

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 15 June 2021

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

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

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Members, Officers and members of the public to the first meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Committee of the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Samantha Frost and Julie Johnson (Co-opted Member).

3 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.

The following declarations were made:

Councillor Cherry Povall	Personal interest as member of the Wirral Fostering Panel.
Councillor Paul Stuart	Personal interest by virtue of he and his wife being Local Authority foster carers.
Councillor Helen Collinson	Personal interest as Chair of Governors at St Peter's and by virtue of employment for an alternative provision service for children excluded from school.
Councillor Adrian Jones	Personal interest as a governor of Oldershaw School and his daughters

	employment as a teacher.
Councillor Chris Carubia	Personal interest as Chair of Governors at a Primary School.
Councillor Chris Cooke	Personal interest as a Governor of a Primary School.
Councillor Wendy Clements	Personal interest as a Governor of Greasby Junior School.

4 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2021 be agreed.

5 **PUBLIC AND MEMBERS 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.

6 **PREVENTION**

Elizabeth Hartley, Assistant Director: Early Help and Prevention introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education, which provided the Committee with an overview of the prevention approach recommended for adoption, including a Prevention Policy Statement and Prevention Framework. In addition, the report detailed the Breaking the Cycle programme, which sought to demonstrate how a collaboration of preventative activity could maximise opportunity and lead to better outcomes for people, services, and organisations.

It was reported that the Prevention Policy Statement was intended to make a clear commitment from the Council to early intervention and prevention, whilst the framework provided structure and guidance on taking preventative approaches, defining the different levels of prevention and setting out 6 foundations for preventative approaches, these were:

- Strategic Leadership
- Place-based Approach
- Strengths-based Approach
- Equity
- Whole-system Approach
- Co-production

The intention was to create a suite of preventative programmes, one of which was the Breaking the Cycle programme which was presented to the Committee. The programme intended to bring together a range of

interventions working towards similar outcomes, and would work with people dealing with deprivation factors associated with deprivation such as drug abuse and risk of homelessness to give them priority access to catalyst projects, and eventually would be used to ask wider agencies to work differently with this cohort of people to provide support in a more suitable way.

Members expressed significant support for the approach and sought further clarity on the source of the funding. The Assistant Director: Early Help and Intervention informed the Committee that the Council had been successful in funding bids over a number of years, and that this workstream pulled together those different strands of work to maximise their effectiveness.

Resolved – That Policy and Resources be recommended to:

- 1) Approve the Prevention Policy Statement and Prevention Framework.**
- 2) Endorse the Breaking the Cycle programme approach.**

7 YOUTH OFFER

Elizabeth Hartley, Assistant Director: Early Help and Prevention introduced the report of the Director for Children, Families and Education providing the Committee with an overview of proposals to implement an equitable, consistent, branded, neighbourhood youth offer for universal, open access provision.

Members were reminded that in Summer 2019 a review of youth provision in Wirral took place, including a consultation in which approximately 3,000 young people took part. A report went to Cabinet in February 2020 where four proposals were approved, the fifth proposal relating to the delivery of youth clubs being deferred for further development, and the report before the Committee presented the revised arrangements for youth clubs for approval.

The report detailed the current youth offer and outlined the strengths of the offer which would be retained in the new model including a mixed economy of provision and a qualified and experienced workforce. The report also detailed the weaknesses of the current that the new offer would need to overcome including an inequitable offer across the borough, impact of staff absence on delivery and lack of consistent brand and quality assurance. Details of the proposed new offer were presented to the committee, which would use the neighbourhood model to provide a consistent offer, developing a service brand and set of standards with young people, using a quality assurance framework to ensure consistency, and introducing a set of key performance indicators for collective impact.

The committee considered several elements within the offer including the Hive outreach work and the role of the Neighbourhood Youth Workers. It was queried whether the offer had been tested with young people to see if would meet their needs, and it was confirmed that the Young People's Action Group had been engaged during the development of the proposals and were supportive of the approach.

Resolved – That delegated authority be given to the Director of Children's Services to carry out actions for the delivery of a universal, open access youth provision as set out in Paragraph 3.6, 3.16, 3.18 and Appendix 2 to the report.

8 CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

Anne-Marie Carney, Children's Commissioning Manager introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which sought agreement in principle to invest up to £1m by way of a loan to the organisation identified in the exempt appendix to the report to develop children's residential accommodation in Wirral.

The Committee was reminded that in March 2019 the Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy was adopted which prioritised the increase in placement provision within Wirral. The need to do so was driven by a number of factors which the report outlined, these included:

- Rising numbers of Children Looked After
- Escalating costs as demand exceeded supply
- Mixed quality of current provision
- Inward-facing market reducing the Council's ability to procure local placements for children
- Lack of sufficiency within the market
- Increase in private provision and use of growth acquisition models across the sector

The different options considered to tackle this were outlined to the Committee. It was acknowledged that doing nothing was not an option due to the unsustainability of the current market. Other options included commissioning an external provider to provide services in Council-owned property, which was discounted due to lack of appropriate accommodation and lack of interest from providers to deliver a service without the associated asset, and a further option was to enter into a joint venture with a service provider, which was also discounted due to it being a technical and time-consuming process which was not warranted given the level of investment proposed. The report detailed other options that had also been considered and discounted.

The proposal put to the Committee was to agree in principle to invest up to £1m by way of a loan on commercial terms to the organisation identified in the

exempt appendix, who had set out an ambitious proposal to set up a new social enterprise that would create a new ethical, sustainable network of residential care homes that significantly improved the life chances of children living in care. The loan would be used to support the organisation to provide initial rental allocation or purchase property, enable recruitment and secure access onto the North West Flexible Purchasing Scheme.

Members welcomed the approach but queried the need to agree to the approach in principle prior to due diligence being undertaken. Officers advised that the item was before Committee for agreement in principle to ensure that members were agreeable to the approach before officers undertook further work, and to give the provider in discussion with the Council assurances that they would receive funding, should they become the chosen provider. Members further queried whether it was necessary for the recommendation in the report to tie the Council to one specific provider.

It was moved by Councillor Kate Cannon and seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, that recommendation 1 in the report be amended to read:

‘That agreement be given in principle to invest up to £1m by way of a loan on commercial terms to enable the development of children’s homes within Wirral for children looked after.’

The motion was put and carried unanimously. It was therefore –

Resolved – That

- 1) agreement be given in principle to invest up to £1m by way of a loan on commercial terms to enable the development of children’s homes within Wirral for children looked after.**
- 2) the Director of Children, Families and Education be requested to bring a further report to Committee after due diligence had been completed in respect of the proposals set out in the report.**

9 SEND SERVICE UPDATE

James Backhouse, Assistant Director of Education introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which provided an update on the Special Education Needs and Disabilities services that supported young people in education.

The Committee was reminded that at its meeting in December 2020, it approved the SEND Strategy 2020-2024 and the subsequent SEND Improvement Plan aimed at addressed concerns with the service. The report detailed actions that were being taken as part of that plan, these included:

- Recruitment of staff in the SEND assessment team to ensure completion of Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments within the statutory 20-week timeframe.
- A review of provision for young people requiring Special School placements for September 2021, with additional capacity being agreed to sustain the additional demand.
- Short-term placements and additional long-term recruitment processes taking place to address the staff shortages being faced nationally in Educational Psychology, which were resulting in challenges in delivering assessments within the relevant time frame.

Members raised several concerns including the number of EHCP assessments taking place outside of the statutory timescales and sought further information on the outcomes of tribunals relating to children with SEND. A further discussion was had around the number of children requiring EHCPs and whether there was any benchmarking data that could be provided to committee. Further clarity was sought on the short-term solutions to address the capacity challenges in the Education Psychology team, where officers confirmed that locum support had been recruited and greater links had been made with the university for additional trainees.

It was moved by Councillor Wendy Clements, seconded by Councillor Kate Cannon, that –

“Having received the service update, the Children, Young People and Education Committee expresses its deep concern regarding the current position of the SEND service and the impact that this has upon families and children. The Committee requests a further update in three months on progress towards completing Education Health and Care Plan assessments within the statutory timeframe, seeking evidence of progress in this vital and statutory service for those Wirral families who need it.”

The motion was put and carried unanimously. It was therefore –

Resolved – That having received the service update, the Children, Young People and Education Committee expresses its deep concern regarding the current position of the SEND service and the impact that this has upon families and children. The Committee requests a further update in three months on progress towards completing Education Health and Care Plan assessments within the statutory timeframe, seeking evidence of progress in this vital and statutory service for those Wirral families who need it.

Vicki Shaw, Head of Legal Services introduced the report which enabled the committee to appoint members and named deputies to serve on statutory and advisory committees and working parties for 2021/22 Municipal Year.

It was reported that Cllr Chris Cooke had indicated a wish to be a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel and therefore the committee would need to agree to increase the membership from 5 to 7 to ensure it remained politically proportionate.

It was proposed by Councillor Wendy Clements, seconded by Councillor Kate Cannon that the membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel be increased to 7. The motion was put and carried unanimously. It was therefore –

Resolved – That

- 1) the Monitoring Officer as proper officer be authorised to carry out the wishes of the Group Leaders in allocating Members to membership of the Statutory and Advisory Committees listed in the report and to appoint those Members with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members.**
- 2) the current constitution and membership of the School Appeals Panel be noted.**
- 3) the membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel be increased to 7 members.**

11 2021/22 BUDGET MONITORING AND 22/23 BUDGET PROCESS

Simone White, Director of Children, Families and Education introduced the report of the Director of Resources which outlined the processes for monitoring the 2021/22 budget and for commencing the budget setting process for 2022/23.

It was reported that following the capitalisation directive of up to £10.7m the Council had received from Ministry for Housing, Local Government and Communities, one of the conditions of that offer was that the Council needed to provide evidence from the assurance review of the authority's financial position and its ability to meet any or all of the identified budget gap without any additional borrowing. Therefore, it was important that the Council had robust processes in place to manage and monitor the in-year financial position, to ensure it is reporting a forecast balanced position to the end of the year and that the process for 2022/23 budget setting was underway early so that an agreed budget could be agreed by Council in March 2022.

Members acknowledged that the Policy and Resources Committee had resolved to pilot zero based budgeting in Adult Social Care and Public Health, but it was queried whether there was scope to undertake the preliminary zero-based budgeting without taking part in the pilot. It was confirmed that the principles of zero-based budgeting would be adopted to ensure that funding was taken away from areas where there were savings to be made and directed to areas with cost pressures.

Resolved – That

- 1) the content of the report and the current forecast position of savings for 2021/22 and the ongoing work being undertaken to mitigate any under-achievement be noted.**
- 2) the current proposals within this report from the Medium Term Financial Plan from 2022/23 – 2025/26 and the Director of Children be agreed for the Families and Education to develop them into full business cases, where appropriate, for inclusion in the 2022/23 budget proposals to Policy and Resources Committee at its October meeting for approval.**
- 3) a series of budget workshops be convened to identify any alternative savings/income/reductions in pressures to ensure that a full suite of costed and deliverable proposals can be recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee at its October meeting for approval.**

12 CAPITAL AND REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 4 (APRIL - MARCH 2021)

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 Q4 2020/21, which was reported as a favourable position of £1.476m and a favourable capital position of £2.8m.

The report detailed the reasons for the position, where it was outlined that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had resulted in one-off actions and funding which had positively impacted on the position. It was further reported that within the Dedicated Schools Grant there was an adverse variance in the High Needs Block of £1.373m due to additional demand in both volume and complexity, but that the favourable position in the early years budget due to reduction in attendance had offset the shortfall in the Dedicated Schools Block. The report further detailed the favourable position in the Capital Budget, where it was explained that it was due to a delay in school improvements due to Covid-19 and the underspend would be rolled over into the next financial year when work could proceed.

Members considered the various underspends and overspends within the overall budget. It was acknowledged that some of the underspends were due to the humanitarian efforts to support families during the pandemic which it was felt highlighted the importance and positive outcomes of a preventative approach.

Resolved – That the projected year-end revenue forecast position of £1.476m favourable and the capital position of £2.8m favourable, as reported at quarter 4 (April-March) of 2020-21 be noted.

13 **CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

Simone White, Director of Children, Families and Education introduced the report, which set out a revised performance monitoring and reporting framework for the Committee. The new approach had been designed in consultation with the Chair and Group Spokes, aiming to deliver an open, honest and transparent performance framework that would allow Committee Members to effectively challenge performance and support decision-making.

It was reported that the focus was on reporting performance information relating to child social care, but that there was a need to understand other parts of the system to ensure that members could have a wider oversight on all performance information affecting children and families. It was hoped that the new PowerBI technology would allow members to be able to look at the headlines at both Wirral and ward level, and then drill down into the underlying data. Therefore, the report was intended as an interim report to introduce the new system to members.

Members discussed a wide range of data including that relating to Independent Reviewing Officers Caseloads and Escalations alongside turnover of social service staff. Further information on national benchmarking of performance data and missing episodes were requested.

Resolved – That

- 1) the report be noted and the work completed to date as well as the next steps involved in developing a robust performance monitoring framework that encompasses all aspects of Children's Services be acknowledged.**
- 2) the proposed clusters of performance indicators in Appendix A be agreed.**
- 3) the delivery of Performance Management Workshops during the summer where elected Members would receive training on the Council's business intelligence system including how to access**

and navigate around real-time data reports be agreed.

4) the content of the databook in Appendix C be noted.

14 FOSTERING AND ADOPTION ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT. REPORTING PERIOD 1 APRIL 2020 – 31ST MARCH 2021

Nabeel Chaudhry, Head of Integrated Provision introduce the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which provided an overview of fostering and adoption performance during the financial year of 2020 – 2021 and how this linked to the Council's children looked after 'sufficiency duties'.

Members were advised that a key priority for Children's Services was for Children Looked After to be living in family-based settings, most notably foster placements. At the end of the reporting period (31st March 2021), 59% of children were living in local authority 'in-house' foster placements. Overall, 71% of children were living in foster placements taking into account 12% of those in placed with private fostering agencies. The Committee was further advised of the success in recruiting 12 new fostering households, alongside the successful marketing campaign in late 2020 which resulted in an increase in enquiries resulting in approvals of new foster carers. Overall, during the reporting period, 25 children had been adopted and a further 23 were placed with prospective adoptive families.

Members welcomed the figures and sought further information on the reasons why foster carers stopped providing care. The level of training provided was raised, where it was confirmed that each carer had an individual training and personal development plan which compliance with was a key requirement of them being a carer.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

15 WORK PROGRAMME

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

Members acknowledged that work had already been undertaken on the healthy weight agenda and suggested it be removed from the work programme. It was further suggested that a report on the impact of the pandemic on job prospects for school leavers be added to the work programme.

Resolved – That

- 1) the proposed work programme be noted.
- 2) the Healthy Weight item be removed from the work programme.
- 3) the working group for the provision of food and activities in school holidays during the Covid-19 pandemic be re-established.
- 4) Councillors Cherry Povall, Chris Carubia and Moira McLaughlin be appointed to remain on the working group for the provision of food and activities in school holidays during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5) the Monitoring Officer as proper officer be authorise to carry out the wishes of the Labour Group leader in allocating a Labour member to the working group for the provision of food and activities in school holidays during the Covid-19 pandemic.

16 **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 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

17 **CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME**

Resolved – That the content of the exempt appendix be noted.