

## Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 10 September 2024

Time: 2.00 pm – 3.29 pm

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

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

Co-opted Members:

Jon Young, Church of England Diocese of Ely

Dr A Stone, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

### 221. Changes to Committee Membership

It was resolved to:

appoint Jon Young, Diocesan Director of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Ely, as a co-opted member of the Committee representing the Diocese of Ely, succeeding Sarah Connant.

### 222. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Atkins, Councillor Hay and Councillor Hoy, substituted by Councillor Costello.

There were no declarations of interest.

### 223. Minutes – 25 June 2024 and minutes action log

The minutes of the meeting on 25 June 2024 were approved as an accurate record. The minutes action log was noted.

### 224. Petitions and public questions

There were no public questions or petitions.

### 225. Education Capital Projects

The Committee considered a report that sought approval to award contracts for capital project delivery to ensure education place sufficiency in Cambridgeshire whilst also adhering to the established decision-making processes within Cambridgeshire County Council's (the Council's) constitution.

In response to questions from individual Members, officers:

- Clarified that a note updating on Waterbeach Primary School would be provided to Members outside of the meeting. **Action Required.**
- Highlighted that the cost of projects could on occasion be inflated against the original estimate and that these projects would need to come through Committee for approval. Officers explained that the report sought retrospective approvals for a number of projects that had been through Committee as part of the Business Planning process, as the Monitoring Officer had highlighted that there had not been sufficient transparency on the projects that had breached the £500,000 key decision threshold.
- Gave assurance that robust arrangements were in place for monitoring capital projects within the contractual framework which included open book accounting, a risk register for each project and a contingency budget.
- Stated that the value of the delegation had been raised from £500,000 to £1 million to allow for cases where schools repairs were required quickly for example due to flood or fire damage to ensure that schools could be kept open in these circumstances where possible.
- Explained that there would be a regular update at spokes on School Capital Projects. Officers gave assurances that local Members would be kept informed regarding ongoing projects in there area.
- Clarified that a contingency of between 5-10 percent was built into project budgets. Officers highlighted that an increase in construction costs were a nationwide issue particularly in relation to the cost of materials and labour shortages.
- Stated that all section 106 agreements were index linked.

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

It was resolved unanimously:

- a) to retrospectively award design or professional services and construction contracts which are in breach of the contract procedure rules (the Rules).
- b) agree to awarding and executing the design, professional services and construction contracts for the projects set out in section 3.5.

It was resolved to:

- c) delegate to the Executive Director of Children, Education & Families (CEF), in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the CYP Committee, the authority to award design or professional services, JCT minor works/intermediate contracts and construction contracts up to £1m in value.

## 226. Children, Education and Families Risk Report

The Committee received a report on the management of risk within the Children, Education and Families Directorate, which included a snapshot of the current Directorate Risk Register.

In response to questions from individual Members, officers:

- Explained that in relation to risk 1, the authority was in a phase of enhanced management and support with regards to the Safety Valve as the authorities current forecasting was off track to meet the original targets set by Government. During this phase funding was paused and conversations were ongoing with the Department of Education (DfE) and neighbouring authorities, and the authority would be going back to the DfE at the end of October with an updated forecast. This was a complex piece of work, however officers were confident that this would be approved and the programme would be back on track with a refreshed timeline and forecast. A report updating the Committee on the Safety Valve was scheduled for the November Committee following the discussions with the DfE and this would address the request from the Audit and Accounts Committee in relation to the internal audit queries. Officers confirmed that currently there was no indication from government on any changes to the future of the Safety Valve programme.
- Stated that the proportion of children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Cambridgeshire was marginally higher than neighbouring counties. The transformation plan focused on meeting children's needs earlier ensuring that local schools could be as inclusive as possible, with the primary driver being that children's needs were met.
- Explained that the authority did hold data in relation to the number of children moving from independent to mainstream schools but that it would be difficult to quantify accurately.
- Highlighted in relation to risk 2, that continued cost pressures on home to school transport were linked to the growth in EHCPs as children needed to be transported to schools that were not in their local area. The authority was seeing a forecast of reduction in mainstream transport in the last few years.
- Confirmed that in relation to risk 3, there was a large amount of ongoing work focused on managing caseloads and workforce capacity and the social care academy and the authority was starting to see an improvement in this area with six newly qualified social workers and three international social workers.
- Commented that in relation to risk 6 all local authorities were continuing to see insufficient amounts of placements for looked after children and there was a national shortage of care placements. Officers stated that the Residential Strategy had been to Committee and was going to Strategy and Resources Committee next month. Officers explained that they would clarify this further in the mitigations for this risk.

- Explained that in relation to the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) transformation programme Education Resources Bases (ERBs) were having some sign of success with another coming on line in January 2025 and that two special free schools were being delivered through the Free School Programme by the DfE but that the projects had been delayed but that the authority continued to monitor the situation. Officers stated that the ability to be able to negotiate home to school transport costs was an issue across the sector and that it was an extremely tight market.
- Note the continued concerns in relation to school admissions and explained that the admissions team aimed to give schools as much notice as possible before the start of term.
- Stated that the authority was working with the Combined Authority on a number of transport pilots. The Chair clarified that a note on the pilots would be circulated to the Committee. **Action Required.** A Member also highlighted the additional work in this area with highways and transport colleagues through the Local Highways Initiative and partnership working with the Greater Cambridge Partnership that could also be included in the update. Officers acknowledge the suggestion of setting up an operation unit within the authority and explained that they were open to looking into all suggestions. Officers highlighted the constant pressures and complexities in this area with approx. 23-24 thousand journeys a day. Officers stated that they hoped that the new routes would have a positive impact on home to school transport and acknowledged the need for clear and consistent communications with parents/carers on any changes to bus routes and times.

It was resolved to scrutinise the risk management report.

## 227. Children and Young People Committee agenda plan, training plan, committee appointments and Local Authority school governor appointments

It was resolved to:

- a) note the Agenda Plan and Training plan.
- b) note Local Authority School Governor appointments April to July 2024.

Chair