

## Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 1 December 2020

Time: 2.00pm – 3.48pm

Venue: Virtual Meeting

Present: Councillors Ambrose Smith, Bywater (Chairman), Downes, Every, Hay, Hoy (Vice Chairwoman), Nethsingha, Taylor, Whitehead and Wisson

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

### 373. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Mr F Vettese, co-opted member representing the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia. There were no declarations of interest.

### 374. Minutes – 10 November 2020 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2020 were agreed as an accurate record and a copy would be signed by the Chairman when the Council returned to its offices. The action log was noted.

### 375. Petitions and Public Questions

One public question had been received from Councillor Anna Smith, Cambridge City Council, relating to Item 6: Winter Fund and Arrangements to tackle Food and Fuel Poverty (minute 378 below refers).

### 376. Joint Dynamic Purchasing System for Education and Social Care Transport (KD2020/062)

The current frameworks for the award of contracts to deliver education and social care transport would both expire in 2021. In preparation for this, a review had been conducted in conjunction with the Council's procurement team. The recommended option was to enter into a Joint Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) with Peterborough City Council, using the ProContract system already in place in Cambridgeshire. Dynamic purchasing offered greater flexibility than a framework and would provide the simplest and most efficient solution. A five year term was proposed, commencing on 1 April 2021. The proposal had been endorsed by the Joint Commissioning Board. Peterborough City Council Cabinet approval was not required at this stage, but a Cabinet Member decision notice would be needed in due course.

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

- Deemed the proposed joint working with Peterborough City Council to be reasonable in this case, but expressed broader reservations about the extent of joint working across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- Questioned the use of the term 'dynamic'. Officers stated that this was a technical term relating to this type of contract and reflected its greater flexibility in comparison to a framework.
- Questioned the mis-match in the approvals timeframe for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Assistant Director for Education stated that that these would usually be presented for approval at the same time, but Cambridgeshire had some contracts which needed to be renewed in April 2021 so this was a pragmatic response. She offered an assurance that no service users would be disadvantaged.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the proposal that Cambridgeshire enters into a Joint Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) with Peterborough City Council, using the ProContract system (Etendering portal/system) already in place in Cambridgeshire, and that this then becomes the mechanism by which all procurement of Education and Social Care Transport services for both Authorities is undertaken, effective from 1 April 2021, the start of the financial year;
- b) Support the proposal that officers from Cambridgeshire continue to work with Peterborough colleagues to investigate options for delivering a fully integrated specialist transport system and that, in due course, the resulting recommendations are presented to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration and approval;
- c) Note the changes to the current staffing structure identified as necessary to successfully implement a joint DPS and support the move to a Shared Services model for all aspects of operational delivery of Education and Social Care transport for both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

### 377. Regional Adoption Agency

The Committee was invited to approve the establishment of a Regional Adoption Agency on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council, to be hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council. The issue had been raised with the Committee some years ago, but no suitable applicant had been found to host the agency. Instead, the Department for Education's (DfE) approval had been obtained to establish a regional adoption agency across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Officers welcomed this outcome as they had some concerns that links with local services could be lost in agencies covering larger areas.

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

- Expressed serious reservations about the proposal. The aim of regional adoption agencies was to broaden the reach of local authorities to find adopters and they did not consider the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough region large enough to do this. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding acknowledged that the proposed region would be quite small, but that it did meet the DfE's requirements. Officers retained good links with the consortium which had previously provided the county's adoption services and would continue to make use of these. Both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had good adoption functions in place and would also have an Assistant Director to drive this forward and raise its profile.
- Asked whether the main driver for the proposal was financial. Officers stated that this was not the case. The key consideration was the wish to retain control of adoption services and for them to be integrated into the local authorities' wider work with children.
- Welcomed the proposal to bring the adoption service back within the Council's control as they felt it had begun to lose some impetus whilst out-sourced.
- Asked whether the proposed regional adoption agency would improve children's experience. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated his belief that it would represent a good result for both children and families. In addition to adoption services it would provide post-adoption support, birth parent counselling and support to adoptive families, so its work would go beyond adoption services as well as raising the profile of adoption. The agency would continue to work constructively with other local authorities and regional adoption agencies and it would still be necessary to look for adoptive families outside of the local area where this was in the child's best interests.

It was resolved by a majority to:

- a) Agree that Cambridgeshire County Council hosts the Regional Adoption Agency on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council and enters into a partnership agreement to that effect to 30 November 2030 and subject to extension as agreed between the two authorities.

### 378. Winter Fund and arrangements to tackle Food and Fuel Poverty

The Committee received a presentation which provided an update on developments since the report had been published the previous week. A copy is available to view of the [Council's website](#). Between December 2020 and March 2021 Cambridgeshire would receive a grant from Government of £1.4M to help meet the cost of food, utilities and other essentials for those children and families most in need of support. Officers welcomed this grant being delivered through local government as many of those requiring support would already be known to local services. The updated guidance had been received on 24 November 2020 and officers had been working on the arrangements for administering it since then. It was unusual in that local authorities had been given quite wide discretion, subject to the rules, to tailor the allocation of the grant to meet local need. The proposed allocation was based on deprivation and population statistics and reflected national guidance on how funding should be dispersed. Support with food costs would be delivered through a food voucher scheme with every eligible

child receiving a £15 voucher for the two week Christmas period and for one week in February. Vouchers would be issued the week before the Christmas break and would be managed using existing data systems so there would be no need to apply. Parents would receive their vouchers automatically by text or email and schools would be able to print these off for them if required. An opt-out option was available for anyone not wishing to use their voucher and the Christmas vouchers would be time-limited to the end of January with any unused funding being recycled back into the scheme. The vouchers would be delivered using the existing WONDE system and the small number of schools not yet linked to the system were currently being added.

The aim of the scheme was to reach as many people in Cambridgeshire as possible who needed some support in addition to that offered by universal services. The aim was to broaden the eligibility for this additional support and provide a rapid response to need with a simple verification process. In addition to the immediate practical support being provided it was intended to use the remaining funding to create a menu of additional support options beyond the central food voucher scheme. This would include providing funding to established and trusted organisations to continue or extend the support they already provided to households, such as Citizens' Advice, the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme and the Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme. A central fund would also be maintained in the Countywide Hub from which trusted community groups, identified by District and City Councils, could directly award small grants. A grant would also be made to each District and City Council Hub to provide rapid support to existing local activity. Communications were being prepared to advise parents and community groups of the support available and to advise on how this could be accessed. Lessons learned from the Christmas roll-out would be applied to the February half-term and beyond. In order to respond to the emerging situation, officers proposed three additional recommendations in addition to the one contained in the published report. These were to:

- a) Agree the process for allocating the winter grant as outlined in the presentation.
- b) Note that the council's Section 151 Officer and Chief Executive can instigate emergency powers to award the contract for free school meals vouchers to ensure parents can receive supermarket vouchers prior to the end of term and, if such a decision is taken, will report back to the next meeting of the Committee.
- c) Delegate authority to the Executive Director: People and Communities to deliver the winter grant scheme.

The Chairman invited Councillor Anna Smith, Executive Councillor for Communities at Cambridge City Council, to ask the question which she had submitted. A copy had been circulated in advance to members of the Committee and published on the Council's website.

Councillor Smith expressed her thanks for the opportunity to speak on this matter and to officers for a clear report. Cambridge City Council had been acutely aware of the issue of holiday hunger for some time and the impact of Covid-19 had made the situation worse. She welcomed the wider Winter Fund offer and expressed the hope that this would be the start of providing school holiday meals going forward. Councillor Smith asked what the County Council would be doing to help ensure the success of the

Christmas Free School meals scheme and how monitoring of take-up would be carried out.

The Chairman stated that, in these unprecedented times, the Committee welcomed the funding provided by Central Government to support vulnerable families and individuals. It also welcomed the additional flexibility within the scheme, that it allowed the Council to broaden the scope of those it could assist and that the scheme would be operated on a local basis by those with the necessary expertise and local knowledge. The report before the Committee set out the approach proposed by the Council. This would ensure that support would be targeted to those in receipt of free school meals and schools would assist with this. In addition, a broader and more flexible support package would be available to others, for example families who were in significant need but who were just above the threshold for free school meals. Support would also extend in some circumstances to assistance with household utility bills and officers would be encouraging schools to refer families who needed such support. The Council's approach would be to utilise the cross-cutting 'Think Communities' approach and coordinate support through county and district hubs. This would also provide the opportunity to have a broader discussion about other forms of support that would be of use to vulnerable families and individuals including, for example, individual support from Citizens' Advice Bureaux. Monitoring of how the funds were used was required by central Government and take-up would be monitored to ensure that those eligible for and in need of support had taken advantage of the offer. Officers would also make schools aware of any vouchers which were not used. The Chairman concluded by expressing his thanks for the efforts made by Cambridge City Council and for its work in support of children and young people.

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

- Welcomed Councillor Smith's comments and expressed thanks to Cambridge City Council and to other district councils for their work in support of those in need during October half-term.
- Welcomed the campaign by Marcus Rashford to highlight the issue of food poverty.
- Welcomed the straightforward way it was proposed to get support to those in need, particularly the automatic provision of food vouchers without the need to apply.
- Commented that there would be many families needing support for the first time who were unfamiliar with the benefits system and for whom this support would be quick and simple to access.
- Expressed thanks to the Service Directors for Education and Communities and Partnerships and their teams and to schools for devising and implementing a simple delivery process.
- The Chairwoman of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee asked about the support available to care leavers and how they would be made aware of this support. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that social

workers and personal advisers would work closely with those care leavers who remained in touch with the Council to ensure they got the support they needed either through the Winter Fund scheme or through corporate parenting support.

- Asked for more information about the support being provided to 'people without recourse to public funds'. Officers stated that this referred primarily to foreign nationals who had not exercised their treaty rights and were otherwise unable to access support, such as those who were homeless. This was likely to involve only small numbers of people, but it was a gap in provision where the need for support had been identified.
- Noted that a number of Council staff had been re-deployed to support the countywide hubs and asked whether the staffing levels remained sufficient. The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships stated that the hubs remained fully staffed by a core team of officers, supplemented as needed by staff re-deployed from elsewhere in the Council and by volunteers. He was confident that this remained sufficient.
- Asked how community groups could access the small grants available. Officers stated that community organisations known to the Council were encouraged to discuss the role they might play with their local city or district council or hub. Work was also taking place to raise awareness through the Community Resilience Group which comprised voluntary sector, community and faith groups and public sector partners.
- Asked whether the Winter Fund included money for elderly or isolated adults in need. Officers stated that up to 20% of the funds available could be used for households without children so there was no reason why support could not be provided to older adults. In addition, the Communities and Partnership Committee was leading work on tackling poverty and had established a cross-party task and finish group to look at a range of interventions to support those in need.
- The Vice Chairwoman welcomed the support which was being made available to those experiencing difficulties who fell outside of traditional definitions. However, whilst she had no wish to create unnecessary bureaucracy it was important to ensure that funds went to those in need and she asked what checks were in place to ensure the proper use of public funds. The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships stated that officers would be working with known and trusted voluntary and community organisations and offered an assurance that due diligence would take place prior to any awards being made.
- Asked that councillors should be kept well briefed on how the arrangements would be implemented and how they could signpost local residents to the support available. Officers stated that the report before the Committee was the first step in sharing details of the types of support which could be made available. There would be a single process for making a referral for support which would involve the completion of an online form or making contact through a local rate phone number. This would be widely advertised and shared with Members.

- Asked what support might be available when the Winter Fund grant had been used up. The Service Director for Education stated that a Government announcement had been made the previous week around holiday clubs which might offer a layer of targeted support offering some continuity. He would bring a report on this to either the January or March meeting when the position was more clear.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to officers and to city and district council colleagues for the excellent partnership working which was taking place.

The co-opted member was not eligible to vote on this item. It was resolved unanimously by the elected members of the Committee to:

- a) Note the arrangements being put in place to support vulnerable families, children and young people at risk of food poverty in Cambridgeshire.
- b) Agree the process for allocating the winter grant as outlined in the presentation.
- c) Note that the council's Section 151 Officer and Chief Executive can instigate emergency powers to award the contract for free school meals vouchers to ensure parents can receive supermarket vouchers prior to the end of term and, if such a decision is taken, will report back to the next meeting of the Committee.
- d) Delegate authority to the Executive Director: People and Communities to deliver the winter grant scheme.

### 379. Service Director's Report – Children and Safeguarding

The Committee was advised that the decision had been taken to continue face to face meetings with children and young people in care during the second Covid-19 lockdown unless they were displaying symptoms. Officers judged that this had led to less demand on services post-lockdown than was the case for some local authorities. There had been an increase in the number of those accessing early help assessments and this was being monitored closely. Fewer court applications and care orders were being made which, when considered alongside the number of children and young people subject to a Child Protection Plan, was an indication that the process was working as intended. The downward trajectory of the number of children in care was also continuing. There had been a significant reduction in the turnover of qualified social workers and performance in this area was now better than both regional and national averages. This was taken as a positive indication of a more settled and stable service.

The Chairman expressed the Committee's thanks to the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding and the front-line team for their continued efforts throughout the Covid period and asked that these should be cascaded within the service.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the key performance information and actions being taken to continue to improve outcomes in children's services;

- b) Note the continuing work by all in children's services, including our foster carers, to support children, young people and families through the continuing pandemic.

### 380. Finance Monitoring Report – December 2020

The in-year position to the end of October 2020 showed an improvement from a projected overspend of £1.9M to £450k. The numbers of children in care continued to reduce, although there had been a small increase in expenditure due to one high cost placement. The associated transport costs for children in care was also reducing. There had been some reductions in costs associated with unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) due to an appropriate level of funding now being provided by the Home Office. Increased savings were also forecast in relation to adoption allowances due to a high number of young people in care turning 18. There had been a reduction in the underlying pressure on the High Needs Block element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funded budgets to around £11.4M for 2020/21, an improvement of approximately £1M from previous forecasts.

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

- Asked what funding was available to support care leavers when their carers allowance was no longer being paid. Officers stated that legal order allowances ended at the age of 18. If young people needed financial support beyond that point there was a separate budget for this. The allowances for under 18s were quite high in comparison to post-18 payments so a saving would be achieved even if the young person continued to receive support. However, not all care leavers required this support as they could be working and supporting themselves or eligible for other support or benefits as adults.
- Asked that the paragraphs should be numbered more clearly in future reports.  
**Action required**
- Asked for more information about the loss of income relating to Covid-19. Officers stated that there had been a reduction in income from traded services due to reduced demand during school closures and in the income from outdoor centres due to the cancellation of all residential visits.
- Asked about the arrangements for home to school transport in the light of Covid-19. Officers stated that there had been an increase in costs due to the need to provide extra buses to facilitate social distancing, adjust routes and provide extra cleaning. A Government grant to help cover these additional costs had been received via the Combined Authority and the demand for places had been met with relatively few complaints. Officers were continuing to monitor take-up and how this evolved.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Review and comment on the report.



### 381. Children and Young People Committee Review of Draft Revenue and Draft Capital business planning proposals 2021/22 to 2025/26

The report before the Committee was published on 26 November 2020 and circulated electronically to members of the committee. It was accepted by the Chairman as a late on the following grounds:

1. Reason for lateness: The delay had been the result of needing to collate and analyse the most up to date financial, local and national data sets in order to enable the Committee to have the best possible discussion on the current position and future opportunities.
2. Reason for urgency: To enable the Committee's views to be available to the General Purposes Committee when it reviewed the budget proposals on 22 December 2020.

The report contained an appendix which was exempt from publication under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, in that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed: information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person, including the authority holding that information. The Chairman asked whether any Member wished to discuss the exempt appendix. No Member expressed the wish to do so.

Officers highlighted that the Government was now funding the true costs of supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) which enabled a reduction to be made to this budget. Also, fewer children were entering the care system which led to a reduction in associated costs. Work was also in hand to look at developing a focused clinical service for children in care which would provide an increased clinical care offer whilst also making a saving. Savings were also being made in relation to transport costs due to the reduced numbers of children in care.

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

- Asked about the additional capacity needed for St Neots secondary. The Service Director for Education stated that officers were still looking at moving to 22 forms of entry (FE) from the current 17. He offered a briefing note to committee members on St Neots school place planning issues in the new year.  
**Action required**
- Commented that Loves Farm Primary School in St. Neots had a scheme start date of 2021-2022, but that the site was not yet being developed and asked whether this timeframe remained realistic. Officers stated that Covid-19 had slowed house-building and revised housing estimates were awaited. Work on Wintringham Park had been brought forward so it was expected that this project would be moved back.
- Asked for more information about the land acquisition that was required for the expansion of Samuel Pepys Special School, St. Neots and whether a scheme start date had been agreed. The Service Director for Education stated that

active conversations were continuing and that he would ensure that the local Member was kept updated.

The Chairman stated that work was continuing to understand the impact of Covid-19, but that there were still a lot of unknowns.

The co-opted member was not eligible to vote on this item. It was resolved by a majority of the elected members of the Committee to:

- a) Note the progress made to date and next steps required to develop the business plan for 2021-2026
- b) Note the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's financial planning
- c) 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
- d) Endorse the changes to the capital programme that are within the remit of the Committee as part of consideration of the Council's overall Business Plan
- e) Note the updates to fees and charges for 2021-22

## 382. Housing Related Support: Update

The Committee was advised that a good response had been received to the Housing Related Support (HRS) consultation and that the new HRS strategy would be submitted to the Adults Committee for approval on 10 December 2020. The Adults Committee would also be asked to consider removing the remaining HRS saving. The Member Reference Group which had been established to support this work had provided valuable input in looking at the various models and client feedback was also being sought. Market engagement would be carried out prior to going out to tender and a report would be brought before the Committee in March 2021, rather than January as originally proposed, to set out the full procurement approach.

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

- Sought clarification of which responsibilities rested with the county council and which sat with district councils, expressing concern about a possible overlap. Officers stated that district councils had a statutory responsibility in relation to homelessness assessments and deciding whether they were required to provide a person with accommodation, but had no duty to provide any other support. The county provided support to enable people to develop their life skills and live more independently. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that this support was designed to provide the skills needed to help prevent vulnerable people falling back into homelessness.

The Chairman stated that he deemed it sensible to take a step back and review the position in relation to savings targets.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note and comment on the update provided.

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

The Committee agenda plan and training plan were reviewed and updates reported. There were no changes to committee appointments.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the following changes to the Committee agenda plan:
  - i. New item: January 2021 – School Holiday Clubs (subject to Government announcements)
  - ii. Housing Related Support: Deferred from January to March 2021
- b) Note the training plan.
- c) Note that committee appointments to outside bodies and internal advisory groups remained unchanged.

Chairman