

Children and Young People Committee Minutes

Date: 18 January 2022

Time: 2.00 –3.45pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon

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

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

Apologies: Councillor K Prentice
Councillor F Thompson, substituted by Councillor A Bradnam
F Vettese – Co-opted member

Also present: Councillor J French (Item 3 only: Petitions and Public Questions)

45. Chair's Announcements

The Chair and Committee Members paid warm tribute to Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Executive Director for People and Communities, and Lou Williams, Director of Children's Services, who would both be retiring from the Council during the next month.

Charlotte Black was welcomed to her first meeting of the Children and Young People Committee as the new Executive Director for People and Communities.

46. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received as recorded above.

Councillor Sharp advised that his appointment as a Local Authority Governor at Burrough Green C of E Primary School was included under Item 8: Committee Agenda Plan, Training Plan, Committee Appointments and LA Governor Nominations and Appointments (minute 53 below refers). He had previously been appointed as a Foundation Governor and this was included on his Register of Interest.

47. Minutes – 30 November 2022 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2022 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair. Councillor Bradnam abstained from the vote.

The action log was reviewed. A Member expressed disappointment that, despite assurances, the Household Support Fund had not been spent in full. The Chair stated that applications were still being processed until March.

48. Petitions and Public Questions

One petition was received titled 'School for Children with Special Needs' from Amy Loveridge, a local resident. There were no public questions.

Ms Loveridge, the petition organiser and a local resident, was unable to attend the meeting so, with the agreement of the petitioner, the Chair exercised her discretion to invite Councillor French to present the petition as a local Member for March North and Waldersey.

Councillor French explained that there were many children with special educational needs in Fenland and that many of these children had to travel miles on their own in taxis to access appropriate educational provision. If a planning application for 2,000 new homes in March was approved there would be more children in the area with special educational needs and she hoped that the needs of those children would also be taken into account. At present, there was one special school in Ramsey, but this was still a long way for children in March to travel. Councillor French asked the Committee to listen to the petition and to take this into consideration when looking at new schools in March.

There were no questions of clarification from Members. The Chair stated that the petition organiser would receive a written response to the petition within 10 working days of the meeting and that this would be copied to Committee members and local Members. In the interim, she asked officers to give a brief outline of the position.

The Service Director for Education stated that Cambridgeshire had seen exceptional growth in recent years in the number of children with additional needs and Education, Health and Care Plans. This had led to unprecedented pressure on places in specialist settings. In common with other local authorities, the Council faced an extensive budget gap on its high needs block funding and this was expected to reach £40m by the end of the financial year. The draft capital programme presented to the Children and Young People (CYP) in November 2021 included £37m for the expansion of specialist provision across the county. Sufficiency planning work had identified the need for additional places in specialist settings across the county in the next 10 years, including for those children in the Fenland area. A new SEND school in Fenland might therefore be needed, but the strategic direction for Cambridgeshire was to find solutions that could be implemented quickly to ensure that children benefit as soon as possible. The development and planning of a new school could take between three to five years. At the October CYP meeting, Officers had set out plans to create an additional 200 Special Educational Needs places within mainstream schools or other accommodation within the Council's or school estate to meet existing need for specialist placements for children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs). £2.6m had been provisionally allocated to these schemes. Conversations had also taken place with education leaders in Fenland to see how the capacity of placements in the local area could be increased. It was not practical or affordable to have a

special school in every community across the county, but the Council did have a network of excellent area special schools which provided local coverage across the county. While the Council was fully focussed on ensuring provision as close to home as possible, there would always be some cases where more specialist support was required and it was not possible to find appropriate provision locally.

49. Schools and Early Years Funding Arrangements 2022-23

The Committee considered a report setting out the 2022-23 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation for Cambridgeshire which had been published by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2021. This included a net increase of around £16.6m in the Schools Block for 2022/23 due to additional investment through the national funding formula and a net increase in pupil numbers in the year from October 2020. The Department for Education (DfE) had also announced additional supplementary funding allocated by grant. Based on an initial allocation exercise this was expected to be around £12m for Cambridgeshire, but the exact figure would be confirmed later this term. Schools had been consulted on the proposed funding formula in October 2021 and following initial modelling a £41k funding gap had been identified. The Schools Forum had agreed proposals to address that shortfall in principle when it had met the previous week. Appendix A set out the proposed 2022/23 funding formula factors and rates, but allocations would not be finalised until the Education, Skills and Funding Agency validated Officers' submission. In relation to Early Years, an uplift of 21p per hour for funded two-year olds and 17p per hour for all three and four year olds would be passported in full to providers. Whilst the Government settlement for Cambridgeshire did provide an uplift for schools it did not address the historic underfunding which had taken place over many years. The Early Years uplift was welcome, but this remained a challenging sector. The High Needs Block settlement was also positive, but there was still a significant deficit in this area and it would remain an area of focus for the Committee in the coming year. Officers were meeting termly with the DfE to discuss the pressures the Council faced and were working in collaboration with other shire counties to highlight the particular challenges which they faced.

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

- Expressed the hope that sparsity funding would address some of the issues faced by small schools. Officers stated that the Council wanted to sustain as many schools as it could in rural communities. More schools would be qualifying for sparsity funding this time, but this changed year on year due to pupil numbers. The Schools Forum had agreed to taper the allocation so that more schools would benefit.
- Welcomed the improved settlement from Government following years of lobbying, but commented that more was still needed to address historic under-funding and the current pressures on the High Needs Block.
- Asked for more information around the breakdown of funding allocations. Officers stated that when school level budgets were published all of the factors would be broken down and would therefore show the individual allocations in

respect of the minimum per pupil levels and the minimum funding guarantee. Officers offered a breakdown of the figures outside of the meeting.
Action

- Thanked Officers for the training on schools funding which had recently been provided to committee members and for the useful information contained on the Council website.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the formula factors and unit values to be applied in the local Cambridgeshire funding formula, for primary and secondary mainstream schools as set out in Appendix A.
- b) Approve the proposed hourly rates for Early Years settings as detailed in section 5.2.

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

50. Determined Admissions Arrangements for the 2023-24 Academic Year

The Committee was advised that the Local Authority (LA) was required to publish information annually on admissions arrangements for maintained schools. Details of the engagement and consultation arrangements with families and stakeholders were set out in the report. Two changes to published admissions numbers (PAN) and one change to catchment were proposed as follows:

1. Spring Meadow Infants School - PAN reduction from 120 to 60: One objection had been received from the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT) which suggested this could lead to Isle of Ely Primary expanding their entry to 3 form entry (FE) and suggest a middle ground of 90.

The Local Authority response was that there was no evidence to support a move to a PAN of 90. Reception data forecasts remained below 60 for the next five years and the proposed change reflected that position. DEMAT had expressed concern that the LA would ask the Isle of Ely Primary to take a third form of entry in preference to Spring Meadow Infants, but Officers had advised DEMAT that this was not the case and decisions would depend solely on where demand was located.

2. Newnham Croft Primary School – PAN reduction from 34 to 30: No objections received.
3. Alconbury Primary School - proposed change to the school's catchment area to include Upton: No objections received.

Local Members had had been advised of the proposed changes and invited to share their views. Written representations had been received from Cllr Gardner as follows:

‘As the Local member for Alconbury I fully support the change in the catchment area for Alconbury school to include Upton. Parents in Upton naturally want their children to attend Alconbury Primary as it is the nearest school. The nearest services for Upton are in Alconbury. Both Alconbury and Upton are in the same County Council and District Council Divisions. Therefore, Upton residents naturally look to Alconbury, rather than Sawtry. I wholly heartedly support this change.’

A Member asked at what point local members were consulted about proposed changes in their divisions. The Service Director for Education stated that local members would be advised of proposed changes to maintained schools within their own and neighbouring divisions as part of the standard consultation arrangements. Where Officers were made aware of proposed changes by academy schools this information would also be shared with local Members, but those changes were a matter for the relevant academy trusts.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Determine the co-ordinated qualifying scheme and admission arrangements for all schools for whom the Council, as the Local Authority, is the admission authority as published in the consultation documents for admission to school in 2023/24.
- b) Support the proposal that a full and comprehensive review of the determined admission arrangements for all own admission authority schools is undertaken. This should include the published definitions of existing school catchment areas and admission policies for schools with a sixth form. Any issues, or concerns should be highlighted, recorded and shared with the respective admission authority for the school with a view to these being addressed immediately, where they are in breach of legislation, or as part of the annual consultation process for admission to school in 2024/25 which will commence in the autumn term of 2022.

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

51. Children’s Services Feedback Annual Report 2020-21

The Committee was reminded that it was a statutory requirement to produce an annual feedback report for Children’s Services and for the local authority to have a dedicated customer care manager. The report covered the feedback received, including both compliments and complaints, and the learning which had been taken from these. Statutory complaints related specifically to children’s social care whilst all other areas were covered by the corporate complaints process. The complaints process did not cover adoptions as this was a judicial process. During the period covered by the 2020/21 annual report the majority of compliments had related to SEND response whilst 188 statutory complaints had been received with the highest volume in relation to children in care and care leavers. The specific detail of complaints was confidential to the complainant and so was not included in the report.

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

- Accepted that complaints were sensitive and that it would not be appropriate to disclose information which would make the complainant or their circumstances identifiable. However, in future they would like to see reference made to the types of complaints received for balance. Officers stated that the format of the annual report was set out in Government guidance. However, information was included around how complaints were addressed which was indicative of the types of complaints which had been received. The report also indicated which teams and areas of work received the most complaints.
- Commended the high number of compliments received during such a challenging period. The Vice Chair asked that the Committee's thanks be passed on to the teams concerned for their hard work.
- Asked how learning from complaints was prioritised and disseminated. Officers stated that quarterly internal reports were produced and that learning was implemented throughout the year in order to make continuous improvements to services.
- Commented that it would be helpful for reports to be brought before the Committee more quickly following the period being covered to ensure any issues raised were considered in a timely way.
- Expressed concern that a number of concerns had been expressed in relation to the process for recruiting in-house foster carers, given the importance which the Council attached to attracting new foster carers as well as retaining those already providing this vital service. The Director of Children's Services stated that he would be confident in the experience of foster carer applicants going forward.
- Noted that a number of compliments had been received in relation to the staff at Child and Family Centres (previously called Children's Centres). The Member expressed themselves to be reassured that these centres were still providing valuable support to families during difficult times, including through their online offer. The Chair commended the dedication and hard work of the staff involved.
- Officers confirmed that the welcome pack for families referenced at paragraph 2.35 had been reviewed by service users and was also available in non-electronic formats.
- Asked for more information around the reasons for complaints being re-opened. Officers stated that this often arose when a complainant accepted some of the information provided in relation to a Stage 1 complaint, but also sought further information or clarification.

With the consent of the meeting, it was agreed that the next report should be requested within twelve months, rather than in twelve months, to ensure any issues which arose were considered in a timely manner.

It was resolved unanimously to consider the content of the report and appendices and request a further report within twelve months.

52. People and Communities Risk Register

The Committee reviewed those elements of the People and Communities risk register which related to its areas of responsibility and the controls and mitigations which had been put in place to address identified risks. A distinction was drawn in the report between those risks relating to business as usual and those which related specifically to the Covid pandemic. The Committee's attention was drawn to the national and regional shortage of qualified social workers. Services were still being delivered to ensure that clients were safe and a recruitment campaign was underway, together with a number of changes designed to make Cambridgeshire a more attractive employer.

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

- Suggested that risks and mitigations might be presented alongside for greater clarity. Officers acknowledged that there were different ways of presenting risk registers and undertook to look at how this information was presented in the next iteration of the report. **Action**
- Noted that it had been agreed in November to recommend to the Strategy and Resources Committee that a risk be identified in the corporate risk register around the non-delivery of free schools. The Service Director for Education undertook to confirm that this had been done. **Action**
- Noted the risks associated with the recruitment and retention of social workers and asked what confidence officers had about the proposed mitigations given the implications for safeguarding. The Executive Director for People and Communities confirmed that this was one of the biggest challenges being faced and that she would be chairing the internal steering group working on this. The Director of Children's Service stated that this was a challenge across the Eastern region and nationally. A small number of applications were being received for permanent vacancies and the advertising campaign was being monitored and refreshed. The sourcing of supply teachers in school was also challenging at present.
- Commented that it was important to emphasise career opportunities as well as the financial package available to social workers in Cambridgeshire and asked about the impact of Government immigration policy and the number of overseas staff. They also asked about the development of community capacity, although noting that the voluntary sector remained stretched by its contribution to the Covid response. The Director for Children's Services stated that immigration policy would have less implications for the recruitment of qualified social workers as the Council tried to avoid recruiting from countries where these skills were in short supply. It could though impact on other areas such as childcare providers and non-qualified staff where staff have been recruited previously from overseas.

- Commented that it would be helpful for the report to contain the ratings from the previous year to indicate the direction of travel. Another Member asked that senior officers should look at the presentation of risk registers Council-wide to make them more meaningful for Members. The Executive Director for People and Communities undertook to share this feedback with colleagues. **Action**
- Officers confirmed that early help and preventative services remained central to the Council's approach to improving outcomes for children and their families.
- Officers stated that the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee was the lead body on Think Communities, but that any issues relevant to CYP could be included in the relevant service director's report.

It was resolved unanimously to note the People and Communities risk register

53. Committee Agenda Plan, Training Plan, Committee Appointments and Local Authority Governor Nominations and Appointments

Councillor Sharp made a declaration of interest at the start of the meeting in relation to his appointment as a Local Authority Governor at Burrough Green C of E Primary School (minute 46 above refers). He had previously been appointed as a Foundation Governor and this was included on his Register of Interest.

The Committee noted an additional meeting date of 17 May 2022. Calendar invitations would follow.

Members provided positive feedback on the recent training sessions on finance and special educational needs and disabilities.

Local authority school governor nominations and appointments were noted. The Chair placed on record her thanks to all those who gave up their time to act as school governors and who made such an important contribution to the County's schools, noting that several members of the committee also served as school governors.

A Member noted that one vacancy remained for a committee appointment to the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. The Chair stated that this would be raised at the next Spokes meeting.

(Chair)