

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 10 October 2017

Time: 2.00pm – 4.25pm

Present: Councillors S Bywater (Chairman), A Costello, P Downes, L Every, A Hay, S Hoy (Vice Chairwoman), L Nethsingha (from 2.20pm), S Taylor, J Whitehead and J Wisson

Apologies: Co-opted members A Read and F Vettese

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were noted as recorded above. Apologies were received from Councillor Nethsingha advising Members that she would be arriving a little late.

There were no declarations of interest.

40. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2017 AND ACTION LOG

The minutes of the meeting on 12 September 2017 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

The Action Log was noted.

41. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

KEY DECISION

42. STRATEGY FOR EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN ST NEOTS

The Committee received a report seeking its endorsement of a strategy for education across St Neots. This was designed to address the future need for new school places arising from the Eastern Expansion development site and increasing demand for primary school places in the existing community of Loves Farm.

The Director of Learning stated that there had been significant growth in St Neots since 2009. The Council had previously agreed to meet the increased demand for secondary school places by expanding Longsands Academy and Ernulf Academy. However, in April 2017 the Department for Education (DfE) had approved a new secondary free school in St Neots to pre-implementation stage under Wave 12 of the centrally delivered Free Schools programme, with a proposed opening date of 2018. With regard to primary provision, the Committee was already aware of the over subscription for places at the Round House Primary Academy. Officers had been working closely with elected Members and the local community to address this issue. Mobile classrooms would be used from September 2018 to provide additional places for the academic year 2018/19 pending completion of the building work required to provide permanent additional

accommodation. Details of the permanent solution could not yet be made public due to the requirement for commercial confidentiality during negotiations, but the Chairman and local Member were being kept fully informed of developments and local residents would be informed as soon as possible.

The following comments were made in discussion of the report and in response to questions from Members:

- A Member welcomed the strategy, but commented that place provision in St Neots felt a little disjointed at present. They acknowledged that this was often the case when initially responding to new developments;
- Officers confirmed that Ernulf Academy had spare capacity available in the immediate future, but that when the Eastern Expansion was completed additional places in the 11-16 age range would still be needed. Expansion of Ernulf Academy could be considered in the context of meeting this need, but it would need to take account of the additional places which would be offered by the new Free School approved by the DfE. Discussions were continuing with the Regional Schools Commissioner on this. A Member expressed concern about the impact on existing secondary and sixth form provision in St Neots if the proposed new Free School was to proceed;
- A Member expressed concern that the Free School proposal approved by the DfE was for a four form entry school when it was generally recognised that the minimum size for a secondary school to offer students a full range of educational and social opportunities was a six form entry, with eight form entry being preferable. The Member recognised that the Local Authority was bound by the decisions made by the DfE to approve the establishment of new Free Schools, but felt that a four form entry secondary school was not in students' best interests and that public awareness of this should be raised. It was agreed that officers would write to the DfE Free School Unit to express the Committee's view that a four form entry secondary school was educationally unviable;
(**Action:** Director of Learning)
- A Member commented that the Council was responsible for the wellbeing of young people in Cambridgeshire and that this was not best served by DfE approval being given to open new free schools where there was no basic need, or to open small secondary schools which could not offer the range of opportunities afforded by a larger secondary school;
- A Member noted that the Committee would be receiving a report on revisions to the methodology used for estimating demand for educational provision arising from new housing developments (known as multipliers) in December 2017 and emphasised the importance of getting this right to meet the needs of local families. Officers acknowledged the importance of this as discussions with developers about Section 106 funding could only be based on the multipliers in place at the time.

Summing up, the Chairman noted a shared concern within the Committee that new school places should be provided in those areas with a demonstrable need for additional places to make most efficient use of the limited resources available.

It was resolved to:

- a) note and endorse the strategy for education across St Neots to address the need for future new places in response to the:
- growth arising from the Eastern Expansion development site; and
 - increased demand for primary school places in the existing community of Loves Farm.

DECISIONS

43. FREE SCHOOL PROPOSALS

The Committee received a report setting out the latest position in relation to Wave 11 and 12 free school applications in Cambridgeshire which had been approved to pre-implementation stage by the Department for Education (DfE). The report also described the process adopted by the Council to seek an academy or free school sponsor for a new special school to serve Alconbury Weald and the wider north Huntingdon area.

The Director of Learning stated that difficulties persuading the DfE's Free School Group to recognise a basic need for school places where less than 60 Reception places would be filled on opening had led to the Active Learning Trust (ALT) withdrawing its application to promote a new primary school in Chatteris as a Free School. To meet the need for places the Council was working to acquire a suitable site locally to deliver a school to open in September 2019. Officers would shortly be entering discussions with ALT about running this new site as a second campus to Kingsfield Primary School, which was already sponsored by the ALT. Officers were waiting to hear whether this proposal was acceptable to the DfE.

During discussion it was noted that:

- The DfE had sought further information about basic need and likely opening dates as part of the Wave 12 application round and had stated that these would be considered in the decision making process. Officers confirmed that they had already reported the Committee's disquiet that the DfE had approved some free school applications where there was no basic need for additional places and refused some applications in areas where a basic need did exist. Officers would re-iterate these concerns in their continuing dialogue with the DfE and the Regional Schools Commissioner;
- A Member stated that it was unrealistic to delay work on establishing a new school until 60 Reception places could be filled at the time of opening. Officers stated that the DfE judged it to be economically inefficient to open a new school below that number and deemed it inappropriate to make use of temporary accommodation as an interim measure to allow opening before 60 places could be filled. The Local Authority's view was that modern temporary accommodation could provide an appropriate and suitable option to meet the short-term needs of growing communities;
- The Vice Chairwoman noted that the DfE was conducting a site search for a free 11-16 secondary school in Wisbech sponsored by St Bede's Inter Church School Trust. This was despite a site having previously been identified on local authority land which was acceptable to local residents. It was noted that there were no similar inter-denominational faith schools in the north of the county and that this would offer a wider range of choice to parents in the Wisbech area. The Chairman asked

officers to ensure that developments in relation to the St Bede's proposals were reported to the Committee going forward and to provide clarification of its admissions criteria;

(**Action:** Strategic and Policy Places Planning Manager)

- Officers confirmed that they were developing proposals to address basic need and condition issues in Sawtry's primary schools, and at Sawtry Village Academy. A report would be submitted to the Committee in December 2017 for consideration. A Member commented that it was a great pity that Sawtry Village Academy was continuing to experience a drop in student numbers as its students were achieving good results. Every effort should be made to support Sawtry Village Academy to bring its accommodation and facilities up to the desired level. The Chairman asked officers to draft a letter to the Secretary of State for Education endorsing the work being done by local MPs to seek the additional funding needed to bring Sawtry Village Academy's buildings and facilities up to the required levels;
(**Action:** Director of Learning)
- A Member noted the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner's head teacher reference group (Head Teacher Board) in deciding which sponsor to recommend to the Secretary of State for Education in relation to the competition to sponsor Alconbury Weald Special School. The Member noted that some of those head teachers might be members of other Trusts and questioned the validity and transparency of their involvement. Officers stated that they presumed that any conflicts of interest would be declared and published in the usual way.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the latest position regarding Wave 11 and Wave 12 free schools in Cambridgeshire;
- b) note the progress of the competition to identify a preferred sponsor for the new special school required at Alconbury Weald.

44. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SELF EVALUATION

The Director of Learning stated that the School Improvement Self-Evaluation was a working document which was updated every six months. Performance was evaluated against the Ofsted inspection framework, but in practice there was no regular cycle of Inspections for school improvement. Instead, inspections were generally conducted only in areas where practice was deemed to be either particularly effective or poor. Cambridgeshire had not yet been inspected under the current arrangements, but a peer review was scheduled for early 2018.

Members offered the following comments in discussion of the report:

- The report ran to 51 pages, with the full agenda for the meeting containing 234 pages. It was important to get the balance right between providing Members with sufficient information to make well-informed decisions, but without providing so much detail that salient points could get lost. Officers noted that the cover paper summarised the Self-Evaluation, with the Self-evaluation itself being an appendix, but agreed that further consideration would be given as to how these documents could be presented;

- A Member noted the comment that officers' concerns about under-performance in secondary schools and academies were raised promptly with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), but questioned what happened after that. They highlighted the important role of Governing Bodies in exercising oversight of school performance. Officers stated that there would always be a follow-up discussion with the RSC in such cases and if it was felt the concerns were not being adequately addressed the matter would be raised with the Educational Achievement Board. The Director of Learning offered an assurance that clear and strong links existed with all maintained schools' Governing Bodies with regards to the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities. There were also good links with Trust Boards and academy local governing bodies, although this was an area that required further development because of the variety of models and the rate of change;
- The Committee noted that the Executive Director for People and Communities had been tasked in her absence at the last meeting to suggest to the Social Mobility Opportunity Fund Strategy Group that some funds from a successful bid might be used to fund research into the causes of the gap in educational achievement between those in vulnerable groups and their peers. Members looked forward to hearing the outcome of this on her return from leave. The Chairman and Lead Members would also consider whether a workshop or report on learning within the Council in relation to the achievement of vulnerable groups would be helpful;
(**Action:** Director of Learning)
- A Member suggested that a report be brought to Committee on Opportunity Area Funding and the Aim High Initiative.
(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer)
- A Member commented that actions described in the report often started with the word 'continue'. Officers stated that this use of language was misleading; they were always looking for new and better ways of doing things and did not continue unsuccessful action
- Appendix 2, Paragraph 2.6: A copy of the Cambridgeshire Academy Protocol would be circulated to the Committee for information;
(**Action:** Director of Learning)
- Officers confirmed that an analysis of the information about the use of the pupil premium in different schools had been conducted using the information which all schools were required to include on their websites. More detailed information about the achievement of vulnerable groups would be brought to the Committee in December, but it appeared that in more affluent areas the pupil premium tended to be spent on whole school enrichment and extra-curricular activities whereas in less affluent areas it tended to be targeted towards individual pupils. Members emphasised the importance of identifying which interventions worked best.

It was resolved to:

- a) note and comment on the findings.

45. SERVICE COMMITTEE REVIEW OF DRAFT REVENUE BUSINESS PLANNING PROPOSALS FOR 2018-19 TO 2022-23

The Committee received a report providing an overview of the draft Business Plan Revenue Proposals within the remit of the Children and Young People Committee. The report set out the financial challenge faced by the Council and the measures taken to date to address this. In order to deliver a balanced budget in the context of the cost increases identified and reduced central Government funding, savings or additional income of £37.2 million was required in 2018/19 and total savings or additional income of £85 million across the full five years of the Business Plan. To release the further savings and create the additional income needed future plans were focusing on fundamental transformations to the way in which the organisation worked, including targeted work through Outcome Focused Reviews. Work was continuing to develop the business cases included in the report and further proposals would be brought back to the Committee in December 2017. The revised proposals and full set of tables will also be presented to the General Purposes Committee for the first time in December.

The Chairman noted that a request to speak on this item had been received from Neil Perry. A copy of the questions submitted by Mr Perry had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting for information.

Mr Perry emphasised the importance of early intervention in improving children's social, emotional and educational outcomes. The financial cost of late intervention had been calculated at around £17 billion annually and this did not include the human cost to the children and young people concerned. Expenditure on Children's Centres in Cambridgeshire was already lower than in many areas whilst the costs of caring for the county's Looked After Children continued to rise. Mr Perry emphasised the value of investing in community-based early intervention to reduce long-term need and the contribution made at Romsey Mill Children's Centre.

The Chairman responded to the questions which Mr Perry had provided in advance of the meeting (copy attached at Appendix 1). A Member commented that these represented fine words, but were not much good when funding was being cut. They felt that the changes proposed to Children's Centres represented a significant narrowing of funding to a targeted pool alongside many other cuts to early intervention work in the county. They commented that there was a need to be thoughtful in balancing the words of the Council with its actions. Another Member highlighted the long-term financial and human cost of choosing not to invest in early intervention, describing a longitudinal study conducted in the USA.

Mr Perry stated that he did not feel that the Chairman's answers fully addressed the questions he had submitted. The Chairman invited him to clarify which points he felt had not been addressed so that a written response could be provided.

The Chairman noted that Councillor Crawford had requested to speak to this item in her capacity as a Local Member. Councillor Crawford expressed concern that figures relating to Children's Centres had been placed before the Committee in advance of the discussion of future arrangements for Children's Centres which would be taking place at the meeting of Council on 17 October 2017. She commented that budgets required a risk assessment and expressed concern about the lack of facts and figures relating to proposals for Romsey Mill. She commented on the importance of early intervention to support families and noted that it cost approximately £1 million pounds take five children

into residential care. She urged caution about setting a budget which might cause crisis situations in the longer term.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Crawford for her comments. He noted that the report before the Committee was for initial comment rather than for decision and that there was no suggestion of pre-judging the decision about Children's Centres to be taken by Council the following week. The Chairman noted that Councillor Scutt had also requested to speak to this item as a Local Member and invited her to address the Committee.

Councillor Scutt stated that the proposals represented a funding cut which would undercut and undermine services. She stated that cuts to budgets for Children's Centres and to services for Looked After Children should not be decided by the Committee, but by the full Council. The Council needed to recognise that some residents were hugely disadvantaged. Councillor Scutt questioned how realistic it was to propose saving money by reducing the number of Looked After Children when the number of Looked After Children was continuing to increase. She felt that the proposals were not about caring for abused or vulnerable children, but about cutting costs.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding responded that there was no question of leaving children and young people in unsafe situations to avoid the costs associated with taking them into the Local Authority's care. However, it was in the child's best interests if the time they spent within the care system was kept to a minimum. This would also reduce costs.

The Chairman noted that Councillor Richards had also asked to speak to this item in her capacity as a Local Member and invited her to address the Committee. Councillor Richards expressed concern about the proposed funding cuts and questioned the recent press release issued by the Council which referred to the effectiveness of services. Councillor Richards highlighted the increase in numbers of Looked After Children, increased numbers of requests for assessments for Education Health and Care Plans and difficulties accessing special educational needs assessments. She commented that cuts to the Looked After Children budget the previous year had proved unsustainable and expressed opposition to the proposed cuts to funding to Children's Centres. Councillor Richards stated that she was aware of a primary school aged child in Cambridge City with no school place because none were unavailable.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that the Council was seeking to reduce costs by increasing the number of in-house foster carers. This would enable the Council to provide the same quality of care closer to home and at less cost. It would though take time to recruit and train the new foster carers needed to meet the rising demand for places.

The following points arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions from Members:

- Paragraph 5.3: A Member sought more information about the statement that negotiations were being undertaken with providers to mitigate inflationary pressures. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that the Council spent significant sums with some providers, but that this had not previously been reflected in the rates charged;

- Paragraph 5.3: A Member sought more information about the reference to reducing the impact of parental mental health in risk to children. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that a pilot project was underway with two members of staff working with the mental health trust to identify parents with emerging mental health needs and to facilitate joined-up support from services to reduce the impact on their children;
- Home to School Transport: The Vice Chairwoman noted that she had raised concerns last year on this item in relation to the Meadowgate School footpath and sought clarification of the current proposals in relation to this. The Director of Learning stated his understanding that the footpath issue had been resolved and that the proposals related to contract re-tendering, but he undertook to check the detail and confirm this outside of the meeting;
(**Action:** Director of Learning)
- A Member stated that they were speechless with anger at the proposals and that the Council's decision not to increase Council Tax by 1.99% had led to providing a less good offer to those in need. Proposals to cut costs relating to Looked After Children's services and home to school transport were made year after year and were either not delivered or led to a less good service being provided. The Children's Change programme was leading to further reductions in early intervention services and the Member believed that the strategic review of the Local Authority's provision of services to schools would lead to a further reduction in the learning offer. The Vice Chairwoman commented that if an increase to Council Tax was approved by Council there was no guarantee that it would be directed to Children's Services. Many people welcomed the revised offer proposed in relation to Children's Centres and revisions had been made to the original proposals to address some specific concerns raised during the public consultation process.

Councillor Nethsingha proposed the following resolution, seconded by Councillor Whitehead:

To ask that the General Purposes Committee review its assumptions regarding Council Tax levels and that budget proposals be drawn up on the basis of a 3.99% Council Tax increase, made up of 1.99% Council Tax and 2% Adult Social Care precept. This would cost a Band D household with more than one resident around 50 pence per week.

On being put to the vote, Councillor Nethsingha's resolution was defeated.

- A Member commented that many of the proposals contained in the report were aspirational and that some increases in costs were outside of the control of the Council. They felt that the Council was nearing the end of its ability to deliver further savings through efficiencies whilst maintaining existing levels of service. Some great work was being done by officers year on year to do more with less resources, but there came a point where further efficiencies would have a direct impact on service delivery. The Member felt it was important to acknowledge that this was the case;
- A Member noted that a selection board for the Service Director: Learning post would be held on 31 October 2017 and that the current Director of Learning would be retiring at the end of December 2017. They expressed concern that there was likely to be a period when the post was vacant whilst the new appointee completed their

period of notice. They asked for clarification of the arrangements for the appointment and the interim arrangements should the post be vacant for a period;
(**Action:** Executive Director, People and Communities)

- A Member asked for clarification of costs in relation to traded services. Officers stated that this would be addressed through the Outcome Focused Reviews and would depend on what model was adopted for each traded service going forward. A Member commented that a reduction or loss of music services or outdoor education would be an impoverishment to students;
- A Member expressed concern at the pastoral well-being of Council officers in the context of an increase in shared roles and workload. The Chairman acknowledged this point and noted that there were Human Resources processes in place to address staff wellbeing. Employee surveys had recently been conducted amongst County Council and LGSS staff and the outcome of these would be presented to Members in due course.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the overview and context provided for the 2018-19 to 2022-23 Business Plan revenue proposals for the Service;
- b) comment on the draft revenue proposals that are within the remit of the Children and Young People Committee for 2018-19 to 2022-23.

46. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT: AUGUST 2017

The Strategic Finance Business Partner reported a worsening position at the end of August 2017 with a forecast overspend of £3,843k across the People and Communities Directorate compared to a forecast overspend of £3,091k at the end of July 2017. The main pressure related to an increase in numbers of Looked After Children and this increase was expected to continue into September 2017.

The following points arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions from Members:

- The Chairman asked for an update on the weekly Section 20 panel reviews of children on the edge of care which looked specifically at preventing escalation by providing timely and effective interventions. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that the arrangements seemed to be bedding in reasonably well, but that it was important to ensure that this was used appropriately. The Chairman asked that the Committee should be kept informed of how this work was progressing in future reports;
(**Action:** Service Director: Children and Safeguarding/ Strategic Finance Business Partner)
- A Member noted that all targets relating to young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) were currently being met, which represented a great improvement;
- The Chairman highlighted the importance of recognising the good work being done by staff.

It was resolved:

- a) to review and comment on the report.

47. AGENDA PLAN, APPOINTMENTS AND TRAINING PLAN

The Committee reviewed the agenda plan, appointments and training plan. Councillor Wisson advised that she would be stepping down as one of the Committee's three representative to the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). Details of the role and time commitment involved would be circulated to all members of the Committee. Two places were now vacant.

(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer)

No appointment was made to the Outcome Focused Review of Education ICT. Details of the vacancy would be circulated to all Members.

(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer)

It was resolved to:

- a) note the following change to the published agenda plan:
 - New item: December 2017 - Strategy for Educational Provision in Sawtry.
- b) make the following appointments to Outcome Focused Reviews:
 - Outdoor Education; Councillor S Bywater
 - Schools Admissions and Education Transport: Councillor S Hoy
 - The Learning Directorate: Councillor L Every
- c) to appoint Councillor P Downes to the Educational Achievement Board;
- d) circulate details of the Outcome Focused Review: Education ICT appointment to Members and invite expressions of interest;
- e) note the Committee training plan.

48. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee would meet next on Tuesday 14 November at 2.00pm in the Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge.

Chairman
(date)