



Children and Families Committee

Responses to questions

- a) **Response to Members Questions raised at 13 January Committee (Pages 3 - 8)**

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Children & Families Committee – 13 January 2025 - Responses to questions raised by Committee Members

Agenda item 5 – Third Financial Review

Question

A written response would be provided to questions raised in relation to the capital programme, specifically around Tytherington High School, Poynton High School, and the new secondary school in Macclesfield. Update on those programs (Cllr C O’Leary).

Response

A Capital programme update would be provided at April committee which would include a briefing paper, as an appendix, on our condition programme.

Question

Officers agreed to provide information on the involvement and approval of DfE advisors in the production and monitoring of the DSG management plan, to provide reassurance that the plan delivers VFM. (Cllr M Beanland).

Response

A report would be brought to the next Committee.

Agenda Item 6 - Medium Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2025/26 - 2028/29 Provisional Settlement Update (Children & Families Committee)

Question

In response to a question raised in respect of the Youth Justice service contributions nearly doubling, officers stated that there was a split between the Youth Justice Service and safeguarding and that more details on the split would be provided in a written response. (Cllr G Hayes)

Response

Youth Justice Service

Below is the summary of the growth included in the MTFS for the YJS. The current base budget is £417k.

The below is the link to the relevant committee report around the changes to the delivery of the service, and associated growth required. The report starts on P83.

<https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/g9836/Public%20reports%20pack%2029th-Apr-2024%2014.00%20Children%20and%20Families%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
YJS growth required	168,675			
YJS Interest increase	29,000	30,000	31,000	34,000

Agenda Item 8 - Update on the progress of the key areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 - Financial Reporting 3 2024/2025.

Question

Officers agreed to provide a written response to a request for a breakdown of the data in respect of Special Independent Schools and Special Schools. (Cllr S Bennett Wake)

Response

Table within appendix 1 of the report – page 260 of the agenda pack

	Original Budget 2024-25	Revised Budget Updated (to reflect 2023-24 outturn) 2024/25	Forecast 2024-2025 FR3 (Oct/Nov)	Variance 2024-25	Commentary
Mainstream	£22,616,870	£21,850,992	£22,240,848	£389,856	1.75% overspend – on track
Resourced Provision or SEN Units	£3,138,000	£3,148,667	£3,174,667	£26,000	Small overspend relating to place funding
Maintained Special Schools or Special Academies placements	£20,724,458	£21,191,106	£22,633,841	£1,442,735	Average cost of other LAs £16k v £13.8 = £400k 1 other LA average £47k Further investigation required to fully understand overspend on special schools, as numbers of EHCP are lower than anticipated.
Non maintained special schools or independent (NMSS or independent) placements	£51,163,557	£40,909,564	£36,282,942	(£4,626,622)	34 less CYP in placement type. Average cost appears to be lower than anticipated (£60k v £64k) – not all placements have been subject to a 3.4% receipt and passport of separate government grants to reflect teachers’ pay and pension increases and the new core budget grant has aided the fee increase challenge.
Hospital Schools or Alternative Provision placements	£3,241,600	£3,300,177	£3,283,167	(£17,010)	Small underspend re top up funding but small overspend on place funding – on track
Post 16 mainstream placements	£5,643,352	£6,273,542	£4,961,871	(£1,311,671)	Forecast EHCP numbers and associated costs include CYP who may not be currently educated in a setting. The management plan assumes that costs may be incurred for CYP if they continue their education.
LA Expenditure – schools support services	£1,735,303	£1,646,023	£1,318,541	(£327,482)	Outreach programme (pilot under evaluation and assessment – intention is to continue in the future) Vacancies within the EY SEN practitioners & Start for Life teams
Health, Social Care, Therapy Services and Care Provision	£1,892,207	£2,022,207	£2,003,207	(£19,000)	Small saving on SALT contract

Total Expenditure	£110,155,346	£100,342,278	£95,899,083	(£3,124,653)	
Total Income (including block transfer)	(£58,899,531)	(£58,899,531)	(£57,377,371)	£94,143	DfE Allocation plus a school block transfer of 0.5% less historic pay and pension grant.
Deficit brought forward	£89,634,605	£78,651,798	£78,651,798	£0	
Cumulative Deficit	£140,890,419	£120,094,544	£115,745,494	(£4,349,050)	Qtr. 1 we anticipated a cumulative deficit of £120m, Latest forecast figures suggest a cumulative deficit reserve of £115.7 million, an improvement of £4.3 million on the revised/updated DSG mgmt. plan, and a £25 million improvement on the original submission

Within the mainstream row in the table above (highlighted in green) includes £1.8m high needs placement/top up funding expenditure relating to independent mainstream schools. Independent mainstream schools include schools such as Terra Nova, Beech Hall, The Kings Macclesfield.

The NMSS or Independent special schools' row (highlighted in yellow) represent schools such as Lavendar Fields, Bluebell. Some of the schools within this expenditure are both within Cheshire East and also out of borough. This line also includes specialist post 16 schools/colleges (SPIs).

Agenda Item 9 - Update on the Transformation of Travel Support

Question

In relation to concerns raised in respect of taxi licensing of vehicles from other authorities and consistency in safety standards, officers agreed to take the concerns back to licensing and a written response would be provided. (Cllr N Cook)

Response

Licensed vehicles are allowed to undertake pre-booked work anywhere in England and Wales. This is a principal set out within the legislation (dating from 1847 and 1976) and has always been the case. However, there has been a notable increase in vehicles

working outside their licensed areas in recent years. There are a range of reasons for this increase, but advances in app-based book technology and streamlined application processes in certain council areas have served to increase the practice.

Councils have historically set their own standards for vehicles and drivers. These can vary considerably but fundamentally the legislation places a statutory duty on Licensing Authorities to ensure that those they licence are fit and proper persons to hold a licence. Different councils have different requirements and policy considerations.

Over the past 10 years there have been a number of reviews of the legal framework around taxi licensing, but these have not resulted in a change of the law.

In 2020, the Department for Transport (DfT) issued statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards. These standards introduced minimum levels of checks on drivers and vehicles. However, the standards are not mandatory, and councils can depart from them where they can provide justification. The DfT surveys councils every other year to confirm which checks they are implementing. In relation to safeguarding, they reported that councils conducting enhanced checks with barring list checks stands at 100%.

The Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022 also places a statutory duty on Licensing Authorities to record in a database information about the refusal, suspension and revocation of taxi driver licenses. Commonly called the NR3s database, this is hosted by the National Anti Fraud Network and all Licensing Authorities check applicants and drivers against the database. Statistics on these checks are also recorded by DfT in their surveys. The Act also places a duty on all Licensing Authorities to report concerns about safeguarding to the home licensing authority of the driver (for example where the driver is working outside their licensed area).

Historically taxi licensing and cross border hiring has been seen as a potential threat to public safety (and specifically safeguarding). However, there have been significant changes to ensure that those licensed are fit and proper (or safe and suitable) to hold licences. While vehicles working predominantly out of their area is lawful and seemingly will continue (if not increase), the framework used to protect public safety is more robust now than it has ever been.

In Cheshire East prior to operators starting any CEC home to school contract, additional checks are carried out with both the Data Barring Service to the Enhanced Level for all employees employed on CEC Contracts and an additional vehicle inspection is carried out by CEC Officers to confirm it is 'fit for purpose' and in a safe roadworthy condition. CEC also carries out periodic inspections of persons and vehicles employed on CEC contracts to ensure that they continue to meet our expected standards.

