

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 25th January, 2021

PRESENT

Councillor J Saunders (Chairman)
Councillor C Bulman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors R Bailey (sub), J Barber, M Beanland, D Brown, J Buckley, P Butterill, S Handley, A Moran, L Smith and N Wylie

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor K Flavell, Portfolio for Children and Families
Councillor L Jeuda, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health; Deputy Leader of the Labour Group
Councillor A Stott, Portfolio Holder for Finance, ICT and Communication

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Heather Baron, Head of Service: Preventative Services
Mark Bayley, Head of Service: Education Infrastructure and Outcomes**
Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Victoria Howarth, Project Manager***
Zoe Macey, Supported Internship Coordinator*
Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People
Kate Rose, Head of Service: Children's Safeguarding****
Jamilia Tausif, Deputy Director of Strategy and Partnerships (NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group)
Rod Thomson, Locum Consultant in Public Health**
Claire Williamson, Head of Service: Education Participation and Pupil Support***

* Attended for Minute No. 55 only

** Attended for Minutes Nos. 56 and 57 only

*** Attended for Minute No. 57 only

**** Attended for Minute No. 59 only

50 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M Addison, who was substituted for by Councillor R Bailey.

51 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2020, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

53 WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

There were no declarations of a party whip.

54 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present who wished to speak.

55 CHILD/YOUNG PERSON'S STORY

The committee received an update from the Support Internship Coordinator about a recent example of a successful supported internship. Members were advised of how this person had been supported in work experience placements whilst studying in college, and had achieved a part-time position of paid employment in January 2021, with a view to progressing to full-time.

RESOLVED –

That the update be received and noted.

56 COVID-19 UPDATE

The committee gave consideration to its standing update on the Covid-19 pandemic and the work undertaken by the council to respond to, and recover from, it. Members asked questions and put comments in relation to;

- whether, in light of new evidence of transmissions in schools, the council had communicated a consistent message regarding Covid-19 transmissions in schools and how these can be reduced;
- what IT support had been available to households in the borough and whether further help and support was available to less affluent households or those in areas of greater deprivation;
- whether teachers had been identified as a priority to receive Covid-19 vaccinations;
- how attendance in schools compared between the first lockdown (March 2020) and current lockdown;
- the significant mental health challenges faced by children and what the council's long-term plan was to address this and ensure that appropriate support services will be available to those in need of it;

- what the anticipated budgetary implications would be of the increased numbers of children, as well as their parents/carers; and
- how much IT equipment each school had received and how each school had supported parents to home educate their children during this lockdown.

RESOLVED –

- 1 That the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families follow-up on the committee's questioning around the vaccinating of school staff and ascertain whether a letter could be sent on behalf of the Council to lobby government to prioritise this.
- 2 That a report be requested to be submitted to the committee's next ordinary meeting on 22 March 2021, on the financial and resource pressures predicted to be created by the increased numbers of children, parents and carers presenting mental health and wellbeing issues.
- 3 That the next standing update on Covid-19 include figures and information in relation to the 'digital divide', the amount of IT equipment each school in Cheshire East had received, as well as on the proportion of at-home students that had taken part in online lessons and support provided by their school.

57 SELF-EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

The committee gave consideration to the self-evaluation of Children's Services, including Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention, Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), and Education.

Members asked questions and put comments in relation to;

- how confident the council was about its impending Ofsted ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services);
- whether the council would have the residential provision to enable greater numbers of cared for children to remain in-borough; and
- the relationships between maintained schools and academies and whether sharing arrangements were in place for physical and online resources, as well as best practice for supporting students during lockdown restrictions.

RESOLVED –

That the three Self-Evaluation Frameworks be received and noted.

58 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION 2021/22 - CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The committee considered the Pre-Budget Consultation 2021/22 proposals relating to services that fell within its remit, with a view to

passing on its comments, feedback and recommendations to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (28 January 2021) to include within its final budget scrutiny feedback to Cabinet (2 February 2021).

Members asked questions and put comments in relation to;

- the proposal to reduce frontline workers in the council's Prevention service, and concern that this was proposed following a recent 30% rise in referrals to Children's Services;
- the potential impact that the proposal to fund the Cygnet programme would have on the council's overall Dedicated Schools Grant for its schools; and
- concern that the reduced capacity in the Family Information Service would negatively impact on key messages and information being made available and communicated to, people and households in the borough without access to broadband and other IT equipment.

RESOLVED –

That the committee's comments, questions and feedback on the Pre-Budget 2021/22 Consultation proposals be formalised and presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (28 January 2021) to include within its final budget scrutiny comments/recommendations to Cabinet (2 February 2021).

59 CHESHIRE EAST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee considered the Cheshire East Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2019/20, which was the first annual report of the Partnership.

The Chairman asked for an update pursuant to Minute No. 45 (Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2020/21) and whether further advice had been received as to whether the funding for domestic abuse services would be continued.

RESOLVED –

- 1 That the report be received and noted.
- 2 That the agencies comprising the Cheshire East Safeguarding Partnership be asked to present the Partnership's 2020/21 Annual Report to the Children and Families Service Committee.

60 FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the council's Forward Plan of key decisions.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

61 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee reviewed its work programme.

RESOLVED –

That the work programme be agreed.

The meeting commenced at 12.30 pm and concluded at 4.09 pm

Councillor J Saunders (Chairman)