

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, 28 January 2021

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

Councillors K Cannon S Spoor
C Carubia P Stuart
M McLaughlin T Usher
Cherry Povall A Wright
J Robinson

21 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Members of the Children's, Young People and Education Committee, Officers and viewing members of the public to the online, virtual meeting.

22 APOLOGIES

A roll call of Councillors was undertaken by the Head of Legal Services. No apologies for absence were received.

23 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATION 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.

The following declarations were made:

Councillor Sarah Spoor	Personal interest by virtue of her parent representative on PCPW, a parent support group and her employment in a Liverpool City Region school.
Councillor Moira McLaughlin	Personal interest in respect of item 13 , working group update: The provision of food and activities during the covid 19 pandemic by virtue of her role as a Trustee of the charity ' Feeding Birkenhead'
Councillor Jean Robinson	Personal interest by virtue of her role

24 **MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS COMMITTEE**

A minor amendment was proposed to the minutes with regards to the incorrect Christian name of one Councillor being mentioned.

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2021 be agreed subject to a minor amendment.

25 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

A question received in advance of the meeting was read out and responded to as follows.

Q: My son has autism and along with most children on the Borough are at home due to the national lockdown. His school have set the children work to be done online which is great but my son with having autism finds this very difficult and causes him great anxiety. I have spoken with the school and they said this is all they will be doing there is no alternative to online lessons.

I find this an indirect discrimination on the grounds of accessibility. What would my council propose as a solution as my son who is 15 is missing vital education and will possibly fail some of his exams next year if this continues?

A: Members of the committee share your concern about the impact of COVID-19 on your sons education. We are very well aware that your concerns are shared by many parents, carers and young people not just in Wirral but across this country particularly in relation to children with additional learning needs.

To minimise the impact of missed education it is absolutely vital that every member of our community complies with the lockdown rules so that we can reduce the spread of the virus as soon as possible. This will enable all our children and young people to go back to school and provide them and our teachers with the opportunity to make up for lost time and return to some form of normality. During this crisis we have seen countless examples of the excellent work in our schools to minimise the impact COVID-19 including for children with additional learning needs to keep children and young people engaged in learning. We have seen some of the highest attendance rates and lowest self-isolation rates in the region. We have seen how the infection control measures in our schools have kept school based outbreaks to the absolute minimum. The new variant of the COVID-19 has brought additional challenges but all the evidence suggests that schools are safer places for children, young people and school based staff than the wider community. Remote learning is being provided as is face to face learning for a larger number of children and young people than in the first lockdown.

However, none of this compensates for the loss of learning in school. This is why as a council we will continue to do all we can to drive down the infection rates in our borough and work with schools in every way we can to keep them safe, and to provide support to help with the catch up on lost learning.

26 **ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THE CO-ORDINATED ADMISSION SCHEMES FOR 2022-2023**

A report by the Director of Children, Families and Education invited the Children, Young People and Education Committee to determine the Authority's admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools and the co-ordinated schemes for 2022-2021. Members were informed how this is a statutory requirement.

The report informed Members that some amendments had been made to the existing co-ordinated scheme in order to take into account Department for Education guidance issues July 2020, "Coronavirus (COVID-19); assessment processes for selective school admissions". Members were advised that the amendments included expanding the number of preferences from three to five.

Members heard how the changes to the scheme were consulted upon with the four non – Catholic selective schools, all other local schools, neighbouring authorities and the Diocesan bodies under paragraph 1.44 of the School Admissions Code, and submitted as per the DfE guidance of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA), although the variations proposed did not require formal OSA approval.

In response to questions by Members, the Committee heard how prospective parents had partaken in virtual tours of schools and there hadn't been a significant difference in rates of applications in light of the current Covid 19 global pandemic.

Members then heard how last year 96.5% of primary applicants got their first or second preference whilst 96% of secondary applicants got their first or second preference.

On a motion by Councillor W Clements and seconded by Councillor T Usher it was:

Resolved - That the proposed admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools and the Wirral co-ordinated schemes for 2022-2023 as set out in the appendices to the report be approved.

27 **SECTION B - BUDGET REPORTS**

28 **BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Vicki Shaw, Head of Legal Services, reminded the Committee that due to the current governance arrangements having only been in place since October 2020, there had been insufficient time to enable the usual full budget consultation process, and therefore the complete public consultation response nor the final Local Government finance settlement figure were yet available. However, the item before the Committee was its opportunity to make public comments on the budget proposals, and those comments would be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee, who would then recommend a final budget proposal to Council.

Paul Boyce OBE, Director for Children, Families and Education then introduced the report, which formed part of the budget setting process and included two savings proposals in appendix 1 for consideration. It was reported that the options were arrived at following a review of all council statutory and discretionary services to support children and young people in the borough, and had been put out to public consultation in the context of the significant budget reductions the council was facing.

Members discussed the £200,000 potential saving in youth provision and noted that there had been public interest in this proposal, particularly in relation to The Hive, and queried whether the proposal was a reduction on any previously committed funding. It was confirmed that Wirral Council had provided 3 non-contractual grants of £400,000 per year to The Hive up to 2019/20, in order to give the provider an opportunity to increase income streams with a view to becoming self-sustainable. A further £400,000 grant had been agreed for the 2020/21 financial year to continue to support The Hive in its efforts to become self-sustainable. Paul Boyce confirmed that the figure of £200,000 within the report had been derived from a service-wide review of youth services funding, and that given the current situation and overall youth provision budget, it was felt that The Hive was the most logical place for the £200,000 savings to be taken from. It was confirmed that there had been no prior commitment to funding for The Hive in the 2021/22 budget.

The Committee further discussed the overall allocation of funding for youth services across the borough and noted that the proposed allocation of funding to The Hive was still greater than all of the three Council providers. It was queried whether a Service Level Agreement had been agreed with The Hive and if so, whether those contractual agreements had been met in 2020/21. Members acknowledged the ongoing pressure of Covid-19 on such services, and reinforced the view that The Hive delivered a much valued service to the children within the borough.

RESOLVED – That both the comments made at the Children, Young People and Education Committee budget workshop and during this Committee meeting be considered by Policy & Resources Committee as part of the budget consultation.

29 **REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING**

A report by the Director of Children’s Services set out the financial monitoring information for the Children, Young People & Education Committee. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance for the area of activity which falls under the remit of the Committee. The financial information detailed the projected year end revenue position, as reported at quarter 2 (April – Sept) 2020/21.

Members heard how the Covid 19 pandemic had resulted in a recognised risk of significant placement demand pressures transpiring later in 2020/21; as the full impact of Covid 19 emerges, the current estimate of this is a 5% increase in placements, which amounts to £0.6m forecast for the full financial year. Members were then informed that a forecast overspend on In House Foster Care Skills payments, which is a 5% contingency of £0.19m for additional Covid-19 pressure for the rest of the year.

In response to questions by Members the Committee heard how Tranche funding will be utilised going forward and that some costs can be reclaimed through Covid funding. The Department are active in reclaiming any costs that can be claimed through Tranche funding.

On a motion by Councillor W Clements and seconded by Councillor C Carubia it was:

Resolved – That the Children, Young People & Education Committee are requested to note the projected year-end revenue forecast position of £2.058m adverse, as reported at quarter 2 (Apr- Sep)

30 **UPDATE ON SEND IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

A report by the Director for Children, Families and Education provided Members with an update on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Plan. Members were informed how the Improvement Plan underpins the SEND Strategy 2020-2024 that was agreed by the Committee in December 2020.

The report provided detailed activity to be undertaken to support delivery of the Strategy and set out its four main strategic priorities:

1. Provide high quality provision and support focussed on achieving outcomes

2. Ensure early identification of special educational needs and high-quality intervention particularly for children and young people exhibiting social, emotional and mental health issues.
3. Further develop effective transition from one education phase/ setting including preparing for adulthood pathway; and
4. To develop participation, engagement and coproduction with children, young people, parents and carers.

Members were reminded that at its meeting on 1 December 2020, the Children, Young People and Education Committee agreed the SEND Strategy 2020-2024. Members were advised how the Strategy sets out the local area's priorities over the next four years for improving services, support and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

The update presented to Members was set out in appendix 1 of the report and was based on the review of the current action plan and target dates. Members heard how the original improvement plan set out challenging timescales, particularly in the context of delivery within the COVID-19 pandemic and that the refreshed improvement plan reflects a more realistic picture in terms of key milestones and timescale. Progress of priorities were set out within the report.

A Member made comment regarding transitional planning for young people and resources available for moving into suitable employment and asked that a training session be arranged or workshop so that awareness of personal budgets can be raised. In response to a question, Members heard how at present there hasn't been a substantial uptake in the utilisation of personal finance and that work is being undertaken with parents and carers in order to raise awareness.

On a motion by Councillor W Clements and seconded by Councillor S Spoor it was:

Resolved – That the Children Young People and Education Committee agreed to:

- (1) endorse the progress made to date and on achieving the actions set out within the SEND Improvement Plan; and**
- (2) receive a further update on progress towards achievement and evidence of impact in six months**

31 WIRRAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

A report by the Statutory Safeguarding Partners provided the annual report setting out activity undertaken by the Wirral Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) and relevant agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Wirral.

Members heard how the report was designed to provide a transparent assessment of multi- agency safeguarding arrangements that came into force in September 2019, replacing the previous Local Safeguarding Children Board arrangements.

Members were informed how the annual report is presented on behalf of the three statutory safeguarding partners – the Local Authority, Merseyside Police and Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group, who are jointly responsible for the new safeguarding arrangements.

In response to a comment by a Member it was suggested that Members of the Committee would benefit from training on Safeguarding and the Business Manager for the Local Safeguarding Board specified that he could offer this

On a motion by Councillor W Clements and seconded by Councillor J Robinson it was:

Resolved – That the Children, Young People and Education Committee notes the Wirral Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report.

32 **CHILD POVERTY NOTICE OF MOTION**

A notice of motion referred to the Children, Young People and Education Committee by Council on 7 December 2020 (minute 49 refers), asked that the Committee considers the motion and requested that it begins to lead on compiling a comprehensive child poverty strategy for the borough.

On a motion by Councillor W Clements and seconded by Councillor M McLaughlin it was:

Resolved – That a working group on child poverty be established responsible for compiling a comprehensive child poverty strategy for the borough.

33 **WORKING GROUP UPDATE: THE PROVISION OF FOOD & ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL HOLIDAYS DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC**

A report by the Director for Children, Families and Education provided an update to the progress of the working group of the provision of food and activities for children in school holidays during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Members were reminded that a report presented to the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 1 December 2020 provided an update following the proposal agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee in respect of the provision of free school meals in the school holidays during the

COVID 19 pandemic. The report explained that the Policy and Resources Committee 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 Christmas 2020, February half term 2021 and Easter 2021 holidays. This built upon learning from the operation of the Edsential Holiday Activity Fund over the summer, providing an adaptation of a successful model of delivery.

Members heard how the Working Group had met on 21 December 2020 and 18 January 2021 to be informed of progress and to agree next steps. Members were then advised that during the Christmas holiday period, 23 organisations were involved in the distribution of 8071 hampers and 9961 activity packs that were delivered to those eligible children.

Members were informed that the overall budget of the DWP Covid Winter Grant Scheme (£385,790) and the Budget Tranche 4 (£200,000) is £585,790. The actual spend for Christmas 2020 was £439,621 with an additional projected spend of £243,205 for February half term. The total projected spend was £682,827. It was reported that the estimated contingency for the project is up to £97,037. The way in which the budget was allocated was detailed within the report.

It was reported that individual hampers were costed at £20 each per week, with an enhancement for larger families. Members were advised that the budget attributed to the programme was aimed at a 56% take up rate, based upon delivery of the programme in the summer, but with additional contingency set aside anticipating increased demand over Christmas. In practice, there had been a 66% take up rate from eligible children, and 45% take up rate from early years settings and additionally two colleges requested support. Members were further advised that that contingency had been built into the projects costing in order to support this.

Members were advised that the next steps are to continue working alongside organisations to deliver hampers and activity packs during the February half – term and for the Working Group to continue to meet on a monthly basis.

On a motion by Councillor W Clements and seconded by Councillor M McLaughlin it was:

Resolved – That the Children, Young People and Education Committee note the progress of the Working Group for the Provision of Food and Activities in School Holidays during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

34 **COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members gave consideration to the report of the Director of Law and Governance that set out the proposed Children, Young People and Education Committee Work Programme 2020/21 as detailed in the appendix to the report.

The report informed that the Children, Young People and Education Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

It was envisaged that the work programme will be formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. The work programme for the Children, Young People and Education Committee was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Tom Usher, it was:

RESOLVED - That the proposed Children, Young People and Education Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year be noted.