

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, 11 March 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

35 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 virtual meeting. An update was sought from Paul Boyce, Director of Children, Families and Education on the return of schools.

It was reported that children had returned to school earlier in the week and early indications were that the return had been successful with good attendance reported throughout the borough. Secondary schools and colleges had undertaken lateral flow testing prior to opening, and out of the 6000 student and 700 staff who had been tested, none had returned positive results. It was further reported that the Council had continued to support the safe return of children to school, with additional support in place for children in vulnerable families and the provision of additional digital devices where required. Parents were urged to continue to maintain social distancing, wear face coverings and avoid gatherings at the school gate.

The Chair thanked the Director for Children, Families and Education for his update and informed the Committee that the following day would be Paul's last day in post. The Committee expressed its thanks to Paul for his leadership during his tenure as Director for Children, Families and Education, during which Wirral had received recognition from the Department for Education, and wished him all the best for the future.

36 APOLOGIES

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

37 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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 Wendy Clements	Personal interest in respect of item 8, 'Early Years Sufficiency and Covid-19 Response' by virtue of her employment in a charitable early years setting.
Councillor Jean Robinson	Personal interest in respect of item 8, 'Early Years Sufficiency and Covid-19 Response' by virtue of her employment in early years.
Councillor Sarah Spoor	Personal interest by virtue of her membership of Parent Carer Participation Wirral, and her employment in a Liverpool City Region school.

38 MINUTES

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2021 be agreed.

39 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Head of Legal Services informed the Children, Young People and Education Committee that no public questions, requests to make a statement or petitions had been submitted.

40 WSCP SAFER ADOLESCENCE STRATEGY

Anthony Kirk, Head of Service Contextual Safeguarding introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education, which provided an overview of the Wirral Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) Safer Adolescence Strategy 2021-23.

The report set out the objectives of developing the strategy, which included:

- Promoting a more strategic preventative approach to adolescent safety by raising awareness of associated vulnerabilities;
- Enhancing the collective understanding of what is meant 'extra-familial harm', or 'risk outside the home';

- Embedding a shared set of partnership principles and values for working with adolescents; and
- Developing a Wirral contextual safeguarding framework.

The strategy further detailed the approach of contextual safeguarding, with a three levelled approach in terms of child level, location and groups level and a third level of themes and trends causing risk or harm or increasing vulnerability. Members welcomed the wide consultation and input from young people in shaping and developing the strategy, which included feedback from groups such as the Youth Voice Group, Junior and Youth Arts Group and Children in Care Council.

It was reported that there had been a similar level of contact during lockdown restriction, but the harm themes for adolescents had changed with a reduction around criminal exploitation and changes in anti-social behaviour patterns due to the restrictions on multi-household gatherings. It was further reported that there had been an increase in violence involving younger people during periods of lockdown easing. Further assurances were given around the national standards of transition to adulthood and the local measures to prevent children being held and charged as adults.

Resolved – That

- 1) the Wirral Safeguarding Children Partnership Safer Adolescence Strategy 2021-23 be supported.**
- 2) the approach and ongoing development work within the Wirral Safeguarding Children Partnership be noted.**

41 WIRRAL PUPIL PLACE PLANNING STRATEGY 2021-2026

Simone White, Assistant Director for Children’s Services introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education which detailed the proposed introduction of a Wirral Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026 to set out a transparent and equitable approach for pupil place planning.

It was reported that the Council had a statutory responsibility to ensure there were sufficient school places available for children and young people in the right locations and at the right time to meet demand, as well as to identify how to remedy any excess or insufficiency in the provision of school places. The Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026 set out a methodology for forecasting pupil places, proposed a phased approach for reviewing school places across the five years and provided a detailed appraisal and governance framework to guide the review planning of school places.

A key set of principles would underpin the review process as part of the strategy to provide consistency and result in positive outcomes for future provision. The principles included a commitment to:

- Using detailed and meaningful insight and data to allow accurate and robust forecasting;
- Taking a collaborative approach and a commitment to work with all schools and stakeholders in ensuring they are consulted and involved;
- Maintaining a focus on inclusion so that children with different needs are offered high-quality education which meets their need; and
- Ensuring that children's educational outcomes and attainment are at the forefront of decision-making.

Members discussed the school place planning areas detailed within the strategy, and the impact housing development could have on how these were shaped. It was acknowledged that the strategy was a working document that could change over time.

Resolved – That

- 1) the Wirral Pupil Place Planning Strategy be endorsed.**
- 2) the Director of Children, Families and Education be requested to inform the wider membership of the Council of the Pupil Place Planning Strategy.**

42 EARLY YEARS SUFFICIENCY AND COVID19 RESPONSE

Carol Fenlon, Head of Early Childhood Services introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education, which provided an overview of Wirral's Childcare market sufficiency for the period of April 2019 – March 2020, in addition to the response to Covid-19 including securing childcare places specifically for vulnerable and keyworker children.

It was reported that the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was a statutory duty which provided analysis on whether there was sufficient childcare to meet the needs of families presently and in the future. The Wirral Childcare Sufficiency Assessment identified that there was a decreasing birth rate and that on average early years settings were 80% full with most settings having vacancies for all ages. Planning for future sustainability of childcare places after Covid-19 was a priority for Early Childhood Services, with business recovery online training being made available for providers.

The report further detailed the sufficiency of early years places during the pandemic. The Committee was advised that 216 of the 384 settings closed following the announcements of lockdown restrictions in March 2020, of which many were childminder services closing due to lack of demand or through providers having to shield following advice from Public Health England. It was

further reported that were positive signs of recovery across 2,3- and 4-year-old offer following the commencement of the autumn 2020 term, but there were still fluctuations in take up of early years place due to increased working from home or furlough arrangements.

Members welcomed the work undertaken to support early years settings during the pandemic.

Resolved – That

- 1) publication of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 19/20 be endorsed.**
- 2) Wirral’s Childcare Providers’ Covid-19 response in continuing to offer Early Years Childcare and Education through unprecedented times be noted.**

43 TRANSFORMING CARE THERAPEUTIC SHORT BREAKS

Anne-Marie Carney, Children’s Commissioning Manager introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which outlined a Transforming Care Therapeutic Short Breaks Capital proposal and context on a capital bid process which was underway with NHS England for a grant to be used for children and young people experiencing levels of crisis or difficulty and presenting with behaviours of concern.

It was outlined that following a successful expression of interest stage, a full project proposal had been submitted to NHS England seeking capital fund to provide a facility for up to three young people at risk of attendance at Accident and Emergency, in need of assessment and treatment for mental health issues or in need of a placement away from their normal residence. It was noted that there was no similar provision currently in Wirral. The proposal included the appointment of a care provider for a 9-month period whilst a full tendering process was undertaken, and the Committee was advised that the option to support the facility in-house had been considered but it was felt that it was not achievable to recruit the necessary clinical oversight required for such a facility in a suitable timeframe.

The proposal included the facility for up to three young people and a member queried whether it was anticipated that long term admissions may result in a limited availability of spaces. In response, it was confirmed that modelling had been undertaken based on the existing tier 4 hospital admissions and that demand for places was usually limited to 2 or 3 beds at a time, consequently it was felt that the provision was sufficient for current demand. It was however anticipated that the demand for such places would increase in the future, therefore the Council would continue to explore further funding opportunities to create additional similar provision.

The Committee further considered the ongoing cost of the provision where it was confirmed that the anticipated annual cost based on 100% occupancy was £0.753m compared to the current cost of £0.878m for three externally commissioned placements. Further annual contributions from NHS England Transforming Care of £0.173m for two year helped to mitigate the risk of the occupancy being below 100%.

Resolved – That Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to:

- 1. accept the capital grant monies of up to £700,000 from NHS England to enable the purchase by the Council of a property to be used for the purpose of providing a facility for children and young people with Learning Difficulties, Autism and presenting mental health difficulties along with the delivery of suitable services to such occupants;**
- 2. delegate authority to the Director of Law and Governance to finalise the associated grant agreement;**
- 3. delegate authority to the Director of Regeneration and Place, in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance, the Director of Children, Families and Education and NHS England to purchase a property at market value suitable for the purposes outlined within the report; and**
- 4. delegate authority to the Director of Children, Families and Education to procure a registered care provider for the first nine months of the facility's operation.**

44 **REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 3**

Steven Prytherch, Senior Finance Business Partner, introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which set out the budget performance for Children, Young People and Education and the projected year-end revenue position as reported at Q3 2020/21.

It was reported that the overall financial forecast for Children, Young People and Education showed a full year favourable position of £0.433m, which was a significant change to the forecast at the previous quarter of an adverse position of £2.058m. The Committee was advised that national assumptions for additional demand for Children's Social Care were reflected in the previous quarter forecast, but that the increased demand had not materialised, and the subsequent forecast had therefore been reduced by £0.771m. Furthermore, the increased costs associated with children requiring transport to ensure social distancing had been fully funded by Covid-19 grants, which alongside slippage cause by delays to implementation of contracts for modernisation

and Early Help and Prevention Services had resulted in the change in position since the previous quarter.

Further detail was provided on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget to increase transparency on how it was being spent. The expenditure was forecast to be in line with the budget, but there were significant pressures on the high needs block due to increases in demand and complexity. This had resulted in anticipated underspends earmarked for DSG reserves not materialising and instead the extra use of DSG reserves having to take place. It was queried how the reserves would be replenished, and members were informed that further funding for the high needs block would help to correct the position, alongside a DSG management plan that had been put in place to bring expenditure back in line with funding and recover the deficit.

Members sought further detail on the replenishment of the DSG reserve to be included in the budget monitoring management plan.

Resolved – That the projected year end revenue forecast position of £0.433m favourable and the capital position of £1.89m favourable, as reported at quarter 3 of 2020/21 be noted.

45 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Vicki Shaw, Head of Legal Services introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance, which outlined the proposed Children, Young People and Education Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2021/21 municipal year.

Members welcomed the performance monitoring data that would be available for future meetings and proposed a further item be considered at a future meeting on child mental health.

Resolved – That the proposed work programme for the remainder of the 2021/21 municipal year be noted.

46 **APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL APPEAL PANEL**

Vicki Shaw, Head of Legal Services introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance which sought the Children, Young People and Education Committee's approval of the appointment of additional members to the Independent Appeal Panel and Independent Review Panel to consider Admission Appeals and Exclusion Reviews.

The Committee was advised that in advance of school place offers being circulated to parents for September 2021, a recruitment process had taken place to increase the pool of individuals able to sit on the Admission Appeal

Panel, and approval was sought to appoint those recruited to the Panel. The relevant qualifications of the prospective members were included in the confidential appendix.

Resolved – That the appointment of the following members to the Independent Appeal Panel and Independent Review Panel be approved:

- **Mr Peter Mawdsley**
- **Mr Colin Harwood;**
- **Mrs Ruth Winterton;**
- **Mr Matthew Lloyd Evans;**
- **Mr David Buckley;**
- **Mrs Paula Dixon;**
- **Mr Phil Sheridan ; and**
- **Mrs Lynn Ireland.**

47 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved – That

- 1) under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 2 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test had been applied and favoured exclusion.**
- 2) further to Minute No.46, the content of the exempt appendix circulated with the agenda, be noted.**