

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 12th March 2024

Time: 2.00 – 5.28pm

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

Present: Councillors D Ambrose Smith, M Atkins (Vice Chair), A Bradnam, A Bulat, P Coutts, C Daunton, M Goldsack, B Goodliffe (chair), J Gowing, A Hay (to 5.16pm), S Hoy (to 4.02pm), A Sharp, P Slatter, S Taylor and F Thompson

Co-opted Member: Sarah Conant, Church of England Diocese of Ely

198. Changes to Committee Membership

The Committee noted the appointments of Councillors Goldsack and Gowing on 28th February 2024 and Councillor Coutts on 13th March 2024. They succeeded Councillors Costello, Jonas King and Prentice.

199. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Dr A Stone, co-opted member representing the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia.

There were no declarations of interest.

200. Minutes – 16th January 2024

The minutes of the meeting on 16th January 2024 approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

The minutes action log was reviewed. It was noted that an update on a phonics pilot project had been circulated to all committee members electronically on 6th March 2024.

Individual Members:

- learned that the arrangements for the proposed district member briefings on Early Years provision had been discussed at Spokes and smaller, more localised briefings would be arranged instead.
- asked for a copy of the report by Essex County Council (ECC) officers following the conclusion of their independent review of the Council's Children's Services. The Executive Director explained that the Council's Children's Services were currently being inspected by Ofsted, and that this superseded the work done by Essex. ECC had provided a summary of its findings and this had already been used alongside

feedback from young people to underpin the development and implementation of improvement strategies within Children's Services. A report on the findings and response to the Ofsted inspection would be brought to the Committee, hopefully to the next meeting.

201. Petitions and Public Questions

One public question was received from Councillor Lara Davenport-Ray, Huntingdonshire District Council, and one question was heard from County Councillor Steve Tierney in his capacity as the local member for Wisbech West.

Councillor Davenport-Ray explained that the Astrea Academy was the topic raised with her most frequently by local residents. She expressed concerns on behalf of students and parents about the behaviour policy, class sizes and deteriorating facilities at Longsands Academy. Quoting feedback she had received she highlighted concerns around the cleanliness of toilets, the condition of changing rooms and the general condition of the building. She asked what the County Council would do to support the young people attending Longsands Academy.

In response to questions of clarification from Committee members, Councillor Davenport-Ray explained that local councillors had visited the school site and that conversations with them were continuing, although there was no outcome yet. In 2022 £600,000 had been spent on the school's heating systems and £200,000 on its windows and doors. She believed that the school had been part of the Astrea Academy Trust for around 10 years.

The Chair thanked Councillor Davenport-Ray for sharing her concerns and those of local parents and students with the Committee. A written response would be provided within 10 working days of the meeting.

Councillor Steve Tierney addressed the meeting in his capacity as the local Member for Wisbech West.

Councillor Tierney explained that Wisbech West was one of the most deprived areas in the county, and that Waterlees was the most deprived area within it. Grant funding had recently been obtained for a youth facility at The Spinney, which was great news, but most of the equipment in its adventure playground had either been condemned or removed. The Friends of the Spinney was trying to raise funds to replace this play equipment, but Councillor Tierney understood that the playground was owned and operated by the County Council and felt the Council should do this. It would cost around £80-90k to fund comparable replacements for the play equipment previously at the playground and he asked the Committee to speak to officers about making this funding available.

In response to questions of clarification from Committee members, Councillor Tierney stated his understanding that the adventure playground had been a County Council site for many years. It had been an amazing facility when it first opened, but over the years the play equipment had aged or been decommissioned and its CCTV cameras had not been replaced. It looked quite sad now, although it was still well loved and used by local

children. A Member expressed surprise that this was a County Council asset and expressed hope that it was on the radar of the property and assets review currently being carried out.

The Chair thanked Councillor Tierney for joining the meeting to share his views as the local Member. He would receive a written response within 10 working days of the meeting.

There were no petitions.

Key decisions

202. Cambridgeshire Holiday Vouchers Scheme [KD2024/034]

The Committee was advised of a correction to the published report. The Easter voucher amount would be £30, rather than £25 as stated. The revised total per eligible child in 2024/25 aged 2-19 would be £140.

The proposed arrangements were for the fifth iteration of the Cambridgeshire holiday vouchers scheme. Committee approval was sought to re-procure for three years based on the Council's continued commitment to the programme which had been restated at the Full Council meeting on 13th February 2024. Since publication of the report the Government had announced an extension of the Household Support Fund (HSF) for a further six months, and allocation of that funding would be discussed at the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on 26th March 2024.

In response to questions from Members, officers:

- explained that the holiday voucher scheme was available to children eligible for free school meals while Household Support Funding was available to low income families and had wider eligibility criteria.
- confirmed that officers were working with the Council's Communications team to promote the holiday voucher scheme.
- explained that families received weekly communications from the scheme administrators and that reminders were sent about any unclaimed vouchers. This had led to a significant reduction in the number of vouchers which went unclaimed. Funding for any vouchers which did still remain unclaimed was returned to the Council and reallocated. Vouchers were distributed at the start of each school holiday, with the value increased for the longer holiday periods.
- explained that unclaimed payments from previous rounds were used to uplift payments in the current round. Vouchers could be used alongside participating supermarkets' loyalty schemes, and families were advised of any exclusions to the goods which they could purchase when the vouchers were issued. Conversations were continuing with the two supermarkets which did not currently accept the vouchers.

- advised that families living outside of the county's boundaries were signposted to alternative support services.
- confirmed that the funding for the extension of the voucher scheme had been included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the next four years, and would go through the Council budget process each year.

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

It was resolved by a majority to:

- a) agree the scope and operation of the Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme (CHVS).
- b) agree to utilise up to £3m earmarked for this purpose by Full Council in order to fund the CHVS during 2024/25, subject to any government announcement on available national funding.
- c) delegate responsibility for awarding and executing a contract for the provision of the holiday vouchers starting from 1st April 2024 and extension periods to the Executive Director: Children, Education and Families, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee.

203. Education Contracts [KD2024/044]

The Council had a number of statutory duties in relation to the sufficiency, diversity and planning of early years places. To fulfil these duties the local authority procured services from external providers. The Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System (PDPS) approved by the Committee in October 2022 offered a streamlined method of selecting the most suitable provider while minimising gaps in provision for Cambridgeshire's families. The Council also had statutory duties in relation to the provision of home to school transport to eligible families. Around 11,900 children of statutory school age were transported each day, with around a third of routes re-tendered each year.

In response to questions from individual members, officers explained that:

- officers could carry out preparatory work for the anticipated demand for home to school transport, but could not measure actual costs until families applied for education transport. A note was offered outside of the meeting on the position of 30 Wisbech children who had been offered school places in Littleport next year as there was no space available in their local school. **Action required**
- sectional contract completion arrangements were being used in Northstowe, so accommodation for Reception and nursery provision would be available for September 2024. The Early Years team would work with any settings which were struggling and monitor provision in any areas where settings might close.

- there was no statutory obligation to provide education transport assistance Post 16, and applications were assessed against an eligibility criteria. Those receiving this support were mainly young people with additional needs or exceptional circumstances. Some colleges offered means tested bursary schemes. Officers undertook to provide a copy of the Post 16 education transport assistance eligibility criteria and a briefing note on Post 16 transport and the bursary system. **Action required**
- pupil forecasting in new and existing communities was based on catchment forecasts which included all children living in the area. The budget was based on assumed overall secondary school pupil numbers.
- the procurement process for Early Years providers was essentially a public sector procurement process, so all providers were assessed in the same way. Officers offered an assurance that no commercial advantage was offered to new providers over an existing supplier. A robust process was now in place to ensure this.
- offered a note outside of the meeting setting out the number and percentage of pupils in Cambridgeshire schools who were transported each day. **Action required**
- confirmed that the nationwide shortage of drivers and fuel costs described in the narrative of the report should have been identified as a potential risk at section 7.3.
- undertook to provide a briefing note on progress around the education transport transformation programme and improved practices. **Action required**
- explained that it was not always possible to offer spare seats on school buses for purchase by families whose children were not eligible for education transport assistance. A briefing note was offered. **Action required**

The Chair asked that the Committee's thanks to Ian Trafford, Education Capital and Place Planning Manager, be placed on record for his many years of service to the Council ahead of his retirement at the end of the month.

It was resolved unanimously:

In relation to Early Years Provision:

- a) delegate responsibility for awarding and executing the contracts for the provision of early years and childcare starting April 2024 – April 2025, and extension periods, to the Executive Director for Children, Education and Families, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee. These are listed below:
 - EY provision at Milton CE Primary School
 - EY provision at Brightfields Children's Centre, Farcet
 - EY provision at Sawtry Infants' School
 - EY and wraparound provision adjacent to Melbourn Primary School
 - EY provision at Caldecote Primary School

- Wraparound provision at Former Children's Centre, Somersham Education

In relation to Transport Contracts:

- b) delegate responsibility for awarding and executing a contract for the provision of special, mainstream and child social care transport contracts for implementation in September 2024, to the Executive Director for Children, Education and Families, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee.

204. Recommissioning of the Healthy Child Programme [KD2024/011]

The Healthy Child Programme (HCP) was a universal service currently commissioned through a single section 75 agreement with two local NHS Trusts (Cambridgeshire Community Services and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust) across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Committee's approval was sought to commission an integrated service across both areas. The HCP related primarily to health visiting and school nursing services with contract values of over £9m in Cambridgeshire and £4m in Peterborough. There was a joint leadership and management structure in place, supported by three locality teams. There were some workforce recruitment and retention issues which had impacted on the ability to carry out visits within the specified timescales, but children were being seen.

In response to questions from individual members, officers:

- acknowledged the concerns expressed around dental provision and healthy weight. Different discussions would be initiated by the health visitor at each contact, and this included oral health advice and asking if a baby had been registered with a dentist. Healthy weight was addressed through the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) and Child Weight Management Service and delivered under separate contract.
- explained that the IT systems of some clinical systems in the two NHS Trusts had been harmonised, but that there was still more to be done to streamline the provision.
- noted the additional costs that would be incurred by separating the provision. This would create a £129k budget pressure in Cambridgeshire, which was equivalent to funding three frontline practitioners.
- explained that around 100 Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) spaces were commissioned, and that the learning from these was used to inform an enhanced young parent pathway for those that did not meet the criteria for places on the FNP programme. More places could be commissioned at additional cost, but it had been possible to apply learning from the FNP programme locally while using it on a small scale. The resources needed to fund more places on the FNP programme would need to be taken from elsewhere and there was an 'opportunity cost' to this. A Member's view that they would want Cambridgeshire's young people to have the

benefit of the FNP programme was acknowledged, and would be raised by the Public Health Consultant with the Director of Public Health. The Chair stated that extending the offer was not simply a matter of employing another person but a whole team, and was financially complex.

- explained that the universal nature of this service and national guidance on how mandated contracts are delivered in a standardised way lent itself to continued joint arrangements with Peterborough, whereas with other more targeted services the differences in geography and demography between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough meant that there were different needs. Each issue was judged on its own merits.
- hoped to bring a further report in June on the proposed duration of the contract and approach to commissioning. A Member expressed the hope that there would be break points in the contract.

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

It was resolved unanimously to commission an integrated service across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in order to maintain the stability of this service, to allow for improvements in delivery to be consolidated and to avoid a dip in performance. The integrated model also allows for greater efficiencies in management costs and greater resilience in the specialist elements of the service. Once a decision is agreed on this, further papers will be brought to CYP Committee to consider 'the service model and what to include' in the 0-5 and 5-19 elements of the HCP and the approach to commissioning, which will look at options including Section 75 Agreements, procurement using the new Provider Selection Regime or In-house options.

[The meeting adjourned from 4.02pm until 4.18pm]

[Councillor Hoy left the meeting at 4.02pm]

205. Adoption Support Fund Purchasing Framework [KD2024/55]

The Council had a statutory duty to provide a range of support services to adoptive and special guardianship families, including services relating to the therapeutic needs of the child. Funding for this was provided to local authorities through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The use of a Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System (PDPS) for two years with the potential to extend for up to a further two years (2+1+1) would create a better, more flexible framework to deliver these support services. The PDPS could be re-opened periodically to enable new providers to join.

In response to questions from individual members, officers:

- confirmed that support would be available to applicants about registering with the PDPS, including a live online guidance session run by the Procurement team.

- confirmed that the PDPS could be opened to providers in other parts of the country where Cambridgeshire children were placed to make this support available to them in their local area.
- acknowledged a query about whether the proposed length of the contract at 2+1+1 years was too short. This had been discussed with the Procurement team, but at present funding was only confirmed until 2025. The proposed contract length gave the option of extending beyond 2025 without committing the Council much beyond that point.

With the consent of the meeting, recommendations b), c) and d) were amended to give delegated authority to the Executive Director Children, Education and Families in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee, instead of the Service Director for Fostering, Adoption and Corporate Parenting as stated in the published report.

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

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) approve the proposal for the implementation of the Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System.
- b) delegate 'Authority to Award' to the Executive Director Children, Education and Families in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee, when deciding which providers meet the criteria to join the Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System.
- c) delegate authority to the Executive Director Children, Education and Families in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee, to approve that call offs can be made from the Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System when an opportunity arises at short notice.
- d) delegate authority to the Executive Director Children, Education and Families, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee, to award contracts when a call off from the PDPS has been made and the most suitable provider has been identified.

Decisions

206. Finance Monitoring Report January 2024

At the end of January 2024 core funded activity showed a forecast overspend of £11.9m. This was primarily due to children in care placement costs. The overall numbers of children in care had remained fairly constant, but the children were experiencing an increased complexity of need. The number of education health and care plans (EHCPs) continued to increase at an unprecedented rate. The dedicated schools grant (DSG) was showing an increased risk around Early Years (EY) funding

from Government as this would be adjusted based on the January census data. This could lead to a change in EY funding that could increase the pressure on the DSG.

In response to questions from individual members, officers:

- confirmed that the figures relating to strategic management for children and safeguarding in Appendix 2 represented a technical adjustment, and had no direct impact on service delivery.
- stated that the £338k pressure forecast by the Education Psychology Service reflected the difficulty being seen nationally in recruiting educational psychologists (EPs). The Council was looking to recruit permanent members of staff, but in the interim the demand for services was being managed through the use of locum EPs.
- undertook to confirm when a report on the preferred delivery option for Alconbury Weald Secondary and Special School would be brought to the Committee.
Action required
- undertook to confirm when a planning decision was expected on Waterbeach New Town Primary. **Action required**
- confirmed the use of grants and reserves to mitigate the forecast overspend, together with some funding transferred from the Adults budget.
- stated that a roll-forward exercise was carried out on children in care cost commitments. A shortfall was likely, but this had not yet been quantified. Vacancy figures were reviewed on a quarterly basis, and the detail would be included in the closedown report. Placement costs were being addressed in a number of ways, including looking at how to grow the number of in-house foster carers and close oversight of high cost care packages to ensure best value. The Commissioning Service was also working more constructively with the local provider market to try to bring more children in care back to Cambridgeshire.

The report was noted.

207. Corporate Performance Report Quarter 3

The Committee reviewed the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3 (October to December 2023) which provided monitoring information on the key performance indicators relating to the Council's ambition that children and young people have opportunities to thrive. The ratings for Indicator 8: Ofsted – Children attending schools that are judged as Good or Outstanding (primary schools) and Indicator 11: Percentage of two year olds taking up the universal entitlement (15 hours) had improved from a RAG rating of Amber to Green, showing improvement. The rating for Indicator 2: Number of children with a Child Protection Plan per 10,000 population under 18) had moved from Green to Red. At the end of December 2023 the rate in Cambridgeshire

was 50 children with a Child Protection Plan per 10,000, an increase of 1.9 children per 10,000 over the previous last year. Nationally the rate was 70 children per 10,000, and Cambridgeshire's current rate was the third lowest of the eleven local authorities in the Eastern region.

In response to questions from individual members, officers:

- advised that all secondary schools in Cambridgeshire were academy schools, so the Council had no direct influence on their operation (Indicator 9: Pupils attending schools that are judged as Good or Outstanding (Secondary Schools) - Red rating. The Executive Director stated that it was not acceptable that secondary schools were performing at this level, and that officers continued to raise this issue with the Regional Director for the East of England and the Department for Education. The Council had a School Improvement team which offered support and challenge to both maintained and academy schools. Recruitment was also underway for a new Service Director for Education who would lead future work to improve educational outcomes and attainment.

A Member highlighted that three schools in Huntingdonshire were currently rated as Requiring Improvement, and two of these were in St Neots. They had raised this with the Regional Director when he had attended a committee meeting in November 2023, and asked that the Committee should write to him about this. Officers advised that a number of issues had been raised with the Regional Director recently and they would provide an update outside of the meeting about whether this had been raised previously. **Action required**

- acknowledged that completion rates for education, health and care plans (EHCPs) within the required timescales were currently at their lowest levels. There were high sickness rates within the officer team and additional staff were being brought in on an interim basis. A new team manager was in post and the Interim Service Director for Education would be reviewing the EHCP process to see if it could be made more efficient. The demand for EHCPs continued to rise at an unprecedented level. It was agreed that further updates would be provided to keep a focus on this issue. **Action required**
- advised that officers were working closely with schools in relation to pupil absenteeism. Robust processes were in place for tracking children missing education, and cases were kept open to check on them which was above statutory requirements. An increasing number of children were also being educated at home.

Members commended the Special Guardianship Order and adoption rates for children with complex needs, which were the highest in the East of England.

The report was noted.

[Councillor Hay left the meeting at 5.16pm]

208. Children, Education and Families Directorate Risk Register

The Committee reviewed the risk register for the Children, Education and Families Directorate. Nine risks were currently identified, of which four were rated as high risk. The risk register was regularly reviewed and updated within the Directorate to ensure that key risks were monitored and managed appropriately.

In response to questions from individual members, officers:

- acknowledged that changes to immigration rules which would prevent international workers from bringing dependents into the country were likely to have an impact on the recruitment international social workers. A target of recruiting 24 social workers from overseas had been set for this year and it was still hoped to achieve that target.
- advised that the new care academy would support the recruitment and retention of key areas of the workforce. Around 30 % of the current workforce was agency staff, and the aim was to reduce that to 15%. This would deliver both a cost and service benefit.
- the Council was working with the Combined Authority on some specific skills projects around care leavers. There were also wider conversations around skills taking place with the Combined Authority.
- officers were working with the Department for Education to reprofile the forecast for Risk 3: Failure to meet statutory duty to provide sufficient education provision across Cambridgeshire within early years, schools and post 16 access to provision. There was no direct risk to the Council in relation to secondary school performance as these were all academy schools, but the Council was ambitious for all young people in Cambridgeshire.

The report was noted.

209. 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 committee appointments.

A return visit or written report was requested from the Department for Education's Regional Director for the East of England. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) note the committee agenda plan.
- b) note the committee training plan.
- c) appoint Councillor M Atkins as a member of the East of England Local Government Association Children's Services and Education Portfolio-Holder Network

d) appoint Councillor M Atkins as a substitute member of the F40 Group.

(Chair)