

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 23 July 2024

Present: Councillor C Carubia (Chair)

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| Councillors | P Basnett S Bennett P Jobson V Wilson I Lewis | C Baldwin A Onwuemene J Grier C Carubia T Murphy |
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26 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.

27 APOLOGIES

Councillor Sue Powell-Wilde sent her apologies. Councillor Tony Murphy substituted.

28 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 declared a personal interest as she was a foster carer.

Councillor Amanda Onwuemene declared a personal interest as a close family member was a foster carer.

29 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2024 be approved as a correct record.

30 PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS

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

PUPILS EXCLUDED FROM EDUCATION KEY STAGE 4

The School Improvement Senior Manager Alternative Provision and Inclusion presented a report on behalf of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report provided Members with an overview of Wirral Local Authority's requirement to arrange full-time education from and including the sixth day of a permanent exclusion for Key Stage 4 (KS4) pupils. The successful bidder(s) would be awarded a contract for a period of 5 years from 1 September 2024 to 31 July 2029. A report was put forward on Monday 25th September 2023. The tender process for KS4 was unsuccessful. However, this academic year the Council had completed 2 successful pilots. This was based on a new model around geographical areas, which the council believed would open the tender up to more bids, as the pilots could no longer continue.

The report gave the opportunity to Members to monitor, review and challenge performance in relation to Wirral's statutory responsibility to arrange full-time education from and including the sixth day of a permanent exclusion and the use of alternative provision.

Members asked how confident officers were that they would receive KS4 tenders. The School Improvement Senior Manager Alternative Provision and Inclusion explained that provision had improved with 3 locations across the borough now available to young people where previously, there was only one.

Members asked if local council schools had been considered to provide KS4 care to help cover the amount of provision needed. The School Improvement Senior Manager Alternative Provision and Inclusion noted that this had been looked into, but that it was felt that secondary schools would not be able to meet the need within the local authority.

Members asked what level of monitoring would take place and what actions would be taken if issues were identified within the first six months of a contract or if complaints were received. The School Improvement Senior Manager Alternative Provision and Inclusion noted that he held weekly monitoring meetings online as well as visiting sites at least once a week unannounced. He worked closely with the Head Teachers of the schools covered to support them. Six weekly data drops were also provided to evidence quality assurance and pupil voices. Regarding any issues raised or complaints made, the service worked closely with the Department for Education and OFSTED to follow complaints procedures and ensure a timely reaction.

The Chair queried what would happen if a provider had not signed up to the Wirral Guild of Alternative Provision. He was informed by the School Improvement Senior Manager Alternative Provision and Inclusion that if a provider did not sign up, then they would not be used by the schools. The schools had the duty of care as they were commissioning the services.

Members queried if Wirral MET College was used as an alternative provision and was informed by the Assistant Director Education that they were not but that conversations could be had with the college for future provision.

Resolved – That the development of Wirral Local Authority’s provision to meet the requirement to arrange full-time education from and including the sixth day of a permanent exclusion for KS4 pupils be noted.

32 C&M LD & AUTISM HOUSING STRATEGY

The Director of Children, Families and Education presented the report of the Director of Care and Health. The report provided a summary of the Cheshire and Merseyside commissioning work programme for “Independent and Fulfilling Lives” and the development of a Learning Disability and Autism Housing Strategy. The strategy had been jointly produced with the Housing Learning and Improvement Network and would support a framework for all commissioners when assessing local housing need for this cohort of people and supporting new developments, alongside general housing to meet those needs.

The report had previously been before the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee on 5 March 2024. That committee had resolved that:

1. The Cheshire and Merseyside Learning Disability and Autism Housing Strategy as set out in Appendix 2 to this report be approved; and
2. The report be considered for information at the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee at a future date to be agreed.

Members discussed the merits of a regional co-ordinated strategy policy and queried whether the report authors were working with the Regeneration and Place Directorate regarding the strategy’s aims of providing specialist, supported housing. The Director of Children, Families and Education noted that the report had also been referred to the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee for discussion and noting, and that clarification would be sought from them on what is going to be built.

The Chair noted that it was frustrating that the report had been referred to the committee after the decision had been made, and that he felt it would have been more useful for the committee to have sight of the report beforehand so that their input could be incorporated into the recommendations.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

2023/24 BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 4 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT

The Head of Finance – People presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report provided a summary of the year-end revenue and capital position for the Children, Young People and Education Committee for the 2023/24 financial year as at the end of March 2024. 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 and balances, which enabled the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

The year-end revenue outturn for 2023/24, represented an adverse variance against the Committee revenue budget of directorate revenue budgets of £1.974m, which was a £1.609m deterioration from the quarter 3 forecast.

The Chair referenced paragraph 3.9 in the report which explained that there was a £0.147m favourable variance for Modernisation and Support due to staff being appointed in lower salary scales and vacancies, which were above the staff salary savings targets. He asked if this variance included the increases in payments to foster carers. The Head of Finance – People responded that the variance in question just related to Council staff and that the raise in payments to foster carers would come from the Children's and Families budget.

Members noted that they were pleased that the number of Children Looked After were declining, but expressed concern for the higher costs for family placements and queried the reasons for these increases. The Assistant Director Children and Families explained that there was a national shortfall of foster placements, and that Wirral was utilising a number of projects and strategies to increase provision, she noted that in comparison to neighbouring boroughs and across England, Wirral did really well with the number of children in foster care, however, more foster placements were still needed. She noted that a paper would be brought to committee on the subject in future.

Resolved – That

- 1. The draft, unaudited 2023/24 outturn adverse Directorate variance of £1.974m, which has been managed corporately by utilising the contingency budget, savings from reduced energy costs and use of flexible use of capital receipts be noted;**
- 2. The progress on delivery of the 2023/24 savings programme be noted;**

- 3. The use of earmarked reserves, as detailed in table four be noted; and**
- 4. The draft, unaudited 2023/24 capital outturn position detailed in table five be noted.**

34 BUDGET MONITORING AND BUDGET SETTING PROCESSES

The Head of Finance – People presented the report of the Director of Finance. The report set out how the 2024/25 budget would be monitored through the Committee system, which would facilitate the Policy and Services Committees (the Committees) to take ownership of their specific budgets and present appropriate challenge and scrutiny of Officers on the management and performance of those budgets.

The concurrent activity of budget setting for 2025/26, and how this would be approached, was also set out in the report; incorporated in which were:

- revisions to the approved Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) – the formulation of savings proposals and presentation of pressure/growth items
- the application of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) principles that underpin the budget process and decision-making, with links to the Council Plan
- how savings plans were to be configured
- considerations of requisite consultation exercises
- the role of the Finance Working Group

Members discussed the Budget Oversight Panel and sought clarity on when it would be appointed and when it was likely to meet. The Chair responded that the Chair and Spokespersons were likely to be appointed and that they were waiting on written confirmation on the remit of the Panel.

Resolved - That

- 1. The process for in-year monitoring of the 2024/25 budget be noted; and**
- 2. The proposed approach to 2025/26 budget setting and the key assumptions that will be used be noted.**

35 2024/25 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER ONE (THE PERIOD TO 30 JUNE 2024)

The Head of Finance – People introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report set out the financial monitoring information, revenue and capital position for the Children, Families and

Education Committee as at Quarter 1 (30 June) of 2024/25. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2024/25 saving programme and a summary of reserves and balances, which enabled the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers.

The report noted that managing a budget required difficult decisions to ensure that a balanced position could be presented. Regular Member engagement, which the report formed part of, was considered essential in delivering effective governance and financial oversight.

At the end of Quarter 1, there was a forecast adverse position of £7.604m on the revenue budget of Children, Families and Education revised net revenue budget of £94.716m

Members asked whether the Home Transport Review would take account of parents with a mobility vehicle and were informed that it did not. The Assistant Director for Education noted that all assisted travel for Children and Adults now sat within Children's Services and that a strategic piece of work was to be undertaken to look at the pressures this created.

The Chair noted that a lot of work had been done to mitigate some of the issues raised in the report and noted that the service could not keep delivering the same services with less and less money.

Resolved – That

- 1. The forecast adverse position of £7.604m presented at Quarter 1 be noted;**
- 2. The progress on delivery of the 2024/25 savings programme at Quarter 1 be noted;**
- 3. The forecast level of reserves and balances at Quarter 1 be noted;**
- 4. The budget virements due to administrative changes in the allocation of Service budgets between directorates, as detailed in paragraph 3.15 be noted; and**
- 5. The capital position at the end of Quarter 1 be noted.**

The Assistant Director of Children and Families presented the report of the Director of Children and Families. The report provided the latest performance information for the Children's, Families and Education Directorate. The design and content of the report was developed following discussions with the Chair

of the Children, Young People & Education Committee and party spokes at a Performance Monitoring workshop back in March 2021.

The report noted that the Key performance areas for Members of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to note included:

1. Improved timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences – ongoing work within the Safeguarding Unit and the Locality Teams had led to 75.8% of conferences being held in time compared to 59.5% during the same period last year.
2. Timeliness of assessments continued to improve – this was the result of regular performance meetings and increased management oversight through the use of Power BI. 76% of assessments were completed within timescale this quarter compared to 71% last quarter.
3. The rate of youth re-offending stood at 75% at the end of quarter 4. Whilst this figure looked high, it actually equated to just eight young people re-offending between January 2024 – March 2024.

The Chair queried why the percentage of Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) issued within the 20 week statutory timescale had fallen to 18%. The Director of Children, Families and Education responded that EHCPs were measured over the calendar year, rather than the financial year and therefore the counter started again from January. 355 EHCPs had been finalised for the year, so large numbers were being processed, just not within the 20 week timescale. She noted that the target to be inline with the national average was 49% and by October 2025 the intention was to be at 75%. There were a number of factors which were currently affecting the speed that EHCPs could be finalised such as educational psychologist capacity, speech and language assessments etc. She offered to provide additional details in future reports to show how much past 20 weeks the majority of EHCPs were being agreed by.

Members discussed the number of home educated children in Wirral, which was reported as 387, and asked how this compared to other authorities nationally. The Assistant Director for Education stated that a report would come to committee in future on this subject.

Members noted that the speed that EHCPs were being agreed was likely to have an adverse impact on many children.

Members felt that there was a drop in the level of care for children as they moved from primary to secondary school and stated that this should not be the case. The Assistant Director for Education noted that this was being looked into through the Delivery Better Value programme and that the service was working with the Department for Education to look into how to improve this.

Members noted that the report showed that the current rate of youth re-offending stood at 75% and asked what provision there was to help them out of that cycle. The Director for Children, Families and Education responded that the Youth Justice Board oversaw this cohort, she noted that there was support for these young people and the type depended on the age of the young person. Those under 18 were supported by the Youth Justice Team and those moving beyond 18, up to 25 were supported via work with the probation service.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

37 **EARLY YEARS QUALITY AND SUFFICIENCY**

The Early Years Operations Manager presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report covered key updates for the early years' service, including two-year funding take up for the disadvantaged entitlement and working family's entitlement. The two-year funding take-up for disadvantaged entitlement had decreased however it was thought that families potentially eligible for both working families and disadvantaged entitlements had applied through working family's entitlement. This was being explored further so would be a system to ensure that families took up the most relevant entitlement.

The report also included two models, the first the Family Information Service (FIS) in terms of meeting section 12 of the Childcare Act 2006, which placed a duty on Local Authorities to share information on childcare provision and services. The model to support early years providers was also attached, this detailed the work of the quality improvement and training team to support providers and ensure all provision is of the highest quality. An update on the wrap around programme had also been included; supply and demand mapping had been completed and a proposed delivery plan had been submitted to the Department for Education to approval.

Members stated that they were pleased with the take up of provision for 2 and 3 year olds. The Assistant Director for Education noted that there was likely to be pressure on provision from September 2025 due to changes in the number of hours that needed to be provided from 15 hours per week currently, to 30 hours per week for 9 months to 2 year olds. Work had been identified to support this.

Members queried the level of engagement with providers and were informed that work with providers was carried out in a number of ways such as through the School Forum Early Years Subgroup with the National Day Nurseries Association in attendance, The Early Years Operations Manager also made visits to providers to speak directly with them about any concerns they had. They also held cluster meetings with providers every term, they also met with

the Childminding Association through the Subgroup and by attending their meetings.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that a further report on the rollout of the Early Years Entitlement Funding be received at a date to be decided.

38 **APPOINTMENT OF PANELS, STATUTORY / ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND WORKING PARTIES 2024/25**

The Head of Legal Services presented the report of the Chair of the committee. The report enabled the committee to review the continuing need for various panels, statutory / advisory committees and working parties, and to appoint members and named deputies to serve on those (including the statutory committees and panels) that are to be retained in 2024/2025.

The Chair stated that regarding the appointment of Members to a cross-party policy development review group, he felt that a smaller group would likely achieve more and proposed that this group be made up of the Chair and Spokespersons of the committee. This was agreed by assent.

Resolved – That

- 1. The Monitoring Officer as proper officer be authorised to carry out the wishes of the Group Leaders in allocating Members to membership of the Statutory and Advisory Committees listed in the report and to appoint those Members with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members;**
- 2. The current constitution and membership of the School Appeals Panel be noted; and**
- 3. A cross party group of Members, made up of the Chair and Spokespersons, be appointed to conduct a policy development review in accordance with the approach outlined at appendix 2 of the report.**

39 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services presented the report of the Chair of the Committee. The report reminded members that the Children, Young People and Education 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.

Members discussed that a large number of reports coming to committee were just for noting and raised that this went against the council's policy on reports going to committee. The Head of Legal Services advised that many of the reports that committee were asked to note would fall under the requirements of scrutiny and that this was a necessary part of the committees' work.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.