

Children and Young People Committee Minutes

Date: 1 March 2022

Time: 2.00pm – 5.15pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon PE28 8YE

Present: Councillors D Ambrose Smith, M Atkins (to 4.27pm), A Bradnam, A Bulat, C Daunton, B Goodliffe (Chair), A Hay (to 5.00pm), S Hoy (to 5.00pm), J King, M King (Vice Chair), M McGuire, K Prentice, A Sharp, P Slatter and S Taylor

Co-opted Members:

Canon A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely

F Vettese, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

Apologies: Councillor F Thompson (substituted by Councillor A Bradnam)

54. Announcements

Committee members expressed their sympathy and support for all the children and families caught up in the violence in Ukraine, and for the children and young people who found themselves on the front line on both sides of the conflict.

The Chair expressed her thanks to Hazel Belchamber, the Assistant Director for Education Capital and Place Planning, for 34 years' service to the Council and wished her well for her retirement. She also congratulated Nicola Curley on her recent appointment as Director of Children's Services.

55. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were reported as recorded above. There were no declarations of interest.

56. Minutes – 18 January 2022 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 18 January 2022 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair. Councillor Bradnam abstained from the vote.

The action log was noted.

57. Petitions and Public Questions

The Committee received four public questions relating to Item 6: Delivery of Early Years Provision to serve Abbey Division, Cambridge. A copy of the questions can be viewed on the [Council's website](#) and minute 59 below refers.

There were no petitions.

58. Tender Framework for Early Years and Childcare Provision

The impact of the Covid pandemic on early years settings had led to a rise in the number of tenders being required. Appendix 2 to the report set out the proposed tender policy. This included criteria for exceptions to the requirement to tender, but it was emphasised that the preferred approach would be to go out to tender. The Committee was invited to note the existing delegation to officers to enter into agreements to dispose of interests in property at less than best consideration up to an annual rental limit of £20,000.

In response to Members' comments, officers stated that:

- Work was in hand on producing a framework which would allow the tender process to be carried out more quickly. The Service Director for Education stated that officers would look to Spokes for advice on this and offered a note on how the process would work in practice. **Action**

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Endorse the tender policy as set out in Appendix 2 to this report for immediate adoption and implementation.
- b) Note the existing delegation to officers to enter into agreements to dispose of interests in property at less than best consideration up to an annual rental limit of £20,000.

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

59. Tendering for Early Years Places in Loves Farm, St Neots

There was a need to secure new childcare providers to deliver services for Loves Farm and Wintringham Park in order to meet the Council's statutory sufficiency duty. There were sufficient places available at present, but the leases for the settings at The Round House Primary Academy and the Community Centre were coming to an end, so there was a need to act now to ensure the continuation of provision.

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

- Commented that the local Members for St Neots East and Gransden and St Neots Eynesbury had spoken to officers about the proposals and raised a number of queries received from a local resident. They welcomed the discussion of the proposals.
- Asked whether the award of tenders would be brought back to the committee for decision. The Service Director for Education stated that the Committee was recommended to delegate this decision to him in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, but that details of the proposed award could be shared with Spokes and committee members.

It was unanimously resolved to:

Approve the initiation of a tender process and delegate the subsequent decision relating to the award of a tender to the Service Director for Education, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee, in order to secure new childcare providers to deliver provision from:

- a) The Round House Primary Academy in Loves Farm, St Neots; and
- b) The Community Centre, Kester Way, Loves Farm, St Neots.

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

60. Delivery of Early Years Provision to serve Abbey Division, Cambridge

The Committee was advised that the figure for Council investment to date on the mobile classroom currently being used by SeeSaw Preschool was £15,000, and not £20,000 as stated at paragraph 4.1 of the report.

There was strong community support for the proposal to include accommodation for the delivery of early years and childcare provision in the planned re-development of the East Barnwell Community Hub. The Council would be able to continue to meet its statutory sufficiency duty if the Seesaw Preschool relocated from its current temporary accommodation on the site of The Galfrid Primary School back to East Barnwell. The Fields Nursery School would continue to deliver early years and childcare provision from The Galfrid Primary School site, and the geographical separation of the two providers would offer parents a better balance of provision in the most disadvantaged ward in the City and could support The Fields' future sustainability.

Four public questions were heard from Nicky Massey, local resident and former Cambridge City councillor for Abbey Ward; Councillor Haf Davies, Cambridge City councillor for Abbey Ward; Reverend Stuart Wood, a trustee of Seesaw Preschool; and Nicky Shepard, CEO of Abbey People.

Nicky Massey commented that she had spoken at the meeting on 9 March 2021 when the Committee had decided that SeeSaw Preschool should remain on The

Galfrid Primary School site and not move back to East Barnwell. She was glad to see the decision being re-visited and the recommendation that Seesaw Preschool should now be allowed to return to its previous location at East Barnwell. Early years provision was vital to the development of children's skills, and she expressed the hope that the wishes of the local community would be heard.

Councillor Davies commented that the co-location of services at the East Barnwell Community Hub, including early years provision, was the clear wish and expectation of local Abbey residents. She stated that Abbey was home to some of the most disadvantaged groups in the city and her belief that returning Seesaw Preschool to East Barnwell would be of great benefit both to local families and to The Fields Nursey School and would meet a real community need.

Reverend Wood commented that Seesaw Preschool had been located in East Barnwell for over 20 years. At every stage in the process the County Council had committed to early years provision being retained on the East Barnwell site, so it had been a shock last March when this position was not supported. He expressed concerns about how the report to the March 2021 meeting had been written and presented and his view that the community's voice had not been heard. He acknowledged Seesaw Preschool's continued success on The Galfrid Primary School site, but felt that the report did not make clear that this was due to the hard work of staff and trustees, or recognise that some families had left the preschool due to the change in location.

Nicky Shepard commented that for over nine years the local community had taken part in multiple consultations with the vision of achieving a community hub with co-located services. That vision was dependent on more people accessing the site. She highlighted the wide range of needs across the Abbey community and that all of their research showed a preference for early years provision being available at different locations and not from the same site. There had been a big increase in the number of benefit claimants in Abbey during the pandemic and access to early years provision had an important role to play in breaking the cycle of inequality.

There were no questions of clarification to any of the public speakers.

Speaking as the local Member for Abbey, Councillor Bulat commented that the public speakers and the written representations included at Appendix 2 of the report clearly set out the views and wishes of the local community. The local community and stakeholders had been very disappointed by the Committee's decision in 2021 that Seesaw Preschool should remain on The Galfrid Primary School site and their wish to see it return to East Barnwell was unchanged. Abbey remained the most disadvantaged area within Cambridge City, and the East Barnwell Community Hub would place a range of services close to those who would be using them. Councillor Bulat paid tribute to her predecessor, Councillor Joan Whitehead, for her work on this issue and expressed the hope that committee members would feel able to endorse the proposed inclusion of early years provision delivered by Seesaw Preschool in the East Barnwell Community Hub.

Individual Members offered the following comments:

- Congratulated the staff and volunteers at Seesaw Preschool on maintaining the provision and welcomed the proposed co-location of services in East Barnwell.
- Asked that officers should include more information about the range of costs contained in the report and the basis for these in the report going to the Strategy and Resources Committee on 29 March. Action
- Stated that they would not vote against the proposals as they considered it important to listen to the views of local Members and the local community, but hoped the same consideration would be shown to projects for Fenland. However, they expected to see an escalation in the estimated capital costs over time and considered this to be a political decision as the current Galfrid Primary School site was adequate.

In response to questions from Members, officers stated that:

- There was a need to consider both The Fields Nursey School and Seesaw Preschool. One of the positive aspects of the proposed relocation of Seesaw Preschool was that this might also help sustain The Fields Nursey School.
- It was estimated that it would cost around £1,000 to move Seesaw Preschool's furniture and equipment to the East Barnwell site. The Council would support these costs if the relocation was approved. The capital cost of including early years accommodation in the East Barnwell Community Hub would be considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee on 29 March 2022.
- Space would be available within the East Barnwell Community Hub for the 48 places currently offered by Seesaw Preschool. Its relocation would also free up the mobile accommodation on The Galfrid Primary School site and so offer The Fields Nursery School scope to increase provision in future, should there be demand for more places.
- There had been a clear expectation when Seesaw Preschool moved from its original location in East Barnwell to The Galfrid Primary School site that this would be temporary re-location and that Seesaw Preschool would return to East Barnwell.
- The £625k estimated capital cost of the relocation to East Barwell represented the best estimate of costs currently available from the finance team. However, as the proposed early years accommodation would form part of the larger East Barnwell Community Hub project and increases in inflation it was difficult to be more specific about how realistic this figure would be.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Support the proposal that the Strategy and Resources Committee be asked to approve the inclusion of accommodation for delivery of early years and childcare in the design and build specification for the re-

development of the East Barnwell Community Hub, and the associated capital funding for this.

- b) Approve the proposal that the Council would not be required to undertake a tender process for the early years and childcare provision on the basis that the Seesaw Pre-School previously operated from the East Barnwell Community Hub and had no option other than to relocate to temporary accommodation on the site of The Galfrid Primary School to facilitate the re-development project.

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

61. The Award of Design and Construction Contracts for Education Projects Included in the Council's Approved Business Plan

The first section of the report set out a recommendation to approve the award of the pre-construction contracts and the design and construction contracts set out in Table 1 of the report. This reflected the Monitoring Officer's advice that the approval of the Council's business plan was not in itself sufficient authority for officers to enter into contracts and that separate committee approval was required. The projects set out in Table 1 represented those projects where contracts would be required during the next 12 months. In future, it was proposed that this committee approval would be sought annually alongside its consideration of the draft capital programme each autumn. If a project was controversial or was going over time or budget it would be taken to Spokes for consideration and brought back before the committee if required.

The second part of the report sought approval for the direct award of the design and construction contract for Phase 2 of the Northstowe education campus to Kier construction and the supporting consultant team. Kier had successfully delivered Phase 1 of the project and had submitted the lowest rates on this value lot. The tender framework allowed for the direct award of contracts and the procurement team's advice was that a waiver was required in this case, although the practice of running competitive mini-tenders would remain the normal practice. However, due to the cost inflation currently being seen across the construction industry it would be beneficial to move quickly. The cost would be in excess of £500k which made this a key decision requiring committee approval.

The local Member for Longstanton, Northstowe and Over had submitted written comments on the proposal which she had asked should be shared with Committee. Councillor Thompson was pleased to see the design and construction contract for Phase 2 of the Northstowe education campus being considered as it was essential that Northstowe Secondary College's post 16 building was ready for September 2024 opening to ensure that current Year 9s could continue their education seamlessly. She understood from officers that a review of the overall demand for post 16 places had been undertaken across the Cambridge Partnership area of Cambridge City, South Cambridgeshire and East Cambridgeshire and that additional capacity was required across this area by 2024. This would be provided by the opening of post 16 provision at both Northstowe and Cambourne. In the new era of rising inflation - forecast to peak near 9% in the current year for the construction industry – there was a stronger case for direct contract award as the Local Authority

might accrue a greater benefit accrue to the authority from being able to conclude design packages, secure a supplier and fix prices at the earliest opportunity. Northstowe Secondary School advised that teaching space was already becoming tight, so the 2024 completion date was essential to accommodate the increasing numbers of pupils. Councillor Thompson asked for the Committee's support of the proposal.

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to the report/commented that:

- Asked why Phases 1 and 2 of the Northstowe education campus project had not originally been tendered together given the risks now described if a different contractor was chosen to deliver Phase 2. Officers stated that, on reflection, this was something which should have been identified earlier. Current practice was being reviewed and this was something which would be considered with similar projects in the future.
- Asked whether officers were confident that the contract costs described in the report, including Phase 2 of the Northstowe education campus, were still reasonable and deliverable given the current increase in costs being experienced in relation to construction projects. Officers stated that the rates had been set in December 2021 under market conditions. The Council business plan had also included scope for a 4% increase on costs to mitigate at least part of the inflationary impact.
- The Vice Chair stated that whilst there were reasons for the proposed direct award to Kier for Phase 2 of the Northstowe education campus the competitive tender procedure did remain the preferred option and that the Committee would want to see the framework used to ensure competition and value for money.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the award of the pre-construction contracts and the design and construction contracts with a value over £500,000 for those schemes set out in Table 1 of the report.
- b) Approve the direct award of the design and construction contract for Phase 2 of the Northstowe education campus to Kier construction and the supporting consultant team.

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

62. Request for a One Year Exemption to Re-Procure an Expiring School Transport Contract

The Committee was advised that a single operator provided all of the school transport for Swavesey Village College. The existing contract had been awarded in 2019 and so pre-dated the introduction of a dynamic purchasing system in 2020. The bus market had been significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic, so officers

were seeking a one-year exemption waiver to allow time to re-test the market and to allow bus operators to recover to a more sustainable position. The existing arrangements were working well and allowed for negotiation between the school and the operator to meet changes in local need.

In response to Members' questions:

- Officers stated that the existing contract was for three years. Going forward a three to five year contract was anticipated.
- The Service Director for Education offered a briefing note when he proposed to exercise the delegated authority approved by the Committee. He further offered a briefing note at the start of the next academic year providing information on changes in demand and trends. **Action**

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree to an exemption waiver for the Swavesey Village College whole school transport contract for a period of one year;
- b) Approve the subsequent procurement exercise to be run as detailed in the report below; and
- c) Delegate authority to the Service Director for Education, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee, to award a contract following the compliant procurement exercise.

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

63. Meeting Demand for Children with Special Educational Needs and/ or Disability (SEND)

During the previous two years there had been an unprecedented increase in the number of children with special educational needs and/ disabilities (SEND) requiring a specialist placement. This reflected a national trend, with Department for Education (DfE) data showing that Cambridgeshire was broadly in line with its statistical neighbours in terms the numbers of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and the type of provision being made for them. The greatest demand was for placements in area special school provision and places specialising in social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). The highest demand for additional places was currently in Fenland, with demand also forecast to increase in Huntingdonshire. The situation remained dynamic, with the number of children awaiting a specialist placement having decreased from 211 to 194 in the fortnight since the report was completed as 17 children had been placed during this period.

The report sought the Committee's approval for the proposed approach to increasing the number of specialist places in the next 6 to 18 months by:

- The creation of additional special school places.
- The creation of dedicated provision for autism, in line with existing Enhance Resource Base (ERB)/Units attached to mainstream schools which created opportunities for inclusion.
- More efficient use of independent providers through negotiation of block contracts.

Initial investment of £2.5m had been approved by the Capital Programme Board for inclusion in the Council's 2022/23 capital business plan and the Schools Forum had approved a 0.5% / £2.1m revenue block transfer from the Schools Block to support the wider SEND Transformation programme, of which around £1m had been identified to support the creation of new provision.

The Service Director for Education stated that Cambridgeshire was an inclusive education authority which sought to keep children in their local schools and communities, with additional support where this was needed. He had received confirmation the previous week that Cambridgeshire had been accepted onto the DfE's safety valve scheme which could see the write-off of the Council's high needs block deficit. A Green Paper on SEND was also expected in the next few weeks which could represent a significant change. The Chair stated that Members were very mindful of this deficit, and thanked officers for their work to address this.

In accordance with the Constitution, Councillor Hoy had given notice of her wish to move an amendment to the officer recommendation. Seconded by Councillor Hay, she moved an additional resolution:

To commit to build a new special school in Fenland to meet the clear need, whether that be at Meadowgate or another location. Opening date to be as soon as reasonably possible after site searches, planning and other associated factors.

Speaking to the amendment, Councillor Hoy stated her belief that the case for building a new special school in Fenland had been clearly made both at the last committee meeting and in the report under consideration. There was only one specialist school in the north of the county and, whilst a very good school, it could only do so much. Schools in Fenland continued to see pupils unable to access the support they needed, and the report seemed to imply that these children would need to attend specialist provision outside of Fenland. This would have implications both in relation to the cost of providing transport to access that provision and the time the children would need to spend travelling. The report referenced the expansion of Meadowgate Academy, but she was not confident that this would happen and felt a contingency plan was needed. Building a new special school in Fenland would involve significant cost, but the amendment recognised that a new school might not be required if the expansion of Meadowgate Academy was approved. Councillor Hoy felt that there were many children in mainstream schools who were in need of specialist placements and that the failure to provide these would have a real impact on their life outcomes. She had tried not to be prescriptive about how additional provision would be delivered, but would like to see a commitment to the principle.

The Service Director for Education stated that the estimated capital cost of building a new school would be around £12-15m, depending on its size and location, with an estimated revenue cost of between £3-4m per year for between 120-150 pupils. Options for expanding the capacity at Meadowgate Academy were currently being considered and a collegiate approach was being taken to the challenge by the Special School Heads Group. Consideration might also be given to the block purchase of places to meet local need and the DfE would be opening a new round of free school special school applications.

Debating the amendment, Members:

- Voiced their appreciation of Councillor Hoy bringing this issue to the committee's attention as a local Member for Wisbech, commenting that all geographical areas would be considered equally and that it was a matter of concern to see the number of children and young people awaiting specialist placements.
- Commented that the costs of establishing a new school should not be considered in isolation as savings would also be made, for example to the cost of transporting students to other schools.
- Objected to any suggestion of geographical favouritism for projects, noting that the capital expenditure projects considered under the report on the award of design and construction contracts for education projects included in the Council's approved Business Plan included projects across the county (minute 61 refers).

In response to questions from Members, officers stated that:

- Area special schools usually offered a minimum of 100 places.
- The planning application for a new SEMH School in Wisbech had been approved the previous week.
- The timing of the next special school application round had not yet been confirmed, but could potentially be during summer 2022. The process for establishing new special schools was slightly different to the mainstream free school process and the Council could specify a preferred location based on data. Whilst a number of sites might be considered it was likely that the north of the county would be the focus for this. It was also proposed to link Enhanced Resource Bases to mainstream schools to ensure support. The Service Director for Education offered an update report at the next meeting in relation to the current position and timescale of the proposed expansion of provision at Meadowgate Academy, Enhanced Resource Bases and the SEND Transformation programme. **Action**
- There were a small number of children accessing specialist settings with journey times in excess of those set out in the guidelines (45 minutes

maximum for primary school aged children and 90 minutes maximum for secondary school students). Sometimes the capacity to meet needs closer to home did not exist, so longer travel times were required.

- The Service Director for Education stated that timescale for increasing capacity at Meadowgate Academy was subject to negotiation as Meadowgate was an academy school and could not be directed by the Local Authority. He offered an update at the next meeting on the current position. **Action**

The Chair stated that she would want to ensure that Fenland was an area of focus and that if the Meadowgate Academy expansion proposals did not progress this issue should be brought back to the committee for consideration.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was defeated.

Co-opted members were not eligible to vote on the amendment.

Debating the substantive recommendation, individual Members:

- Suggested the need for caution in relation to the DfE writing off the high needs block deficit as this could contain caveats and asked what was being done to address the structural deficit as well as the legacy deficit. The Service Director for Education stated that his last Service Director's report had set out the proposed transformation programme, which had been endorsed by the Schools Forum. He offered an update on the transformation programme at the next meeting. **Action**
- Commented that they felt that lengthy journeys to school for children with additional needs could impact on their mental health and the time available for them to socialise and that this was not acceptable. The Service Director for Education stated that journey times were closely monitored and were taken into account in discussions around suitable placements.
- Expressed the hope that schools were not being discouraged from seeking EHCPs where they felt these were needed. The Service Director for Education stated that the Council's focus was on meeting need. He welcomed the increase in the number of EHCPs issued to early years children as these enabled those with high needs to receive early support. There was also a category of special educational needs support available to those with additional needs but without an EHCP to provide early intervention.

In response to questions from committee members officers stated:

- That they would always try to place children as close to home as possible. There were a number of area special schools within Cambridgeshire and on occasion children would be placed at special schools in Peterborough.
- Stated that the proposed block purchases of places at a SEMH special school in Huntingdonshire related to an independent school located in St Ives.

- The plans for the expansion of Samuel Pepys Area Special School in St Neots were taking longer than hoped, but that this remained within the Council's plans.

A Member sought clarification about why co-opted members were eligible to vote on the substantive recommendation, but had not been eligible to vote on the amendment. They further commented that co-opted members had previously been eligible to vote on all education matters and expressed concern that recent changes to the Constitution relating to co-opted members voting rights could materially impact the decisions being made. The Democratic Services Officer stated that the amendment would have required capital expenditure and co-opted members were not eligible to vote on the determination of capital expenditure. The changes which had been made to the Constitution were to better reflect the existing guidance contained in the Direction from the Department of Education and mirrored the wording contained within that guidance. The Department for Education's advice was currently being sought in relation to co-opted members' voting rights, and officers were working to the best advice currently available. A co-opted member commented that the Chair and Democratic Services team were establishing the facts around voting rights as co-opted members did not feel that this was sufficiently clear.

It was resolved by a majority to:

Approve the approach set out in the report for increasing the number of places offering special education provision for children and young people with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) who are currently awaiting placement.

Co-opted members were eligible to vote on this recommendation.

The meeting was adjourned from 4.05pm to 4.16pm for a comfort break.

64. Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme

The Committee was invited to agree the scope and operation of the Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme (CHVS) to utilise up to £3.6m earmarked for this purpose by Council during 2022/23. It was proposed to use broadly the same process as for previous allocations, but recognising that Cambridgeshire was now funding this scheme independently rather than through a national scheme. The percentage of vouchers which had remained unclaimed had been reduced from 6% to 3% in the previous allocation round and work was in hand to look at how best to reach groups with lower take-up rates, like the digitally disadvantaged and those with English as an additional language.

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

- Asked whether it was necessary to give delegated authority to officers for the award of contract for the scheme. The Service Director for Education stated that it was necessary to follow the appropriate process for the contract award.

- Asked whether Child and Family Centres were being used to promote the voucher scheme. Officers confirmed that this was the case. In addition, families were contacted directly by email the day before vouchers were issued and their availability was publicised through schools and social media.
- Asked whether the voucher scheme was being promoted to members of the Traveller community. The Service Director for Education stated that details were shared with district councils and could be shared with the Council's Traveller Liaison Officer. He also invited Members to let him know of any other organisations which they felt could usefully receive details of the scheme.

Action

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree the scope and operation of the Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme (CHVS).
- b) Agree to utilise up to £3.6m earmarked for this purpose by Full Council in order to fund the CHVS during 2022/23.
- c) Agree that the Service Director for Education may, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Committee and the Head of Procurement, award a contract for the voucher scheme using the RM6255 for the Household Support Grant.

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

Councillor Atkins left the meeting at 4.27pm.

65. Finance Monitoring Report – January 2022

The Committee was advised that as of the end of January 2022 the budgets within the remit of the Children and Young People Committee were showing a forecast underspend of £464k (excluding the Dedicated Schools Grant). This compared to a forecast overspend of £485k reported at the previous meeting. The difference was mainly due to vacancy savings on social worker posts. The home to school transport budget for special schools was forecasting an overspend of £1,200k which reflected the significant increase in the numbers of pupils with education, health and care plans (EHCPs). Home to school transport for mainstream schools was forecasting an underspend of £500k due to more efficient route planning and updated contracts. The increase in numbers of EHCPs had also contributed to a net forecast overspend of £14.734m on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Work was continuing with the Department for Education to manage this deficit and evidence plans to reduce spend.

In response to questions from Members, officers stated:

- That an assumption on staff turnover was built into the budget, but that the current vacancy levels were unprecedented. The Director of Children's Services

stated that there was particular difficulty recruiting qualified social workers at present due to a national shortage. Some posts were also being held vacant prior to consultation on a planned restructure. The situation was being monitored carefully and a new recruitment campaign was planned. Caseloads were higher than would be wished, but the flow of work was being carefully managed and managers were offering support.

It was resolved to review and comment on the report.

66. Establishment of a New Primary School at Sawtry

The need for a new primary school at Sawtry was driven by planning approval being granted for three large developments in the village totalling over 700 new homes. The Council had launched a competition under the free school presumption process in September 2021 to seek an academy sponsor to establish and run a new school. Five multi-academy trusts had applied, with three shortlisted Trusts being interviewed on 13 January 2022 by an assessment panel comprising Members and officers. Paragraph 2.7 of the report set out in detail the panel's reasoning for recommending Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (CMAT) as the preferred sponsor, but the key identified strengths included:

- CMAT's appropriate experience and expertise to run the new primary school. This had been further enhanced by its recent merger with Cambridge Primary Education Trust (CPET), a successful primary specialist Trust with a track record of excellence, and its Teaching School Hub (the only one in Cambridgeshire).
- CMAT was well-established in the community and fully understood the education landscape in the village as the Trust was already responsible for the local junior and secondary schools.
- CMAT had a strong track record of improving achievement and attainment across schools in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area and provided strong and credible evidence that the new free school would add high quality places into the local area.

The Committee's preferred sponsor would be notified to the Regional Schools Commissioner's Advisory Board which would decide which potential sponsor should be recommended to the Secretary of State for Education to run the new school. This meeting had originally been expected to take place on 24 March 2022, but would now be held on 28 April 2022.

Written representations had been received from Councillor Simon Bywater, the local Member for Sawtry and Stilton. Councillor Bywater expressed his thanks to the Council for involving him in the selection process to find a sponsor for the new primary school in Sawtry. He had found the process to be well run and expressed his thanks to officers whom he considered to have carried out the task with the upmost professionalism. He also expressed his thanks to Councillors Goodliffe and Taylor for taking the time to take part in the selection interview panel. Some very

strong Trusts had taken part and it had proved to be a thorough interview process. Councillor Bywater expressed his support for the recommendation to endorse Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (CMAT) as the Council's preferred sponsor for the new primary school in Sawtry and expressed the hope that the Committee would take the same view.

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

- Described the process which had been undertaken as a great example of local authority decision-making.
- Sought reassurance that other schools in the local area had been consulted on the proposals to ensure that there was not an over-provision of places which could undermine Reception numbers during the initial years following opening of the new primary school. The Service Director for Education stated that the assessment panel had considered the impact on other schools and that CMAT had given explicit agreement to take into account the potential impact on Sawtry Primary School and other rural primary schools.
- Asked whether sufficient secondary school capacity existed in the local area. Officers confirmed that this was the case.

It was resolved unanimously:

To endorse Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (CMAT) as the Council's preferred sponsor for the new primary school in Sawtry.

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

67. Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Annual Report 2020-2021

Councillor Bradnam introduced the report as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee. The report covered a difficult period for families and for officers and she was pleased with the work which the Sub-Committee had done. She was glad to see an improvement in the timeliness of initial health assessments for children in care and also an increase in the number of in-house foster carers. She advised that a Chair's foreword would be added to final version of the document.

The Director of Children's Services stated that the Sub-Committee had continued to meet remotely during the pandemic. The work programme consisted of themed meetings focusing on health, education and placement. Three public meetings per year were interspersed with three informal, private meetings with representatives of the Children in Care Council. More recently, the Chair of the Sub-Committee had written to NHS England to voice concerns around initial health assessments and dental provision.

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

- Noted that the figures in the table on page 208 of the agenda document pack did not add up. Officers undertook to correct this. **Action**
- Asked whether any ethnic groups were over-represented within the county's children in care population. Officers stated that there was a slight over-representation of children from a mixed heritage background and from a Black British background, but that the position had improved over time.
- Asked for more information about the increase in incidents of missing children in March 2021. The Director of Children's Services stated that this could relate to lockdown. The weather could also be a factor, with higher numbers of incidents occurring during better weather. Whilst every incident was significant it was important to recognise that the overall numbers remained small and that a number of incidents might relate to a single child. She judged that the process for responding to incidents of a missing child had improved.
- Asked how the figures relating to child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation compared to previous years. The Director of Children's Services stated that the number of cases was small, although each one was significant. There was still a gender bias which found more young women subject to child sexual exploitation, although there were also cases relating to young men. In general terms the numbers relating to criminal exploitation had gone up, due to higher identification rates. She offered a briefing note on trends over time in relation to criminal exploitation cases. **Action**
- Emphasised the importance and positive impacts of the links which existed between the Virtual School Management Board, the Children and Young People Committee and the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee.

The Chair expressed her thanks to both previous and current members of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee for their work.

It was resolved to note the content of the report and raise questions with the lead officer.

68. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board Annual Report 2020-21

The Committee was advised that it was a statutory requirement for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board's annual report to be presented to the Committee each year. Its content was set out in legislation and the report before the Committee covered the period from April 2020 to March 2021. Members' attention was drawn to partnership work during this period to address child exploitation, which had included consulting both the public and practitioners. The Safeguarding Children Partnership Board also worked in partnership with Community Safety Partnerships across the county. One case review had been published during the period covered and the action plan had been completed and signed off. It was a requirement for the County Council's Lead Member for Children's Services to sit on the Board.

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

- Welcomed the successful partnership working described in the report.
- Asked about the practicalities of work with the community safety partnerships. Officers acknowledged that this could be a challenge due to the differences between the various partnerships, but stated that they worked particularly closely in relation to child sexual exploitation. This included though a joint strategic exploitation board and delivery group, of which the community safety partnerships were members. It had taken time to establish this model of working, but it was now being used to look at other areas.
- Described a short film about county lines which they had found informative and suggested other Members might find useful. A link would be circulated outside of the meeting. Action
- Asked about the extent to which priorities were driven by agencies compared to local people. Officers stated that discussions about priorities took place at Safeguarding Board level and were informed by surveys of stakeholders, practitioners and the public as well as the outcomes of case reviews and national and local initiatives.

It was resolved to:

Receive and note the content of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board Annual Report annual report 2020-21.

69. Committee Agenda Plan and Committee Appointments

The agenda plan was reviewed, and the Committee was invited to consider whether to appoint a representative to the Advisory Group for Anglia Ruskin University's 'Nature for Everyone' project.

A Member highlighted the remaining vacancy for a committee representative to be appointed to the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE).

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the Committee agenda plan.
- b) Appoint Councillor A Bulat to the Anglia Ruskin University and Learning Through Landscapes' Advisory Group on Nature for Everyone.

(Chair)