

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Monday, 13 September 2021

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

Councillors K Cannon H Collinson
C Cooke C Povall
C Carubia P Stuart
M Booth Y Nolan (In place of
D Brennan S Frost)
S Williams (In place
of A Wright)

18 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Members, Officers and members of the public to the meeting.

19 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Alison Wright and Councillor Sam Frost.

20 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests in connection with any item(s) on the agenda and, if so, declare and state what they were.

No declarations were made.

21 MINUTES

The Chair invited members to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2021. It was raised that a member raised a query relating to the number of early years children categorised as having Special Education Needs and Disabilities and officers had undertaken to provide a response. The Assistant Director for Education undertook to provide the response. It was further noted that the Minutes detailed the removal of the Healthy Weight agenda from the work programme and this needed to be actioned.

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2021 be agreed.

22 **PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions, requests to make a statement or petitions submitted.

23 **WIRRAL YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-22**

Tony Kirk, Head of Contextual Safeguarding introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which provided an introduction to the Wirral Youth Justice Service Strategic Plan 2021-22. The statutory requirement to have a Youth Justice Service under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was outlined. This sought to ensure co-operation with statutory partners such as Police and Health, and the requirement included producing an annual plan which was before members for consideration.

The details of the plan were outlined to the Committee, where it was reported that the priorities within the plan included a combination of both locally and nationally set priorities, with issues like Harmful Sexual Behaviour receiving significant national media attention whilst other issues such as Child to Adult Violence had been identified for local development of the service. The governance of the Youth Justice Services was outlined, with the Youth Justice Management Board having an operation plan that supported the overarching strategic plan.

Members welcomed the adoption of a preventative approach and sought further information on the prevalence of anti-social behaviour on the cusp of the criminal system in the context of the Youth Justice Service preventative services. Participation and engagement was discussed as a priority, where it was hoped co-production of plans with young people, parents and victims could be further explored.

Resolved – That

- 1) the Wirral Youth Justice Service’s Strategic Plan 2021-22 be endorsed and Council be recommended to approve it.**
- 2) the approach and ongoing development work within the Youth Justice Service and across the Youth Justice Management Board be noted.**

24 **WIRRAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director for Education introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education which presented to the Committee the School Improvement Strategy 2021-24, which set out the Council’s vision and ambition around school improvement. It forms part of a

wider multi-factorial Education Strategy which will provide a new transformational and holistic approach to education across all areas, including early years, social care, early help and beyond. The report detailed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic to schools and education in Wirral, and the importance of working collaboratively with schools to support children and improve attainment in response to Covid-19 was outlined to the Committee. The strategy focused on five key themes, namely:

- Leadership and Governance
- High Support, High Challenge
- Self-improving School System
- Learning and Innovation
- School Improvement Wirral

It was anticipated that the strategy would take three years to deliver and to allow for new systems and activity to be embedded. To support this, it was reported that the capacity in the School Improvement Service had been increased.

Members welcomed the aspiration of school improvement but sought further detail on how this would be achieved and whether resources would be required to fully recover from Covid. It was reported that significant work had been undertaken with headteachers in Wirral to capture the main challenges and to adopt the quality assurance process detailed within the strategy, but that there was still further work to be done to develop those documents that sit within the strategy which would be reported back to members. Following further comments, officers undertook to report back on performance measurements and benchmarking.

It was moved by Councillor Wendy Clements, seconded by Councillor Steve Williams, that officer recommendation 3 be changed from 12 months to 6 months.

It was then moved by Councillor David Brennan, seconded by Councillor Chris Carubia, that –

“the School Improvement Strategy is identified in the Council’s Corporate Risk Register as the mitigation of educational under attainment caused by the pandemic, the Committee therefore agrees that alongside the three year strategy, it is necessary to develop an 18-month Covid-19 Education Catch Up Plan, to identify key actions, resources, target groups and key performance indicators to ensure that the adverse impact on our children’s life chances that may be caused by the pandemic are minimised, with the plan being reviewed by this Committee in 2022.”

In response, officers undertook to bring the plan for review in January 2022.

The motion, with the additional recommendation from Councillor David Brennan was then put and agreed by assent. It was therefore –

Resolved – That

- 1) the School Improvement Strategy 2021-2024 be endorsed.**
- 2) the approach taken and ongoing support given to the school system by Wirral Council be noted.**
- 3) an update on progress towards implementation of the strategy be reported back to the Children, Young People and Education Committee in 6 months.**
- 4) the School Improvement Strategy is identified in the Council's Corporate Risk Register as the mitigation of educational under attainment caused by the pandemic, the Committee therefore agrees that alongside the three year strategy, it is necessary to develop an 18-month Covid-19 Education Catch Up Plan, to identify key actions, resources, target groups and key performance indicators to ensure that the adverse impact on our children's life chances that may be caused by the pandemic are minimised, with the plan being reviewed by this Committee in 2022.**

25 BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 1

Nicholas Ajaegbu, Senior Finance Officer introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which set out the financial monitoring information for the Children, Young People & Education Committee as at quarter 1 (Apr – Jun) of 2021/22, with an overview of budget performance to enable Committee to take ownership of their specific budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

The Committee was advised that as at the end of June 2021 (Quarter 1), the forecast year end position for Children, Families and Education showed a balanced forecast position. It was reported that the service continued to manage demand with financial pressures being mitigated by in-year cost savings and use of specific related reserves. In-year employee cost savings across the service had mitigated contractual cost pressures and contributed to the overall balanced position. Members' attention was brought to the schools core, where there was an adverse variance of £0.223m due to the on-going annual costs that are being incurred in relation to the non-operational status of the Kingsway School building, but that this had been partly mitigated by an underspend in historic teacher's pension costs.

The steps being taken to manage demand for services were queried, where it was reported that demand management was based on a range of preventative strategies, with one example being preventative measures in relation to Children Looked After which meant the numbers requiring care had not increased as in other authorities thus keeping costs down. Following a request, officers undertook to consider whether the profiled and actual expenditure could be included in future reports to provide members greater assurance that the reported forecasts would be reflected in the year-end position.

Resolved – That

- (1) the forecast year-end revenue position balanced forecast, as reported at quarter 1 (Apr – Jun) of 2021/22 be noted.**
- (2) the progress on the achievement of approved savings and the year-end forecast position at quarter 1 (Apr – Jun) of 2021/22 be noted.**
- (3) the reserves allocated to the Committee for future commitments be noted.**
- (4) the forecast year-end capital position of £4.970m favourable as reported at quarter 1 (Apr – Jun) of 2021/22 be noted.**

26 CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT

Tricia Thomas, Performance & Improvement Manager introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which provided a summary of progress made to date on the development of a new performance reporting framework for Members of the Children, Young People & Education Committee. The background to performance monitoring was outlined, with the development of a Power BI Dashboard for members as well as the development of a supplementary performance report to Committee. Members were given a summary of the data provided in the performance report, which included data on 8 priority groups as agreed by members, each of which contained a set of performance indicators.

Members sought further information on SEND where it was reported that further work was underway to cleanse the data and develop the SEND reports within PowerBI. In relation to Free School Meals further information was sought on the reasons behind the significant increase in demand in 2018/19. Officers then outlined that the Q2 performance report was due in November 2021, therefore there was scope for a focused performance report for the October Committee meeting and suggestions were sought from Members. It was proposed that reports on children's social work workforce and post-16

participation in employment, education and training following the pandemic be brought to the next meeting.

It was moved by Councillor Kate Cannon, seconded by Councillor Chris Carubia, that the recommendations within the report alongside the inclusion of the two additional items for the next scheduled meeting be agreed. The motion was agreed by assent. It was therefore –

Resolved – That

- (1) the progress made to date and the next steps involved in developing and rolling out a new performance monitoring framework be noted.**
- (2) the content of the Performance Report (Appendix A) and highlight any areas requiring further clarification or action be noted.**
- (3) performance reports in relation to children’s social work workforce and post-16 participation in employment, education and training following the pandemic be brought to the next meeting.**

27 **OVERVIEW OF 2019/20 COUNCIL LIFELONG LEARNING SERVICE ADULT EDUCATION DELIVERY**

Paul Smith, Head of Integrated Learning, Skills and Employment introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education which set out the Lifelong Learning Service’s developments, summary of delivery and learner achievements in the 2019/20 academic year as its first full academic year funded by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. The service sought to actively engage and support local residents aged 19+ who were furthest from the labour market and provide learners with the confidence to take the next steps back into education and employment.

The report was based on the 2019/20 academic year, and it was anticipated that a report on 2020/21 would be reported back to Committee in early 2022. It was reported that 2019/20 was a challenging year for the service, with a move to online delivery as a result of the pandemic which presented further challenges when engaging with the most vulnerable people in deprived wards, and the work of the team to continue to deliver the service during this period was praised.

It was queried whether the service would work with Syrian refugees, where it was confirmed that notification of the first three families arriving had been received and Liverpool City Region would inform the service if the Lifelong Learning Service was required. Information was sought on the working arrangements with Wirral Met College where members were advised that although there was no formal agreement, the service was closely aligned to

the College and data on referrals could be provided in the future. The results from the Test and Learn Pilots were also sought for at a future date. It was further reported that whilst the service would be returning to face to face, the value of online delivery was recognised and an online learning platform was being developed.

Resolved – That

(1) the report be noted.

(2) the services' planned improvements be supported and the contribution to improving the lives of adults in Wirral's more deprived communities during 2019/20 be recognised.

28 **EDSENTIAL UPDATE**

Simone White, Director for Children, Families and Education introduced the report which provided an update on the work of Edsential, a community interest company (CiC) co-owned by Wirral Council and Cheshire West and Chester Council which provided high quality, ethical and innovative services to schools and families across the Northwest. The report detailed Edsential's achievements during 2020-21 including the delivery of the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF), Edsential at home service and free school meal parcels. It also outlined the current challenges being faced specifically the impact of COVID-19 on the organisation's financial position, as well as the strategic business plan priorities for 2021–2022. Mark Parkinson, Chair of Edsential Board and Ian McGrady, Managing Director were in attendance to answer questions from members.

The criteria for eligibility for holiday activity programmes was queried due to residents just over the threshold for eligibility for Free School Meals having to pay full price, where it was noted that the eligibility was set by Department for Education and that because Edsential overachieved on forecast places, demand was high. A further query was raised in relation to the losses the company had incurred and whether it was able to access any covid money for recovery. In response, the Committee was advised that £1.85m had been received in government funding the majority of which had been used for furlough, with rate relief and grants also being received mainly attached to the residential centre in Anglesey. It was reported that there was a robust recovery plan in place and it was expected that income would recover to pre-Pandemic rates.

A further discussion was had around the decision to close the Oaklands residential centre and move existing bookings to the centre in Anglesey. It was felt that the quality of the provision was superior at the Anglesey site, with significantly more activities all of which were accessible on foot, unlike the Oaklands site which required minibus travel and therefore extra cost. It was

reported that rates to attend both sites as well as the travelling time to both were equal. A number of queries were then raised in relation to the status of the company in terms of profit, as well the liability for the loss of income during Covid-19 and the anticipated recovery. The status of the company as a CIC was outlined, as well as the use of any profits where it reported that the £100k of profits were reinvested into 12 Wirral schools through grant funding. It was further reported that to the credit of the staff the company avoided cash flow issues during Covid-19 and the Board was confident that it could comfortably pay back the debt it had incurred whilst running the company efficiently.

It was moved by Councillor Wendy Clements, seconded by Councillor Kate Cannon that the Committee places on record its thanks to Edsential for its work during Covid-19. The motion was unanimously agreed. It was therefore

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Resolved – That

(1) the report be noted.

(2) Edsential be thanked for their work during Covid-19.

29 **THE PROVISION OF FOOD & ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL HOLIDAYS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

Vicki Shaw, Head of Legal Services, introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which provided an update further to the proposal agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee regarding the provision of free school meals (FSM) in school holidays during the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. The Working Group had met in July 2021 and decided that due to the extension of the funding, it wished to continue to meet and report back to Policy and Resources.

The Chair confirmed that the members of the Committee serving on the Working Group were content with the proposal.

Resolved – That

(1) The progress of the Provision of Food and Activities Working Group for Children in School Holidays during the Covid-19 Pandemic be noted.

(2) a report be presented to Policy and Resources Committee in the new year.

30 **CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Vicki Shaw, Head of Legal Services introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance, which provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

It was proposed that the item in relation to learning from Covid could be embedded into the reports for other issues as part of a working agenda, but members felt that it warranted a specific discussion. It was proposed that the Child Poverty Strategy should be timetabled in and the Director of Children, Families and Education undertook to consider the timescales and review the overall timetable of items. It was further proposed that the SEND Strategy Update be brought to the next meeting and that the Pupil Place Planning Strategy be added to the work programme.

The recommendations within the report with the inclusion of the proposals suggested by the Committee were moved by Councillor Wendy Clements, seconded by Councillor Chris Carubia. It was therefore –

Resolved – That

- (1) the report be noted.**
- (2) the Child Poverty Strategy be scheduled in for consideration at a future meeting.**
- (3) the SEND Strategy Update be presented to the next scheduled meeting.**
- (4) Pupil Place Planning Strategy be added to the work programme.**