

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 28 January 2020

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

Councillors	K Cannon	J Johnson
	T Norbury	I Lewis
	J Robinson	C Povall
	S Spoor	A Wright
	P Stuart	C Carubia
	KJ Williams	C Cooke

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Yvonne Nolan.

31 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Councillor Tony Norbury declared a personal interest by virtue of his role as a school governor and member of the Schools Forum.

Councillor Jean Robinson declared a personal interest by virtue of her connection with an Early Years Contract.

Councillor Sarah Spoor declared a personal interest by virtue of being member of PCPW - Parent, Carer, Participation Wirral and employment with SEND in Liverpool.

Councillor Chris Carubia declared a personal interest by virtue of his role as a school governor and member of the Schools Forum.

Councillor Chris Cooke declared a personal interest as a supply teacher in Wirral and Merseyside.

Councillor Cherry Povall declared a personal interest by virtue of being a Trustee on the Wirral Play Council.

Councillor Wendy Clements declared a personal interest as she was employed as an Early Years Educator and Administrator for Moreton Baptist Preschool and a school governor.

There were no declarations made in respect of the application of a party whipping arrangement.

32 MINUTES

Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2020/21

Paul Boyce, Director of Children's Services introduced the report of the Director of Finance and Investment (S151) introduced her report that formed part of the Council's formal budget process - as set out in the constitution and in accordance with the legal requirements to set a balanced and sustainable budget for 2020/21. The Director of Finance and Investment (S151) also presented an update on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the period from 2021/22 to 2024/25.

In a variation from past practice, the previous format of scrutiny workshops had been discontinued, and each Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed a list of budget proposals under its remit.

As such, Members were requested to review and comment on the financial proposals for 2020/21 that were currently subject to consultation and further consideration by Cabinet on 17 February 2020; and to note the financial challenges facing the Council in setting a sustainable and balanced budget for the MTFP period from 2021/22 to 2024/25.

The report informed how, in September 2019, the Government announced the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2020/21 budgets, in the form of a single year Spending Round, with a multi-year Spending Review would follow in 2020. This year's Spending Round formed the basis for updating the MTFP and set out a 4.3% real-term increase in overall Government funding for Local Authorities - against a backdrop of consistent cuts in the previous three Spending Reviews since 2010 and continued pressures in delivery of social care. Details of how the overall announcement would affect the specific funding settlements for individual Local Authorities were not available at the time of writing the report. The Spending Round settlement for 2020/21 represented an improvement in funding in comparison to previous assumptions for 2020/21, given:

- No loss of the Council's equivalent of the Revenue Support Grant or Public Health Grant;
- A £6.4m increase in funding for Adult and Children's Social Care;
- A proposed £2.8m increase in Council Tax - resulting from permission to include a 2% Adult Social Care Precept in 20/21, over and above an inflationary increase of up to 2%;
- A (£0.8m) reduction in Council Tax due to the Council's review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme; and
- A new round of the New Homes Bonus allocations for 2020/21 only.

The Director of Children's Services updated the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the key financial pressures identified by his service. These included:

- Emergency Duty Team (EDT) – increased costs relating to the resourcing of the EDT out of hours service (£0.14m);

- Contractual increase for the Environmental Port Health Authority (£0.09m);
- Increased costs of additional forecast for looked after children and fee increases £2.97m); and
- Grant reduction to support Troubled Families programme (£1.61m).

The Director informed that the figure of £1.6m in respect of the Troubled Families programme had been re-valued as a result of a recent announcement arising from reinstatement of £800k funding from central government.

Members noted that a Budget Saving in the amount of £1.27m had been identified utilising a demand management approach for Looked After Children – reducing the number of children in care by accelerating existing plans for children to be rehabilitated at home. Thereby reducing the cost of residential care placements by improving commissioning and market management.

Members questioned the Director on existing arrangements for Foster Care - the prime opportunity to aid a reduction of residential care placements. He informed that despite increased numbers of foster carers and an improved settlement in the recent spending review allocation of £6.4 for Adult and Children's Social Care - if the saving identified i.e. reduction in numbers of Looked After Children in residential care were not achieved - this would add significantly to the financial pressures already identified.

Members questioned the Director of Children's Services further on a number of alternative options and existing provisions in respect of Children in Care. He identified that funding for Troubled Families had been set at the same level as the previous year. He added that significant improvements had also been made in respect of claiming the 'payment by results' element of funding, and that the Council had aspirations to do more.

Resolved – That

- 1) the financial challenges facing the Council in setting a sustainable and balanced budget for the MTFP period from 2021/22 to 2024/25 be noted;**
- 2) the challenges faced by the Director of Children's Services as he balances his budgets, and the needs of the large number of looked after children, be recognised; and**
- 3) as Corporate Parent, this Committee urges the Director of Children's Services to ensure looked after children receive the most appropriate and excellent care, having particular mind to the stability of placements.**

SUMMARY OF STANDARDS - PROVISIONAL OUTCOMES FOR KEY STAGE 4 AND KEY STAGE 5

Sue Talbot, (Lead School Commissioner) introduced the report of the Director for Children's Services that provided an in-depth analysis for the pupil outcomes at the age of 16 (GCSEs) as well as a brief summary of GCE outcomes.

The report provided comparisons with the results nationally wherever possible. The report also informed how there had been ongoing changes to the content and grading system of GCSEs and GCEs, making the subject content and exams far more challenging.

Key points covered in the report included how - for Wirral pupils in GCSEs there had been a decrease in attainment in English, Mathematics and English and Mathematics. In contrast nationally there had been an increase in the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 4 or higher in Mathematics, English and English and Mathematics. However, the proportion of Wirral pupils achieving a grade 4 or above in both English and English and Mathematics continues to be above the national average; by 0.7% in English and 0.5% in English and Mathematics. And that -

the attainment of Wirral girls continued to be above the national average. The attainment of boys in Wirral was in line with national average. Wirral boys' and girls' attainment had decreased. In contrast the National average for both boys and girls had increased. Nationally the gender gap had narrowed slightly. The Wirral gender gap had also narrowed by a greater margin, but the gap remained wider than the national average.

The report also covered national provisional outcomes at GCE to determine how Wirral performed against national measures. The data was provisional with validated data scheduled for publication in March 2020.

Members were apprised that the Key Stage 4 & 5 Standards 2018 report had been produced to evaluate some of the Wirral Plan pledges, in particular Children are Ready for School; Young People are Ready for Work and Adulthood and Vulnerable Children Reach their Full Potential. The report is scheduled to be shared with headteachers and used as an essential tool to challenge underperformance as well as celebrate successes / improvements in Wirral schools.

Resolved – That

- 1) the Summary of Standards - Provisional Outcomes for Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 (2019) report be noted; and**
- 2) the report be shared with headteachers and used as an essential tool to challenge underperformance as well as celebrate successes/improvements in Wirral schools.**

35 **SEND - OUTCOMES FROM SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION CONSULTATION**

Sue Talbot, (Lead School Commissioner) introduced the report of the Director for Children's Services in support of a summary presentation of the findings and proposed options from independent review of SEND provision conducted by the Premier Advisory Group (PAG).

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee was apprised that on November 26th, 2019 PAG had met with representatives from the Schools Forum High Needs working party and later with elected members to provide initial proposals around five potential options. Having considered the comments and feedback PAG produced the SEND review document.

PAG sent the local authority a SEND Review: Final Report on Friday, 13th December 2019, and the local authority received the following six documents:

The Main Report

Option 1 – Development of the Kingsway Site
Option 2 – SEMH Secondary Schools
Option 3 – Wirral Hospitals' School
Option 4 – Expansion of Resourced Bases
Option 5 – PMLD/SLD Secondary Schools

Members were informed that the SEND High Needs budget had a projected overspend so work was needed to be undertaken to determine whether efficiencies can be made. Members further noted that there was increasing demand for places in special schools is becoming more than places available.

Following a verbal presentation from the Lead School Commissioner summarising the history and suggested options. Following debate on the matter, Members were of the view that the options / recommendations as contained within the report not be progressed, but the source information was useful and should form the basis of further consultation and development of a plan to suit Wirral's need.

Members were of the view that the review highlighted the need for project management at key junctures – and showed little understanding of the key differences within Wirral, and the locality.

The Chair thanked the Officers and noted that although the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would not be recommending support to the options and recommendations of the Premier Advisory Group (PAG), it had been a very useful exercise in terms of pre-decision scrutiny.

Resolved – That

- 1) the request for further consultation to determine and prioritise options utilising the data gathered be approved; and**

- 2) it be recommended to Cabinet that the SEND - Outcomes from Special Needs Education consultation options / recommendations as contained within the report not be progressed.**

36 ADULT LEARNING UPDATE

Paul Smith, Head of Service, Learning, Skills & Employment introduced his report that set out information on the service's developments, summary of delivery and achievements in the 2018/19 academic year (AY). The report informed that the Service in 2018/19 was grant funded by the Education, Skills Funding Agency (ESFA); however, this was a transition year ahead of the transfer to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (AY 2019/20). Grant funding received from the ESFA in 2018/19 was £849,374.

Members were apprised that Wirral Council's Lifelong Learning Service actively engaged and supported local residents (aged 19+) who are furthest from the labour market. This education provision provided learners with the confidence to take the next steps back into education and employment. As a grant funded Council service, it had the capacity to support the most disadvantaged, working on difficult issues and using innovative approaches for example, supporting community cohesion, troubled families, Children's Centres, family learning, refugees and improving mental health through learning. The work also played an important role within public sector reform through its integration and joined up delivery of Council service outcomes and its role in underpinning prevention and early intervention.

A Member congratulated the Head of Service, Learning, Skills & Employment on the inspection by Ofsted, February 2018, which resulted in a 'Good' assessment. Members noted that the service was also MATRIX accredited recognising its integrated high-quality delivery of careers education and support for its learners.

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the services' planned improvements and recognised the contribution to improving the lives of adults in Wirral's more deprived communities during 2018/19.

The Chair requested that the Committee be provided sight of the case studies references.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

37 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Chair introduced the report of the Head of Intelligence, Statutory Scrutiny Officer that provided an update regarding progress made since the last Committee meeting held on 11 November 2019. The report informed that the current work programme was made up of a combination of scrutiny reviews, workshops, standing items and requested officer reports.

The update report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan, review and evaluate its work across the municipal year. The work programme for the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The report also contained a list of topics for future consideration, work programme activities with suggested dates / deadlines.

A Member requested that an item relating to referrals for residential places be added to the current programme. The Chair thanked the Member for her suggestion and reminded the Committee of the new governance arrangements that would come into effect in May 2020.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

38 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved - That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test had been applied and favoured exclusion.

39 URGENT BUSINESS

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a verbal report from the Director of Children's Services containing exempt sensitive information, under Paragraph 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The report provided an update on a specific case in respect of a gap in the legislative framework relating to placement of children outside of the borough.