homes had in part been due to the difficulty in attracting sufficient skilled staff so this would be an important consideration. Another member concurred, commenting that the Council would be competing with other local authorities and providers for the necessary staff.

Officers stated that an options appraisal would be produced if the strategy was agreed. This would include looking at using either a commissioning process or the Council running the residential settings itself. Local authorities were generally seen as a more attractive employment option. Officers were also looking at ways of supporting working in a residential care setting as a career option.

- Emphasised that the wellbeing of the children and young people in the Council's care was the most important consideration. The report showed that between April 2019 and March 2022 only 21 of the 93 Cambridgeshire children and young people placed in residential homes were located within the county, with the majority of these located in and around the Fenland district.

Councillor Bradnam endorsed the proposals in her capacity as the chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee, and welcomed the small size of the units proposed.

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

It was resolved unanimously to endorse the residential service strategy.

Decisions and monitoring

160. Finance Monitoring Report May 2023

In addition to the May monitoring report, two additional meeting papers were published on 21 June 2023 providing an executive summary of the outturn for 2022/23 and the 2022/23 closedown report.

The outturn for 2022/23 reported the position at the end of the financial year to 31 March 2023. This included an overspend of around £4m on non-dedicated schools grant (DSG) expenditure, which represented a slight reduction from the previous forecast. An overspend of around £11.9m was reported on DSG expenditure.

The May 2023 report was in a new format. In response to member feedback, it included only expenditure relating to children, education and families and the DSG and non-DSG elements were separated out. As the first report of the new financial year it included the roll-forward position on capital expenditure from the previous year and the committee's endorsement was sought for changes to the capital programme budgets from the Business Plan. The changes were set out in Appendix 1 and, if agreed, would go forward to the Strategy and Resources Committee for approval.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- confirmed that the DSG overspend was at a comparable level with previous years, and reflected an underlying pressure of c£10-11m. The Council had received its first Safety Valve payment, so the cumulative deficit had reduced to c£29m. More detail would be provided on this in future reports as part of the new monitoring process.
- stated that the interest cost on the deficit was an opportunity cost of between £100-500k, but that this represented a notional figure.
- stated that the scale of the overspend reflected a national funding issue. There were 12 local authorities including Cambridgeshire with a Safety Valve agreement, and around half of local authorities were reporting a deficit. The focus was on supporting need appropriately through local action in relation to children and young people with special educational needs. Cambridgeshire's plan had been

signed off by the Department for Education (DfE) and there was no suggestion from Government that the Council had done anything wrong. A report on the Safety Valve programme would be brought to the committee in the autumn.

- confirmed that variations to the capital budget were calculated each year based on slippage. The S106 reduction of c£13m was also due to slippage. The majority of capital projects represented new builds or expansion projects. There was also a small slippage on school refurbishment, but this was likely to be rectified over the summer when the majority of projects took place to minimise disruption.

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

- welcomed the new format of the report, which they found more clear.
- asked whether unfunded pay rises were a cause of concern. The Director of Education stated that the information on this was currently being collated and would be reported in the autumn. More generally, maintained school budgets had reduced, and some deficit budgets would be approved. Officers were seeing some creative solutions to delivering the curriculum and were working closely with schools to support them. A report on school budgets would be going to the Schools Forum in July and a copy would be shared with committee members for information. **Action required**

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

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Review and comment on the report.
- b) Note and endorse the changes to the capital programme budgets from the Business Plan detailed in Appendix 1 for approval by Strategy and Resources.

The meeting adjourned from 15.53 to 16.05pm.

161. Corporate Performance Report – Children and Young People Committee

Committee members reviewed the Corporate Performance report for Quarter 4 of 2022/23. This covered the period to the end of March 2023.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- stated that a large number of primary schools were still maintained by the local authority. Officers worked closely with them and also with the academy trusts working locally in relation to school improvement. A number of Ofsted inspections were due, and it was hoped to see that improvement reflected in their assessments. This should be seen against a background of national decline.
- explained that there were a variety of reasons why a child might be made subject to a child protection plan for a second time. It could be that a long period of time had passed between the two instances, or there might have been a change in family circumstances. The proportion of child protection plans for Cambridgeshire

was still good. The key consideration was ensuring that children in need were identified at the right time and that appropriate support was put in place.

- RAG ratings in relation to reading, writing and maths had been suspended as there was no national published data for the past three years due to Covid.
- the target for persistent absences from school had been set historically. Post covid, a significant increase had been seen nationally in persistent absenteeism. It was believed that this related mainly to anxiety issues and respiratory-related conditions. Officers were working hard to address this through school attendance processes. The Council's work on this had recently been reviewed by the Department for Education (DfE) and was found to be good.

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

162. Children, Education and Families – Directorate Risk Register

The directorate risk register was brought to the committee annually for review. The Council's standard process had been followed, with any red rated risks scoring 16 or above being referred to the corporate leadership team for review. Covid risks had been removed and the Children, Education and Families directorate currently had seven red risks.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- stated that there was a lot of work happening on information sharing in relation to children at risk of exploitation. That work would be continuing to ensure that children were protected. The Executive Director's first impression of the local safeguarding partnership was that good relationships existed between partners and that everyone was fully involved and playing their part.
- work was continuing to deliver three new special schools alongside the new enhanced provision bases. The timing of this was an issue, but officers were doing all they could to make sure sufficient places were available. An update would be provided in the autumn.
- explained that AYSE referred to an assessed and supported year in employment for newly qualified social workers, during which they would have a protected caseload. The new social worker academy would be available during 2023 and would provide support to this group as well as to support the continued professional development of experienced social workers. This was a positive change, and it was hoped this would help support social worker retention. The academy would have a physical base, and further information around anticipated numbers of students would be circulated outside of the meeting. **Action required**

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

- expressed concern at the number of amber and red rated risks. The Council was going through a lot of organisational change, and they were concerned whether there was sufficient capacity to manage that change. Officers stated that the

appointment of the new Director of Children's services whose sole focus would be on Cambridgeshire would be a key factor in reducing that risk. Recruitment to permanent service director roles would also be important and that was happening now. The Council's chief executive was working closely with his counterpart at Peterborough City Council to manage a smooth de-coupling process between the two organisations.

It was resolved to note the current Directorate Risk Register

Other decisions

163. Children's Feedback and Complaints Annual Report 2022/23

The annual report for 2022/23 provided details of the feedback and complaints received about children's services during the period covered, together with a breakdown of the number and types of complaints received. This was used internally to identify areas for learning and quality assurance activity. Following feedback from the committee on the last report there was a more equal balance between compliments and complaints. Updated guidance had been received from the Local Government Ombudsman on which complaints should be subject to the statutory process, with the remainder being addressed through the corporate complaints process. During 2022/23 there had been an increase in the number of compliments and enquiries received. The number of Stage 1 complaints had remained fairly stable, but there had been an increase in the number of complaints escalated to Stages 2 and 3. The highest number of complaints had related to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services and the statutory assessment team, with complaints around the timeliness of education, health and care plans reflecting challenges being experienced nationally around this issue.

Committee members welcomed the changes to content and format which had been made in response to feedback on the previous report. The inclusion of case histories was informative and the learning points reassuring.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- advised the report would be shared with the Children, Education and Families (CEF) Directorate's management team after it had been considered by the committee. Quarterly reports were taken to the also taken to CEF management team meetings, and in future this information would also be shared at service level. It was not currently shared with the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association, but this could be done and as the team looked at producing more specific reports they could explore something specific around foster carers. **Action required**

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

- spoke of the importance of ensuring that all children and young people had the right nationality status to avoid detention or deportation. They expressed the hope that those born in the United Kingdom were encouraged to follow the citizenship route if they wanted to do that. They were concerned by the case described in the report, but glad that it had been resolved. Officers undertook to confirm outside of

the meeting whether they were confident that no other children were in the same circumstances. **Action required**

- suggested that it was important to manage service users' expectations. Officers acknowledged this, but emphasised that it was important that all complaints were fully investigated.

It was resolved with the consent of the meeting to:

- a) Consider the content of the report and appendix.
- b) Request a further report in 12 months.

164. Children and Young People Committee Agenda Plan, Training Plan and Appointments to Internal Advisory Groups and Panels and Outside Bodies

The Committee reviewed its agenda plan, training plan and appointments. Expressions of interest in the remaining vacancies were welcomed outside of the meeting.

The Chair expressed her thanks to all members sitting on internal advisory groups and panels and outside bodies.

It was resolved to:

- a) Review the committee agenda plan attached at Appendix 1.
- b) Review the committee training plan attached at Appendix 2.
- c) Review the appointments to Outside Bodies within the Committee's remit at Appendix 3.
- d) Review the appointments to Internal Advisory Groups and Panels at Appendix 4.
- e) Appoint Councillor A Bradnam as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and Councillor M Atkins as Vice Chair for 2023/24.
- f) Note the appointment of Cllr C Daunton to the Cambridgeshire Culture Steering Group on 9th May 2023.

(Chair)