

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: Thursday 01 December 2022

Time: 2.00pm – 5.35pm

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

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

Co-opted Members:

Canon A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely

Dr Andy Stone, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

Also present: Councillor Shailer

108. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

The Chair welcomed Dr Andy Stone, Director of Schools Service for the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia to his first meeting as a co-opted member of the committee, and Elaine Redding, the new Executive Director of Children's Services,

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M King (Councillor Atkins substituting) and Prentice.

Canon Read declared an interest with respect to Item 6: Alconbury Weald Secondary School Project, as a trustee for the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust; and for Item 7: Review of Draft Revenue and Capital Business Planning Proposals, as a trustee for the Church Schools of Cambridge.

109. Minutes – 11 October 2022 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 11 October 2022 were approved as an accurate record, subject to the removal of an incomplete sentence.

With regard to the Action Log, Minute 85: Finance Monitoring Report: Outturn 2021/22, the Chair advised that the briefing note circulation date should read 20 November 2022.

The action log was noted.

110. Petitions and public questions

There were no petitions.

Two public questions had been received. These were from Mark Woods, Chief Executive of Meridian Trust, relating to Item 6: Alconbury Weald Secondary School Project; and Dr Seb Falk, incoming Chair of St Philips Primary School Board of Governors, in relation to Item 7: The Review of Draft Revenue and Capital Business Planning Proposals for 2023-28. The questions can be viewed [here](#).

Decisions

111. Finance Monitoring Report - October 2022

The Committee reviewed the financial position for expenditure within its remit to the end of October 2022. There was an emerging pressure on children in care placements in relation to placement costs and increased complexity of needs.

In response to questions from members, officers:

- Confirmed that the overspend on outdoor education related solely to Stibbington Outdoor Centre and that Burwell and Graffham Water were currently breaking even. A report on outdoor centres was scheduled for January 2023.
- Recognised the increasing pressure on the budget for home to school transport and offered a briefing note on this. **Action required.**
- Acknowledged the impact of Stagecoach's decision to withdraw a number of bus routes used by pupils to travel to and from school. Officers were in conversation with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority around this, but the Council's priority was to put transport in place, and this was being done at a cost of around £500 per day. It was hoped that this cost could be mitigated over time, but at present it represented a sizeable cost outside of statutory requirements.
- Stated that there were legislative restrictions around selling spare seats on school transport. However, there was an open offer to both members and parents to contact the Education Transport team for advice around transport issues.
- Confirmed that the overspend for the children's disability service related to three residential homes being moved in-house. Officers understood the cost related to moving staff to County Council terms and conditions of employment, but would confirm this outside of the meeting. **Action required.**
- Confirmed that they would look at the presentation of the finance tables to try to make them more accessible. Councillor Sharp offered his support with this. **Action required**

It was resolved to review and comment on the report.

Key Decisions

112. Transport Transformation

The home to school transport strategy had been reviewed to enable the Council to address identified pressures and areas of concern. A number of efficiencies and improvements were proposed, particularly through the provision of financial support to secondary schools which would ensure transport provision for young people at risk of permanent exclusion.

In response to the report, members:

- Acknowledged that pressures on the Schools' Budget had increased dramatically from Easter 2022 due to the increasing cost of fuel, Covid-19, a changing market, inflation, and increasing demand.
- Acknowledged that transport provision was a national issue, especially across rural areas due to increased fuel costs, a lack of drivers and the impact of covid. To mitigate this, the service was looking to diversify providers to increase resilience. The introduction of new software would also increase efficiency within the transport team and around transport delivery.
- Noted that Cambridgeshire forecast a 47% increase in children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) by 2031. This was being addressed through the SEND strategy, new SEND schools and the safety valve. Collaboration between the Education Transport Team, PinPoint and SEND schools was occurring to ensure parents of children with an EHCP were informed about their transport options, and that children with additional needs received appropriate transport provision.
- Learned that funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant for the Behaviour and Attendance Improvement Partnership (BAIP) had enabled Cambridgeshire to have one of the lowest exclusion rates in the country. Expenditure on this had been managed down following a bench-marking exercise some years ago, but officers were looking to top this up with a focus on transport.
- Advocated the use of multiple occupancy travel, cycling or walking for young people when appropriate, to encourage resilience, independence, and journey planning skills. Officers stated an Independent Travel Training Programme existed to enable this to occur safely. Individual transport needs would though continue to be considered on a case by case basis.
- Expressed concern that current transport solutions could be rigid and advocated a more innovative approach to transport provision, such as enabling a parent or carer to accompany a child to school. Rules around personal budgets also changed frequently, which could discourage parents from considering these. Officers suggested carrying out a deep dive on personal budgets and sharing the results with the committee. Action required

- Championed the use of efficient and environmentally friendly transport and transport routes throughout the Council's services. Officers confirmed that the proposed policy review would include innovative home to school transport schemes which embedded the principles of sustainable and affordable travel to school. There would be an initial focus on high cost routes including solo travellers, and a route review to enable betterment. The aim would be to achieve tangible impacts in the next six months.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the approve the Transport Transformation Strategy
- b) To endorse the Council committing funding to support the access and transportation of our most vulnerable students to Appropriate Alternative Provision, directly commissioned by our secondary schools with effect from April 2023.

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

113. Alconbury Weald Secondary School Project

The Committee was invited to consider the options and for the construction of a new secondary school which, together with a 150 place Area Special School, would form part of the Alconbury Weald Education Campus.

A S106 agreement had been signed in 2014 and included a commitment to build a new secondary school on the same site as a new area special school. The report set out the options for when this new secondary school would be delivered. Significant savings could be achieved and inflationary costs avoided by building both schools at the same time. Officers emphasised that the new secondary school was intended to serve the Alconbury Weald development, and were working with local secondary schools and the Department for Education (DfE) to avoid any adverse impact on existing schools. The final decision would rest with the DfE.

One public question was received in response to the report. The Chair invited Mark Woods, Chief Executive of Meridian Trust, to speak on behalf of Sawtry Village Academy.

Mr Woods cautioned against opening the Alconbury Weald secondary school in 2024, when forecasts suggested the school would not have a viable pupil number. He judged that local schools such as Sawtry Village Academy and St Peter's School could support Alconbury's growth in the medium term, but would be affected should catchment areas change to ensure Alconbury Weald's secondary school had a viable number of pupils. He expressed disappointment at a lack of engagement with local schools prior to the report's publication and stated that the report contained serious inaccuracies. He spoke of the uncertainty being caused to local schools, and felt that the risk of lingering unnecessary capacity was understated in the report and could have a seriously adverse impact on local schools for years to come. Mr Woods' written comments can be seen [here](#).

In response to questions of clarification from members, Mr Woods:

- Cautioned that opening a school with eight form entry capacity would create high heating costs as the school grew to capacity.
- Argued that 1,350 homes was not a viable number to fill the new school and that this could result in unfilled places.
- Stated that the opening of Northstowe Secondary College had been made a viable development by changes in catchment area and an intake of students from Hatton Park Primary and Swavesey Village College which was growing past capacity. This was unlike Alconbury Weald, where other local secondary schools still had capacity. There had been some suggestion that children could transfer to Alconbury Weald from Sawtry Village Academy (SVA), but this could impact on SVA's viability.

Councillor Bywater, local member for Sawtry and Stilton, provided a written statement on the proposals which was read out at the meeting. It can be viewed [here](#).

The Chair thanked Councillor Bywater and the CEO of the Meridian Trust for sharing their views with the Committee. She expressed her preference to have the building ready to open as soon as the minimum viable number of students was reached, and noted the obligation to open in September as this could not be done midway through the academic year. She was proud of the co-working between the Council and academies during Covid and beyond, and saw this as indicative of the strong relationship which existed between them. She also welcomed the Council now being a member of the Cambridgeshire Secondary Heads group. Cambridgeshire County Council was known as an outlier in best practice for joint working with schools and academies, and the Chair was keen that this should continue.

In response to the report, individual members:

- Clarified that officers had anticipated consultation with the trust and local residents regarding the opening date of the school and interim arrangements would occur following a decision on the build completion date by the Committee. Officers had been in touch with both Mr Woods and Councillor Bywater since they had raised their concerns and had discussed arranging a forum discussion in the new year.
- Noted that having a local school would attract home buyers to an area.
- Were reassured that the service was working to avoid an adverse impact on surrounding schools and was not seeking to move their pupils into the new school. However, parental preference could be a source of concern for these schools.
- Clarified that option a) would attract the benefits of S106 money and the synergies of building both schools at the same time, but would incur mothballing costs for the secondary school until it reached its minimum viable number of students. In their judgement, the mothballing cost seemed relatively small compared to the cost of delaying the secondary school build.

- Were reassured that the school was designed to the Cambridgeshire County Council net zero standard and would have ground source heat pumps and solar panels. It was predicted this would give an 80% reduction in planned energy use.
- Noted that the school would have a religious character, but would not be a faith school.
- Promoted advertising development of the school to potential Alconbury home owners. Officers responded that this was usually done by trusts, rather than local authorities,.
- Expressed concern around whether the proposed timescales could be met. Officers stated that the capital project was well advanced. Details of the proposed contractor remained commercially confidential at this stage, but could be shared with committee members outside the meeting. Action required.
- Clarified that Option d) would allow the Council to conform to the S106 agreement and save costs by building in conjunction with the special school. Mothballing effects might be mitigated by alternative use of the facilities should the opening date be delayed. The Chair stated that she was willing to accept recommendation d) as the preferred option if there was consensus on this.

Officers advised that option a) would give Urban and Civic an assurance around the Council's intention to comply with the trigger set out in the S106 agreement, and that there was less risk associated with option a) than option d).

- Noted that that the local member for Alconbury was supportive and keen to see the school opening.
- Noted that option d) gave the flexibility to bring further detail later for final sign-off when more information was available.
- Commented that they felt unable to support the proposals in the report on the basis of what had been discussed.
- Asked whether option d) would offer sufficient flexibility to open the school as soon as it became viable to so. Officers confirmed this was the case.
- Expressed the hope that constructive discussions were taking place with DEMAT. Canon Read stated the need for him to be sensitive in what he said given his declared interest in this decision as a trustee of DEMAT. Against that background, he felt able to say that DEMAT had opened and run the Alconbury Weald Primary School and that the secondary school was part of the trust's wider plan for the locality which had been in place for six years, and so was not a surprise. The decision would rest ultimately with the DfE , but the financial risk of opening a non-sustainable school would rest with the trust.

- Emphasised that no member had suggested that they did not wish to proceed.

On being put to the vote, recommendation a) was rejected by a majority of those present and voting.

It was resolved by a majority of those present and voting to:

Give approval to enter into contract for the joint delivery of the two schools on the basis of the financial appraisals outlined in the report in Tables 1 and 2.

The meeting adjourned from 3.52pm to 4.07pm.

Decisions

114. Review of draft Revenue and Capital Business Planning Proposals 2023-28

During the last budget setting round the Council had faced a budget gap of £17m. In the current financial year that had peaked at £28.6m, primarily due to inflationary pressures. The updated position showed a budget gap of £12.9m, with significant budget gaps forecast in future years and particularly in 2024/25. Officers were continuing to analyse the Chancellor's fiscal statement and awaited details of the local government settlement in December. The budget position for each service committee needed to be considered in the context of the Council's finances as a whole. The balance of savings proposed for the CYP budget was weighted to the capital budget, and in the context of significant increases in borrowing costs the Council faced difficult decisions on the capital programme. The service was seeking to reduce reliance on borrowing and instead use grants, make efficiencies, and focus funding on statutory duties, S106 funded agreements and essential maintenance.

The Chair invited Dr Sebastian Falk, incoming Chair of St Philips Primary School, Cambridge to speak on the item. Dr Falk spoke against the Council's proposal to remove the St Philips school project from the capital programme, which would have included a nurture space for children with high needs. He stated that the basic needs analysis had been incorrect and that there was a safety need and basic need for the project. He also commented that the money already spent on the project would be lost. The submitted question can be viewed [here](#).

In response to questions of clarification from committee members, Dr Falk stated that:

- The Church Schools of Cambridge Trust had been advised of the proposal to remove the St Philips' project from the Council's capital programme, but the school had only been made aware of the proposal the previous week.
- The school had not considered restoration of the current mobile classroom for which planning permission had expired in 2013 as they considered it to be potentially unstable with unsafe access. Previously, this had been used to provide a safe space for children with SEND. Now, children had to remain in classrooms while

dysregulated. This was increasing classroom disturbances, temporary exclusions and teaching assistant turn over.

- Stated that works had not been started, but that money had already been spent on architects' fees and commitments to contractors.
- The Council had asked St Philips to take children that other schools could not support and was considering making St Philips School a nurture hub. Dr Falk said this could not occur without the development of a safe space.

The Chair thanked Dr Falk, for attending and expressed the Committee's thanks to all school governors for giving their time to take on this important role, and particularly chairs of governors.

In discussion of the report, members:

- Commented that they were uncomfortable with the proposal to remove three projects from the capital programme when the report contained relatively little detail about them. Officers stated that capital savings had to be found and this meant difficult decisions must be made. Officers had worked through the options and applied the same principles to all schools for fairness and transparency. On this basis they judged that the three capital projects recommended for removal from the capital programme were the least impactful. However, it was for members to decide how they wished to proceed.
- If savings were not made, an additional £2.4m of savings year on year would be taken from frontline services.
- Were advised that the BB103 calculation which was used to determine whether a school had sufficient space showed that this was the case at St Philips school, even if it might not feel that was the case.
- Noted that these decisions had to be considered in the context of historic underfunding from central government for education in Cambridgeshire.
- Challenged removing funding for the St Philips school safe space when the Council aimed to accommodate children with special educational needs in schools near to their homes. Officers stated that the capital scheme at St Philips was to address basic need. It did not relate to the provision of a nurture space, as that would be picked up via safety valve funding if that bid was successful.
- Noted that the St Philip's school project had been added to the capital programme as a basic need requirement, but had evolved into a betterment project.
- Clarified that the S106 agreement had been for '*St Philips School or other relevant projects in agreement with Cambridge City Council*'. Subject to the committee's decision, officers would work with Cambridge City Council to establish where any redistribution of S106 monies would be made.

- Stated that the only money spent to date on the St Philips school project related to design fees, so the abortive costs would be marginal. Details of these could be provided to members outside of the meeting. There would be no costs for breaking contracts. **Action required**
- Noted that St Philips was a voluntary aided school and the property belonged to the Church, so applying for planning permission was not a matter for the Council.
- Noted that all schools could make a strong case for additional investment, but that funds were limited.
- Noted that North Cambridge was a pressure spot. Officers were working with the trust running Chesterton Community College to unlock space there. The report reflected a compromise in unlocking as many places as possible with the funding available. School places were being managed to keep children educated locally until the new school came online.
- Expressed concern that the local member for Manea Primary School had not been made aware of the proposal to remove this project from the capital programme, and emphasised the importance of timely consultation with local members. Officers acknowledged this, and undertook to speak to the member concerned. **Action required**
- Learned that original plans for Manea Primary School included expansion of four classrooms and general betterment. This project had been reduced to classroom expansion which met the basic need analysis.
- Noted that officers had been working since half-term to identify where savings could be made, but that proposals had only crystallised in the last month. Discussions had taken place with the schools which might be affected during the past couple of weeks.
- Stated that officers were exploring the provision of additional spaces to support children with SEND via enhanced resource provision, and that everything possible was being done to access external funding.
- Canon Read cautioned about the potential risk to the reputation of the Council and the Committee if it was perceived to be renegeing on commitments. He welcomed confirmation that officers would be visiting St Philips school for further conversations.
- Asked why residential charges for Burwell House had gone down. Officers understood that pricing for Burwell House and Grafham Water was reviewed to align with other centres and that differential charging occurred across the year to maximise use, but undertook to clarify this outside of the meeting. **Action required.**

The Chair stated that she understood the misgivings expressed during the debate, but the Council must achieve a balanced budget in the context of the very difficult financial position in which local authorities were placed. The Council would continue to work with all schools going forward in what was a very difficult situation. Equality impact assessments would be developed for all of the proposals within the report, and she asked that these should be taken to the next CYP chair and vice chair and Spokes meetings. The Committee's recommendations would form part of the on-going consideration of the Council's wider budget, but the final decision would rest with Council in February. **Action required**

It was resolved by a majority to:

- a) Note the progress made to date and next steps required to develop the business plan for 2023-2028.
- b) Comment on and endorse the budget and savings proposals that are within the remit of the Committee as part of consideration of the Council's overall Business Plan.
- c) Comment on and endorse the proposed changes to the capital programme that are within the remit of the Committee as part of consideration of the Council's overall Business Plan.
- d) Note the updates to fees and charges proposed for 2023-24

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

115. Schools Revenue Funding Arrangements 2022/23

The Committee received an update on school revenue funding arrangements which had been published prior to the release of the Autumn Statement. The Chancellor had agreed to protect education and provide support to meet cost pressures, but it was important to note that this would represent a standstill position rather than an enhancement. The High Needs Block remained an area of significant pressure.

The Council had begun in previous years to move towards implementing the Department for Education's (DfE) national funding formula, and good progress had been made on this. The appendices to the report contained illustrative budgets at individual school level, but this was dependent on the outcome of the final settlement. Budget proposals had been presented to the Schools Forum and virtual briefing sessions held with headteachers and governors as part of the consultation exercise. Final proposals and school budgets would be considered by the Schools Forum in January before being brought to the Committee for approval, prior to their submission to the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

The Chair highlighted that inflation would negate the increases to funding and that Cambridgeshire County Council was rated 136 of worst funded authorities in the country.

It was resolved to:

Review and comment on the report.

116. Provisional Educational Outcomes 2022

The Director of Education briefed the Committee on provisional educational outcomes for 2022. This included Cambridgeshire's improved ranking for the outcomes of children and young people in Cambridgeshire, particularly among secondary schools and disadvantaged children, despite coronavirus affecting outcomes nationally. In primary schools, Cambridgeshire had improved every measure relative with other authorities.

The Chair, Director for Education and members credited teaching staff for their resilience and for enabling children to reach their potential.

In response to the report, members:

- Welcomed comparative data between different areas and academies, maintained and non-maintained schools in the report.
- Welcomed the Council's triple bottom line accounting approach, and looked forward to seeing the impact of this.
- Thanked the Director of Education for his leadership.
- Congratulated teachers for working effectively with children for whom English was not their first language.
- Noted that benchmarking tables would be developed at a later date.

It was resolved to:

Note the findings of this paper and comment as appropriate.

117. Children and Young People Committee agenda plan, training plan and appointments

There were no changes to the published committee agenda plan or training plan.

It was proposed by Councillor Goodliffe and seconded by Councillor Bulat to appoint Councillor Shailer to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Federation of Young Farmers Club as a substitute representative.

Councillors were reminded of a vacancy for a Conservative representative on the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). Officers undertook to clarify the requirement for appointments to SACRE to be politically proportionate outside of the meeting. **Action required**

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the committee agenda plan.
- b) Note the committee training plan.
- c) Appoint Councillor N Shailer as substitute representative on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs.

(Chair)