

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, 1 February 2024

Present: Councillor S Powell-Wilde (Chair)

Councillors	P Basnett	C Povall
	S Bennett	V Wilson
	T Laing	C Cooke
	L Luxon-Kewley	J Grier
	K Hodson	

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast and reminded them that a copy of the webcast would be retained on the Council's website for two years.

2 APOLOGIES

Councillor Chris Carubia sent his apologies

3 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interests in connections with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Paula Basnett and the Chair both declared a personal interest as foster carers.

4 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2023 be approved as a correct record.

5 PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS

The Chair noted that no public questions, statements, or petitions had been received.

6 ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND COORDINATED ADMISSION SCHEMES FOR 2025-26

The Senior Manager for Admissions and Place Planning presented a report on behalf of the Director of Children, Families and Education which invited the

committee to determine the Council's admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools and the co-ordinated schemes for 2025-2026. The Wirral Fair Access Protocol had also been amended to reflect feedback from Wirral schools.

The report noted that the Council in its capacity as Local Education Authority was required to determine admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools. The Council was also required to have in place a co-ordinated scheme for admissions to all primary and secondary schools including Academy schools, in 2025-26. The Council was required to have in place a Fair Access Protocol agreed with the majority of schools which ensured that there was a fair and balanced approach to admitting unplaced children, particularly those who were most vulnerable, outside the normal admissions round. The Wirral Fair Access Protocol had been developed in partnership with local schools. All admission authority schools must participate in order to ensure that children were allocated a place quickly.

Members discussed the consequences of schools opting out of in-year admissions co-ordination and were informed that they would still have to inform the local authority of all applications they received and their outcomes. They also queried how funding works for children being placed at an oversubscribed school when they have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and were informed that once a school has been chosen, funding based on the EHCP needs of the child would be allocated to that school. Members further discussed policy on children returning to school from elective home education and how children might be affected should they transition to another sex while attending a single sex school. They were informed that children returning from home education to a school would go through the same process as any child wishing to transfer in-year from another school. Children going through a transition would be supported and would be able to remain within their current school unless they chose to move.

Resolved – That

1. The admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools and the Wirral co-ordinated schemes for 2025-2026 as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report be agreed.

2. The revised Wirral Fair Access Protocol as set out in Appendix 3 of this report be agreed.

7 2024-25 BUDGET REPORT UPDATE

The Finance Manager presented a report on behalf of the Director of Finance which provided an update on the budgets within the remit of the Committee in respect of forthcoming pressures and proposed savings that were being considered within the Medium Term Financial Plan. The report noted that the Council had a legal responsibility to set a balanced budget, which set out how financial resources were to be allocated and utilised. The report highlighted the

external challenges impacting the 2024/25 budget setting process and proposed options to address the challenges faced.

Resolved – That

- 1. the indicative pressures and proposed savings detailed in Appendix 1 be noted; and**
- 2. The Budget Workshop feedback and outcomes, as detailed in Appendix 3 be agreed.**

8 HOLIDAY ACTIVITY AND FUND UPDATE

The Assistant Director of Education presented a report on behalf of the Director of Children, Families and Education which gave an update on the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF). It noted that in 2020 Wirral local authority made the decision for Edsential, a Community Interest Company jointly owned by Wirral and Chester and Cheshire West Councils, to deliver the HAF on behalf of Wirral Council. Holiday Activity funding received by the Local Authority from the Department for Education (DfE) in the last academic year was £1.46 million, this funding had continued this financial year and would continue in 2024-2025. The Edsential team that delivered HAF oversees management, administration marketing, training and finance in relation to the HAF programme, Edsential worked closely with officers within Children's Services to deliver the programme. After each holiday programme Edsential have to complete a finance return to the DfE outlining how the funding had been utilised.

Members queried who was entitled use to the HAF programme and whether children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) were given priority. Officers clarified that the HAF programme was specifically for families that could not afford school meals and qualified for free school meals during term time. They highlighted that there were separate respite programmes for SEND children and that work was being carried out to improve this offer.

Members queried whether food or activity was given greater priority within the programme and that some of the activities such as martial arts and boxing sounded potentially dangerous. Officers assured Members that there was no physical fighting and that it was more of an exercise class than combat. There was broad guidance for those clubs taking part and the offer of nutritious food was a key part of the programme.

Members noted that the programme was not a statutory requirement and praised the work done by officers and Edsential. They asked how Members could steer their constituents towards the service. Officers noted that further work was needed to let parents know about the programme.

Resolved – That

- 1. The report be noted; and**

2. the committee supported further developments with Edsential CIC for provision in summer 2024.

9 SCHOOLS STANDARDS

The Assistant Director of Education presented a report on behalf of the Director of Children, Families and Education which gave information about the provisional pupil outcomes. There was an executive summary followed by a detailed analysis for the pupil outcomes at the age of 5 (Good level of development), age of 6 (Phonics assessment) the age of 7 (Key Stage 1 SATs), the age of 11 (Key Stage 2 SATs) and at the of 16 years old (Key Stage 4 qualifications).

Comparisons had been made with the results nationally wherever possible. For key stage 4 the final statistical release would be at the end of January 2024, any significant changes would be amended and shared with the committee. The report provided a detailed analysis of pupil outcomes and gave a clearer picture a further year on from the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time since 2019 both primary and secondary outcomes would be published nationally.

Members queried how areas services determined where support was needed and asked whether the location of the school attended, or the home address of the child was the determining factor. Officers stated that this was a recent change and was now based on the home address of the child as many children, particularly of secondary school age, travelled outside of their local area to attend selective schools.

Resolved – That

1. The report be noted; and

2. The committee supported the service priorities to support the school improvement strategy based on the outcomes outlined.

10 SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2022-2025

The Assistant Director for Children and Families presented a report on behalf of the Director of Children, Families and Education with an updated version of the Children's Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2025. The Strategy set out the local authority's strategy and plans for developing and supporting the social care workforce over the remainder of its course. It outlined five priorities to attract, retain and support the development of a stable, talented, and committed workforce which had the skills, knowledge and motivation to improve children's lives. These priorities were:

- Priority 1: 'Growing our own' through recruitment and development
- Priority 2: Support Continuous Professional Development to deliver a motivated and skilled workforce, with an emphasis on supporting staff retention

- Priority 3: Develop high performing social work managers that support a performance management framework that reflects ‘high support high challenge’
- Priority 4: Develop new and revised ways of working building on existing strengths to support children, young people and their families
- Priority 5: Communication and change management

Underpinning those priorities was a commitment to developing a healthy working environment that supported a positive emotional health and wellbeing amongst the Council workforce and enabled Wirral Council to be an employer of choice in children’s social care services.

The Assistant Director for Children and Families provided Members with a simplified data set from that in the report, this data showed the number of starters, leavers and the net change in staff numbers of the past three years for Advanced Practitioners, Social Workers and Assessed and Supported Year in Employment staff.

Members discussed the need for more foster carers across Wirral. Officers noted that it had been a constant challenge to recruit and retain foster carers but that this had improved and work was still underway to improve this further.

Members discussed the Yonder programme and the advantages it would offer to both the authority and agency social workers as a not-for-profit recruitment agency. The Director of Children, Families and Education suggested inviting Yonder to speak to Members directly.

Members raised the environmental impact of social work as there was still a requirement for face to face visits that necessitated travel. Officers noted that face to face visits were always likely to be needed but that there had been an increase in on-line meetings for those that were happy to meet in this way which would decrease the environmental impact of meetings.

Resolved – That

1. The progress made to date on the Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2025 be endorsed; and

2. A further update on progress at a future date be agreed.

11 EARLY YEARS FUNDING EXPANSION

The Interim Operations Manager: Early Years presented a report on behalf of the Director of Children, Families and Education which noted that the changes to Early Years Funding Entitlements posed a significant change for families across Wirral as well as the landscape for early years childcare and education. Two-year funding take up had increased from 87% in summer term 2023 to 96% in Autumn 2023, back to pre-covid levels. The 9% points increase was down to a number of factors, the Family Hubs and Children’s Centre continued to assertively target eligible families and promoted the entitlement whenever

possible both to families and professionals. The eligible population had decreased across all wards in Wirral, coupled with Department for Education (DfE) supplying phone numbers for families had made it easier to promote the offer. The media coverage of the new working family's entitlements had possibly helped parents feel more comfortable with sending their young children into early years provision. Three-year funding remained unchanged from summer term at 95% take up.

Members thanked officers for the report. They discussed the difficulties that local authorities faced in recruiting in the early years sector and the need for such recruitment as free childcare was to be provided across the country to children as young as nine months. Officers noted that recruitment was a challenge nationally and that Wirral was involved in a number of initiatives with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the Department for Education to increase the number of staff.

Members expressed their approval for schools caring for 2 year olds and felt that it would help develop social bonds and that providing care for children 9 months up would be of great social and economic benefit to the borough.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

12 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance which reminded members that the Children, Young People and Housing Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme was to align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were the remit of the Committee.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.

13 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved - That under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the following appendix be deemed to be exempt from publication on the grounds that it involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12a (as amended) to that Act.

2024-25 Budget Report Update – Exempt Appendix 3

Resolved – That the exempt appendix be noted.