

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 15 September 2020

Time: 2.09pm – 3.50pm

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

Present: Councillors S Bywater (chairman), S Hoy, D Ambrose Smith, P Downes, L Every, M Goldsack, A Hay, L Nethsingha, S Taylor and J Whitehead

Co-opted Members:
A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely

Also present: Councillor Joshua Schumann (until 2.25pm)

Constitutional Matters

344. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were noted from Councillor J Wisson, substituted by Councillor M Goldsack.

345. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Ambrose Smith declared an interest in Item 6: Service Director's Report – Education as a school governor and Chair of Trustees of the Littleport Leisure Trust. Councillor Ambrose Smith left the meeting for the duration of the discussion and vote on this item. Minute 349 below refers.

346. Minutes of the meeting on 7 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting on 7 July 2020 were approved as an accurate record. A copy would be signed by the Chairman when practical to do so.

347. Action Log

The Committee reviewed the updated action log which had been published on Monday 14 September 2020. The updated action log was noted.

348. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

Decisions

349. Service Director's Report: Education

Councillor Ambrose Smith declared an interest in this item at the beginning of the meeting as a school governor and Chair of Trustees of the Littleport Leisure Trust. He left the meeting for the duration of the discussion and vote on this item. Minute 345 above refers.

The report provided an overview of the Education Service's continuing response to Covid-19 and the re-starting of education in September 2020. A significant amount of new guidance had been issued to schools and early years settings over the August bank holiday weekend, but settings had responded positively. The start to the new academic year was going well and attendance figures were amongst the best in the country. The Service Director for Education expressed his pride in how all sectors had come together to share their expertise for the benefit of Cambridgeshire's children. In particular, he wished to place on record his thanks to Andrew Read, Diocesan Director of Education, and his team from the Diocese of Ely in leading the Cambridgeshire Academy Trust CEO forum; Tracy Bryden, Headteacher of Roundhouse Primary Academy and chair of Cambridgeshire Primary Headteachers association; Mark Woods, CEO of Cambridge Meridian Academy Trust, who chaired the Cambridgeshire Secondary Headteacher Association; Dr Kim Taylor OBE, Executive Headteacher of Spring Common Special School, who led the Cambridgeshire Special School Headteachers group; and the Regional School Commissioner's team.

Section 3 of the report set out the work which was being done around the acquisition of playing field land from Littleport Leisure Trust. If approved, this acquisition would future-proof the site to allow for the further development of the Littleport Education Campus. The commercial decision would rest with the Commercial and Investment Committee, but the Children and Young People Committee's endorsement of the proposals was sought to inform that decision.

A reduction had been made to the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Eastfield Infant School in St Ives, but officers would try to be flexible to local need as and when demand for places increased. The Committee was also invited to confirm a reduced PAN for Burwell VC Primary School to 60, effective for entry to Reception from September 2021. Officers judged that there was sufficient capacity in place for Post-16 provision and significant work had been done in relation to the curriculum and recovery for early years settings. Officers had also worked with outdoor education centres to support their viability. The lockdown had enabled good progress to be made on clearing the backlog on education, health and care plan (EHCP) assessments and work was continuing to identify the savings that would be needed to balance the special educational needs and disability (SEND) budget. Following consultation, a decision had been taken to make two posts supporting the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme redundant. To mitigate the impact, it had been agreed that the Council's licence to run Gold Residential Awards for the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme would be transferred to the Education Outdoor Centres.

The Chairman invited Councillor Joshua Schumann to address the Committee in his capacity as the Member for Burwell. Councillor Schumann expressed the wish to place

on record his thanks to the Service Director for Education and his team with regards to the flexibility which they had promised to look at any future need for additional places at Burwell VC Primary School. He also wished to address the comment in the report about the low admission numbers relating to a large planned housing development not proceeding. In his capacity as a non-executive director of This Land, the site developer, he confirmed that the planning application was proceeding as planned, although due to the scale of the project there would be no houses on site for about two years. There were no questions of clarification to Councillor Schumann and he left the meeting at this point.

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

- Several Members expressed their thanks to school staff and all of those in the organisations supporting them for their work in response to Covid-19. With the consent of the meeting it was agreed that the Chairman would write to schools and early years settings on behalf of the Committee to formally recognise the efforts and commitment of school staff. [Action required]
- Asked about the reason for the reduction in the PAN at Eastfield Infant School. Officers stated that there was an on-going conversation around future arrangements for Eastfield Infants School and Westfield Junior School as the demographic in St Ives had decreased dramatically. Remedial work was being done on the fabric of the building.
- Two Members expressed concern about the narrow focus of specialist schools such as the Cambridge Mathematics School and whether schools like this offered access to a sufficiently broad range of academic subjects and extra-curricular activities. The Service Director for Education undertook to feed this back to the academy trust and to raise the opportunities which existed to work with other sixth form providers to broaden their offer. [Action required]
- Asked for more information about the Council's role as the 'provider of last resort' for an early years setting in Trumpington. Officers stated that where the Council was unable to source a provider at short notice the local authority could step in on this basis. There were some challenges involved in this, but both settings which were currently being operated on this basis were doing well. Officers were continuing to look to the market to take over this provision, but would continue to run them while this was needed. Numbers in early years settings generally were down in response to Covid-19.
- Highlighted that school staff had been working hard throughout lockdown and during school holidays in response to Covid-19.
- Welcomed confirmation that sufficient capacity existed for Post-16 provision, but asked whether anything was being done to influence what was provided. Officers stated that the focus of the review had been on capacity and suggested the question about the breadth of provision might be included in the report on what synergy existed between the work on young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) being carried out by the Combined Authority with that done by the local authority which had previously been requested from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. [Action required]

- Expressed concern at the reduction in the number of apprenticeships available and asked what was being done to respond to this.
- Asked for a note providing details of the percentage increase in the number of children receiving free school meals currently compared to the pre-Covid figure. [Action required]
- Asked whether new pupil premium funding would be received in the current or next financial year. Officers stated that pupil premium data was collected in January each year and that all families which were eligible for free school meals were being urged to apply.
- Noted that the Council had been allocated 946 laptops from Government and asked whether any surplus was available. Officers stated that more than the requested 946 laptops had been received and schools were being asked to get in touch if they could make use of these. Consideration was also being given about whether more laptops could be obtained for disadvantaged pupils through a new scheme being offered by the Department for Education.
- Asked whether the lack of Government guidance on school transport in relation to Covid-19 presented a risk and what was being done to encourage children to walk and cycle to school where possible. Specifically, whether any work was being done to provide lighting along school cycle paths to encourage their continued use during the winter. Officers stated that Government guidance had been issued in relation to home to school transport, although this had been vague and received quite late. The practice in Cambridgeshire went beyond the Government guidance in encouraging the use of face-coverings and providing additional transport to special schools. These measures had been generally welcomed by parents. A survey had been issued to parents the previous week about travel use and 1200 responses had been received so far. The Executive Director: Place and Economy would be asked to provide a briefing note on the measures which could be taken to support independent travel. [Action required]
- Expressed concern about the closure of some nursery schools and asked for more information. Officers confirmed that there had been a small number of closures, some due to financial issues and others part of the natural cycle of settings opening and closing. A report was being produced on early years' sufficiency and this would be shared with the Committee. There had been a reduction in the number of children attending early years settings due to Covid-19 and a media campaign was planned to emphasise that settings were safe and open for business. No announcements had been made on nursery funding so far and it was hoped that the current Government grant would be extended for a further year. [Action required]
- Welcomed the reduction in the backlog of EHCPs and asked for more details. The Service Director for Education stated that the number of assessments completed within the statutory timescale had been as low as 60%, but was now around 82-83% which was above the national average. However, this increasing demand for EHCP assessments meant that this remained an area of challenge.
- Asked for more information on the progress on the SEND recovery strategy. The Service Director for Education undertook to bring a report on this to a future meeting when more information was available. [Action required]

- Expressed disappointment at the end the Council's role in delivering the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Officers stated that the local authority's role had been primarily as a commissioning body, but that this function had now been delegated to schools and charities. The offer was still available within Cambridgeshire, just not delivered through the Council. Officers offered a note to confirm whether the Gold award was still being offered through the county's outdoor centres and the organisations offering the scheme within the county. The Chairman commented that he took part in Duke of Edinburgh events each year with his local school and highlighted the need for adult volunteers to enable these sessions to run. [Action required]
- Asked whether safeguarding responsibilities were being written into both new and existing contracts for those working in schools. The Service Director for Education confirmed that this was being added to the job descriptions of relevant members of staff.
- Welcomed the success of the virtual service delivery by Cambridgeshire Instrument Tuition.
- Asked for more information about how the tutoring programme in response to Covid-19 would be staffed. Officers stated that the National Tuition Service was a brokered service. The Council was hoping to establish its own provider to maximise the use of the available funding and draw on its wealth of experienced and trusted educators.
- Asked whether it would be possible to advocate for later dates of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 SATs exams in 2020/21. The Service Director for Education stated that Key Stage 2 dates had already been published, so it was probably too late for this. His sense was that headteachers were not overly concerned about the timing of the SATs, provided that they were assessed fairly and not used to produce league tables. The focus remained on getting children back into school and learning.
- Asked about the Ofsted programme going forward. Officers stated that Ofsted would be in schools from the autumn term onwards offering supportive visits and that a number of pilot visits would be taking place in Cambridgeshire over the next few weeks. Inspections were expected to resume in January 2021 and the Committee would be kept updated on this. [Action required]
- Asked for an update on the test and trace process in schools. The Service Director for Education stated that the process had been in place now for some time and was working well. However, the limited accessibility to testing was an issue. From the following day the Council would have access to specific testing for education professionals.
- Asked about the impact of the problems with exam grading on Cambridgeshire pupils. The Service Director for Education stated that there had initially been significant concerns raised over the algorithm used to award grades. Anecdotally, it appeared that the local experience mirrored that which had been seen nationally. Further Education colleges had taken a flexible approach in relation to admissions and close attention would be paid to the figures for those not in education,

employment or training (NEET) in coming months to ensure that this cohort was supported.

- Commented that it was well known that using teacher assessments as a basis for grading led to grade inflation and that they would expect to see lower results next year as a result of this. The Service Director for Education stated that grades were now based on whichever was higher based on teacher assessment or the algorithm. There was no published results data either locally or nationally so he would not be able to produce his usual report setting out the validated examination data. The arrangements for next year's exams were not yet known.
- Highlighted the significant financial implications of Covid-19 on education.

The Chairman stated that he wanted to send a clear message to the Commercial and Investment Committee about the Children and Young People Committee's support for the proposal to purchase additional playing field land from Littleport Leisure Trust to ensure that the Littleport Education Campus could be developed and expanded to respond to the forecast increase in demand for school places. To that end, he proposed an additional recommendation, seconded by Councillor Hoy, to:

Support the acquisition of the additional playing field land to ensure that the Littleport Education Campus can be developed and expanded in response to the forecast demand for school places and planned housing growth and request that the Commercial and Investment Committee approve the terms of the land transfer.

The additional recommendation was endorsed unanimously by those present.

Returning to the original recommendations, it was resolved unanimously by those present to:

- a) Note the issues outlined in this paper and comment as appropriate.
- b) Confirm the reduced Published Admissions Number (PAN) for Burwell VC Primary School to 60, effective for entry to Reception from September 2021.
- c) Consider whether there are any areas within the report where they require further updates in future Service Director reports.
- d) Support the acquisition of the additional playing field land to ensure that the Littleport Education Campus can be developed and expanded in response to the forecast demand for school places and planned housing growth and request that the Commercial and Investment Committee approve the terms of the land transfer.

Councillor Ambrose Smith returned to the meeting after the vote.

350. Outline of People and Communities Priorities and Recovery Plan

The Committee received a presentation providing an overview of the People and Communities' Directorate priorities and recovery plan in preparation for the autumn business planning round.

The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that it remained difficult to predict the likely impact of Covid-19 on Children's Services, but nationally there was a growing consensus of opinion that the lockdown would have a long-term impact on vulnerable families. This included the delayed impact of reduced schooling. Whilst vulnerable children had been eligible to attend school during lockdown not all of them had done so. The potential economic impact was also expected to have the greatest impact on families with less secure housing and employment. Increased financial stress compounded the problems faced by vulnerable families. These pressures on vulnerable families made it likely that more children would be taken into care, some of whom would require higher cost specialist placements. Families from black and ethnic minority backgrounds had been disproportionately impacted due to the greater health impacts of Covid-19 on adult members of this community. It had also been a particularly stressful time for the parents of children with complex health and additional needs. Care leavers were recognised as a vulnerable group, but this position was compounded for those not in education, employment or training (NEET). Children at risk in terms of safeguarding issues had also been less visible during lockdown and the summer holiday period and there was concern that a group might exist who had not yet been brought to the attention of Children's Services. The Business Intelligence team had done some work around demand forecasting, looking at various scenarios against the backdrop of the previously reducing numbers of children in care or open to child protection plans. More information on this would be included in the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding's October committee report. The use of 'virtual visits' to families had been useful to maintain contact, but less good for moving work on which meant that children might spend longer on child protection plans or within the care system than would otherwise have been the case. Ethnographic research carried out by Essex County Council with families who were assessed to be 'just managing' found that they were generally coping reasonably well, but were struggling most with education due to their focus on their children's emotional wellbeing. Work on outcomes and the potential financial implications across the full range of Children's Services activities was at an early stage. However, it was already clear that if the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government did not meet the cost of any additional pressures arising from the response to Covid-19 this would create both in-year and future financial pressures. Officers judged that there would be a better understanding of the changes in demand within Children's Services in three to six months' time as the impact of Covid-19 became more clear. It did not now seem that there would be a large spike in demand following the September return to school, but some additional cases were still anticipated.

The Service Director for Education stated that September attendance rates in Cambridgeshire schools were amongst the best in the country, but that it was not yet clear what the recovery phase would be like within education services as it still felt that the Covid-19 crisis was on-going. There was a recognised need to support leadership teams in their return to business and to ensure that education within the county got back on track. Work was continuing with Ofsted to look at school improvement and developing the wider curriculum and it was hoped to develop an ICT programme for those children in need of this support. Support to vulnerable pupils was recognised as a key component of the wider school recovery plan. A significant increase had been seen in the number of registrations for elective home education with around half of parents citing Covid-19 as a factor in this.

A Member commented on the potential increase in the number of high cost care placements needed and asked whether there was still capacity to accommodate some young people on a short-term basis in outdoor education centres. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that the option of using Grafham Water had been excellent, but that this type of provision would not generally provide the type of accommodation required for those placed in higher cost settings. The centre was also now returning to its normal business model so had less capacity available.

The Chairman reiterated the need for all services to work together. The autumn business planning round would begin in October and the Committee would begin looking in detail at the figures which lay behind the emerging picture.

It was resolved to discuss and agree the approach for People and Communities recovery plan and priorities.

351. People and Communities Risk Register

The risk register had been expanded to include the new and emerging risks associated with Covid-19 in addition to those which related to normal business operations. The register was kept under regular review by the People and Communities' Directorate senior management team and many of the identified risks had already been discussed during the course of the meeting.

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

- Asked the meaning if the acronym BAU. Officers stated that this was 'business as usual'. The Chairman asked that a key should be added in future versions of the report to explain any acronyms. [Action required]
- Asked for an explanation of what the numbers for each risk rating signified. Officers stated that this number was calculated by multiplying the likelihood of something happening with the consequences if it did. The higher the number, the greater the risk.

The Chairman noted that the risk register followed a standard format which was presented to all Committees, but commented that anything which could be done to make it as easy to read as possible would be welcome.

The People and Communities Risk Register was noted.

352. Agenda Plan, Appointments and Training Plan

The Committee reviewed and noted the Committee training plan and appointments and was advised of two changes to the published agenda plan.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the following changes to the Committee agenda plan:

- i. 6 October 2020: New Item - Service Committee Review of the Draft 2021/22 Capital Programme
- ii. 1 December 2020: Item removed – Home to School Transport Joint Dynamic Purchasing System

b) note that there were no changes to Committee appointments;

c) note the Committee training plan.

Chairman
(date)