

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 10 November 2020

Time: 2.03pm – 4.20pm

Venue: Virtual Meeting

Present: Councillors Ambrose Smith, Bywater (Chairman), Downes, Every, Hay, Hoy (Vice Chairwoman), Nethsingha, Taylor, Whitehead and Wisson

Co-opted Members:

A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely

F Vettese, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

364. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

There were no apologies for absence. Councillor Every declared an interest in Item 6: Service Director Education's Report as the Chair of the Academic Council at the City of Ely College. Flavio Vettese declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 6: Service Director Education's Report. Andrew Read declared an interest in Item 6: Service Director Education's Report as a trustee of the St Bede's Inter-Church Trust. Councillor Hoy declared an interest in Item 7: Dedicated Schools Grant and Schools Budget as a Governor of Octavia Alternative Provision in Fenland.

365. Minutes – 6 October 2020 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 6 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman when it was practical to do so. The action log was noted.

366. Petitions and Public Questions

A petition was received from James Bull which called on the Council to agree to extend free school meals over the school holidays. The full text is available to view on the [Council's website](#). There were no questions from the Committee. The Chairman stated that the petition had been overtaken by events following the Government's welcome announcement of the extension of free school meal entitlement to school holidays the previous weekend. He had discussed how this would be implemented with officers and the Service Director for Education was in liaison with schools to identify vulnerable children and those needing support. Further help was also available to families through the local hubs which had been set up around the county. The Chairman endorsed a Member's request that the Committee should be kept informed of the mechanism for delivering free school meals during school holidays. Action required.

A public question was received from Alistair Day, Head teacher of St Bede's St Inter-Church School, Cambridge, in relation to the proposed new free school in Soham. This was heard under Item 6: Service Director Education Report (minute 369 below refers).

367. Cambridgeshire Education Capital Procurement Delivery Options (KD2020/046)

The Education Service had been using a local design and build framework since 2013 and this would come to an end in 2021. In preparation, officers had reviewed the market and potential procurement options to ensure value for money and to meet the statutory requirement to meet basic need for school places. Following this initial review a detailed analysis had been carried out of four procurement options:

- Re-procurement of an improved Local Cambridgeshire Framework
- Use of the Department for Education (DfE) School Building Framework
- Use of the Pagabo Framework
- Use of the Scape Framework

A business case had been prepared following review meetings with adjacent local authorities and market testing. The outcomes of this were set out in table 2.2.6 in the report. The Pagabo Framework was found to have a high financial impact. The DfE Framework offered the lowest cost option, but lacked the flexibility needed to allow negotiation with suppliers which it was judged could result in higher delivery costs. The officer recommendation was the re-procurement of an improved Local Cambridgeshire Framework.

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

- Welcomed the thoroughness of the report.
- Commented that one of the weighted averages in table 2.2.6 did not add up. Officers stated that they would correct the figures, but confirmed that this did not affect the recommendation. **Action Required.**
- Asked whether it would be possible to review the framework in less than the four years proposed in the report. Officers stated that this review timeframe was usual in frameworks of this scale, but confirmed that it could be reviewed at any point. Some reviews would in any case be carried out anyway during the duration of the framework from a performance management perspective.
- Noted that four companies were included on the current framework and asked whether more would be included this time. Officers stated that they would not want to involve more than six contractors in each lot on the advice of the Council's procurement team due to the resource implications of evaluating more than six bids. A minimum of three bids per lot were expected to ensure a competitive process, although it was for contractors to decide if they wished to bid.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to the Interim Education Capital Strategy Manager and the Education Capital Projects Manager for a thorough piece of work which had explored every available avenue.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the re-procurement of a local Cambridgeshire-based Design & Build Framework, with improvements to key performance management criteria and the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the high priority areas of value for money, social value, and environmental performance;
- b) Approve the proposal that responsibility for awarding the framework contract be delegated to the Executive Director: People & Communities in consultation with the Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee.

368. Finance Monitoring Report

The report set out the position to the end of September 2020. An overspend of around £2m was forecast on those budgets for which the Children and Young People Committee was responsible, excluding the High Needs element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This position had been relatively consistent throughout the year and the pressures on budgets arising from Covid-19 in this area of the Council's business were relatively small. There was a savings target of around £4m on the Children in Care Placement Budget and officers were on track to deliver around £3.7m of this. However, there was a need for caution in relation to this in case any new pressures should arise during the remainder of the financial year.

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

- Asked for more information around the loss of income due to Covid-19. Officers stated that some traded services such as outdoor education could not currently be delivered, whilst others like Cambridgeshire Music had a changed service delivery model. The closure of schools during the first lockdown had also reduced demand. The Service Director for Education stated that some services were provided on a contracted basis and so had still been paid for in full and that he was confident that there would be a return to pre-Covid levels of income. However, the expansion in traded services meant that there was an inherent risk to income in this situation.
- Welcomed the savings made on the Children in Care Placement Budget, but commented that it was difficult to predict what the situation would look like in three to six months' time and cautioned against complacency. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that the number of children in care in Cambridgeshire was now in line with the average of the county's statistical neighbours. The introduction of the Family Safeguarding Model would in more normal circumstances be expected to lead to a further reduction in numbers. However, it was possible that whilst there might be a smaller number of children in care, these children might have more complex needs resulting in higher placement costs. There were still more children in care placed with independent foster carers than the Council would wish, but some of these were settled placements which

officers would not wish to disrupt. Efforts were being made to encourage in-house foster carers to work with older children and young people as there was a particular need in this area. The savings target of £4m had always been ambitious and he was pleased with the current position. The Chairman concurred, describing the work to date to achieve these savings as excellent, but cautioning that the future remained uncertain.

- Asked when a report on tendering for home to school transport was likely to be brought before the committee. The Service Director for Education stated that there was no static demand at present and that the market was not strong. Officers would return to this when the position stabilised, hopefully in 2021.

It was resolved unanimously to review and comment on the report.

369. Service Director Education Report

The Committee discussed the proposed establishment of a new secondary school in Soham by St Bede's Inter-Church School Trust first as a member of the public had requested to speak on this issue. The remainder of the report was discussed afterwards.

St Bede's Inter-Church School, Soham

The Committee heard a public question on the establishment of the proposed new secondary free school in Soham by St Bede's Inter-Church School Trust from Alistair Day, Head teacher of St Bede's Inter-Church School in Cambridge. Mr Day spoke in favour of the establishment of the new school and the full text of his comments can be viewed on [the Council's website](#). Councillor Every, Mr Vettese and Mr Read all made declarations of interest in relation to this item (minute 364 above refers). Written comments had also been received from Dr Carin Taylor, Executive Head teacher, Staploe Education Trust; Jonathan Culpin, CEO, Anglian Learning and Richard Spencer, Executive Principal, Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust. The three written representations opposed the opening of an additional secondary school in Soham.

The Service Director for Education stated that St Bede's Inter-Church Trust was one of two trusts which had submitted an application under Wave 12 of the government's central free school programme to run a secondary school on a new development at Waterbeach Barracks. This application was unsuccessful, but the Department for Education (DfE) had suggested Wisbech as an alternative location. The Trust decided against pursuing this option because it did not meet its preference for a second school within easy reach of its existing school in Cambridge. In 2018 the DfE identified an alternative site in Soham. The Council's view was that there was currently no basic need in this area. It acknowledged that there was a growing population locally, but had judged that additional capacity would not be required until 2027. House building in the area had since been delayed due to Covid. These views had been made clear to the DfE. Representations had also been made to the Regional Schools Commissioner, but no response had been received. The Council was informed on 12 October 2020 that the DfE was minded to progress with the establishment of a new free school in Soham by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System. Officers were

bringing this information to the Committee's attention and seeking its support for the Executive Director for People and Communities to write to Ministers to reiterate the Council's concern about creating additional capacity where it was not needed. St Bede's Inter-Church School in Cambridge was a very good school, but officers remained concerned about de-stabilising the local secondary education system in Soham and the impact on existing secondary schools in the area.

The Chairman invited questions to Mr Day from members of the Committee. Individual Members:

- Noted Mr Day's reference to working collaboratively with other schools and asked whether St Bede's Inter-Church School in Cambridge was engaged in any collaborative working with schools in the East Cambridgeshire and Fenland Opportunity Area. Mr Day stated that most collaborative working was currently with schools in Cambridge. However, St Bede's took part in the managed move process and he was employed by the Diocese of Peterborough to support schools in Northamptonshire. This demonstrated St Bede's commitment to working collaboratively to raise standards and that it did not take an insular approach. He had worked previously with Dr Taylor in the context of the Cambridgeshire Secondary Heads group and now that a decision had been made in relation to the new school in Soham he was confident that all parties would work together to achieve the best outcomes for local children and schools.
- Noted Mr Day's comment that a survey conducted on behalf of St Bede's had concluded that 'there is unlikely to be any significant detriment from the new school opening'. This implied that there would be some detriment. In the Member's judgement, the proposal should not have been taken forward. The establishment of a church school in the city of Cambridge was not comparable with establishing one in a rural area like Soham. Most children in Cambridge were able to cycle to school, whereas most children attending the proposed school in Soham would need to travel greater distances making this impractical. This would have both a time and environmental cost. Mr Day stated that the new St Bede's school in Soham had been selected as one of 15 green schools which would have a low carbon footprint and build. The opening of the new rail station in Soham would provide a connection to Newmarket and Ely. There were currently six buses transporting students to St Bede's in Cambridge and it was hoped that this number might be reduced by some students travelling to Soham instead.

The Chairman thanked Mr Day for his comments and invited Members to debate the section of the report relating to the proposed new secondary free school in Soham by St Bede's Inter-Church School Trust. Individual Members raised the following issues:

- Noted that St Bede's Inter-Church Trust had previously considered opening a school in Wisbech and commented that it was a shame that the Trust had chosen an area where there was no basic need for additional places over one where this need did exist.
- Commented that the key issue was capacity and that they opposed the establishment of an additional secondary school in Soham on the grounds that

this would be detrimental to other schools in the area and possibly to the new school too. The figures showed that there was currently no need for an additional secondary school in Soham. If one was established, existing schools would lose some pupils which could result in there being a number of struggling schools in the vicinity of Soham. The Member also endorsed the concerns which had previously been expressed about the student travel implications and questioned why students were being bussed from Ely to St Bede's in Cambridge when a rail line already existed.

- Commented that the letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System stated that there was agreement with the County Council that there was capacity for a school in Soham. In their view, there was a need to address local and central government decision-making as this placed both St Bede's and the Council in a difficult situation. However, the fact remained that a decision had been made at Ministerial level so this was not a matter for either the school or the Diocese of Ely.
- Commented that there was a lack of faith schools in the county. This meant that students needed to travel greater distances to attend one. They were supportive of the new school, but mindful of the sensitivities involved and supported all parties working together in collaboration. In their judgement it was for the local authority and central government to establish the way forward.
- Commented that they found the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's comments in relation to basic need to be disingenuous. If Soham continued to grow as expected this offered a potential benefit to Soham Village College which would receive capital investment to enable it to meet this additional need. This opportunity would be lost if a new school was built. In their judgement, having two schools in a small town could lead to unhelpful competition and they called on the Committee to endorse writing to Government to object in the strongest terms.
- Commented that there had been longstanding opposition from other local secondary schools to the opening of a new secondary school in Soham. They personally would have supported the opening a new school in Wisbech, but they could not support it being located in Soham. Another Member echoed this view.
- Questioned whether a 600 place secondary school could offer the breadth of curriculum and facilities necessary, particularly at key stage 4.
- Criticised the system whereby an arm of the DfE could identify a site for a school where there was no basic need, commenting that this could have a disastrous impact on existing schools.
- Spoke in support of parental choice in relation to faith schools, but not to the detriment of existing schools. On this basis they were strongly opposed to a new secondary school in Soham.

Summing up this part of the debate, the Chairman stated that there was no doubt that St Bede's, Cambridge was an excellent school, as were those existing secondary schools in Soham and East Cambridgeshire. However, the decision to establish an

additional secondary school in Soham was being forced upon the Council by the DfE. The representations which had been sent to committee members by the leaders of those schools and school trusts which would be affected by this decision eloquently expressed their concerns.

The Service Director for Education introduced the remainder of his report. This included an overview of activity related to Covid-19, highlighted the positive position in relation to school attendance levels and reported the reduction in laptops to be provided for digitally disadvantaged children in Cambridgeshire from 1589 to 419 following a review by Government. Wider issues included the changing process around elective home education being advocated by the DfE to ensure that parents fully understood the expectations around this. Whilst welcome, no additional resources had been provided to deliver this new process.

The Chairman commented that discussions were taking place at regional level around the increases being seen in elective home education. There were some great examples of this being done well, but as a former police officer he had concerns about the potential safeguarding implications. He asked that officers should bring a report on this to a future meeting to allow the Committee to consider the issue in detail and agree the Council's position to inform future discussions with regional colleagues. **Action required.**

Individual Members offered the following comments on the remainder of the report:

- Commented that elective home education had been a long-standing area of concern. It was an emotive issue, but in their judgement education should involve broadening children's experiences. They welcomed the opportunity to discuss this further, and further welcomed the steps being taken to ensure that parents were aware of the responsibilities placed on those who chose to home educate.
- Asked for more information about the laptop scheme and what could be done to support those families without access to the internet. Officers stated that there were two schemes in operation. The first was designed to provide laptops to children known to a social worker, in year 10 and disadvantaged which had been completed. The second was to provide laptops to those children identified as digitally disadvantaged, and it was this scheme that had seen a reduction of around 75% in the number of laptops allocated. Schools were being encouraged to appeal their allocations where appropriate. Internet access was provided through the provision of 4G sim cards where appropriate.
- Commented that in their view there were a lot of families doing a good job of home educating their children.
- Welcomed schools being encouraged to use tutors who were already known to them as part of the National Tutoring Programme. They suggested that an opportunity existed to do some learning on where money was being used to best effect.

- Commented that there was a substantial minority of children who were missing significant periods of schooling and that there was a need to make sure that these children were identified. The Service Director for Education stated that schools were doing all that they could to help students catch up on missed learning and were being encouraged to identify those in real need of support as soon as possible.
- Noted that the current Government guidance on public exams was that these would be taking place, but that there would be flexibility for those attending schools which had been impacted by Covid. Further information on this was awaited, but officers had flagged that individual children or households could also be disproportionately impacted if they were required to self-isolate while their schools remained open.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to the Service Director for Education and to all those involved in delivering education across the county for their continued efforts in the face of significant challenges.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the issues outlined in this paper and comment as appropriate.
- b) Provide its support to the Executive Director (People and Communities), in writing a response to Baroness Berridge around the lack of basic need demand for a new secondary school in Soham.

370. Dedicated Schools Grant and Schools Budgets

The Committee's attention was drawn to an additional officer recommendation seeking approval to submit a disapplication request to the Secretary of State for Education for a transfer of funding of 1.0% between the Schools Block and High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2021-22 school budget setting process. Details of the recommendation had been circulated electronically to committee members earlier in the day and published on the Council's website.

A detailed discussion of the issues involved had taken place the previous week at the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum and a recording of this was available to view via [the Council's website](#). The Government had invested an additional £40bn nationally in education and Cambridgeshire had received an additional £30m into the Schools Block. An uplift in High Needs funding had also been received, but Cambridgeshire remained the third lowest funded area in the country. It was anticipated that there would be a £24m deficit on High Needs funding by the end of the current financial year and the number of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) was continuing to rise. Schools had been consulted on the Council's proposed budget, after which the Schools Forum was also consulted before the Committee was invited to make a final decision in January. However, the proposed mitigations would still not have a material impact on the High Needs budget. The High Needs Block deficit which was being carried forward was the responsibility of schools rather than the local authority. The Schools Forum had voted against the recommendation to approve a transfer between the Schools

Block and the High Needs Block of 0.5% or to seek the Secretary of State for Education's approval for a transfer of 1.0%. Without this transfer the High Needs Budget deficit would continue to increase so officers were recommending that the Committee approve the submission of a disapplication request to the Secretary of State for a transfer of funding of 1.0%, between the Schools Block and High Needs Block for the 2021-22 school budget setting process.

Individual Members offered the following comments:

- Asked whether the cuts to services described in the report would still need to be implemented if the transfer between the Schools Block and High Needs Block (HNB) was agreed. The Service Director for Education stated that the proposed cuts would only balance the in-year position, not address the existing HNB deficit. He therefore saw no choice other than to pursue the savings described in order to begin to address the deficit, regardless of whether a block transfer was approved. The Chairman commented that it was a difficult position for all involved as there was not enough funding to go around.
- Asked about the definition of 'small schools'. Officers stated that this included a sparsity factor for those schools with less than 150 pupils and also the two miles distance criteria. The Member expressed the hope that officers would challenge the sparsity factor.
- Expressed frustration at being placed in the same position each year and asked whether schools budgets would still be less than in the current year if the 1% disapplication request was approved by Government. Officers confirmed that this would be the case.
- Asked whether it was worth considering making a disapplication request of 0.5%. The Service Director for Education stated that any sum would be of benefit, but officers were recommending going for the higher figure to allow maximum flexibility on the basis that the disapplication request could either be reduced or withdrawn after submission should the Committee choose.
- Asked whether the Council was serving the debt on the HNB and, if so, whether schools should not do so instead. Officers stated that passing this cost to schools was not permitted. A request had been made to the DfE to forward fund this cost, but officers had been advised that the DfE was too busy to address this at present.

It was resolved to:

- a) Review and comment on the report;
- b) Approve the submission of a disapplication request to the Secretary of State for Education for a transfer of funding of 1.0%, approximately £3.8m between the Schools Block and High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2021-22 school budget setting process.

371. Early Help, Older Children and Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy Development

The Best Start in Life (BSiL) represented a five year strategy covering the period from pre-birth to the age of five. Its introduction had been delayed by Covid-19, but four pilot projects were now being launched. Building on this early help work would be jointly funded work by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the police and the local authority in support of older children and young people. This work had also been delayed by Covid-19, but had re-started in August 2020 and a number of multi-agency workshops were being arranged. ISOS had been engaged to bring some challenge to the process. There was a recognition of the need to provide services that worked for all families, but which could target early interventions sooner in order to reduce pressure on specialist services and improve outcomes for children. Staff across the various agencies involved were excited and positive about these initiatives.

Individual Members offered the following comments:

- Noted that the report referred to 'some tensions' around partnership engagement and asked for more information. Officers stated that there had been some different understandings and expectations between partner organisations which this work had identified, but that this terminology was perhaps not particularly helpful.
- Noted that a small team was working across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to support children identified as at risk of suffering serious youth violence or criminal exploitation. This work was sitting within the Youth Offending Service and was being financed through successful bid funding. Discussions were taking place around possible on-going funding. The Chairman stated that this was a positive programme which was working with young people identified as being at risk. The Council was grateful for the OPCC funding of this.
- Welcomed the work which had been done, describing the outside methodology as helpful. However, they judged there was a need to be aware that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were quite different areas and so it might be appropriate to have different delivery models in the two areas, or even in different parts of Cambridgeshire. Officers confirmed that there was a clear understanding that a 'one size fits all' approach would not be appropriate. The BSiL pilot projects were in areas of relatively high need, but there was a recognition of the need to consider how this learning might be applied in different areas.
- Commented that it would be useful for committee members to have the opportunity for a direct conversation with ISOS. The Executive Director for People and Communities suggested that a workshop might be the best way to do this. This might also be opened up to other councillors to attend. **ACTION**
- Asked whether the ISOS report was a one-off or whether work was still in hand. Officers stated that ISOS was still working with the Council to facilitate workshops and to support BSiL to align the offers. It carried out a lot of work

with the Local Government Association (LGA) looking across the country at different practice and experience.

- Asked whether ISOS also carried out research in relation to pressures on High Needs budgets. A Member commented that quite a lot of work had been done in this area for the LGA and was publicly available.
- The Chairman asked how it was proposed that this work would be monitored by the Committee going forward. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that reports would be brought back to the Committee at key points in the process.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Comment on and endorse the approach for the continued development the Early Help / Older Children and Vulnerable Adolescent / Mental Health Strategy and Best Start in Life Programme.

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

The Committee resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the addition of a report on the Regional Adoption Agency to the agenda for the meeting on 1 December 2020.
- b) Note the committee training plan.
- c) Note committee appointments to Outside Bodies and Internal Advisory Groups.

Chairman