

Children and Young People Committee Minutes

Date: Tuesday 19 October 2021

Time: 2.00pm – 5.02pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon

Present: Councillors D Ambrose Smith, M Atkins, A Bulat, S Count, C Daunton, B Goodliffe (Chair), A Hay, S Hoy, M King (Vice Chair), M McGuire, K Prentice, A Sharp, P Slatter, S Taylor and F Thompson

Co-opted Members:

Canon A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely
F Vettese, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

24. Announcements

The Chair expressed her condolences to Sir David Amess MP's family and friends following his death the previous week following an attack at his constituency surgery. She recounted his family's wishes for people to show kindness, tolerance and love to all.

25. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J King, substituted by Councillor S Count. There were no declarations of interest.

26. Minutes – 14 September 2021 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

Officers apologised for the late circulation of a number of action log updates due to them prioritising the Covid response. They acknowledged a request that action log updates should be circulated in good time in future to allow Members the opportunity to consider them fully before the meeting.

27. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

28. Household Support Grant

This key decision was added to the Forward Plan on 8 October 2021 under General Exception arrangements on the following grounds:

- Reason for lateness: Funding for the Household Support Grant had only been announced by Government on 7 October 2021.

- Reason for urgency: In order for officers to allocate vouchers in time for the October half term a decision was required at this meeting. To delay the decision to the Committee's November meeting would mean that families would not receive this support for October half-term.

Given the success of previous schemes Officers were proposing the continuation of a direct voucher scheme. Vouchers could be used at nine supermarkets and would cover the period to half-term February 2022. It was also proposed to re-instate support to colleges for those students receiving free school meals or a Post 16 bursary, although this was likely to take the form of a direct payment. The funding was targeted at families, but a proportion could be used to support those in need within the wider community. Subject to the Committee agreeing the proposals, voucher allocation would begin the following weekend and a report would be brought to the following meeting around the procurement process. **Action required**

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

- Asked for more information about the eligibility criteria for the wider support available to the community. Officers stated that the Government criteria for funding allocation allowed a wide degree of local discretion. Previous grant rounds had focused on referrals received from district councils and trusted partner organisations and the same criteria would be used initially. In addition, the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee (COSMIC) would be doing some further work around developing the allocation criteria. The outcome would be reported back to both COSMIC and the Children and Young People Committee (CYP).
- Welcomed the additional funding available and the proposal to continue working with district council and voluntary sector organisations, in conjunction with COSMIC.
- Asked about learning from previous iterations of the scheme and the arrangements for reporting back on this current iteration during the six months it would be running. Officers stated that continuous learning was being taken from running these schemes and offered either an update report or a briefing note on the learning, obtained, depending on the Committee's preference. **Action required**
- Asked about the take-up of vouchers within migrant communities. Officers stated that they could provide a geographical breakdown of voucher take-up, but that they could not link this to ethnicity as they did not have access to that data. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that the report to COSMIC would include more data around the ethnicity of recipients and she would ask the Service Director for Communities and Partnerships to update CYP on this. **Action required**
- Asked about the impact of the £20 per week cut in universal credit. Officers stated that their impression was that more parents were asking for support. This would be monitored, especially around fuel poverty.
- Commented that this was the second time that proposals relating to support grants had required a general exception notice and that the arrangements felt rather ad hoc. They asked why no long-term budget item had been added to support this expenditure. The Chair stated that the Council was subject to significant budget

pressures. Going forward, the Joint Administration would consider what should be done within the budget position which it had inherited. The report to the previous meeting had set out the proposed response to managing the demand for support going forward. General exception arrangements had been required as the new funding round had only been announced on 7 October 2021.

- Asked what information about the support would be available for Members to share with their constituents. The Service Director for Education stated that Members would be provided with a range of media-friendly information. Members were also encouraged to share the letter which he had sent to parents advising them about the grant. Action required
- Welcomed the additional funding being provided by Government, but commented that in their judgement the proposals represented a watering-down of the commitment which had been made by the Joint Administration in the knowledge of the financial position which it had inherited from the previous Administration.
- Commented that they would prefer to take an urgent decision now on the operation of the direct voucher scheme, but defer consideration of the wider support proposals to the next meeting as the report before the committee lacked detail around how this would be delivered. They wished to be sure that support was reaching the right people in the right way. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that the detail around how the wider support scheme would operate would be considered by COSMIC, but that it would be based on the previous practice of working with district councils and trusted partner organisations. The Service Director for Education stated that if this decision was deferred, then only the reduced offer of wider support agreed at the previous meeting could be made available.

Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Ambrose Smith, proposed that recommendation (d) be revised to read:

- (d) ~~Approve the proposal for the operation of the wider support to families and community who need support.~~ *Bring a further report to the November committee meeting with further information on the wider support funding.*

Speaking to the amendment, Councillor Hoy commented that the report before the Committee did not provide any detail around how well the wider support arrangements were currently working or the processes in place to deliver them. She would want Members to have this information before reaching a decision on the future shape of the wider support.

A Member questioned why the Committee should wish to revisit the wider support arrangements now when these had been in place since the previous Christmas. Officers stated that under the previous iterations of the scheme the Council had been required to spend 80% of the grant funding on families. This had changed in the current funding round to a requirement that 50% of the funding be spent on families, which did give the Council greater flexibility in how this support was deployed.

A Member suggested that the amendment be revised to release a proportion of the additional funding available for the wider support scheme immediately, with a decision on the balance of the available funding being taken in November. With the consent of Councillor Hoy, the amendment was revised to read;

~~(d) Approve the proposal for the operation of the wider support to families and community who need support. Bring a further report to the November committee meeting with further information on the wider support funding, subject to a tolerance of 18% of the wider hardship fund to be released as set out in the report.~~

Speaking to the revised amendment, Councillor Hoy commented that if the amendment was rejected the Committee would be authorising expenditure on the wider support scheme without knowing the detail of the programme, which would be considered by COSMIC.

The Vice Chair asked whether this proposal would create an administrative burden, and whether expenditure was expected to be even across the six months of scheme's operation. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that no administrative pressure would be created. The Committee was looking at a scheme which crossed two committee's responsibilities which was creating a challenge. It would be for COSMIC to say what it thought in terms of the wider community and how that might be dealt with by districts and councils.

On being put to the vote, the revised amendment was carried by a majority vote in favour.

On putting the substantive recommendations to the Committee, it was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree the principles of the strategy as outlined in section 2.
- b) Agree the operation of the Direct Voucher Scheme to eligible families.
- c) Delegate authority to the Service Director for Education to manage the procurement process to ensure the first voucher allocation can take place in October half term.
- d) Bring a further report to the Children and Young People Committee with more information on the wider support funding scheme subject to a tolerance of 18% of the wider hardship fund to be released as set out in the report.

29. Business Planning Proposals for 2022-27 – opening update and overview

Since the opening overview on business planning was presented to the Committee in September 2021 the budget gap had reduced to just over £19.5m. The report before the Committee set out the proposed re-phasing of previous pressures, savings and income. The main change in the 2022/23 proposals was a saving of 3250k through budget re-baselining. An investment in Family Group Conferencing had also been deferred until 2023/24 as this could be funded through the Family Safeguarding grant, which resulted in a saving in 2022/23. Proposals were being developed by the People and Communities Directorate and the finance team to revise Table 3 for the November

committee meeting. For education, the budget pressures related primarily to SEND costs and home to school transport. For children's services, the main pressure was the cost of external placements.

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

- Asked for more information around the reference to 'changing the conversation'. Officers stated that this was intended to encourage positive conversations around all available options for support before considering whether a child might need an education, health and care plan (EHCP). This was drawing on the learning from the Positive Challenge Programme for adults services which was a more person-centred approach. Over the last few years the number of EHCPs in Cambridgeshire had increased from around 2,500 to the current figure of around 6000.
- Asked for more information around SEND transformation. The Service Director for Education stated that officers were looking proactively for solutions which would avoid placement breakdowns and allow children to stay in local provision. He undertook to circulate the SEND strategy to Committee members. **Action required**
- Asked about the level of funding for children's mental health services. The Director of Children's Services stated that the local clinical commissioning group (CCG) was the primary investor in children's mental health services and that there were no budget savings being suggested in respect of council budgets for the next financial year. The provision of care was the responsibility of the Adults and Health Committee, but the figures could be shared with CYP members. **Action required**
- Commented that their understanding was that CYP now had responsibility for oversight of the Council's public health services for children, including mental health services, but that it had not yet received any reports on this subject. In their view, this should be a standing agenda item. The Executive Director for People and Communities offered a report or briefing note on children's mental health services, CCG investment and the 'United' programme. **Action required**
- Asked about the pressures shown at paragraph 4.9. Officers stated that some of these pressures would have been included in last year's business plan and were being carried forward, whilst others were new. The table in Appendix 3 set out everything contained in the current proposals.
- Asked whether any funding for social prescribing might be available through the Integrated Care System (ICS). Officers stated that the development of the ICS would support the working relationship between the local authority and health service colleagues. However, the challenge to free up more money to spend on preventative services remained and was a topic of conversation in both local ICS partnerships.
- Asked about the current position in relation to outdoor centres. Officers stated that the outdoor centres had now fully re-opened with Covid precautions in place and were popular and trading well. Potential cost savings had been examined in detail

and work was continuing around long-term sustainability. However, without investment the centres would continue to operate at a loss.

- Noted the net saving of £250k in relation to special guardianship orders in the current financial year and asked whether this would become a demand pressure in future years. Officers confirmed that was the case.
- Asked about the rising costs associated with the children in care budget. The Director for Children's Services stated that the placement budget was volatile. However, by November officers would be as confident as they could be on the in-year figures and future projections would be based on that data. The shortage of external placements would have an impact on costs.
- Commented that the report contained few concrete transformation or savings proposals for this stage in the business planning cycle and expressed concern that there would be an over-reliance on the use of reserves to balance the budget. On that basis, they would be unable to endorse the proposals contained within the report.
- Commended the excellent work which had been done around SEND, but expressed concern at the proposed single funding envelope and asked whether £1m would be enough to deliver this effectively. The Member commented that there had been historical issues of inequality of access and suggested that the mapping of SEND services would be useful. The Service Director for Education stated that officers would continue to review the business case, but were confident that this sum was sufficient. Work on mapping was being taken forward alongside work on sufficiency and it was expected that this would lead to different provision which would help keep children local.
- Commented that it would be for the Strategy and Resources Committee and Council to make decisions on the use of reserves, although CYP could make recommendations. With regards to the proposals contained at paragraph 4.12 of the report, the Member questioned whether these should be considered for Transformation Fund bids rather than the use of reserves. Officers offered a note around the precise funding route envisaged. **Action required**
- A Member commented that they could not endorse the proposed budget and savings proposals contained in the report as they felt it lacked detail and that it had been left too late to provide this. Another Member commented that the reports presented to the Committee at this stage in the business planning process in 2019 and 2020 had both identified substantial budget gaps, but had not contained detailed savings proposals so in their judgement the report before the Committee looked comparable to that presented in previous years. The Service Director for Education stated that the main difference this year was Covid and the uncertainty which this created for demand-led services. Officers were still looking at areas for potentially realising savings or for investment. The Chair reminded the Committee that they were not looking at the final budgetary proposals at this stage.
- Expressed concern around the provision and consistency of support available in both maintained and academy schools for those children and young people with additional needs, but without an EHCP. Officers stated that it was a legal duty for

schools to identify need, including SEND. There was an expectation that schools would provide the support needed to enable pupils to thrive and they received funding to enable them to do so.

- Asked about the work being done by the SAFE team, given that grant funding was coming to an end in 2022. The Director of Children's Services stated that he was meeting partners later that week to discuss the work of the SAFE team and to seek contributions to costs as the team was having a demonstrable impact on reducing offending in relation to criminal exploitation. There was also the possibility of some government funding because of the impact the team was having on reducing the number of young people not in education employment or training (NEET).
- The Vice Chair offered her thanks to Officers for their work in difficult times. Covid-related pressures remained significant and the Joint Administration was working hard on the recommendations from the peer review.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the progress made to date and next steps required to develop the 2022-23 to 26-27 Business Plan.

It was resolved by a majority to:

- b) Endorse the budget and savings proposals that are within the remit of the Committee as part of consideration of the Council's overall Business Plan.

Co-opted members of the committee were not eligible to vote on this item.

The meeting adjourned from 3.32 – 3.47pm.

30. Service Committee review of the draft 2022-23 capital programme

The first section of the report was prepared corporately and provide the context for the Council's wider capital programme. The second section was specific to the capital projects within the Children and Young People Committee's remit. Members were reminded of the need for the Council to meet its statutory sufficiency duty and that the new schemes identified for inclusion in the programme were required to meet the increased demand for school places. Two schemes had been identified for proposed removal from the programme. These related to a new secondary school in Wisbech and the expansion of secondary provision in Soham. These were now being progressed under the national free schools' programme and would be funded by direct grant from the Department for Education (DfE). Section 5.7 of the report contained details of schemes where there had been changes in total costs. These were primarily due to the need for additional works, project slippage, nearly zero energy buildings (NZEB) and rising prices in the construction sector. Construction industry data currently suggested there could be a spike in construction costs over the next year and the Council had several schemes due to complete during this period.

Officers were seeking to negotiate Power Purchase Agreements with Trusts sponsoring school schemes which would require on-site renewable power generation to ensure that there was a level of return on the Council's investment for meeting the capital cost of achieving the NZEB requirements.

The Service Director for Education stated that a new secondary school for Wisbech would now be delivered by the DfE and that officers were waiting for more information on the timescale. The Council had been offered the opportunity to build the school and had submitted a cost estimate, but the DfE had been unwilling to fund the full costs identified so to proceed would have exposed the Council to risk. The benefit to the budget process was the release of a significant amount of borrowing from the capital programme and the subsequent revenue savings through not paying the associated debt charges. The Thomas Clarkson Academy in Wisbech was a great school and currently had sufficient places available to meet local need. The report proposed removing the capital funding that had been allocated previously, but with the caveat that Officers would continue to monitor school places and would update the plan with a new bid if that was needed going forward.

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

- Noted that the Council's 2020 School Capacity (SCAP) return had been cancelled due to Covid and asked whether that would impact on the data. Officers stated that the Council's demographic forecasts were still being updated annually and would be available whenever the DfE next requested a return.
- Welcomed the focus on nearly zero energy buildings (NZEB), commenting that lots of mitigations were available but that some investment would also be needed. They noted a blanket uplift of 10% on costs seemed to have been applied across the programme and asked whether this could be refined. Officers stated that the solutions needed for each project would vary, so whilst the estimated costs had been based on the early work at Alconbury Weald it was recognised that these would vary as each project took shape.
- Asked why the decision was made to remove the Wisbech secondary school project from the capital programme and who made that decision. They questioned comments in the press that there was no need for additional secondary school places in Wisbech and suggested that the project could be left in the capital programme for now and removed once the DfE had delivered the new school. The Service Director for Education stated that there were currently sufficient secondary school places available in Wisbech, but that additional places would be needed in the future. Wisbech was quite unusual in that there was some parental choice to place children in out of area secondary schools. If the DfE project did not proceed the Council would need to consider its response as it had a statutory duty to meet basic need. The decision to remove the Wisbech secondary school project from the capital programme had not yet been made. The officer recommendation was before the Committee and the Committee's recommendation would go forward to the Strategy and Resources (S&R) Committee for consideration. This was not an officer decision.

A Member commented that at a meeting with officers in August they had been told that the Council wanted the DfE to allow the Council to build the new secondary school in Wisbech. They asked whether the only change since then had been the DfE's refusal to mitigate against the risks identified by Officers. Officers stated that following a dialogue, the DfE would not offer the assurances around risk which were needed. Those risks now sat with the DfE in delivering the school. If the Committee

wanted to recommend to S&R that the project should stay in the capital programme it could still do so.

A Member asked how often the DfE decided not to progress a project of this type and the reasons why they might decide to cancel. The Chair stated that sufficiency work was carried out by Officers and was subject to change. At present, there were sufficient secondary school places in Wisbech, but there was a plan if the DfE did not progress the project. She refuted the claim that this was a political decision. The Service Director for Education stated that the cancellation of projects of this type by the DfE tended to be when there was no need. Conversations with the DfE were continuing and he was confident that the project would go ahead as they DfE had already sunk its own funds into the project.

A Member asked whether it was correct that associated highways costs would still fall to the Council if the DfE delivered the project. Officers stated that the Council had proposed to co-locate two schools on a single site. A number of planning and highways issues had been identified in association with this, most of which related to the secondary school element of the proposals. The DfE had declined to fund these abnormal costs and was looking for an alternative site, which Council officers had also done previously. As the DfE would now be building the secondary school they would also have to fund those associated costs.

A Member expressed concerns around the decision-making process in relation to the additional secondary school in Wisbech. The DfE had offered the Council the opportunity to build the school and the Member asked for clarification of who at the Council had made the decision not to proceed. They further commented that the Constitution stated that the financial limit for Officer decisions was £500k, but this was a multi-million pound scheme and they did not think it was appropriate for that decision to be made without the Committee being involved. Project timescales would be extended by the DfE review, there would be implications for home to school transport and basic need funding would be lost if mobile classrooms were deployed. The Service Director for Education stated that the decision not to proceed had been his. The Monitoring Officer's advice had been sought. CYP had decided previously that there was a need for an additional secondary school in Wisbech, but this decision was not predicated on a particular funding stream or who was to deliver it. The focus was on providing a new school, and a new school would still be provided. The suspension of the free school presumption route had been discussed with CYP and with the Committee's previous chair. In response to being asked whether his decision had been discussed with any elected Members, the Service Director for Education stated that he considered it to be a decision under officer delegation.

A Member asked about spare capacity at the existing secondary school in Wisbech and future need. The Service Director for Education stated that there were at least 300 places currently available at the Thomas Clarkson Academy, but offered a more detailed paper on demography figures in Wisbech. **Action required**

A Member commented that it was disingenuous to say that there was additional capacity available at Thomas Clarkson Academy (TCA) as that school did not want to take more students at this time. Having previously been one of the worst performing schools in the county it had received an Ofsted rating of 'Good' during the past year which demonstrated huge progress. They would not want to see this

progress disrupted by pressing the school to take on additional students at this point. The proposed location of a new secondary school to the west of Wisbech would also enable local students to walk or cycle to school rather than needing to be driven as was currently the case for them to access TCA. The decision to support the building of a new secondary school in Wisbech had had cross party support. Money had been spent on site searches and associated work and the project had remained in the capital programme on the basis of providing a fall-back option should the DfE not deliver the school. The money was already in the capital programme and they considered this to be cutting a school from one of the poorest parts of the county.

A Co-opted Member commented that they felt that there was a fundamental problem with the interface between local and central government decision-making, and also with the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner. They felt that there was a question around what the Committee could do to improve the quality of those relationships. They had an interest in Wisbech at a community level and felt that a high-quality sponsor was needed. The Service Director for Education stated that there were a range of issues around the free school programme in Cambridgeshire and it would be sensible to review these with stakeholders and to consider whether to make representations to the new Ministerial team at the DfE.

- Officers confirmed that the cost of the new Soham secondary school would be fully funded by the DfE, including the land purchase cost. The Council had favoured expansion of the existing secondary school, but national policy took precedence. There was a need for additional secondary school capacity in Soham.
- A Member commented that the Committee was being asked to endorse the development of the draft proposals contained in the report, but Members had not seen the detail of the exempt proposals. Another Member commented that they believed that the exempt information relating to the capital programme should automatically be included as exempt appendices to reports to the relevant committees. The Service Director for Education undertook to circulate the exempt information around commercially sensitive capital projects to committee members
Action required
- A Member commented that it was their understanding that once a project was ended it was not possible to capitalise the revenue costs, and that this was not reflected in the committee report. Officers undertook to clarify the position with the finance team. **Action required**

Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Count, proposed that the report recommendations be amended as shown below. Her request for a recorded vote was endorsed by six other committee members:

- a) Note the overview and context provided for the 2022-23 Capital Programme for People and Communities.
- b) Comment on the draft proposals for People and Communities 2022-23 Capital Programme and endorse their development, *with the exception of maintaining funding for Wisbech and Soham secondary schools in the capital programme in the expectation that the Department for Education will fund these schools and that Council funding will be the fall-back.*

- c) *Ask the Audit and Accounts Committee to look into the decision-making process to understand how this decision came to pass and look at the wider impact on external parties, including the Regional Schools Commissioner.*

Additional wording shown in *italics*.

Speaking to the amendments, Councillor Hoy commented that the Committee had agreed to fund the provision of an additional secondary school in Wisbech. The DfE had approached the Council to deliver this additional school, and an officer had declined this offer as they judged the risks to which this exposed the Council to be too great. This was the decision which she wanted to see examined.

A Member asked whether an entry should be placed on the Council's risk register to recognise the risk around the additional school being delivered if the funding for this project was removed from the capital programme. The Service Director for Education stated that a risk was already recorded in relation to the Council's statutory duty to meet basic need.

On the amended recommendation (b) being put to a recorded vote, it was defeated. Co-opted members were not eligible to vote on this item:

	For	Against	Abstain
Councillor Ambrose Smith	X		
Councillor Atkins		X	
Councillor Bulat		X	
Councillor Count	X		
Councillor Daunton		X	
Councillor Goodliffe		X	
Councillor Hay	X		
Councillor Hoy	X		
Councillor M King		X	
Councillor McGuire	X		
Councillor Prentice	X		
Councillor Sharp	X		
Councillor Slatter		X	
Councillor Taylor		X	
Councillor Thompson		X	

On the amended recommendation (c) being put to a recorded vote, it was defeated. Co-opted members were not eligible to vote on this item:

	For	Against	Abstain
Councillor Ambrose Smith	X		
Councillor Atkins		X	
Councillor Bulat		X	
Councillor Count	X		
Councillor Daunton		X	

Councillor Goodliffe		X	
Councillor Hay	X		
Councillor Hoy	X		
Councillor M King		X	
Councillor McGuire	X		
Councillor Prentice	X		
Councillor Sharp	X		
Councillor Slatter		X	
Councillor Taylor		X	
Councillor Thompson		X	

On the substantive recommendations being put to the vote, it was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the overview and context provided for the 2022-23 Capital Programme for People and Communities.

It was resolved by a majority to:

- b) Comment on the draft proposals for People and Communities 2022-23 Capital Programme and endorse their development.

Co-opted members were not eligible to vote on this item.

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

The Committee reviewed its agenda plan, training plan and committee appointments. A Member commented that all meetings of the Educational Achievement Board during the current year had been cancelled. The Chair asked officers to look into this. **Action required**

A Member commented that they had not yet received any response to their expression of interest in applying to join the Fostering Panel. Officers stated that the Head of the Fostering Service would get in touch with them directly on this.

The Committee was reminded that a Member Induction Programme session on Members' role as corporate parents and the work of the Fostering Service would be held on Friday 22 October 2021. It was open to all county councillors and all Members were encouraged to attend. The Adults and Health Committee had also invited members of CYP to join them at a training session on Friday 29 October 2021 providing an introduction to children and young people's public health commissioning.

Officers had been advised that the Constitution of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Constitution called for the appointment of four elected members based on political proportionality, rather than the three politically representative appointments which CYP has previously been invited to make. On that basis, the Conservative Group was entitled to appoint another member to SACRE if it

wished. There was also one remaining vacancy as a CYP representative on the Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Foundation Trust Quarterly Liaison Group. Any Members interested in taking up this appointment were asked to inform their Spokes.

(Chair)