

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 9 March 2021

Time: 2.00pm – 4.00pm

Venue: Virtual Meeting

Present: Councillors D Ambrose Smith, S Bywater (Chairman), H Batchelor, P Downes, L Every, A Hay, S Hoy (Vice Chairwoman), S Taylor, J Whitehead and J Wisson

Co-opted Members:

A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely

395. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillor L Nethsingha, substituted by Councillor H Batchelor, and F Vettese, co-opted member representing the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia.

A declaration of interest was made by Councillor J Whitehead in relation to Item 4: Delivery of Early Years Provision to serve Abbey Ward, in that she had been a member of a working party on the Barnwell Hub since 2013. Minute 398 below refers.

396. Minutes – 19 January 2021 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 19 January 2021 were agreed as an accurate record. A copy will be signed by the Chairman when it is practical to do so. The action log was noted.

397. Petitions and Public Questions

Five requests to speak had been received from members of the public. Four of these related to Item 4, the Delivery of Early Years Services to serve Abbey Ward and were addressed under that agenda item (minute 398 below refers). The fifth related to secondary school provision in St Neots. As there was no report on this issue on the meeting agenda the question was not accepted, but would instead receive a written response within ten working days of the meeting. No petitions were received.

398. Delivery of Early Years Provision to serve Abbey Ward (KD2021/007)

A declaration of interest in this item was made at the start of the meeting by Councillor Whitehead, in that she had been a member of a working party on the Barnwell Hub since 2013. Minute 395 above refers.

Four requests to speak on this item were received from members of the public. Copies of their comments and questions are attached at Appendix 1. In accordance with the Constitution, the first three requests to speak which were received were accepted. The fourth request was not accepted, but the comments which had been submitted were circulated to all members of the committee electronically for information in advance of the meeting. A written response would be sent within ten working days of the meeting. Written comments were also received from the Chair of Seesaw Preschool which were circulated electronically to all members of the committee for information in advance of the meeting.

The Strategic Education Place Planning Manager introduced the report. Work on the new Community Hub project for East Barnwell in Abbey Ward had reached the point where the design stage needed to be finalised. Consequently, officers had been asked whether, from a service delivery perspective, early years provision needed to be delivered from the new East Barnwell hub. Currently, early years provision in Abbey Ward was provided through two settings: one at the Fields Early Years Centre and the other on the site of The Galfrid School. The latter, Seesaw Pre-school, had been relocated onto The Galfrid site since August 2019 whilst work was underway to develop the new community hub at East Barnwell.

Both early years settings were required to meet current and future demand for early years' places in Abbey Ward and were either to close there would be a shortfall of places. Officers stated that the Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient early years education and childcare places could be met irrespective of the location of the provision currently delivered by the Seesaw Pre-school within Abbey Ward. Remaining at The Galfrid School would also provide scope for future expansion if more places were needed, which was not the case at East Barnwell. In addition to the Council's statutory duty additional factors included social and community considerations and the impact on these of the location of early years provision within Abbey Ward. There were also financial implications associated with the different locations, with an indicative cost of £450k for an early years element of the East Barnwell site. There was also a longstanding expectation within the local community that early years provision would return to the East Barnwell site when the redevelopment work was completed. These considerations were set out in the report and officers had met with representatives from Seesaw Pre-school and the Abbey People Trust on 1 October 2020 to discuss these. A decision on the re-development of the East Barnwell Community Centre site would rest with the Commercial and Investment Committee. The decision and views of the Children and Young People Committee on the early years element of that re-development would be included in the report which would be submitted to the Commercial and Investment Committee after the local elections in May.

The Chairman invited the three public speakers whose questions had been accepted to address the Committee. A copy of their comments and questions is attached at Appendix 1. There were no questions from the Committee. The Chairman thanked the public speakers for sharing their views and stated that these would be taken into account as the committee considered the report. The Committee would also consider all of the financial and other implications of the proposals and not just short-term savings.

Councillor Whitehead, local Member for Abbey Division, commented that the public speakers had spoken eloquently about why the Seesaw Pre-school should return to East Barnwell and this was also the preference of the pre-school itself. She felt that the money needed for this was available and emphasised the needs of the local community and children. She had asked repeatedly that the outcome of the officer consultation on the proposal should be shared with committee members for their information, but did not believe this had happened. Officers stated that they had met with representatives of the Abbey People Trust and Seesaw Pre-school on 1 October 2020 to discuss the options identified. They were not aware of any written comments being submitted in response to this, but the Seesaw Pre-school representatives had made clear their preference to return to the East Barnwell Hub. This position had been reiterated in the written comments submitted by the Chair of Seesaw Pre-school which had been circulated electronically to members of the committee on 5 March 2021.

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

- Asked what the £450k cost of returning Seesaw Pre-School to the East Barnwell site was for. Officers stated that this was the capital build cost of the Hub redevelopment.
- Commented that they understood that £1.8M has been allocated within the Council's capital programme for the Barnwell Hub project. If that capital provision was still in place they felt this could be used to fund the £450k cost of returning Seesaw Pre-school to the East Barnwell site. They deemed it unacceptable that the Council would not now pay £450k when the original overall budget had been £1.8M. The Service Director for Education stated that this cost would not be funded by capital grant so the Council would need to borrow the money and pay it back, which had revenue implications. The need to consider the capital cost was vital. Officers noted that the Council also needed to fund a new library and the community centre on the East Barnwell site.
- Asked about the higher rent cost at the Barnwell site. Officers stated that the Council leased out many early years' sites. The expectation was that market rent would be paid unless a setting could not afford this, in which case less than best rent might be paid. Pre-school provision was a market-led sector and the Council must ensure that its fixed costs were met and that it acted fairly in relation to all providers. The £16.5k represented the market rent rate and so would be the starting point for discussions with the provider. The lower rent being charged for The Galfrid site reflected the different cost base of operating from a school site.
- Asked about the current status of the East Barnwell Community Centre. Officers stated that designs needed to be finalised now prior to applying for planning permission.

Summing up, the Chairman stated that the Committee was being asked to decide where early years provision in Abbey should be located. Finance was a consideration, but this was mainly for the Commercial and Investment Committee. The focus for the Children and Young People Committee was whether the Seesaw Pre-school provision should remain on its current site at The Galfrid School or return to its initial location at the East Barnwell Community Centre, for which representations had been made by the

public speakers and chair of Seesaw Pre-school. As Education Authority it was noted that Seesaw Pre-school provision had been delivered from The Galfrid School site for around the last 18 months with no fall in usage and that it appeared to be operating well.

It was resolved by a majority to:

- a) Note and comment on the report and consider each option for the future delivery of sessional (pre-school) early years provision to serve the Abbey ward in Cambridge City, in particular taking account of officers' assessment that the Council will continue to be able to meet its duty to secure sufficient and suitable early years places irrespective of which option is implemented.
- b) Note the views of the Local Member.
- c) Endorse the officer recommendation that that the provision, currently provided by Seesaw Pre-school, remain in its current accommodation on the site of Galfrid Primary School.

Councillors Batchelor, Downes, S Taylor and Whitehead asked that it be recorded that they had voted against the recommendations.

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

399. Housing Related Support Services (KD2021/020)

The Committee was advised of the proposed approach to procuring housing related support (HRS) services for young people and the timescales for the planned procurement. HRS services provided dedicated support staff who were able to deliver specialist support to individuals to enable them to develop independent living skills and maintain their accommodation. This support was tailored to meet specific needs, such as developing life skills or managing addiction, mental health or emotional wellbeing issues. This was not a statutory function and costs relating to accommodation such as rent and service charges were not covered by this funding. A review of all HRS services had begun in 2018 with the aim of re-designing the service. It became clear from this work that services were still delivering good outcomes for service users, but that they were not meeting all presented needs. To address this it was proposed to move to a hub and spoke model which would reflect a more place and person centred approach. Smaller units would offer a more flexible response and also provide step down and moving-on options as services users' needs evolved. This would also support provision for particular groups, such as some female-only accommodation, and address some gaps in provision identified by the review. Officers were working with current providers and partners and the re-commissioning would also take account of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the inclusion of ensuite accommodation to increase resilience. There would be a light-touch dialogue approach with providers between stages of bid submission and would reflect a balance between cost and quality. A seven year contract was proposed to reflect the scale of the change being undertaken and there would be a significant transition period.

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

- Asked about the system for moving people towards independence. Officers stated that the current model did not include any step-down or moving-on accommodation. The new model would allow the option of moving into accommodation with reduced support as part of the journey towards independence.
- Asked whether current providers would be in a position to bid and whether contracts would be let on an individual basis or to a single provider for the delivery of all HRS services. Officers stated that it was envisaged that there would be one contract per district. They were encouraging partnerships between providers and there had been discussions about this with existing providers.
- Commented that it had been important to Members that the review was rigorous and that it was driven by need, would better suit the needs of individual service users and districts and was not a top-down approach.
- Noted that there was no reduction to the funding available.

Summing up, the Chairman commended the Commissioner for Housing Related Support and her team for their hard work on this issue. There had been a lot of anxiety initially about the changes which the review might propose, but partnership working had led to a satisfactory conclusion.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree the proposed Procurement Approach.
- b) Approve the recommissioning of Housing Related Support services for young people for a contract period of seven years and total value of £11,253,935.
- c) Agree to delegate the responsibility to award the contract to the Executive Director of People and Communities, in consultation with the Chair of the Children and Young People Committee.

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

400. Exemption to Contract Procurement Rules Request

In a change to the published agenda, the Committee considered a report recommending a twelve month extension to 274 home to school transport routes at a cost of £7M. This key decision was published on Friday 5 March under the Special Urgency arrangements set out in the Council's Constitution and a copy was shared electronically with all members of the committee. When officers started the detailed preparatory work for the re-tendering process it had become apparent that, due to the continuing impact of the pandemic, the preferred option would be to seek an exemption waiver for a proportion of the transport routes due to be retendered during the current financial year in order to ensure that the Council could continue to meet its statutory obligations with regard to the provision of home to school transport. The tenders needed to be awarded in May 2021 in order for operators to have the necessary staff

and vehicles in place for September, so the decision could not wait until the committee's next meeting.

Home to school transport route contracts were reviewed on a rolling basis, but this had not happened in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers were recommending a twelve month extension to 274 routes in order to ensure continuity of service and enable the Council to meet its statutory obligations to provide transport to all eligible children and young people. The Service Director for Education placed on record his thanks to the Transport Team for their hard work in responding to the Covid pandemic. This was echoed by the Chairman on behalf of the committee.

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

- Commented that they were happy to support the recommendation to avoid any further disruption to young people.
- Asked whether levels of demand remained the same. The Service Director for Education stated that demand was dynamic. Officers were seeking the twelve month contract extension in order to allow time for a full tender process to be conducted which would be based on need.

The Chairman stated that the Committee would want to stay across this issue going forward as the Covid situation evolved.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Agree to exemption waiver on 274 home to school contracts for a period of one year.

401. Finance Monitoring Report

The overall position for the People and Communities Directorate remained fairly consistent with previous reporting, with a predicted overspend of around £6.6M. This related mainly to adult services and Covid-related expenses. The position in relation to budgets for which the Children and Young People Committee was responsible had deteriorated slightly from a projected overspend of around £64k to a projected overspend of around £360k at the end of January 2021. This included an increase of around £200k in the cost of children in care placements, but this was offset by underspends elsewhere within the children's social care budget. There had also been an increase in the cost of home to school transport for children and young people with additional needs due to increased demand. The in-year deficit on the dedicated schools grant (DSG) was now around £12.6M and officers were working closely with the Department for Education on the recovery plan. Outdoor centres were driven solely by external income and officers were working hard to contain and manage spend in this area. It was still uncertain when schools and groups would be able to access day or residential trips. The Service Director for Education offered an assurance that officers were doing all they could to manage these costs, including putting staff on furlough. The Chairman stated that he had taken a close interest in this issue and that officers had done everything possible to minimise costs.

A Member asked whether the Council was still using the Grafham Water Outdoor Centre to provide short-term accommodation to young people in care. Officers stated that it was not currently being used in this way, but the option to do so remained available if required.

It was resolved unanimously to review and comment on the report.

402. Service Director's Report: Children and Safeguarding

The report was written before the recent return to school by the majority of students and demonstrated an essentially steady position. Progress was being made in some areas, including a continuing reduction in the number of children in care. However, there had been a small increase in costs associated with the children in care placement budget due to a small number of children with very complex needs having come into the Council's care. Face to face visits with children were continuing where officers judged that these were necessary, but other work was being delivered virtually. The report included a summary of the revised clinical offer which included a focus on providing support to the carers of young people demonstrating challenging behaviours.

A Member commented that there were issues in some areas in relation to health assessment timescales, vaccinations and child health support and asked whether the committee should raise this with the Health Committee or the Director of Public Health to express its concern. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that health assessments were still taking place, even if some were not being conducted within the required 28 day timeframe. This delay had in some cases been due to information not being passed to health service colleagues quickly enough by officers. The Health Service was facing huge pressures at present, but officers were still engaging regularly with health colleagues. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that regular discussions were taking place about the impact of Covid on children's health services. There had been some delays and any concerns were being followed up with health service colleagues, but it was important to recognise the pressures under which they were currently operating. The Chairman stated that these issues had been picked up by the Social Care Board and that both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive had taken up the issue of health assessments at senior level. The Council remained on a journey of improvement, and this included improving its own performance. He asked that an update on this issue should be included in the Service Director's next committee report. **ACTION**

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note and comment on the key performance information and actions being taken to continue to improve outcomes in children's services.
- b) Note and comment on the continuing work by all in children's services, including our foster carers, to support children, young people and families through the continuing pandemic.

403. Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training

The Committee received an update on the work being done through the NEET reduction action plan to support young people in care and care leavers to achieve sustained employment, education or training opportunities. Due to the small cohort and age range involved it was difficult to make direct comparisons and as part of the NEET strategy officers were looking at how to make data comparisons. Many of the industries which traditionally employed large numbers of young people such as retail and hospitality had been disrupted by Covid leading to reduced employment opportunities. However, a number of initiatives had been established to support young people at both local and national level, including the Kickstart Scheme. A working group had been set up to look at digital exclusion and the Virtual School was developing a trauma-informed programme to engage with harder to reach young people.

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

- Asked whether there were any positive outcomes of the Covid experience in relation to care leavers not in education, employment or training. Officers stated that some initial benefits had been seen in relation to active learning and a greater willingness by some young people to engage digitally rather than in person. However, as the lockdown period grew longer this may have lessened. It was likely that future engagement models would include a mixture of both digital and face to face engagement to make the best use of both options.
- The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee stated that the education, training and employment prospects of young people in care and care leavers was an issue of particular concern to the Sub-Committee. All county councillors were corporate parents to the children and young people in the Council's care and it was vital that they offered them their full support. She recognised that there had been some improvements due to changes in service delivery structures, but it was still not good enough. The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee would welcome the opportunity to continue monitoring progress on this work and would want to look at what was being done to support the 23 young people in care and care leavers who were currently not in education, training or employment and whether there were any particular barriers to their progress. The Business Mentoring Scheme pilot project which had included the Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee as a mentor had proved a great success and it was hoped that this would be extended.

The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that it was important to recognise that this cohort of young people may have had very difficult life experiences and as such they were likely to require individualised support. A NEET working group which included personal advisors had been established to focus on the needs of these young people and how to bring them into the education, training and employment process.

- Commented that there used to be a good programme of working in schools with any young person identified by the schools as likely to become NEET and asked whether any similar intervention was being considered now. Officers confirmed

that one of the working group's aims was to look at the different ways in which schools assessed young people's risk of becoming NEET. Whilst this was unlikely to result in a return to direct work in schools it would inform the work which schools themselves did with these young people.

Summing up, the Chairman emphasised the importance of reaching these young people as early as possible in order to be in time to inform their early decisions about education, training and employment.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the good performance in relation to the general population of young people in Cambridgeshire in respect of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- b) Note the positive signs of impact of the renewed focus on reducing the number of young people in care and who are leaving care who are NEET.
- c) Support monitoring of continuing impact of the NEET reduction action plan for young people in care and leaving care by the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee.

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

404. Best Start in Life Update

The Best Start in Life (BSiL) was a long-term project aimed at children from pre-birth to the age of five and designed to improve their life chances. Work-streams had been impacted by the Covid pandemic and there had been some pauses, but work was continuing.

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

- Asked when the pilot projects would finish and be evaluated. Officers stated that the pilot projects were needed to identify what did and did not work so that this learning could be incorporated into future work. The first information was expected to be available in April 2021. The Executive Director for People and Communities stated that learning from the pilot projects would help as officers looked to roll the BSiL programme out to other areas. This would include looking at the digital platform and the relationship between midwives, child and family works and health workers and she anticipated positive outcomes for practitioners as well as service users. The work was being monitored by the Early Help Strategic Board, which she chaired

Summing up, the Chairman stated that some great work was being done. He would welcome a further update being brought to the committee in the summer to keep Members informed. **ACTION**

It was resolved unanimously/ by a majority to note and comment on the continued progress of the Best Start in Life Programme.

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

The Committee reviewed its agenda plan and training plan and noted that there were no changes to committee appointments. The reserve meeting date of 13 April 2021 was not required and the committee would meet next on 25 May 2021.

The Chairman stated that it had been a privilege to serve as the chairman of the committee for the past four years. He expressed his thanks to all those who had served on the committee during those four years. He offered good wishes to those councillors who would be stepping down at the forthcoming election and wished good luck to all those who would be standing for re-election. He also expressed his thanks to the co-opted members representing the Church of England Diocese of Ely and the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia for their invaluable input. He also thanked the Executive Director for People and Communities, the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding and the Service Director for Education and their teams for their work.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note that the report on the Appropriate Adult Service had been deferred from May to July.
- b) Note the training plan.
- c) Note that committee appointments to outside bodies and internal advisory groups remained unchanged.

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

(Chair)

Children and Young People Committee 9 March 2021 – Public Speakers

	Name	Question/ comments
1.	Nicky Shepard, CEO Abbey People	Nicky Shepard emphasised the importance of the pre-school being on the site of the Community Hub to fully deliver the vision of the site. This included Seesaw families to having access to the services available at the Hub and the pre-school contributing to the success of the site. Seesaw Pre-school did not just serve the Galfrid area and removing the pre-school provision from the community centre site would leave a gap in provision. There had been a 300%+ increase in benefits claimants in Abbey Ward and the communities' needs and the role played by Seesaw Pre-school in meeting those needs were being ignored.
2.	Dr Alexandra Bulat, Cambridge resident	Dr Bulat commented that the County Council had promised a new nursery since 2013 and local residents were still waiting. Abbey was the most deprived ward in Cambridge with one in five children living in poverty and when speaking to Abbey residents they say these services are essential. Locating the pre-school on the East Barnwell site would also encourage the use of other, possibly under-used services to the benefit of children and families. Dr Bulat asked why the recommendation was putting short-term savings above long-term and sustainable funding for early years provision in an area where need will increase.
3.	Cllr Nicky Massey, Abbey Ward, Cambridge City Council	Cllr Massey commented that the project was all about community cohesion and joint location, much like the Think Communities approach being used across county council services today. It had initially been planned to return Seesaw Pre-school to its original home within the centre and she questioned whether it was beneficial to separate the pre-school from the library and other services which would be located at East Barnwell. Seesaw served a different area to the other pre-school in Abbey and locating them on the same site would create confusion and limit parental choice. The rent and service charges would double if it went back to the East Barnwell site. There had been no consultation on this by the Council and residents had been ignored. She was sad to see this and urged the committee to include Seesaw Pre-school in the East Barnwell site at their current rates.
4.	Rev. Stuart Wood, Barnwell Baptist Church, Cambridge	1. The County Council has a requirement to provide 'suitable' provision. I would like, using recent history, to demonstrate that the methodology employed to decide what is suitable is flawed.

	Name	Question/ comments
		<p>2. I would like to report that in a recent conversation with a Council Officer, I was advised that “virtually all, if not all” early years settings in the County have a ‘less than best’ rent arrangement. To therefore use this as leverage to keep SeeSaw on the current site, is a flawed argument.</p> <p>3. I would also like to point out that SeeSaw Pre-School is being prejudiced because of the hard work of Staff, Trustees and parents in making the move not have an impact.</p> <p>4. I would finally like to point out that in two meetings we had with Council Officers, one of the issues raised and acknowledged to us in those meetings has not been taken into account in this report.</p> <p>[Received a written response]</p>

Non-agenda item

	Name	Question/ comments
1.	James Boyle, St Neots resident	<p>A proposal to build a new Secondary School in St Neots was approved by the DfE in 2017 (Free School Wave 12). The proposal was put ‘on pause’ in December 2017 to allow time for critical issues to be resolved at the two existing secondary schools in St Neots. The two schools (Ernulf Academy and Longsands Academy) were subsequently transferred to a new Multi Academy Trust in September 2018.</p> <p>Contrary to some reports, the St Neots Free School project was not cancelled and has remained ‘on pause’ at the pre-opening stage. The DfE have recently indicated to me that they are now “reviewing basic need in the planning area for the proposed St Neots Academy and are continuing to work closely with the proposer group, Advantage Schools, to consider options.”</p> <p>My concern is that the CCC is not engaged with this proposal and indeed seems determined to pursue its own preferred option of expanding capacity at the existing schools even though there is no obvious source of funds for this expansion. The recent feasibility study into expanding secondary school provision in St Neots only looked at the CCC’s preferred option.</p>

	Name	Question/ comments
		<p>I note that another wave 12 free school project – St Bede’s in Soham – was recently pushed through by the DfE without the support of the CCC. This is not ideal but in justifying this action, Baroness Berridge argued that "a new school operated by an Ofsted-rated outstanding provider will help raise standards" and would "offer parents more of a choice". These arguments would certainly apply to St Neots where both secondary schools are now rated as 'requires improvement' and are run by the same MAT.</p> <p>Can the CCC please confirm that, rather than getting into a position where the DfE forces the St Neots Free School Project through, they will engage with the DfE in progressing the project and that the proposal will be properly evaluated by the Children and Young People Committee before the CCC commits to any alternative plans to increase secondary school places in the town. Alternatively, if the CCC is not engaging with the DfE on this, I would respectfully ask 'Why not'?</p> <p>[Received a written response]</p>