

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 28th November 2023

Time: 2.00pm – 5.55pm

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), A Hay (to 5.35pm), S Hoy (to 5.05pm), A Sharp, P Slatter, S Taylor and F Thompson

Co-opted Member:
Canon Andrew Read

174. Chair's Announcements

The Chair advised of a change to the published order of business. Item 5: Finance Monitoring Report October 2023 would be presented after Item 9: The Review of the Methodology for Estimating Demand for Education Provision arising from new Housing Developments.

175. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J King, M McGuire and K Prentice, and from co-opted member Dr A Stone.

Councillors C Daunton and A Sharp declared an interest in Item 7: Draft Small School Strategy as governors of small schools.

176. Minutes – 10th October 2023 and Minutes Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

Minutes action log: Minute 158 - New report writing guidance was being issued to all officers and this included the need to avoid over-use of jargon and acronyms and to explain these where they were used.

The minutes action log was noted.

177. Petitions and Public Questions

Two public questions were heard from Miss Ruberta Bisson and Mrs Liz Day which related to Item 4: Regional Director – Department for Education. Minute 178 below refers.

Copies of the questions and written responses are available to view on the [meeting web page](#).

Decisions

178. Regional Director – Department for Education

The Chair welcomed Jonathan Duff, Regional Director for the Department of Education, to the meeting to share an update on his responsibilities and his work with schools in Cambridgeshire.

Two public questions were heard from Miss Ruberta Bisson and Mrs Liz Day. Copies of the questions and responses are available to view on [the meeting webpage](#).

Miss Bisson was asked if a resolution had been found to the difficulties experienced by her family member. She stated that de-registering them had helped, but that the family was still seeking diagnoses and that there were issues of trust with the agencies involved. She felt it would be difficult for them to engage with education outside of the home and that they might need an education, health and care plan to support this. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service was involved.

Mrs Day was asked if her question was focused mainly on the value added by the Regional Director. She confirmed this, commenting that special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) legislation referred to the local authority and that other aspects were siloed though the Regional Director. Mrs Day felt children with SEND seemed the most disadvantaged.

The Regional Director (RD) explained that he had responsibilities across 11 local authority areas in the East of England, including Cambridgeshire, and hoped to act as a champion for the region within the Department for Education (DfE). In relation to schools his responsibilities included commissioning new multi-academy trusts (MATs) and making recommendations to ministers on new free schools. His role was to act as a steward of the system, trying to grow successful trusts and directing improvement funding to those needing support. He also had the role of regulator, intervening in schools that were not operating at an acceptable standard. His role did not include the oversight or operation of individual schools. As a civil servant the Regional Director was politically neutral.

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to the report and the Regional Director's (RD) update:

- noted that there was little representation for Cambridgeshire on the East of England Group membership and asked who was championing the county. The RD explained that his advisory board comprised eight educational leaders who advised and challenged him. They were not appointed to be representative of every geographical area, but to give a mix of experience and knowledge. He had a good working relationship with the Council's Director of Education and had met with the new Executive Director for Children, Education and Families to discuss the County Council's priorities. His regional office was in Cambridge so there was local knowledge there. External attendees were not invited to attend Board meetings, but he would speak with the Director of Education before these meetings as he wanted to hear the local authority's voice, and would always take account of its views. Generally their views aligned, but where they did not he was honest and open about that.

- noted that the Committee would be discussing a draft small schools strategy later in the meeting (minute 180 below refers) and asked the RD's views on support for small schools. The RD stated that the East of England had a lot of small schools, and that the academy trust model did allow some economies of scale which could help small schools band together to make them more viable. He acknowledged that schools in rural areas could offer facilities to their local communities that went beyond education.
- noted that all secondary schools in Cambridgeshire were academies and all except two were part of academy trusts, but the current proportion judged Good or better by Ofsted was below the national average. In Huntingdon three schools were part of a MAT and all three were assessed as Requires Improvement, with one having had this status for many years. They asked how the RD would work with school leaders and the LA to improve this. The RD stated that the percentage of academies judged as Good or Outstanding was rising year on year and that as a region the East of England did quite well in terms of secondary school performance. However, there was a need to keep bearing down on Trusts that were not yet rated Good. Strategic reviews were held annually with the chief executives and board of trustees for Trusts not yet achieving the Good standard to look at governance best practice, finance and external challenge. Where Trusts were based outside of the region he worked with colleagues in other parts of the country to conduct those reviews jointly. The RD had access to small sums to promote school improvement and this was available to both academies and maintained schools. He also had access to growth funding for trusts doing well that might have the potential to do more, or to work in support of other schools. Cambridgeshire had been identified as an education investment area and he was currently developing area plans for all 11 LAs in the region. This would inform his team's work programme for the next 12-18 months, and would categorise schools and trusts it was felt were not yet performing well enough.
- commented that Cambridgeshire was the fastest growing county and that education funding did not reflect its population growth over time. They asked how effectively the RD felt he had represented Cambridgeshire's challenges with ministers and advocated for fairer funding in Cambridgeshire and beyond. The RD explained that funding was decided nationally and set nationally through a formula. As a civil servant his role did not extend to lobbying for funding for the region, but that he would do all he could to further the interests of schools in the East of England. As Cambridgeshire was identified as an education investment area more funding was tilted this way, while Fenland and East Cambridgeshire had been identified as a priority area that attracted an additional £1m for education improvement objectives. The RD stated that he would do all he could to bring more funds into region. When he spoke to ministers he reflected what he had heard directly from his contacts with schools, which could be powerful.
- expressed concern at a significant democratic deficit and loss of local knowledge given that the RD and his team was responsible for such a large and diverse region. The RD acknowledged that he would not have as much local knowledge as LA partners, stating that was why those relationships were so important. Academy trusts in the East of England averaged 5-10 schools, so their trustees knew their schools well.

- expressed surprise that the RD would be involved in the decision if a school sought an exemption from the requirement for broadly Christian daily acts of worship, and asked if there was someone in their team well versed in the issues around this and the work of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). The RD stated that he had received one application in relation to collective worship during his 18 months in post. He would not approve a decision of this kind without knowing what consultation had taken place and whether there was parental support for the change.
- noted that finance experts who acted in an advisory capacity on behalf of the DfE could be deployed to any school free of charge, including maintained schools. The RD would intervene if a school was in a financially precarious position
- expressed serious concerns about the proposed location of a free school secondary school on the site of the Thomas Clarkson Academy in Wisbech. This would lead to the loss of the existing school's sports site and they were concerned that the progress which had been made at Thomas Clarkson, including achieving a Good Ofsted rating, should not be jeopardised. They asked that the DfE should look at this decision again. The RD stated that his understanding was that the LA's proposed site was not viable, but that this decision had been taken before his appointment. The RD assessed proposals from an education perspective. The Trust had done good things at Thomas Clarkson and he understood that the shared site would allow some sharing of facilities and staff which would offer economies of scale. There was a need to find a viable site, but the RD would take those concerns away and ask about them on the committee's behalf.
- expressed thanks on behalf of the residents of Littleport as the RD's intervention in relation to secondary educational provision had put the town and students in better place than they had been in a long time. The RD described a recent visit to meet the new headteacher and their team who he had found to be full of energy and ambition for the school. He paid tribute to the work of the Eastern Learning Trust.
- spoke of their concerns about system fragmentation and asked what could be done better by local authorities and others to address that. The RD spoke of the importance of the message sent by system leaders regarding professional courtesy and co-operation, and of examples of small trusts coming together to form larger, more coherent MATs.
- asked what was being done to support children in care and care leavers post 16. The RD stated that he had met a group of care leavers in Suffolk last year and had been struck by their experiences and vulnerability. The DfE funded some support programmes for these young people, although he was not directly involved in this.
- welcomed the opportunity to share the Committee's views and hear direct from the RD and asked how this might be achieved again in the future. The RD stated that contact would be primarily through senior officers, but that he was content for them to pass on any specific queries which the committee wanted to raise. He was also willing to speak again at another committee meeting, but he worked with 11 LAs and must share his time between them.
- welcomed the RD's commitment to championing the region and asked what he could do in support of the Safety Valve deals. The RD explained that these were not

overseen by his team, but that they could work with the LA to open two new special free schools in Cambridgeshire. His team was also working with officers on ways to develop more places in existing schools so that children and young people had school places closer to home.

- asked how the RD monitored and held academies to account in relation to inclusion and exclusion. The RD explained that this was achieved primarily through Ofsted which had a clear inspection framework which included rates and patterns of exclusions and suspensions. He was clear that unnecessary exclusion or off-rolling was unacceptable, and if the LA was aware of or had any concerns around this it should let him know. The High Quality Framework published by Government referenced the requirement for high quality and inclusive education, so if an academy trust was not delivering that it would not be deemed high quality and would not be able to grow.
- noted that a local secondary school had recently been deemed inadequate and asked if it would be moving to a new trust. The RD explained that this was always looked at on a case by case basis. An assessment would be made of whether the trust had the capacity to turn the position around, and the LA's view on this would be sought. The decision to transfer a school from one trust to another was not taken lightly, and he would want to be confident that the end result would be worth the upheaval. He would keep officers updated on the case concerned.
- stated that the overall performance of academies in Cambridgeshire at KS2 was below that of its maintained schools, and asked what was being done about this. The RD stated that he was not sure he totally agreed with this analysis as he understood that performance figures for 2022/23 were a bit closer. Both the RD and the Council wanted all schools to be good, but he agreed that Cambridgeshire schools needed to improve at primary level as they were slightly outside national averages.
- part of the RD's role was to support LA sufficiency. Cambridgeshire was an area of significant growth, and the Council had invested significant resources, but sometimes this was at odds with the RD's decisions. The RD recognised the challenge around sufficiency, stating that he wanted to work with the LA to reach a shared view, but that there would be times when they would disagree. If the LA considered an academy was being unreasonable and the RD agreed he could talk to them to seek a resolution. The new High Quality Trust Framework published this year spoke about all schools operating fair access and co-operating in their local areas, and this was another signal to academies of need to work within these priorities. He was aware of the particular challenge in Wisbech and knew that the opening date of the pre-school might be brought forward to try to meet some of that demand.

Summing up, the Chair expressed the hope that the RD had seen how much the Council valued all of Cambridgeshire's schools, both maintained schools and academies. Copies of the dashboard data and Key Stage 2 data would be sent to RD for information. **Action required**

The background contents of the Director of Education's report were noted to aid the discussion in the meeting around the Regional Director's role and his oversight of educational and social care outcomes in Cambridgeshire. No vote was required.

The meeting was adjourned from 3.33pm-3.46pm.

179. Transport Transformation Progress Report

The Committee received a progress report a year on the [Transport Transformation Strategy](#) which it had adopted in November 2022. This outlined key areas of progress and savings achieved in the last year. It also described a review of safe walking routes which was being undertaken, and a further report on this would be brought in March 2024.

The Chair welcomed the innovative partnership working being undertaken with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

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

- received confirmation that walking routes which had previously been deemed unsafe would not be deemed safe unless assessed as such by a road safety team assessor. The report to the Committee in March would set out the investment needed to make a route safe where applicable and would specify which routes these were.
- described work being progressed around a volunteer driver scheme and an initial phase of work looking at the existing bus network and mapping it with school routes to see if this could boost viability. A nine month trial would be undertaken with the CPCA to strategically procure routes together to meet both public and home to school transport need.
- confirmed that officers in the education team were working with the Highways and Transport Active Travel Team to see where active travel and independent travel training for young people with additional needs could be incentivised.
- noted the work being undertaken with community transport providers including FACT. This would be extended through the dynamic purchasing system, but not all community providers would necessarily want to take this up.
- spoke of the pressure on places being experienced by secondary schools in the county and asked whether capacity could be increased in Cambridge City to help alleviate this. Officers stated that there were placement pressures in Cambridge too.
- received confirmation that parents and local residents would be consulted as part of the proposed review of safer walking routes to school. The consultation responses would be included in the report brought to the committee for consideration. If investment was needed to make routes safe this would be a capital investment.
- expressed reservations about the potential use of volunteer drivers, commenting that this could take away driving jobs from people and that the administrative costs involved in managing this could result in the same or higher costs. They were also concerned about potential safeguarding issues. Officers reported that there was a significant driver shortage, so they were not concerned that the use of volunteers would take jobs away from existing drivers. Appropriate safeguarding checks would be carried out for all volunteer drivers. The additional administration costs of managing volunteer drivers were acknowledged.

- asked that officers engaged with schools about the safer routes review rather than relying on a desktop exercise to ensure that solutions would be practical and would make a difference.
- suggested early engagement with parish councils around safer walking routes.

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

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) endorse progress made towards the outcomes identified in the Transport Transformation Strategy.
- b) agree to a review of safer walking routes, with a view to bring a proposal to committee in March 2024.
- c) endorse the partnership working with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority in relation to shared public bus routes.

180. Draft Small Schools Strategy

A revised version of Appendix 1 which contained the draft Small Schools Strategy was published on 24th November 2023.

Following the decision to close Great Gidding Primary School the Committee had identified the need for a process to consider options and solutions to protect small schools. Officers had worked closely with small schools on this to develop a framework to identify the challenges they faced and to put an early warning system in place, and the proposals in the report had been co-produced with headteachers. The Committee had also requested that learning from the closure of Great Gidding and feedback on the children who had moved from Great Gidding to other schools should be provided, and this was also included in the report.

The Chair stated the Committee's wish to help support small schools.

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

- asked about the possibility of local authorities establishing their own multi-academy trust. Officers advised that element of the Schools Bill White Paper was not being progressed, so that was not currently an option.
- asked if having a high percentage of pupils from out of catchment was a common feature amongst small school, or if Great Gidding had been an outlier in this respect. Officers offered a response outside of the meeting. **Action required**
- noted that many small schools were Diocesan schools and suggested the Diocesan presence in the document could be strengthened to reflect this.
- asked whether there was a need to revisit the question of local authority (LA) representation in multi-academy trusts (MATs). They felt there might be scope for an

ex officio LA representative at the Diocese of Ely's MAT, but could not speak for other MATs.

- welcomed the partnership approach contained in the strategy which would look at each school's situation in context with the local community and key stakeholders.
- questioned whether the draft strategy reflected small schools' role as anchor institutions in their local communities. Officers stated that a community impact assessment would draw this element out.
- was mindful of the potential impact on pupil numbers and staff churn once a school was designated as being at risk of closure and asked what the LA could do to help small schools. Officers stated that one of the main principles of the draft strategy was to put in intensive work before a school reached the point where closure needed to be considered. This would include dialogue with the school and the development of an action plan. Officers would work with schools to explore the different options and scenarios according to the specific circumstances of each school.

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

It was resolved unanimously to endorse the Small Schools Strategy (which includes the school closure process) set out in Appendix 1 to this report for immediate adoption and implementation.

181. Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022/23

The number of children and young people in the County Council's care had remained fairly stable during 2022/23 at around 646. This equated to around 17 per 10,000 compared to 22 per 10,000 for the Council's statistical neighbours, and an average of 26 per 10,000 across England. However, the children being cared for in Cambridgeshire tended to have higher levels of trauma and challenge which meant they tended to stay in care for longer and their needs were more complex. This meant there was significant challenge around meeting the cost of their care. There had been a continuing rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) during the period through both the national transfer scheme and children arriving spontaneously in Cambridgeshire. 25 new fostering families had been recruited which was likely to represent a net increase which bucked the national trend. More work was needed on the number of young people in care and care leavers in education, employment and training. There had been a drop in performance in relation to the completion of initial health assessments (IHAs) and a recovery plan had been put in place to address this. The level of adoptions across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough was high, but improvement was needed with adoption support, especially at transition points. There had been a rise in the number children in care experiencing mental health issues. Going forward, provision for care leavers would be subject to a separate judgement in Ofsted inspections and work was needed in relation to the care leaver offer and accommodation pathway, working with district council partners.

The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee placed on record the Council's thanks to Cambridgeshire's foster carers and commended the work being undertaken on how best to support and retain existing fostering households and to attract new foster carers. She commended the work being done by officers to maintain business as

usual during the separation of services from Peterborough City Council. She noted that the report incorrectly stated that informal meetings of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee were jointly chaired with a care experienced young person which was not currently the case, and that some of the data in the report appeared to relate to 2021/22.

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

- expressed thanks to the members of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association for their work in support of their fellow foster carers.
- encouraged all councillors to consider their role as corporate parents across the full range of the Council's work.
- spoke of the wish to extend the capacity of foster carers to foster more children and young people, and the need for them to have housing which enabled this. Relationships with district councils would be important to this.
- suggested having a link on the Council's website with frequently asked questions about becoming a foster carer.
- noted that there were a lot of children's homes in Fenland, and that these seemed to accommodate a lot of children from out of county. Officers stated that they were working to strengthen relationships with local providers as part of their work on sufficiency.
- acknowledged the work being done by the new Children's Services team, but commented that the report did not reference many outcomes and that they would welcome the inclusion of some targets in future iterations to drive performance. The Executive Director for Children, Education and Families stated that the report provided a summary of the current position. In a year's time the report would come from the new leadership team and reflect their evaluation of the position at that time. The peer review by Essex County Council would inform the improvement work being done during the coming year.
- welcomed an assurance that officers were committed to using the voice of children and young people in care and care leavers to inform their strategic approach and operational delivery, commenting that they would like to hear those voices in the next annual report.
- welcomed the Siblings Together project, but asked why these siblings were not placed together. Officers stated that this was usually due to care planning rather than resource issues, and that it was a priority to keep siblings together where it was safe and appropriate to do so.
- noted that access to dental services was a national issue, but that officers were working with the local Integrated Care System to facilitate access to dental treatment for children and young people in care. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee had written to the National Head of Nursing Quality and Safeguarding on this issue.

- noted that the new Service Director for Fostering, Adoption and Corporate Parenting and new Head of Corporate Parenting were taking forward work with health service partners in relation to the timely completion of initial health assessments.

The Chair expressed thanks on behalf of the Committee to the members of the Children in Care Council and the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee for their work, to the Interim Service Director for the positive changes introduced during his time with the Council and to the new Children's Services team.

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

It was resolved unanimously to agree the report and areas for development listed for Corporate Parenting in 2023/24.

[Councillor Hoy left the meeting at 5.05pm]

182. A Review of Methodology for Estimating Demand for Education Provision arising from New Housing Developments

Accurate forecasts were required to plan for educational provision for new housing developments and to demonstrate demand for extra school places to the Department for Education (DfE), so it was important to have a credible forecasting methodology. The multipliers were reviewed periodically and this was last done in 2017. It was recommended in the main to retain the previous multipliers, but a variable multiplier was proposed for Cambridge City fringes to ensure the robustness of the forecasts.

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

- sought clarification of the area described as the Cambridge fringes. Officers stated that this referred to developments which abutted Cambridge at Trumpington, the Northwest fringe, Darwin Green, the Marshalls site and to the South East. Northstowe, Waterbeach and Cambourne would follow the previous multiplier formula.
- received confirmation that officers produced both a catchment forecast and a school-based forecast, to reflect that children living close to county borders might attend schools across county boundaries. Where the School Admissions Team was aware that this could cause issues at transition to secondary school they contacted feeder schools to encourage parents to submit their applications on time and to name their catchment school.
- received confirmation that housing association properties and private rented accommodation were included in the calculations.
- commended the report as demonstrating an excellent approach to continuous improvement around the science of risk management. It was noted that the DfE multipliers had been considered in detail during the review, but that the Council's own multipliers were more accurate in most cases.

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

It was resolved unanimously to approve the adoption of the revised child multipliers set out in Table 3 in paragraph 2.8 and Table 5 in paragraph 2.11 with immediate effect, to better inform the planning and funding of early years and school places.

183. Finance Monitoring Report October 2023

The Committee's attention was drawn to the forecast pressure of around £10.7m. This related mainly to placement costs and staffing costs arising from the relatively high number of agency workers. There was a £4.4m overspend forecast on the Dedicated Schools Grant which was in line with Safety Valve submissions, and the capital position had a balanced outturn forecast.

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

- noted that it was hoped that a cohort of six or seven international social workers would arrive in January. They would need to be licensed to work for the Council and would be expected to remain in the Council's employ for a set period of time. There would be some overlap with agency staff while they learned local practice.
- queried the figures shown for Strategic Management – Education. Officers stated that this included financing arrangements and re-charges from the Dedicated Schools Grant.

The report was noted.

[Councillor Hay left the meeting at 5.35pm]

184. Corporate Performance Report

The Committee's attention was drawn to the high level of repeat referrals to social care within 12 months (Indicator 1) which was due in part to the work that had been done to make referrals easier. The next step would be to review the threshold document to ensure that decisions were being made to get the right help to children quickly. The number of children subject to a child protection plan or in care was below the numbers seen in the Council's statistical neighbours, with the highest area of growth being seen amongst unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

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

- sought clarification around privately funded education, health and care plans (EHCPs). Officers stated that advice from private practitioners would be considered as part of the EHCP process, but that this would be validated through the Council's own assessment process.
- asked about the delay in providing data relating to the percentage of persistent absence (Indicator 132). Officers advised that the figures were based on published data, so there was a lag.
- asked about the downward trend in the number of pupils receiving their first choice of secondary school place (Indicator 135). Officers stated that this reflected a higher

demand for places and parental preference. Parents were encouraged to consider applying to their catchment school first. Officers were working with schools to reduce persistent absence and suspensions, and the County had some of the lowest permanent exclusion rates in the country.

The report was noted.

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

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

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the committee agenda plan.
- b) Note the committee training plan.
- c) Note two changes to committee appointments made since the last meeting:
 - i. Councillor P Slatter appointed as a member of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee, in place of Councillor M Atkins.
 - ii. Councillor M Atkins appointed as a substitute member of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee, in place of Councillor P Slatter
 - iii. Councillor M Atkins appointed as a non-voting observer on the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum, in place of Councillor B Goodliffe. This change was made by the Executive Director for Children, Education and Families under delegated authority on 1st November 2023, in consultation with the Committee Chair and Vice Chair.
- d) Appoint Councillor P Slatter as Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee.
- e) Discontinue the Joint Consultative Committee (Teachers).

(Chair)