

# Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 6 October 2020

Time: 2.00pm – 3.40pm

Venue: Meeting held remotely in accordance with The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020

Present: Councillors S Bywater (Chairman), S Hoy (Vice Chairwoman), A Costello, D Ambrose Smith, P Downes, L Every, L Nethsingha, S Taylor, J Whitehead and J Wisson

Co-opted Members:

A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely

F Vettese, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

## Constitutional Matters

### 353. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were noted from Councillor A Hay, substituted by Councillor A Costello.

### 354. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Ambrose Smith declared an interest in Item 6: Service Committee review of the Draft 2021/22 capital programme as a school governor and Chair of Trustees of the Littleport Leisure Trust. Councillor Ambrose Smith stated that he would remain in the meeting for this item, but would abstain from voting. Minute 358 below refers.

### 355. Minutes of the meeting on 15 September 2020

The minutes of the meeting on 15 September 2020 were approved as an accurate record. A copy would be signed by the Chairman when practical to do so.

### 356. Action Log

The action log was reviewed and the following points raised:

- i. A Member asked that a list of outside bodies offering Duke of Edinburgh Awards and details of how to contact them should be circulated. [Action required]
- ii. Councillor Nethsingha asked for a copy of the information on the lighting of cycle paths near schools to be resent to her.

The Service Director for Education stated that his November Service Director's report would include an update on special educational needs and disability (SEND) recovery before any announcements on this were made.

## 357. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

## Decisions

## 358. Service Committee review of the draft 2021/22 capital programme

Councillor Ambrose Smith made a declaration of interest in relation to this item at the start of the meeting as a school governor and Chair of Trustees of the Littleport Leisure Trust. Councillor Ambrose Smith stated that he would remain in the meeting for this item, but would abstain from voting. Minute 354 above refers.

Officers explained that the first section of the report was prepared centrally and was included in the business planning reports presented to each policy and service committee. The second section focused on the Committee's specific business area. The report under consideration was the first iteration to be presented as part of the 2020/21 business planning round. There were quite a few new schemes included this year, almost all of which were basic need proposals to meet the Council's statutory sufficiency duty. The report also contained a review of existing capital schemes. Some of these had been re-profiled, some with reduced scope and costs and others with increased costs.

There were a number of schemes on site where Covid-19 restrictions had led to a valid increase in contractor costs. These costs were currently being settled and would be reported to the Committee when complete. Tenders were now being issued based on current Covid-19 restrictions to mitigate against this in future.

The Department for Education (DfE) determined the basic need capital allocation using data collected each July from the Council's School Capacity (SCAP) return. This SCAP return was generally used to fund growth in existing communities rather than new housing developments, so officers anticipated lower allocations for basic need in future years as there was evidence that the birth rate in Cambridgeshire was beginning to decline.

The move from Section 106 (S106) to community infrastructure levy (CIL) contributions had been identified as a risk in previous years and this remained the case. However, the impact could be delayed due to Covid-19 as CIL was related to the adoption of new district local plans which had been delayed due to Covid. Consultation on the national planning White Paper was still continuing and also had the potential to further delay the adoption of district local plans.

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

- Asked for clarification of whether it was up to the Council to decide whether to seek S106 or CIL contributions. Officers stated that for now it was a matter for district

councils as to whether they proceeded with a CIL scheme or continued with S106. Districts had some freedom in how to construct their CIL process and discussions with districts sought to encourage the most advantageous resolution for County services.

- Asked for more information about the location of the land acquired north of Cherry Hinton for a new secondary school. They further asked whether there would be a need for a second secondary school to serve the needs of Abbey Division and the Wing development. Officers stated that this was part of the land within the Marshalls site which could be developed ahead of the company's relocation. The Council was paying for the part of the site that would be used to meet existing need. The developer contribution would cover the cost of meeting the new need generated by the new development. Officers stated that long-term planning identified the need for a further secondary school to serve the further new developments in the area if they were all to proceed. This could be explored with Marshalls via a S106 agreement.
- Noted that the Cambourne West secondary school was not now needed and asked whether that money would stay with the developer. Officers stated that Cambourne Village College was being expanded by four forms of entry (4FE) instead and that the Council would be arguing that the developer should meet this cost, so the £10m saving would be to the Council. The Senior Finance Business Partner stated that S106 monies never fully covered the costs involved so it would be topped up with borrowing. However, by bringing the Cambourne scheme back onto the existing Village College campus the costs were reduced so it was hoped that the developer contribution would meet the full cost with no need for additional borrowing, representing a saving to the Council.
- Noted that the report stated that contractors would be expected to factor in the impacts of Covid-19 and asked whether or not this was covered within contracts. They further noted that a lot of employers were putting clauses into employees' contracts in relation to Covid-19. Officers stated that specific Covid-19 clauses were not being included in Council contracts on the basis of legal and procurement advice. Instead, contractors were being invited to tender on the basis of the Covid restrictions currently in place. Contractors could still claim for unforeseen events, so if the current restrictions were tightened this could still lead to claims arising from increased contractor costs. So, whilst this risk remained, it would be less than faced previously.
- Asked about the Council's policy in relation to adequate provision and maintenance of early years settings. The Service Director for Education stated that the Council's duty related specifically to sufficiency and not necessarily to supporting individual settings. This issue had been covered in his previous Service Director's report, but he would be happy to discuss issues relating to specific settings in more detail outside of the meeting.

It was resolved by a majority of those present to:

- a) Note the overview and context provided for the 2021-22 Capital Programme for People and Communities (P&C); and
- b) Comment on the draft proposals for P&C's 2021-22 Capital Programme and endorse their development.

### 359. Service Committee review of the draft revenue business planning proposals for 2021/22 to 2025/26: opening update and review

The Chairman reminded Members that a revised report had been published on Friday 2 October 2020 and it was that version of the report which the Committee would be considering. He confirmed that all Members had received the revised report.

#### Children's social care

The position in the report reflected that which had been set out in previous committee reports from the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding. The full impact of Covid-19 on children's social care was still not yet known. There had not yet been the expected spike in cases following lockdown, but officers anticipated a slower increase being seen across the remainder of the current and next financial years. A bid had been made to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government on this basis. Officers remained confident that some further savings could still be made on costs relating to children in care.

#### Education

The Education Service was continuing to work through the additional pressures arising from Covid-19. The report set out the key areas of concern, including vulnerable children and the increase in elective home education. The high needs block remained under significant pressure and a consultation on this was currently out with schools. There were also pressures in relation to home to school transport and education health and care plans (EHCPs) and identifying savings in this context was a real challenge.

The Chairman stated that this was a unique and unprecedented situation with a level of uncertainty which had never been seen. He reminded Members that the business planning process remained at an early stage and that the report before them reflected this early thinking.

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

- Acknowledged the difficulty which officers faced in building a budget in the current circumstances.
- Asked what support would be available from Government and whether the Committee might want to ask the Chairman to write on its behalf to Government setting out the need for this commitment. In the spring there had been a clear message from Government around what support would be available to local government, but they did not feel that to be the case now. The Chairman indicated that he would be willing to consider writing to Government on this issue, but suggested that it would be better to wait until the picture became more clear.
- Welcomed the news that the anticipated spike in children's social care referrals post lockdown had not materialised. However, the Member expressed concern about cases of domestic violence and asked whether there were sufficient refuge places available for those needing them. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding agreed that it was good news that there had not yet been the anticipated spike in children's social care referrals, but cautioned that it remained

relatively early in the academic year and that the situation would remain under review. He acknowledged the Member's concerns around domestic violence and offered an assurance that the Council would always act to safeguard children. There was a national issue around the number of places available in refuges, but if there were women and children in need and no refuge places available officers would find a way to support them.

- Commented that they would be willing to support the savings proposals set out in the report, but noted that these were the same areas from which potential savings were always identified and which remained under significant pressure. A deficit of £2.1m already existed in the current financial year (£13.7m including Covid-related expenditure) so whilst endorsing the proposals they saw them as more aspirational than actual.

The Chairman commented that it was still possible to achieve savings from business areas facing real challenge, highlighting the achievements which had been made in relation to the children in care budget. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that the numbers of children in care in Cambridgeshire was now much closer to that in the county's statistical neighbours, but that the full impact of savings on placement costs would not be seen until the next financial year. Following a small increase in numbers over the summer the September 2020 figures had reverted to a downward trend, but he emphasised that places would always be made available for any child needing to be taken into care. The Home Office had now acknowledged that it had been under-funding payments in relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) so there should be a small saving on this area next year.

- Asked that care should be taken in looking to achieve savings from the home to school transport budget, commenting that pupil safety must be put first even if this impacted on budget. The Assistant Director for Education offered the Committee an assurance that pupil safety was officers' prime consideration. At any time when changes were considered a detailed risk assessment would be carried out with road safety specialists. The proposals would then be submitted to a Member Service Appeals Panel for review. At present there were no proposals pending to review any of the county's routes.
- Asked that it should be noted that the proposals contained in the report were for noting and comment only at this stage and that doing so should not be interpreted as an endorsement of the proposals.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the overview and context provided for the 2021-22 to 2025-26 Business Plan; and
- b) Comment on the draft proposals for the Children and Young People Committee set out in section 5.4 and endorse their development.

The Committee reviewed the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee annual report 2019/20. The majority of the period covered pre-dated Covid-19 and focused on the Sub-Committee's key work during that period. A peer review had been carried out by Central Bedfordshire Council in October 2019 and there had been an inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) focused visit in February 2020. This had provided much positive feedback, but had identified that there was still some work to do around young people's participation. This was being addressed through a re-structuring of Sub-Committee meetings. There had been some notable achievements during the period including improvements on in-house foster carer recruitment and work on health care assessments had been an area of particular focus. Significant changes had taken place around the delivery of the Virtual School offer during the period which was starting to demonstrate real benefits. There was still work to do in relation to those young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and a task and finish group had been established on this under the leadership of the Service Director: Community and Safety. Planning work around care leavers had improved significantly and work was continuing in relation to apprenticeships.

The Chairwoman of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee stated that the Sub-Committee had been on a journey for the past four years. She commended the collaboration which existed between all elected members on the Sub-Committees and with its partner organisations and service leads. Children and young people in care and care leavers were absolutely at the heart of its work. She expressed her thanks to the Assistant Director for Children and Safeguarding who had changed the thinking on the way the Sub-Committee worked and which would see a move to three public meetings per year and three private meetings to hear direct from young people themselves. Every elected member had a responsibility as a corporate parent to the Council's children in care and she encouraged all members to actively engage with this role. A pilot scheme had been established to provide 10 care leavers with a business mentor and the Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee was one of the first mentors. She concluded by expressing her thanks to the staff team which worked in support of the county's children in care and care leavers.

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

- Noted a disproportionate number of male unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and asked whether this was due to a higher proportion of UASC being boys or whether male UASC were considered at higher risk. Officers stated that a higher number of UASC were boys as girls and young women were less likely to present in this way. There had been a significant reduction in the number of spontaneous arrivals of UASC in Cambridgeshire in due to Covid-19, but there had been three recent arrivals.
- Asked how many UASC came to try to join family members already living in the local community. Officers stated that they did not have those figures, but anecdotally it was believed that some young people that went missing from care quickly after their arrival might have gone to join their families. They concurred with Members' observations that there were a multitude of reasons why UASC left their homes and what they were hoping to achieve by travelling to the United Kingdom.
- Noted that of those children in care assessed as being at risk of exploitation girls were more frequently seen as at risk of sexual exploitation and boys as at risk of criminal exploitation. Officers stated that this reflected the pattern of exploitation

seen within the wider population of young people, although there were always exceptions to this. The number of young people assessed as being at risk in this way was small both amongst children in care and the wider cohort of young people, but every case was a matter of the utmost concern and was treated as such. There was an issue in relation to county lines in Cambridgeshire and strong relationships existed with both the police and partner organisations in relation to this. The Chairman stated that the return home interviews which were conducted in cases where children in care went missing were crucial in identifying cases of possible exploitation.

- Highlighted the reference in the report to 'fragmented mental health services' and asked whether a more detailed report might be brought on this to a future meeting. The Assistant Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that the reference to fragmented mental health services was a direct quote from Ofsted and that this was not necessarily how officers would have described the position, although there was a recognised need in this area. Work was in hand look again at the corporate parenting and clinical offer in relation to mental health. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust was being consulted and there was a plan to expand this offer. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding suggested that a summary of how children in care and care leavers' emotional and mental health needs were being met outside of acute child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) could be included in a future Service Director's report, with a fuller report going first to the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee [Action required].
- Asked whether work on apprenticeships might be expanded to support those young people in care and care leavers who were NEET. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that there was specific work done around vulnerable groups in addition to the Service Director for Community and Safety's wider work on young people who were NEET. An update on this could be included in a future Service Director's report. [Action required]
- Mr Read stated that he was the Chair of the Virtual School Management Board. He welcomed the expansion of the Virtual School offer and the work being done by the new Head of the Virtual School. There was still a life-changing attainment gap for children in care, even if the position for Cambridgeshire's children was better than that of many of the county's neighbours. The Service Director for Education welcomed the gains which had been made, but agreed that the attainment gap remained significant. There were no plans within the business planning proposals to reduce this funding and officers were seeking to protect this service as much as they could. The Assistant Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that there was a real need for radical action in support of the educational attainment of children in care. She highlighted the three year plan which had been put into action by the new Head of the Virtual School and the commitment to this work from the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and from Children's Social Care.
- Asked whether the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee's annual report would be made available to all Members given that they were all corporate parents. The Chairman confirmed that this would be done. [Action required]

The Chairman expressed his thanks to the Chair and members of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and to officers for their work which was being carried out in

extremely challenging circumstances. He had attended a number of participation events with children and young people in care and these represented a crucial part of the Council's work. Stability was a key issue to children and young people in care and he welcomed the improvements being made in this area.

It was resolved to:

Note the content of the report.

### 361. Service Director's report: children and safeguarding

The report set out the steps taken during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown periods. Following an initial reduction in the number of children's social care referrals these had now returned to more expected levels. Some aspects of the virtual engagement necessitated in response to Covid-19 had demonstrated real benefits, such as virtual drop-ins and parenting programmes, and these would be retained. However, whilst virtual engagement had been a valuable tool in maintaining support for those families facing more complex and challenging issues it was less successful at moving these cases forward. The number of children on child protection plans had increased slightly over the summer, but this was due primarily to children spending more time on a plan leading to an increase in overall numbers. The Council currently had 675 children in its care which represented 100 children less than in August 2019. The aim to was to further reduce this number to around 600-625 children in care during the next financial year, subject to any unknown pressures arising from Covid-19. Virtual visits had taken place with children and young people in settled placements during lockdown, but face to face visits had continued for those children who were subject to a child protection plan. It was proving difficult for some disengaged young people to re-engage with education following the lockdown, but PinPoint and other s groups were working alongside families to support them with this. A vulnerable children tracker was also used to work with the Education Service and schools to further support these children's engagement.

The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding recommended that recommendation (a) should be expanded to invite the Committee to record its thanks to foster carers in recognition of their contribution during lockdown. With the consent of the meeting this was agreed. The Chairman highlighted the significant challenges which had been faced by all involved.

It was resolved to:

- a) Record the Committee's thanks to all front line staff and managers in children's services and to foster carers for their continuing dedication to safeguarding children in these challenging times, and a special thanks to all those who continued to visit children, young people and families during lockdown;
- b) Note the key performance information and actions being taken to continue to improve outcomes in children's services
- c) Note possible areas of increased demand and actions being taken to mitigate these.



### 362. Agenda Plan, Appointments and Training Plan

The Committee reviewed and noted the Committee agenda plan, training plan and appointments. There were no changes to the published papers.

### 363. Determined admissions arrangements

The Chairman stated that this report had been added to the agenda after publication as an urgent item of business with his agreement and in accordance with the arrangements for committees taking urgent decisions which were set out in the Constitution. The information had been covered in the service Director for Education's report to the September Committee meeting, but he was advised that a formal committee decision was required.

The Assistant Director for Education expressed her apologies that it had proved necessary to add this report to the meeting agenda at short notice due to officer oversight. There was a requirement within the School Admissions Code to bring this report to the Committee annually to seek its approval of the determined admissions arrangements. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator had asked that this omission be rectified as until this was done the Council would be in breach of its statutory duty. The only material change to the admissions arrangements related to a reduction from 80 to 60 in the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Eastfield Infant School in St Ives. The school, which was a community school maintained by the Local Authority, had requested this change. No objections or comments on this proposal were received during the consultation period.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) retrospectively determine the co-ordinated qualifying scheme and admission arrangements for all schools for whom the Council, as the Local Authority, is the admission authority as published in the consultation documents for admission to school in 2021/22.
- b) support to the proposal that a full and comprehensive review of the determined admission arrangements for all own admission authority schools is undertaken. This should include the published definitions of existing school catchment areas and admission policies for schools with a sixth form. Any issues, or concerns should be highlighted, recorded and shared with the admission authority for the school with a view to these being addressed immediately, where they are in breach of legislation, or as part of the annual consultation process for admission to school in 2022/23 which will commence in the autumn term.

Chairman  
(date)