

Children and Young People Committee: Minutes

Date: 29 June 2021

Time: 2.13pm – 3.50pm

Venue: University of Cambridge Sports Centre, Philippa Fawcett Drive,
Cambridge CB3 0AS

Present: Councillors M Atkins, A Bulat, S Bywater, C Daunton, B Goodliffe (chair),
J Gowing, A Hay, S Hoy, J King, M King (vice chair), K Prentice, A Sharp,
P Slatter, S Taylor and F Thompson

Co-opted Members:

Canon A Read, Church of England Diocese of Ely
F Vettese, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

Apologies: Councillor D Ambrose Smith, substituted by Councillor J Gowing

1. Notification of the Chair and Vice Chair

Councillor Bryony Goodliffe was appointed Chair of the Children and Young People Committee and Councillor Maria King appointed Vice Chair by Council on 18 May 2021 by Council for the municipal year 2021/22.

2. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

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

The Chair offered congratulations to Mr Read on his appointment as Canon.

3. Minutes – 9 March 2021 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

A public question had been received on the action log from Mrs Lara Davenport-Ray, a resident of St Neots. A copy of the question had been circulated to committee members electronically in advance of the meeting and published on the [Council's website](#).

Mrs Davenport-Ray expressed concerns around secondary school provision in St Neots. Thousands of new homes were planned in developments at Wintringham Park and Loves Farm East and in her view there were insufficient secondary school places available to meet the need these would create. The Hunts Post had reported that the Council had undertaken a feasibility study and the action log showed that a briefing

note had been circulated to members of the committee with the action marked as closed. Mrs Davenport-Ray asked that the feasibility study should be shared with the community if it had been completed. If it was not complete, she asked that the briefing note provided to the committee should be shared in the interests of clarity and transparency.

There were no questions of clarification from the Committee.

The Director of Education stated that the feasibility study was complete. A number of options were available and council officers were working with the academy trusts responsible for Longsands and Ernulf Academies on these. The Department for Education (DfE) had identified a viable site for additional secondary school provision in St Neots and there was an approved free school, but the DfE's plans for this were not yet known. However, the demographic forecasts over the planning period suggested that the existing published admission number (PAN) of 522 pupils would meet future need, with the exception of two school years where pupil numbers would exceed this figure. It was proposed to work with schools on how this could be addressed in the two years concerned. The briefing note provided to the committee would be updated and made publicly available. **Action required**

The action log was noted

4. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions had been received. One public question was heard in relation to secondary school provision in St Neots (minute 3 above refers).

5. Children and Young People Agenda Plan and Training Plan

The Committee reviewed its agenda plan and training plan.

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

- expressed concern about the move to quarterly meetings, noting that the provisional January 2022 meeting date had already been confirmed.
- noted that the safeguarding training being offered as part of the Member Induction Programme was being rescheduled. The Chair commented that there was safeguarding training available on the Council's intranet and asked that a link be sent to committee members. **Action required**

The Committee noted and commented on the agenda plan and training plan.

6. Children's Occupational Therapy in Cambridgeshire Community Services

The Committee's approval was sought to change an interim cash injection into children's occupational therapy services into a permanent and recurring uplift in funding

of £496k from 2022/23 onwards. This request was made in the expectation of a 50% increase in the number of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) being issued during the next 10 years.

A Member expressed their thanks to officers for their hard work on this issue over a considerable period of time.

The Chair stated that she was aware of the interim support which had previously been made available and was pleased to be able to continue that work.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) To note and comment on the contents of the report.
- b) To support the requirement for additional permanent funding of £496,000 from 2022/23 onwards.

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

7. Finance Monitoring Report

The Committee was advised that it was relatively early in the financial year and that most budgets were currently forecasting a balanced position. However, there was a continued pressure on the outdoor education budget which was due primarily to the impact of Covid. Pressure on the dedicated schools grant (DSG) had also been growing for a number of years due to the increasing number of pupils with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and the complexity of their needs. Officers were continuing to work with the Department for Education (DfE) to manage the deficit, but at present there was a cumulative deficit of £26.4m to be carried forward into 2021/22 and an underlying forecast in-year pressure of £11.2m relating to high needs. The Children in Care placement budget was currently within budget and trend analysis showed a continuing reduction in overall numbers of children in care in Cambridgeshire. However, the complexity of the needs of those children and young people who were within the care system was increasing which was leading to increased costs. Appendix C to the report set out a number of proposed changes to the 2021/22 Business Plan Capital Budgets which the Committee was invited to recommend to the Strategy and Resource Committee for approval.

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

- asked about the increase in referrals of children and young people. Officers undertook to provide this information outside of the meeting. **Action required**
- highlighted that the East Cambridgeshire Adult Service Development Grant on page 80 of the agenda document pack stated that the scheme had been removed in February 2020, but it still showed a budget. Officers undertook to look into this outside of the meeting and provide an update. **Action required**
- asked how the cumulative pressure on school places arising from multiple small housing developments was managed. The Service Director for Education stated

that the Council published a tariff-based approach to new developments. Developers were not always asked to make contributions where sufficient school places already existed, but the Education Place Planning Team evaluated all housing schemes to ensure that sufficient places would be available and used community infrastructure levy (CIL) arrangements where appropriate. However, this did not guarantee that a place at a specific school would be available.

- asked for more information on the £11.2m grant funding variance shown in the summary forecast table. Officers stated that an in-year pressure of £11.2m was forecast and that the grant was due to the cumulative deficit on the DSG rolling forward. It was suggested that using more columns in future reports would make this more clear. **Action required**

The Vice Chair thanked the previous Chair Councillor Bywater for the review of outdoor education which had been carried out previously. Outdoor education created a financial pressure on council funds, but was also of great social value to children and young people across the county. Finding a sustainable way forward on this issue was a priority for the Joint Administration.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Review and comment on the report.
- b) Note the Section 256 arrangement in respect of Overnight and Residential Short Breaks.
- c) Recommend the changes to the capital programme budgets from the Business Plan as summarised in Appendix C for approval by the Strategy and Resource Committee.

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

8. Service Director Report: Education

The Service Director for Education stated that the number of Covid cases was continuing to increase and preventative measures remained in place which adhered to national guidance. School attendance within Cambridgeshire remained good and was within the top 10% nationally. He described the response to the Covid crisis from Cambridgeshire's school leaders and early years settings as magnificent. Schools were working hard to support GCSE and A level students and the committee would be provided with an overview of the teacher assessed grades (TAGs), but there would be no nationally published results. He anticipated another difficult summer for those involved in education, but there was a real commitment from staff to make support available to those students who might not achieve the results they hoped for.

The Council continued to face significant financial challenges in relation to education. Discussions with the Department for Education (DfE) had continued throughout Covid and the Department was comfortable with how the Council was managing its education funding, but the actual level of funding remained low and the pressures were significant. This included a significant increase in the number of families seeking education, health

and care plans (EHCPs) for their children and proposals would be brought to the committee in the autumn seeking to meet need earlier in order to improve children's outcomes without the need for an EHCP. Data was also being collated on gaps in learning. A mixed picture was emerging which was being explored with the Regional Schools Commissioner and partner organisations including the Diocesan bodies. The outcome of this work would also be brought to a future meeting.

Small schools remained an issue of particular concern and it was hoped that Government would respond to this challenge through the sparsity factor. Cambridgeshire remained one of the lowest funded local authorities for education and there was a need to continue to press for sufficient levels of funding to ensure equality of opportunity across the area.

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

- noted that the Children's Commissioner had highlighted the impact of Covid on children's mental health and asked what was being done to address this in Cambridgeshire. Officers stated that there had been investment in this area due to Covid and that the Psychology team was rolling out support to children in schools. Support was also being provided to school staff and headteachers in recognition of the pressures which they faced. The Executive Director: People and Communities stated that this issue was a big challenge. The Council had recently re-commissioned its mental health services and a leaflet would be issued setting out the new arrangements. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust (CPFT) was the lead provider and was working with the voluntary sector to create a seamless pathway and one stop shop for services.
- asked about breakfast club provision and sufficiency and asked for a list of the schools which offered this. Officers undertook to provide details and stated that provision was being monitored. **Action required**
- asked about the impact of the Fenland Opportunity Area. Officers stated that, after a slow start, there had been a significant improvement over time in the collegiate way headteachers were working together and on social, emotional and mental health work. A local member commented that was not necessarily their experience.
- asked whether the need for whole class bubbles to self-isolate when a Covid case was reported could be replaced with daily testing. Officers stated that they were awaiting Government direction on this.
- asked how many small schools there were in Cambridgeshire and where they were located. Officers stated that there was no absolute definition, but it was generally accepted to be schools with less than 100 children on roll. Work was being taken forward to support shared resources and procurement exercises where appropriate to drive down costs. These small schools were located across the county and details would be provided outside of the meeting. **Action required**
- noted the Joint Administration's stated aim to improve the relationship between the local authority and academies and asked what the relationship was like currently.

The Service Director for Education stated that the relationship was strong and collaborative.

- asked what further work was being done in relation to the findings of the local authority survey of schools. Officers stated that this would focus on clear school improvement priorities and the role of the local authority in relation to both maintained and academy schools. A report would be brought to the committee later in the year.
- queried the maximum possible deficit on the dedicated schools grant (DSG) over three to five years, the estimated cost of financing the deficit and how some local authorities had managed to have their deficit written off. The Service Director for Education stated that the cumulative deficit across that period was likely to be in the region of £60m. There was high demand at present and this was particularly evident in relation to social, emotional and mental health needs relating to Covid. The Council's practice in seeking better value for services was in line with that of other local authorities, but he was not willing to compromise children's outcomes which remained the top priority. The Committee might wish to consider how the Council engaged with Government on this issue in future. The cost of financing the deficit was currently around £200k per year, but this was changing all the time. There was no published process for having the deficit written off. Instead, local authorities were invited to apply and Cambridgeshire had not been invited.

The Vice Chair stated that Government funding of the High Needs Block would be a top level challenge and a priority going forward. The Joint Administration was keen to work with all Members, local politicians and families on this and to unite to deliver tangible solutions.

The report was noted.

9. Supporting Vulnerable Families

A revised report was published on 28 June 2021 following a Government announcement on funding and a copy was circulated to all members of the Committee electronically. The report contained a revised recommendation which invited the Committee to consider whether to refer a request for up to £537k of funding to the Strategy and Resource Committee to fund supermarket vouchers and wider support to families during the summer holidays.

The Council had been running a range of schemes since Christmas to support children and families. With the Government's furlough scheme drawing to a close and an increase in deprivation being seen it was proposed to continue to offer support to families across the summer holidays at a rate of £3 per day. The same eligibility criteria would apply with those in receipt of free school meals, pupil premium payments and post-16 bursaries all eligible for support. In addition, it was proposed to offer wider support to those families just above the threshold to receive free school meals but who were also struggling. The remaining monies from previous voucher schemes had been used in this way and it was proposed that this should continue. In addition, 2000 places

would be offered through the Holiday Activities and Food Fund (HAF) in addition to the voucher scheme.

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

- asked whether there were any limitations on what the vouchers could be used to buy, for example alcohol or tobacco products. Officers stated that eight supermarkets were taking part in the scheme. Of these, two placed no restrictions on what the vouchers could be used to buy.
- commented that the requirement to wear branded uniform at some schools created additional expense for parents and asked whether the Council had any influence on this. Officers stated that this was an area of national attention and that legislation was currently being explored around limiting the cost of school uniforms. The Council would remind schools of the financial challenges which many families faced and the Service Director for Education undertook to discuss with the Service Director for Adults and Communities what support might be made available on a case by case basis.
- asked whether any data was available around the uptake of previous voucher schemes amongst different ethnic groups. Officers stated that around 95% of vouchers had been accessed, but that the ethnic background of those doing so was not known. A request had been made to see if this data could be made available in future. The voucher offer had been translated into a number of languages in the past, but officers would be happy to look at any suggestions for additional ways of bringing this to the attention of more communities.
- expressed frustration that some families in most need of support were not able to access the voucher scheme. An example was given of low paid workers who were struggling to meet the costs of childcare. Officers stated that they were looking at siblings being able to access support and that any surplus places on the HAF scheme would be made available to those in need.
- asked about managing expectation going forward when similar schemes might not be available. The Service Director for Education stated that the intention was to transition away from voucher schemes towards the support provided by the Hub. The letter to parents advising them about the voucher scheme would make clear that there would be a tapering of this support if no further Government funding was to be made available.

The Chair expressed her thanks to the Service Director for Education and his team on their work on this issue.

It was resolved by a majority to:

Refer the request for up to £537k of funding to support supermarket vouchers and wider support to families during the summer holidays to the Strategy and Resource Committee for decision.

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

10. Cambridgeshire Sufficiency Strategy

The Committee was advised that the Council had a statutory duty to have a sufficiency strategy in place to minimise the number of children coming into care and to ensure that sufficient places were available for those who were taken into care. Around 70% of the children and young people in the Council's care were placed with foster carers which was consistent with the national average of between 70-72%. The number of in-house foster carers within this group had increased over previous years and now represented just over half of all foster carers and officers were looking to increase this figure further. Work was underway to look at encouraging foster carers to support older children and young people and consideration was also being given to a business review around the provision of a residential children's home. There was high demand for the residential places available through the independent sector and costs were increasing significantly. The Council had run its own residential children's homes in the past and these had not been particularly successful, but it might be timely to look at this again.

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

- thanked Cambridgeshire residents for responding to the campaign to recruit more in-house foster carers.
- asked whether the mentoring scheme for young people in care would be continuing beyond the pilot project and encouraged Members to take part if it was. Officers confirmed that they would want to see this continue.
- asked that any new residential children's homes should not be located in Fenland as there were already a number of independent providers located there. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that it was unlikely that any new provision would be located in Fenland given the existing provision there which would also impact on the workforce available, but that any decision would be brought to the Committee.
- asked what lessons had been learned from the Council's previous experience of running residential homes. Officers stated that previous homes had relatively high occupancy levels of six or more young people. Current thinking favoured smaller households of two or three young people with a more specialised approach.
- commented that foster carers were doing an incredible job and were to be commended. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding echoed this sentiment.
- welcomed the actions listed, but asked how the success of these was measured. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that outcomes were measured all of the time. Distance to placements and the number of in-house foster carers were amongst the most fundamental of these.
- asked whether the Council would consider helping with housing to enable foster carers to take on an additional child or children. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that he would not rule this out, but more typically the Council might contribute to the cost of an extension for established foster carers

making a permanent home for a young person with a charge over the cost on a sliding scale over time.

- commented that foster carers undertook significant amounts of training and should be treated as professionals. Another Member suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to receive training on the work of foster carers. The Chair agreed.

Action required

It was resolved unanimously to:

Adopt the sufficiency strategy included as Appendix 1 to the report.

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

11. Children and Young People Committee Appointments to Outside Bodies and Internal Advisory Groups and Panels

The Committee reviewed the proposed appointments to outside bodies and internal advisory groups and panels. Members were advised that the Executive Director: People and Communities had exercised her delegated authority to appoint to vacancies within the committee's remit outside of meetings in consultation with the Committee Chair and Vice Chair to appoint Councillor Anna Bradnam as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and Councillor Philippa Slatter as Vice Chair for the municipal year 2021/22 on 18 June 2021. The Committee was further advised that the appointment of Council representatives to the Fostering Panel was being put on hold pending consideration of the recommendations of an Independent Remuneration Panel.

In addition to the appointments included in the published papers the Adults and Health Committee had invited the Children and Young People Committee to nominate up to three representatives to attend quarterly liaison meetings with Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust. Details of these and all other remaining vacancies would be circulated to Spokes with an invitation to submit nominations.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- i. Review and agree the appointments to outside bodies as detailed in Appendix 1.
- ii. Review and agree the appointments to Internal Advisory Groups and Panels, as detailed in Appendix 2.
- iii. Note the appointment of Councillor Anna Bradnam as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and Councillor Philippa Slatter as Vice Chair for 2021/22;
- iv. Note the Local Authority School Governor appointments for spring term 2021 as detailed in Appendix 3.

- v. Delegate, on a permanent basis between meetings, the appointment of representatives to any vacancies on outside bodies and internal advisory groups and panels within the remit of the Children and Young People Committee to the Executive Director: People and Communities, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Committee.

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

(Chair)