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CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, 10 March 2022

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

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

Apologies Councillor S Frost

75 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

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

76 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Samantha Frost and Councillor Paul Stuart, who was deputised by Councillor Adrian Jones.

77 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.

The following declarations were made:

Councillor Max Booth	Personal interest in item 8 by virtue of a family member's employment at Clareount Specialist Sports College.
Councillor Helen Collinson	Prejudicial Interest in item 7 as Chair of Governors at St Peter's Catholic Primary School.

78 MINUTES

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January, 2022 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

79 **PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS**

Four questions had been received in relation to item 7. The first two questions, read out by Father Michael Coughlan and Carol Corvers, were about St Paul's Catholic Primary School and the proposed closure. The questions cited early years numbers as an indication that the school would continue to be viable in the future and queried what the council would gain from the closure.

The Chair responded that the council has a statutory duty to secure sufficiency of places for children and young people, this includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. Based on projections calculated using birth rates and housing developments, occupancy will fall to 46% and this will risk the financial viability of the school.

The final two questions were read out by Patrick Landsborough and were in relation to the proposed amalgamation of Manor Primary School and Hillside Primary School and referenced the rivalry between the Beechwood and Noctorum estates and sought clarification on whether the proposal for this stage of consultation could be delayed as both schools had held discussions with Multi Academy Trusts regarding academisation.

The Chair outlined that as part of the consultation process, any concerns from members of the community in relation to anti-social behaviour should be raised to allow an appropriate assessment to be undertaken and stated the importance of the committee supporting parents and young people to feel confident to attend school safely. It was reported that the pupil place planning review included all school types and so it would not be appropriate to delay in relation to exploring academisation.

Full questions and responses can be found in the appended document.

Two statements were read out to the committee. The first statement was made by Patrick Landsborough in relation to item 7 and set out the concerns the governors had regarding the proposed amalgamation of Manor Primary School and Hillside Primary School and stated that the proposals, if approved would destabilise an already disadvantages and vulnerable community.

The second statement was made by Michael Brown in relation to item 7 and reported that the data concerning St Paul's Catholic Primary school refuted the representations made in the Wirral Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026 and stated the data published in the report was incorrect. The statement requested that the proposal to close the school be removed from the consultation.

80 **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY 2022-2025**

The Assistant Director of Children and Families introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which presented the Committee with the Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2025. The Strategy set out the Local Authority and partners plans as corporate parents to ensure CLA and Care Leavers were valued, listened to and supported to be aspirational and to achieve positive relationships and their full potential. The Strategy set out four key priorities all of which were underpinned by listening to the voices of CLA and Care Leavers.

A discussion ensued with Members querying the process for care leavers progressing to full time employment with the Council. The Director of Children's Services stated that there were many opportunities for care leavers in Children's Services and that other directorates also offered opportunities. It was highlighted that there was a full coaching programme in place to support these young people. The Assistant Director agreed to circulate information to Members with details of care leavers in apprenticeships and case studies. Details of care leavers in apprenticeships and case studies would be circulated to Members.

Members noted and welcomed the co-production of the priorities with young people.

Resolved – That:

(1) the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2025 be endorsed and;

(2) an update on the progress of the Strategy be brought to the Committee in 12 months.

81 **PHASE 1 PUPIL PLACE PLANNING**

Having previously declared a prejudicial interest, Councillor Helen Collinson vacated the room during consideration of this item (minute 77 refers).

The Assistant Director of Education introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which outlined the recommendations which arose from the phase 1 of the pupil place planning review. As the responsible authority for maintained schools, the importance of the council managing surplus and demand for pupil places in line with statutory responsibilities was outlined. It was reported that the dioceses of both Shrewsbury and Chester had supported the recommendations in the report which demonstrated the strength in partnership and collaborative working across the education sector.

Councillor Chris Cooke read a statement which queried the accuracy of the future occupancy projections. It was outlined that the Council should be making the most of opportunities to reduce inequalities by allowing schools in areas of greater social need to remain open and thrive with smaller class sizes which lead to better social and educational outcomes.

A discussion followed with Members querying how the projections were established, and whether the number of children in early years provision at schools was considered. It was clarified that as not all schools had an early years facility, in order to ensure consistency, only foundation 2 to year 6 were taken into account.

Following the proposal of suggested amendments in relation to the removal of recommendations 7 and 8 in the report and keeping the schools referred to open, the Chair agreed to adjourn the meeting at 7.00pm for consultation and legal advice on the proposed amendments.

The meeting resumed at 7.10pm.

Councillor Wendy Clements moved the recommendations as in the report, and having been seconded by Councillor Kate Cannon, the motion was put and carried (8:1), and it was -

Resolved (8:1) – That:

- (1) the outcome of phase 1 of the Pupil Place Planning review regarding small planning areas: Beechwood, Central Birkenhead, North Birkenhead, South Birkenhead, Noctorum and Prenton as outlined in the Findings report attached at appendix 1 be noted;**
- (2) recommendation 1, that the Diocese of Shrewsbury decommission existing teaching space in St Anne’s Primary School and repurpose for alternative use to reduce the overall capacity of the school be approved;**
- (3) recommendation 2, that in principle agreement is given for the establishment of a new school in the small planning area of North Birkenhead to meet the demand for new school places over the next 15 years be approved. This will be the subject of future reports for Members’ consideration as more details are developed;**
- (4) recommendation 3, to reduce Pupil Admission Numbers at St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School as agreed by the Diocese of Shrewsbury and Holy Family Multi Academy Trust (MAT) be approved;**

- (5) recommendation 4, to reduce Pupil Admission Numbers at Christchurch Church of England (CE) Birkenhead as agreed by the Diocese of Chester be approved.**
- (6) recommendation 5 relating to Woodchurch Road Primary as outlined in the report 'Admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools and the co-ordinated admission schemes for 2023-24' as considered and approved by the Children, Young People and Education Committee at its meeting on 31 January, 2022 be noted;**
- (7) a formal consultation on recommendation 6 regarding the amalgamation of St Peter's Catholic Primary School and St Paul's Catholic Primary School be undertaken. This would involve closure of both schools and opening of a new combined school on one site. Pupils from both schools would be guaranteed a place at the single school;**
- (8) a formal consultation on recommendation 7 regarding the amalgamation of Manor Primary and Hillside Primary commencing 9th May, 2022 be undertaken. This would involve closure of both schools and opening of a new combined school on one site. Pupils from both schools would be guaranteed a place at the single school. In line with statutory guidance, this recommendation requires a formal consultation.**

82 KINGSWAY SCHOOL PFI UPDATE

The Assistant Director of Education introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which provided the Committee with an overview of the feasibility study that had taken place in relation to Clare Mount Specialist Sports College relocating to the former Kingsway Academy, Wallasey. The Assistant Director of Education noted that when this report had been brought to the Committee in November, Members had asked for information on post 16 provision, and he confirmed his intention to bring a further report in the next municipal year with a review of post 16 provision to understand the growth in demand and the types of provision needed in Wirral.

Members praised and welcomed the report and comments on post 16 provision. It was stated that the clear priority was facilitating the school taking the site in September 2022. Assurance was given to Members that additional capacity had been factored in to current plans in the event that the school needed to expand, and it was noted that the remaining space in the school was a significant educational resource that could be used for projects and opportunities for the local community.

Resolved – That:

- (1) a formal consultation for Clare Mount Specialist Sports College to move to the former Kingsway Academy from September 2022 be undertaken;**
- (2) the Director of Children, Families and Education explore future options for the remaining part of the building that will be un-occupied.**

83 WIRRAL CHILD EXPLOITATION AND MISSING OVERVIEW

The Head of Service of Contextual Safeguarding introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which provided the Committee with an overview of the response to child exploitation and missing children in Wirral. The report set out the working arrangements across partners, in Wirral and regionally; and included an overview of themes, trends and impact. The working arrangements and governance were described with the intention of reassuring members that exploitation and missing remained priorities for the directorate and partners, with resources and time directed to identifying and managing the risk of harm.

Members received assurance that Wirral was not exposed to the type of child exploitation seen in areas of Greater Manchester. The Head of Service of Contextual Safeguarding stated that Wirral had a team of dedicated professionals actively looking for exploitation and establishing any issues and the working arrangements of the multi-agency teams ensured the Council was well placed to identify and tackle those types of issues.

In response to a query surrounding sibling groups, the Head of Service of Contextual Safeguarding referenced the Wirral Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panel, which reviewed social work led Child Exploitation Assessments to determine if the threshold for a MACE plan was met and aimed to reduce the risk of child exploitation, he reported that one of the “four P’s” was protect and that exploitation plans were cross referenced with the child’s plan to consider sibling and associates of the child who might also be at risk.

It was highlighted that the prevention project “In the Zone” was not yet being delivered in alternative provision as it was still being rolled out but the intention moving forward would to be offer the prevention sessions in all organisations.

Resolved – That the approach and ongoing work relating to child exploitation and missing children be noted.

84 **CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT**

The Commissioning Manager introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which provided an update on the Children's Residential Transformation Programme. It was reported that there were great pressures in terms of delivering placements for Children Looked After (CLA) and Care leavers and the pace of the delivery of projects such as these remained crucial to improve outcomes for local placements for local children.

The Chair noted the importance of the report being brought to Committee as it offered improvements for children in Wirral as well as being a crucial part of budget savings. Members thanked officers for their hard work, a recent article in a national newspaper had indicated that Wirral was ahead of the curve and the rest of the country in this area.

The Commissioning Manager drew attention to a potential financial risk with the market place for supported accommodation for 16-18 year olds due to become regulated by OFSTED by April 2023 and warned there could be an increase in cost of the semi-independent provision.

Resolved – That the report be noted, and the Director of Children's Services bring an update report to the Committee on the progress of the Programme in 12 months.

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

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report which outlined the statutory requirement to appoint members to sit on both the Independent Appeal Panel and Independent Review Panel.

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

- Jane Gordon
- Rebecca Burke-Sharples

86 **CHILDRENS SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Director of Children's Services introduced the report which provided the latest performance information for Children's Services. The Director drew attention to a recently published OFSTED report which consisted of a detailed review of Children Looked After and response to permanence which had previously been a weak area, the visit recognised improvement in this area and positive changes made. The Director informed Members of feedback received from The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

(DLUHC) who had recognised that improvements in safeguarding and community partnerships and approach had brought the service forward.

A discussion ensued citing an article in the press which showed large numbers of social workers in Wirral quitting and members sought clarification. The Assistant Director of Children and Families was keen to give accurate data to the Committee and reported that the data printed was from September 2021 and was national data, not just Wirral, and so gave some comparisons with the North West and England. It was outlined by the Director of Children's Services that Wirral social workers had the lowest caseloads in the region and so could develop good practice.

Following a query regarding the 40% increase in the child protection rate from 2019-2020, the Director explained that this was a volatile data set and comparison with Wirral's statistical neighbours was the best comparison. It was outlined that during the pandemic, children remained on plans longer than usual as some services were not up and running. An analysis of child protection plans was to be undertaken and the findings brought to Committee.

It was highlighted that a Member had met some foster carers who had had seven social workers over the course of one year. The Director acknowledged there had been instability in teams with agency workers and that this was not acceptable and suggested a report and update on the fostering team could be shared with Members.

Resolved – That the content of the performance report attached in Appendix A be noted.

87 **2021-22 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER 3**

The Senior Finance Business Partner introduced the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education, which set out the financial monitoring information for Children, Families and Education as at quarter 3 (Oct-Dec) of 2021-22. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provided robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

It was outlined that Children's Services was on course to achieve savings for the current financial year and were planning for savings in the next financial year. The Director of Children's Services highlighted the considerable underspend of the income budget of £19 million due to an additional £4 million from grants and other funding which were all used to fund projects and put back into services for children. It was clarified that the underspend would be mitigated by the input of final contract costs.

A query was raised about transport costs which amounted to £1 million that were not originally the costs of the Council. The Director confirmed that this cost had come over in the budget gap and had been negotiated as one off pressure due to covid. It was reported that officers were conscious of rising transport costs and re-negotiations of transport contracts were imminent and the Committee would be kept informed as events developed.

Resolved – That:

- (1) the forecast year-end revenue position of £0.890m favourable as reported at quarter 3 (Apr – Dec) of 2021/2 be noted;**
- (2) the progress on the achievement of approved savings and the year-end forecast position at quarter 3 (Apr – Dec) of 2021/22 be noted;**
- (3) the reserves allocated to the Committee for future commitments be noted;**
- (4) the forecast year-end capital position as reported at quarter 3 (Apr – Dec) of 2021/22 be noted.**

88 CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION 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 regularly review its work across the municipal year.

The scheduling of the COVID 19 Education Catch Up Plan was raised and it was agreed that it should be brought to Committee earlier than stated on the work programme.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.

89 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF MEMBERS OF THE 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 1 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test had been applied and favoured exclusion.

90 **APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL APPEAL
PANEL - EXEMPT APPENDIX**

Resolved – That further to Minute No. 85 the content of the exempt appendix circulated with the agenda, be noted.

Appendix 1 – Children Young People and Education Public Questions and Statements

1. Question from Bogumit Polachowski

What does the council gain by closing St. Paul's as they do not own the building and the pupil numbers on roll currently including Early Years indicate that we will continue to be viable and prosper into the future?

Answer

The proposal on the table to be consider in the consultation is not made to directly benefit the council. The council has a statutory duty to secure sufficiency of places for children and young people, this includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. We have shared the future trend data on pupil numbers. Which suggests that the oversupply of places in the local area which will increase overtime. The council is there keen to work with the diocese and the schools to find a long-term solution. To enable any changes needed to happen overtime in a planned way. Before any change in pupil numbers impacts on the quality of education and funding in any of the schools affected.

2. Question from Kathleen Ford

With regards to the rivalry between the Beechwood and Noctorum estates, their high levels of crime and antisocial behaviour, how does the Equality Impact Assessment mitigate the risks to vulnerable parents and pupils (many of whom have Special educational needs and disabilities) to ensure community cohesion?

Answer

As part of the consultation process, any concerns from members of the community in relation to anti-social behaviour should be raised to allow an appropriate assessment to be undertaken. This would allow options to explored to support any parent or young person in relation to the proposals that have been outlined. Whatever the outcome of a consultation if approved, it is important that we support parents and young people to feel confident to attend school safely.

3. Question from Jennifer Norwood

Could the proposal for this stage of consultation be delayed, due to the Governors opposing the recommendation to amalgamate, as both schools are progressing discussions with Multi Academy Trusts regarding academisation, with one school already in consultation with parents on a proposal?

Answer

The pupil place planning review that has been undertaken for this area has included all school types, including both academies, maintained and voluntary

aided schools. The local authority has a statutory duty to secure sufficiency of places for children and young people, this includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. For this reason and the remit of the review it would not be appropriate to delay in relation to exploring academisation.

4. Question from Carol Corvers

Can you show us how due process has been followed to result in a proposal to close St Paul's, a school that is deemed to be efficient, financially viable, both now and in the foreseeable future, and achieving good outcomes for extremely disadvantaged pupils in an area which is very near the top of the index of Social Deprivation?

Answer

The council has a statutory duty to secure sufficiency of places for children and young people, this includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. Based on projections that include house building in the local area and birth rates, it is predicted that numbers on roll will fall to 46% occupancy. The predicted reduction in pupil numbers will mean less funding is available to the school, this will risk the financial viability of the school. For this reason, it is appropriate to explore options that maintain viability in the future.

Statement from Patrick Landsborough

The Governing Body at Manor Primary School vehemently oppose the proposal to amalgamate the school with Hillside Primary, and have many concerns, principally:

1. We cannot see the educational benefits for our children.
2. We are concerned about the impact of such a disruption to the learning environment of children with SEMH and SEND issues, who benefit significantly from small classroom environment.
3. Staff at Manor work tirelessly to understand and help both their pupils and family needs. Such vital familiarity would be lost on amalgamation.
4. The school has continued to grow over the past 9 years and has a healthy, stable budget, at no point has the school had to plan and request a licensed deficit
5. We are concerned about potential safety issues with travelling to a site that could treble the journey time for parents/carers/children, some with SEND and mobility issues, and would increase reliance on cars, which contradicts the Council's pledges to reduce both driving, and obesity! There is already a recognised shortage of public transport on both Estates.
6. The community that the school sits within is a vulnerable community and we are concerned as to whether the risks to this community have been properly considered.
7. There is significant gang rivalry and activity between the Beechwood and Noctorum Estates, and we fear that an enforced amalgamation would exacerbate this, making community cohesion difficult to achieve and maintain.

8. With already stretched resources, additional resources will be needed to support and ensure community cohesion. The intervention of a Home Office project is already in the pipeline.
9. The impact of Covid 19 on mental health of our children and families has been significant, emotionally and financially, and feel that such a significant upheaval to their family lives, would exacerbate their stress.
10. We have had meetings with our supportive Ward Councillors, making it clear that we strenuously oppose this proposal. We will be contacting our MP to appraise him of this proposal and our significant concerns.
11. The school has been working closely with an accredited MAT to move the school forward and we are in the process of looking at academisation.

If these proposals go ahead this will de-stabilise an already disadvantaged and vulnerable community.

Statement from Michael Brown

In response to the proposals put forward in terms of the closure of St Paul's through amalgamation I would like to offer the following on behalf of the Governors of the school.

In the Wirral Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021 -2026 (March 2021) it states that on Wirral smaller schools tend to be the ones who have fallen into Ofsted categories of concern, have poorer outcomes than bigger schools, are unable to offer a rich curriculum with enhancement opportunities for all children and are challenged in terms of the budget. All data concerning St Paul's refutes these representations.

Despite the school being situated in highly deprived area – 174 out of 32,844 (on the index of Social Deprivation) we can state that at St Paul's

We **do** offer a high quality education – Ofsted 2013 and 2017 – good outcome

We **are** efficient and viable – we are not in debt and never have been. In fact, this year we do not even have an in year deficit

We achieve good outcomes because we meet the needs of all children including those with complex additional needs and disabilities

In addition to this we offer impressive enrichment experiences for our children in all areas of the curriculum – school visits, art, drama, music, sporting competitions and a varied programme of after school activities as well as a summer holiday club. The leasing of our minibus supports these endeavours including those with mobility issues as it has disabled access. The building also has enhanced wheelchair provision

Vulnerable children are offered free places in our successful Breakfast Club, and we have plans for an after school club to support working parents.

Our staff are skilled and experienced to support and work with those with additional needs, poor mental health and physical disabilities. The establishment of a SEND hub in September will further enhance this facility.

The data published in the papers for this committee is incorrect. We do not have a capacity of 150, it is 117. Paperwork has been submitted to show this. We have a thriving preschool Twos' Room and F1 facility. Although these age groups are not part of this review, the children are enrolled in the school, and we have figures to show that the numbers into F2 will continue to rise as they have done this year and will do for the next three years.

Our FSM is 64%, not 46% as stated in the papers.

As a Catholic School we exist to promote Gospel Values and the teaching of the Church for all children. This is what the St Paul's parents want for their children. Last summer we were accredited with the School of Sanctuary Award. This evidenced that our school is a hub of safety, support and nurture for the whole community.

A testimonial from a local stakeholder towards the award said

"The team at St Pauls never cease to amaze me with their never-ending passion and commitment to make sure that no child or parent is ignored, and every voice is heard so that the best possible education and pastoral care is delivered. I have personally noted that each child is made to feel part of a family when they enroll into St Pauls, and when they leave the school for the last time, I have witnessed it as being a gut-wrenching time for the staff, the pupils and their families, as they felt a sense of safety and understanding whilst their children were there

The area is so fortunate to have St Paul's, and to validate this my mind goes to what would life be like for everyone if it was never there, I would dread to think"

This echoes what we and the community at large feel about St Paul's which they as a parent/pupil safe and easily accessible school. It is financially viable as the LA financial projections confirm and pupil numbers are set to rise from the increase in uptake of the 2- and 3-year-old provision. We would therefore ask that the proposal does not go forward for consultation and St Paul's is left to continue to shine as a beacon in the Beechwood community.

As a result of this meaningful consultation, we wait for the follow up meeting to discuss the findings.