

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29 November 2023

Present: Councillor S Powell-Wilde (Chair)

Councillors P Basnett V Wilson
S Bennett C Cooke
T Laing J Grier
L Luxon-Kewley C Carubia
K Hodson M Jordan (for C
Povall)

53 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast and reminded them that a copy of the webcast would be retained on the Council's website for two years.

54 APOLOGIES

Cllr Cherry Povall sent her apologies, Cllr Mary Jordan substituted.

55 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interests in connections with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Paula Basnett and the Chair both declared personal interest as foster carers.

56 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2023 be approved as a correct record.

57 PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS

The Chair noted that no public questions, statements, or petitions had been received.

CONSULTATION ON AGE RANGE CHANGE, HESWALL PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Assistant Director for Education introduced the report of the Director of Children, Family and Education. The report provided the outcome of a consultation on a proposal to alter the age range of Heswall Primary School to establish a maintained nursery class and a 2-year-old provision. No objections were received during the consultation. The proposal will mean that Heswall primary school will have formalised its oversight of the early years provision at the school.

The report noted that incorporating early years provision into the maintained school would allow children in attendance to be registered as pupils of the school. This would enable the school to ensure communication and administration and adopt a cohesive and consistent approach to learning through to Year 6. This change would not increase the number of early years places in the area or impact on the school's admission policy for Foundation 2.

Members discussed staffing and budget implications, and were assured by officers that there were no staffing implications and that officers had been assured by the school that it has the budget to cover the changes.

Resolved -

1. That the alteration of the age range of Heswall Primary School from 4 to 11 years old, to 2 to 11 years old, as a prescribed alteration to a maintained school be approved.

2. That all necessary authority be granted to the Director of Children, Families and Education to implement the proposal.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

The Director for Children, Families and Education presented her report which noted that the Sufficiency Duty required Local Authorities and children's safeguarding partners to ensure sufficient local accommodation and support to meet the needs of children and young people in care, or to ensure that there was a plan in place to move towards that position. It presented an overview of children in care, how long they had been in care and some of the reasons why children needed to become looked after. The report detailed the current level of provision for children who are looked after which included foster placements, residential homes and semi supported accommodation.

Members discussed the need for more foster carers, why the largest cohort of children taken into care was in the 10-15 year old range, the differences in those receiving help between the East and West of the borough, and the number of looked after children awaiting adoption.

Officers noted that the number of foster carers was falling nationally and that while Wirral is in a similar position it had been more successful than others. Officer reassured Members that work was ongoing to improve the support offered to foster carers and to encourage more people to become a foster carer. Officers noted that reasons for the 10-15 cohort being the largest were varied and abuse and neglect were the most common reasons. Children of that age are more likely to be out in the community than younger children and are more likely to fall foul of criminal exploitation. Officers suggested bringing a further report to committee on the impact that Early Years work might have in reducing the number of children in the 10-15 cohort becoming looked after. Officers noted that a common difference between the East and West of the borough was that while the issues and needs were similar across the borough, people were less likely to seek help in some areas and that work was being done to make help as accessible as possible to those that might not know how best to seek it. Officers confirmed that the 17 children awaiting adoption were in the process of receiving a placement order.

Resolved – That

1. The Childrens Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2023-2026 be noted; and

2. An update on the progress of the Strategy to be delivered within 12 months be agreed.

60 2023-24 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER TWO

The Senior Finance Business Partner introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education. The report set out the financial monitoring information for the Children, Families and Education Committee as at Quarter 2 (1 Apr – 30 Sep) of 2023-24. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2023-24 saving programme and a summary of reserves to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

At the end of Quarter 2, there was a forecast adverse position of £0.351m on the Committees net revenue budget of £86,748m. This position was based on activity to date, projected trends in income and expenditure and potential mitigation to offset areas of adverse/favourable variance.

Members discussed the adverse forecast and whether the directorate was likely to get a handle on the deficit, as well as the impact that the number of asylum seeking children requiring residential care might have on the budget.

Officers noted that they had seen a national rise in special needs with associated costs in that area, as well as a rise in the number of EHCP assessments. They proposed a further workshop to go over these trends in

detail and noted that it would be a challenge to balance the budget. Officers stated that the government provided a fixed amount of money to the council for each asylum seeking child requiring residential care but that if that child needed further care, the cost would fall to the council.

Resolved – That

- 1. The forecast revenue position presented at Quarter 2 be noted.**
- 2. The progress on delivery of the 2023-24 savings programme at Quarter 2 be noted.**
- 3. The forecast level of reserves at Quarter 2 be noted.**
- 4. The forecast capital position presented at Quarter 2 be noted.**

61 **A CELEBRATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Interim Head of Performance and Improvement introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education. The report provided the Children, Young People and Education Committee with an overview of how Council services were actively engaging with children and young people to ensure their views, experiences and contribution were influencing delivery and helping to improve outcomes. The report also celebrated some of the many successes Wirral's young people had achieved in the previous twelve months.

Members thanked officers for the report and noted how impressed they had been when attending events involving young people from Wirral.

Resolved – That the important contribution made to service delivery and Wirral communities by children and young people be noted and those involved be congratulated for those contributions.

62 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance which reminded members that the Children, Young People and Housing Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme was to align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were the remit of the Committee.

Officers noted that an additional report on Early Years was to be added to the work programme with the intention to bring it to the committee in either January or March. The Chair noted her preference would be for it to be received at January's committee.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.