

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 7 March 2023

Present: Councillor K Hodson (Chair)

Councillors H Collinson D Kenny
C Cooke S Powell-Wilde
C Carubia V Wilson
C Povall A Wright
S Bennett H Gorman (for E
Gleaves)

64 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast.

65 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emily Gleaves.

66 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Sue Powell-Wilde declared a personal interest as a foster carer.

67 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2023 be approved as a correct record.

68 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair informed the committee that no public questions had been received.

69 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mr Jon White delivered a statement on behalf of Inclusion 2024.

70 **MEMBER'S QUESTIONS**

The Chair informed the Committee that no questions from Members had been received.

71 **2022/23 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER THREE (THE PERIOD TO 31 DEC 2022)**

The Senior Finance Business Partner presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report set out the financial monitoring information for the Children, Families and Education Committee as at quarter 3 (31 December) of 2022/23. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2022-23 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.

It was outlined that the forecast outturn position for Children, Families and Education at the end of December 2022 (Quarter 3) was an adverse variance of £3.116m against a budget of £79.234m,

There had been significant movements since the last report for quarter 2, largely due to the continued trend of increasing numbers of children in care, after a period of reducing numbers, particularly in young people placed in high-cost residential settings and more recently into independent fostering. Previously reported costs of £1.1m from the employers proposed pay award, over and above the original 3% built into the 2022-23 budget and SEND Assisted Travel contract, demand and inflation pressures remained. Some mitigations had been taken to reduce the full impact of these adverse variances. The proposed reduction in national insurance contributions from November 2022 had been factored in, along with additional grant and income for the Early Help Service and use of specific reserves. The outturn position reflected delivery of most of the 2022/23 saving proposals.

Resolved – That:

- 1. the forecast revenue position presented at Quarter 3 be noted.**
- 2. the progress on delivery of the 2022-23 savings programme at Quarter 3 be noted.**
- 3. the forecast level of reserves at Quarter 3 be noted.**
- 4. the forecast capital position presented at Quarter 3 be noted.**

QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT AND FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Head of Operations (Interim) presented the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education. The report provided the latest performance information for Children's Services. Where available, national, regional and statistical neighbour benchmarking data had been included in the report for comparison. The Performance Report (Appendix A) had been structured around eight indicator groups and the data contained in the report related to Quarter 3 of the 2022/23 financial year.

Members sought further information on a number of performance issues detailed within the report including criteria for missing children, persistent absences, health assessments and dental checks, social workers leaving the borough and the level of casework they had. Members were assured that robust systems had been put in place to track missing children and that the challenge of dealing with persistent absences was being worked on. A lot of work had taken place regarding initial health assessments with the assessments team and with health partners and IT issues had been identified and resolutions had been found. Members were also assured that work had been undertaken to improve the attendance of children at dental appointments. Officers noted that there had been a real issue with workforce retention for both Adult and Children's social care nationally. Work was ongoing with the Department for Education and officers from Wirral were staying involved with as much of this work.

Resolved – That the content of the Performance Report attached in Appendix A be noted.

SEND TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Interim Deputy Director for Children's Services introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report updated Members on the progress of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transformation Programme. The report noted that in September 2022, the SEND Service implemented a refreshed Education Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment to Annual Review process, which included revised decision-making processes, increased capacity within the team, a new model for working with parent carers and families, and more rigorous performance oversight. Throughout quarter 3 (September to December 2022) the SEND Service had focused on improving service compliance, communication, and quality.

Members queried the assessment process, and alternative providers for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), officers noted that the assessment process can be initiated by services, parents or the young person. They noted that a very small number did not require a plan after being assessed. Officers clarified that it was a statutory requirement for Local

Authorities to carry out EHCPs and that schools could not bring in their own providers.

Members asked about numbers of children that had been placed in the last year and how many had disagreed with their placement. Officers noted that 267 children had been placed with 86% getting their preferred choice.

Clarification was sought over the term 'Assistant Educational Psychologist' and Members were informed that they would be trainee Educational Psychologists. It was noted that there was a pattern of trainees remaining with the organisation that they trained with and that it was hoped that this would be the case for these roles.

Resolved – That:

- 1. The Committee having reviewed and scrutinised the report, the progress made to date on the actions in the Wirral Statement of Action be noted; and**
- 2. A further monitoring report be received at a future date.**

74 **CHILDRENS PARTNERSHIP ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT**

The Assistant Director of Children and Families presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report provided an update on the Children Partnership Accommodation Programme which had been established in August 2020 with the vision to “improve the local offer and availability of options of high quality provision that meets the need of children looked after”. The report noted that four projects sat within the programme, with the Director of Children, Families and Education as Senior Responsible Officer. These projects aimed to encourage resilience in the supply of placements locally. Officers across the Council from social care, commissioning, legal, procurement, finance, housing, assets, regeneration had made significant progress over the past 12 –18 months leading to a mixed model of enhancing provision locally.

Members congratulated officers on the work undertaken to date.

Resolved – That:

- 1. The contents of the report be noted; and**
- 2. The Director of Children, Families and Education be requested to bring an update report to the Committee on the progress of the Programme in 12 months.**

The 14-19 Strategy Head of Service presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report informed Members of the complex post 16 education and learning landscape across Wirral.

Wirral young people making the transition at age 16 into further education and training had several options and pathways including school sixth form, further education (including study programme provision) and Apprenticeships. Post 16 opportunities were accessible in borough however, young people could choose to travel to learn in a neighbouring local authority or beyond.

Young people's post 16 participation rates in the Borough were currently at or above subregional and regional averages. Challenges currently exist with recognised apprenticeship participation where the position was one of building back following the national pandemic and structural national changes to the apprenticeship model of delivery.

The quality of locally delivered post 16 education delivered by Wirral based further education college's, school sixth forms and independent providers was in the main rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. Wirral had one school sixth form provision inspected as requires improvement.

Levels of attainment for Wirral young people at the age of 19 were comparable to national rates, with improvements made in the past 3 years for young people from Wirral's most deprived communities. The inequality attainment gap was at or below national averages.

Members queried if there was an increasing need for apprenticeships due to the various regeneration projects across Wirral. They were informed that there were a high number of apprentices coming through Wirral Met College.

Members asked if the figures for post 16 education included information on young people with special educational needs and disabilities. They were informed that there was further data available which would be shared with Members.

Members expressed concerns over T-Levels and what they meant to employers as qualifications. The 14-19 Strategy Head of Service stated that it was still early in their use but that they were becoming more recognised. He noted that it was a challenge to get young people to commit to a specific industry early on. He noted that a T-Level was equivalent to three A-Levels.

Resolved – That:

- 1. The report be noted.**

2. The services' plan to review the sufficiency of post 16 education options based on continued demographic growth for the next 4 to 5 years be given the support of the committee.

76 **PROGRESS ON CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY 2022-2025**

The Permanence Service Head of Service presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report provided Members with an overview of progress made to deliver the priorities as set out in the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy, as agreed on 10th March 2022. The Strategy set out a vision to “ensure children looked after and care leavers are valued listened to and supported to be aspirational and achieve their full potential” and four key priorities to children looked after and care leavers. These priorities were:

1. Emotional and physical health and wellbeing – making sure you are happy and healthy all the way through your childhood and into adulthood.
2. Independence and transition to adulthood – Focussing on helping you learn ‘life skills’ from an early age and getting everything in place so you can be supported if you need it after you turn 18
3. Positive Lived Experiences – Making sure there are enough of the right people to look after you in suitable homes whether this is a short or long stay/time.
4. Education and Employment – Ensuring that you do well and have the right support in school and have the right opportunities to access employment.

Underpinning each priority would be the fundamental principle to listen to the ‘voice of the child and young people’.

The report highlighted progress which had been made since the report was approved in March 2022 and the role of the Corporate Parenting Board in oversight and monitoring of the priorities.

Resolved – That the progress made to date be endorsed by the committee.

77 **JOINT TARGETED AREA INSPECTION INTO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WHO NEED HELP**

The Director of Children, Families and Education presented her report. The report summarised the findings of the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multiagency response to children and families who need help. The inspection took place from 12 to 16 December 2022. It was carried out by inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His

Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

The findings letter of the inspection, published on 16 February 2023 was included under Appendix A of the report.

Members noted that those present at a verbal summary of the report by the investigator had heard positive feedback and felt the investigator had been pleased with Wirral's progress. They felt that it made a significant difference for Members to see how much progress had been made over the past few years.

Members debated how best to get information to parents on the services available.

Resolved – That the contents of the report be noted.

78 **THE PROVISION OF FOOD AND ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL HOLIDAYS DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC AND BEYOND - WORKING GROUP FINDINGS REPORT**

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education. The report noted that during the COVID 19 pandemic, the committee had agreed that a working group be established on the recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee, who had agreed a proposal for a project co-ordinated on behalf of the Council by local charity Neo Community, working in partnership with schools and local community based feeding groups and organisations, to provide food and activities to children eligible for Free School Meals over the school holidays. This built upon learning from the operation of the Edsential Holiday Activity Fund over the summer, providing for adaptation of a successful model of delivery.

A recommendation arising from the December 2020 report, was that the committee establish a Working Group with key partners to explore options in relation to supporting children with free school meals in the medium to longer term. This report provided the final recommendations of the Working Group.

The Head of Legal Services noted that the report had been published with an incorrect recommendation and that recommendation three should read:

“the working group be dissolved and ongoing work of the HAF programme be reported to members on a regular basis.”

Members agreed this amended wording.

Resolved – That:

- 1. The work as reported to the Holiday Activity Fund working group undertaken by Edsential and Wirral Council be acknowledged and supported;**
- 2. The work undertaken to include children who are not entitled to free school meals and the long term planning to continue with this be noted and supported; and**
- 3. the working group be dissolved and ongoing work of the HAF programme be reported to members on a regular basis.**

79 **WORK PROGRAMME**

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

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.