

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 26 November 2024

Time: 2.00 pm - 4.22 pm

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors Ambrose-Smith, Atkins, Bradnam, Bulat, Coutts, Daunton, Goodliffe (Chair), Gowing, Hay, Hoy, Sharp, Slatter, Thompson (Vice Chair) and Taylor.

Co-opted Members:

Jon Young, Church of England Diocese of Ely

237. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maria King (substituted by Councillor Piers Coutts) and Dr Andy Stone.

There were no declarations of interest.

238. Minutes – 8 October 2024 and minutes action log

A Member queried point 236 on page 13 of the minutes relating to the agenda plan as the referral from Audit and Accounts Committee of the internal audit report on the safety valve agreement was not included in the minutes or on the forward agenda plan. **Action Required**

The minutes of the meeting on 8 October 2024 were approved as an accurate record subject to the amendment.

A Member queried progress on action 226 in relation to the authority working with the Combined Authority on a number of transport pilots and that a note would be circulated to Committee in November. The Chair commented that the briefing was still in progress and would be circulated to the Committee once completed.

The minutes action log was noted.

239. Petitions and public questions

There was one petition and one public question. The public question would be taken at the relevant item on the agenda.

Emma Merrells presented a petition, on behalf of families in the Duxford area requesting that the School Buses SW05 and SW06 be reinstated. In the summer families received notification that the buses were to be cancelled, with no warning or consultation. Complaints were initially dismissed by the Education Transport team. The majority of children were asked to board the public 7A bus using a free bus pass whilst the rest were asked to board the SW01, a bus that serviced Hinxton and Ickleton. The Education Transport team had randomly selected a street in the village and put all of the children on this street on to the SW01. These children needed to leave home significantly earlier, travelling backwards away from the school to pick up in Hinxton and Ickleton, which added 45 minutes to their journey. Previously this was a 15-20 minutes journey. The children on the 7A bus received a direct journey leaving at the previous later time. An equitable solution for all of the children was sought as the wellbeing of the children on the SW01 bus had been significantly impacted. She explained that a proposal had recently been received from the Education Transport team to provide a bus service SW04, which could potentially be like the previous SW06, and the remaining children would then use the 7A. She stated that this could potentially be the desired solution but the full details had not yet been confirmed. Parents wanted their children to be picked up at the previous time with a direct journey, retaining stops at the old bank, Wheatsheaf, Plough and Lacey's Way to make it equitable for North and South sides of the village.

The Chair thanked the petitioner and explained that she would receive a written response within 10 working days.

Members queried when the petition was received and why it had not been circulated to the Committee. The Democratic Services Officers confirmed that the wording of the petition had been emailed around to the Committee prior to the meeting.

240. Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023-28

The Chair moved that the report be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee as further revisions were required and this was seconded by Councillor Bradnam, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee. The Chair thanked the Corporate Parenting Board for the work that had gone into the strategy so far and thanked officers and young people for their contribution.

Members queried why the strategy had been dated 2023 as when the Committee would eventually approve the strategy this would be in 2025. The Executive Director for Children, Education and Families explained that the strategy dovetailed the end of the previous strategy and work on the new strategy had been ongoing now for about a year.

A Member highlighted wording in priority 3 that related to age related drugs which she felt was highly inappropriate. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee explained that this point had been raised at the sub committee and was being included in the proposed amendments.

It was resolved unanimously:

to defer the agreement of the updated corporate parenting strategy 2023-2028 to the next meeting of the Committee.

241. Alconbury Weald Secondary School

The Committee considered a report outlining the contract required between Cambridgeshire County Council (the Council) and Morgan Sindall (the contractor) to deliver Alconbury Weald Secondary School.

In presenting the report officers:

- construction was due to start in May 2025, with building due to be completed in February 2027 and opening to year 7's in September 2027.
- highlighted that the electoral division was incorrect at the start of the report and should read Warboys and the Stukeley's.
- at the last Committee meeting it had been requested that if there were any instances where sprinklers were not to be installed in a school then this would be highlighted to Committee. It was recommended that Members endorse the approach to continue the design and construction of this school without sprinklers based on the risk assessment outlined in 3.4 of the report, the current Department for Education (DfE) design guidance and current building regulations. The proposed cost for the addition of sprinklers is £850,000.00 to £900,000.00. In addition, this would add two weeks to the construction programme.
- the installation of a 'three-ply' roofing system which would be a £235,000 addition to the project construction costs

Whilst discussing the report individual Members:

- expressed concern that the authority had used an advisor from within the County Council to carry out the fire safety risk assessment. A number of Members commented that they sat on the Fire Authority and that they were concerned that the Fire Authority had not been involved with the assessment and that there was no independent scrutiny of the risks involved. Officers clarified that the Fire Authority had been consulted in relation to the risk assessment and design of the building and that they were satisfied that a sprinkler system was not required and that there was the right amount of fire escapes and evacuation lifts factored into the building design and evacuation times were acceptable. The Executive Director of Children, Education and Families reiterated that the authority had worked with the Fire Authority to ensure the design met the correct building regulations and safety standards. He stated that the council's fire safety officer was a qualified officer who had worked with the council for over 10 years advising on numerous projects. The Chair requested that the fire safety risk assessment report from the Fire Authority be circulated to the Committee. **Action Required**

- questioned if the extra costs for insurance purposes of not having a sprinkler system had been factored into the costing of the building. Officers agreed to review and update the Committee. **Action Required**
- asked if this would be a one storey or three storey school. It was clarified that this would be a three-storey school.
- queried the operational safety process described in paragraph 3.4 which referred to behaviours and things that people would do and questioned if officers were confident that the school would be protected for example if there was an arson attack overnight that was not at the seat of the kitchen. The DfE provided a risk assessment that had to be carried out as to whether to install a sprinkler system and the risk assessment was clear that a sprinkler system was not required.
- questioned what would happen if a fire broke out on the second or third floor.
- stated that there was a lot of guidance from the DfE and Fire Safety Council historically about sprinklers in building, the guidance was due to change so that low risk buildings did not require sprinklers but this had been put on hold following Grenfell. The report set out that not including a sprinkler system was an average risk and not a low risk.
- highlighted the benefits of sprinkler systems as detailed on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority website.
- highlighted that the design of the building should be about maximising the safety of the children and not about making a saving from additional costs. A member stated that up until two years ago sprinkler systems were being installed in schools so this was a cost saving exercise.
- queried how confident officers were that the project would stay in budget.
- asked if officers could be given more time to present more information on the risk assessment carried out and the decision delayed to January. Officers explained that this would impact on the progress of the project and the budget.

The Chair read out a statement from the headteacher at Wintringham Primary School where a sprinkler system was installed. The statement highlighted the difficulties and challenges of maintaining the system.

In putting recommendation b) to the vote the recommendation was not accepted and members requested a sprinkler system be included in the design.

It was resolved:

- a) To approve the Council entering an Engineering and Construction Contract with the contractor for the construction of Alconbury Weald Secondary School in April 2025 on the condition that the contract value continues to stay within the project budget.

- c) To note the cost of, and approve, the installation of a three-ply roofing system rather than the single-ply roofing system which is included in the DfE's standard specification.
- d) To note the risks associated with the successful delivery of this project.

Note: Following the meeting officers issued a statement which explained that at the time of Committee the project team had just come to the end of outline design and planning phases. The project needed a Committee decision on whether sprinklers should be included in the detailed design of the building. In Committee, a Councillor asked whether the Fire Authority had been consulted. Based on advice from the team, officers confirmed that they had. However, upon further investigation, this information was inaccurate. The consultation would happen at the end of the detailed design process and when the final version of the fire strategy was complete. Building Control would then liaise with the Fire Authority to present and describe the scheme and approach. The Fire Authority reports at this point whether they are content with the strategy proposed. Officers expected this consultation with the Fire Authority for Alconbury Weald Secondary to take place in Spring 2025.

242. Draft Children, Education and Families Strategic Workforce Development Plan 2024-2029

The Committee considered a report that set out the development of the Children, Education and Families Strategic Workforce Development Plan 2024-2029 specifically for children Social Care.

Whilst discussing the report individual Members:

- highlighted that the cover picture was the same as the Corporate Parenting Strategy and queried whether this was intentional. Officers explained it was corporate branding for Children, Education and Families strategic documents.
- commented that to attract and retain staff is to have a good training plan and requested more information on the proposed training programme. Officers explained the training programme was under development as part of the strategy. Currently essential training was assigned for all social care practitioners, officers were looking at getting a better understanding the current skill set in the workforce and then looking at how this could be developed, supporting the workforce to develop new skills with a new programme due to be rolled out in 2025-26.
- commented that the words equality had been used in the strategy and not equity. Officers explained that the Councils overall strategy was named the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, within that there was a consideration for equity. Childrens Social Care had a practice model where the practice standard had been updated to include equity and equality to recognise the difference.

- queried how the authority would fill vacancies for adult social care staff whilst reducing caseloads for social workers. Officers stated that they were working within the current structures to review how work could be done more efficiently. As part of recent partnership working the services threshold document had been reviewed with partners and approved by the safeguarding board and this would allow for early help and targeted support. The authority was also working within the national framework as one of 22 local authorities piloting a new approach through the National Workforce Action Group, utilising IT systems to maximise time and capacity.
- commented that the report was quite detailed and did not get to the point. Officers acknowledged that the report was detailed and stated that reporting mechanisms had been established through the Rapid Improvement Board and Workforce Board to take the actions forward. In future officers would review to make the report more succinct. The Executive Director of Children Education and Families stated that the service was looking at the practice interventions used and adopting an early intervention approach, ensuring that there are manageable caseloads with children still getting their needs met.
- questioned how place-based working would be done. Officers explained that the council had recently launched the CARE values with the C standing for collaboration, and had held leadership events to look at how the council could collaborate more across departments and there was a senior responsible officers leading on places based working and this linked in with the social care reform agenda and early help.
- highlighted that the use of the acronym CARE in two places was confusing. Officers explained that the Cambridgeshire Academy for reaching excellence (CARE) was launched a year ago and was adopted through a consultation and there was a very different symbol used for the CARE Academy and the CARE values adopted by the council.

It was resolved to:

agree the proposed Draft Children, Education and Families Strategic Workforce Development Plan, 2024-2029.

243. Safety Valve Programme Update

The Committee received a report that gave an update on key activity and progress relating to the Safety Valve programme.

A public question was received from Ms Day in relation to this report. Ms Day explained that she had concerns about how the children were going to be taught. She felt that it was unfair that neurotypical children should be subjected to the foibles and differences of neuro-diverse children. She asked if the neurotypical children would be taught in the same classrooms, or would there be division in schools? Whereas neuro-diverse children learn in very different ways, so did neuro-typical

children, but neuro-typical children being the norm may get frustrated by having to wait for neuro-diverse children to catch up. Was the thought that neurotypical children would be employed to do remedial work with neuro-diverse children?

Members sought clarification from Ms Day regarding if she had any personal experience of the modelling of the data and with children that were neurotypical and neurodivergent. Ms Day explained that she had followed the data since the Children and Families Act had come into force in 2014 and the data submitted to the DfE had always fallen short. She explained her son had various health challenges and an Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP). She explained that she was a peer supporter with access to 3,000 families so get a good indication for families across the piece.

The Chair thanked both Ms Day for her question and clarified that she would receive a written response within 10 working days.

In presenting the report officers:

- explained the report outlined what been done to meet the terms and conditions of the safety valve agreement, based on the context of what the service operates in and the challenges that presented in terms of the ability to meet the terms and conditions of the agreement.
- outlined that over the last 4-5 years increase of 46% of children identified as having EHCPs in Cambridgeshire. There had been a significant increase nationally and the impact provided unsustainable financial pressure. The approach proposed was a needs led approach, collaborating across Education, Health and Care through the implementation of an 'Inclusion for All Framework' where the ambition was to meet need at the earliest point and so that children were able to thrive in mainstream schools were appropriate.
- stated that currently 307 children in independent high-cost placements that cost on average of £65,000, whilst placement in mainstream were circa £14,000. There was a need to build capacity to meet those needs, building an inclusive environment where children were able to thrive. This included having enhanced resource provision and specialist support on mainstream schools' sites. All 113 local authorities who were involved in the safety valve programme were working to address significant deficits, and the combined impact of the deficits was £1.2 billion. Note the changes that we are aiming to take.
- highlighted that where the authority was agreeing to EHCPs there was a need to ensure that they were resulting in improved outcomes for children. There was further detail in the 'Inclusion for All Framework.
- expressed a need for further staff training and support in relation to 'Inclusion for all' which had been referred to in the previous report on the Children, Education and Families Strategic Workforce Development Plan 2024-2029.

Whilst discussing the report individual Members:

- highlighted the increase in Special Educational Needs (SEN) demand in Cambridgeshire and queried how this mapped to the increase in population. Officers explained that it was more about the percentage of the population and whether Cambridgeshire was an outlier. 17% of children were identified as either having SEN support or an EHCP and this was similar to the national position. However overall Cambridgeshire had a greater percentage of children identifying as having an EHCP and a higher percentage of children as identified as having a moderate learning difficulty. The standard of educational outcomes was stagnating, so it was about how the authority changed its approach to support outcomes. Officers explained that the High Needs Block element of the National Funding Formula took into consideration of the size of the population and the main concern was the growth in complex needs particularly around Autistic Spectrum conditions. Officers also explained that emotional based school avoidance had grown considerably post covid as well as speech and language issues with increased digitalisation and early intervention and support was crucial in tackling these issues.
- queried what could be learnt from other local authorities who were part of the safety valve programme or were the problems so diverse and different. Officers stated that the first 'Inclusion for All' summit had taken place, and this had included all different types of schools and other partners and had been facilitated by colleagues from other local authorities. The service was working with a range of local authorities who were experiencing the same pressures.
- questioned how the meeting with the DfE at the end of October had gone and asked if there were any further communications from them regarding next steps. Officers explained that the authority had submitted the updated safety valve agreement on 31 October 2024. There was an additional meeting scheduled to discuss technicalities in relation to financial information that had been submitted. Officers were confident in the submission and that it could be implemented within the timescales set.
- highlighted that £21.5 million had already been received from the DfE through the safety valve and that £27.5 million was due to be released subject to the renegotiation of the agreement and queried whether officers envisioned any issues. Officers stated that they did not believe there would be any issues with the resubmission. Officers explained that the plans were ambitious to meet the needs of children but also financially ambitious and that there were challenges outside of their control including parental choice and there was a need to develop and grow the councils independent provision offer.
- sought clarity on what good would look like in terms of meeting the 8 conditions of the safety valve agreement and what the timescales would be. Members also sought regular progress updates. Officers stated that SEN children staying in mainstream school and having good attendance and achieving as much as they can, and being given the best opportunity to thrive was the ultimate goal.
- stated that a further £11.3 million in capital funding was highlighted and queried if this was dependant on the renegotiation of the agreement. Officers explained that they were in receipt of the funding and were in the progress of rolling out

Enhanced Resource Provision, four in secondary schools and one in a primary school with another three being rolled out currently. Officers explained that therapeutic practice was critical in making a difference.

- commented that the Schools Forum had expressed concern about the roll out of the Enhanced Resource Provision as schools felt they had not been given the opportunity to be involved in this work and that communication had not been joined up. A Member also commented that at this point in time the Schools Forum had voted not to make the block transfer, and this had gone to the DfE for consideration. Officers stated that they had gone to Schools Forum to request a transfer of up to 1.25% which they did not support. Because forum had not chosen to support the disapplication, this was escalated to the Secretary of State for approval. Officers stated that the message from the forum was that they understood the approach the local authority wanted to take but wanted to send a message to the DfE that there was insufficient funding to support the changes. 'Inclusion for All' moved away from the competitive approach to a collaborative approach that puts children first.
- The Chair stated that Government was completing a full review of the SEND system and had announced that they would look at the pupil impact of the Safety Valve system and that it would be interesting to see the outcome of both reviews going forwards.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the updates provided on the Safety Valve Programme.
- b) note that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and High Needs Block funding issues facing the Council are a national issue affecting the majority of Local Authorities. The council's position is that Special Educational Needs (SEND) remains an area of Education policy in urgent need of reform.
- c) note the scope of work underway to meet the terms of the Safety Valve agreement by reshaping our offer of support to children and young people with additional needs by identifying and meeting need earlier so that more children and young people can thrive in mainstream schools, where appropriate.

244. Finance Monitoring Report – October 2024

The Committee received the October 2024 Finance Monitoring Report for Children, Education and Families.

Whilst discussing the report individual Members:

- queried the £1.5 million on underspend on the Household Support Fund and whether this would be used to cover the deficit. Officers explained that the

continuation of the household support fund meant that the money that had been originally earmarked could now go towards covering the deficit.

- questioned whether officers were confident that the authority was exploring all of the ways to decrease the spend on home to school transport and reviewing all potential efficiencies as well as looking at adopting a more flexible approach particularly as there was a forecast of lower intake numbers for primary schools for the next few years. The Executive Director of Children, Education and Families explained that Home to School Transport was being reviewed as part of the transformation programme and a consultant had been identified to look at all of the policies, procedures and options and a report was due in the new year. He explained that pupil forecasting was done on a five-year rolling basis and reviewed annually.
- queried if costs were rising due to the rising population. Officers explained that costs were rising and that any additional funding was not meeting the complexities in need and highlighted that any funding from the high needs block could not be used for transport.

It was resolved to note the report.

245. Children and Young People Committee agenda plan, training plan, committee appointments

Members noted that the report on the 'Deed of Variation to enable the building of The permanent accommodation of Wisbech Free School' had move to the February meeting.

Members requested a briefing note on the progress of the CARE Academy. **Action Required**

Members requested an up-to-date briefing on the safety valve at the January or February meeting. The Chair stated that this was likely to be in the form of a briefing note circulated to the Committee as the agenda for the January and February meetings were already lengthy. **Action Required**

It was resolved to:

- a) note the Agenda Plan and Training plan.

Chair