

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**
held on Monday, 10th January, 2022 in the Council Chamber, Municipal
Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe CW1 2BJ

PRESENT

Councillor K Flavell (Chair)
Councillor C Bulman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Addison, L Anderson, M Beanland, J Buckley, A Critchley
(substitute), D Edwardes, G Hayes, J Saunders and L Smetham

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Mark Bayley, Acting Director of Education
Deborah Nickson, Legal Team Manager (People) and Deputy Monitoring
Officer
Joanne Wilcox, Head of Financial Management
Steve Reading, Principal Accountant
Louise Hurst, Head of Child Protection and CIN
Heather Baron, Head of Early Help and Prevention
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Handley, I Macfarlane and L Smith. Councillor A Critchley attended as a substitute for Councillor Smith.

41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

42 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

43 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

44 COVID-19 SCHOOLS UPDATE (VERBAL)

Mark Bayley, Acting Director of Education, provided an update on the current Covid-19 position in schools. It was noted that the recent autumn term had been the most challenging period during the pandemic so far due to high case rates. Schools were thanked for their hard work in remaining open throughout these pressures. While case rates currently remained high, there had been a fall from the recent peak in school age children. The rollout of the second dose of the vaccine for the 12-15 cohort was due to begin on 11 January in schools and it was noted that this was also available to access through vaccination clinics.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

45 UPDATE ON THE OFSTED INSPECTION

Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care, delivered a presentation on the recent Ofsted inspection which took place in November 2021. This was noted to have been a positive experience for Cheshire East and progress was identified as well as recommendations for further improvement. The rating of requiring improvement to be good would remain until it could be assessed at the next full inspection. The committee thanked the team for their work.

A request was made for information to be brought to the committee on the impact of Covid-19 on the service area to put performance data into context.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

46 CHESHIRE EAST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The committee received the report which provided an update on progress against the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership priorities over 2020-21, as well as plans for the partnership for the next year.

A query was raised regarding the 518 cared for children referenced on page 26 as it appeared the breakdown in percentages did not total 100%. It was agreed that a written response would be provided to clarify this data.

A further question was raised about data on page 26 regarding the 148 children who had ceased to be cared for by the local authority as the figures provided did not refer to all 148 children. A written response would be provided.

It was noted that members of the committee were welcome to engage in frontline visits and could arrange this through the Chair.

A request was made for future reports to include comparative data from other local authorities for context.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

47 SCHOOL ORGANISATION: UPDATE ON THE PROPOSAL FOR A PRIMARY SCHOOL, KINGSLEY FIELDS, NANTWICH, FOLLOWING CONSULTATION

The committee received the report which provided an update to the previously approved committee paper, received by the Children and Families Committee on 12 July 2021, on the establishment of a new primary school in Nantwich.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

1. That the committee receives and notes the summary of the feedback received following the 5-week informal representation period (Appendix 1) which is a required stage in the DfE Free School Presumption process to allow the opening of a new primary school in Nantwich.
2. That the committee supports the progression of the prescribed free school process in the generation and submission of the draft specification (stage 3) to the DfE.

48 SCHOOL ORGANISATION: PROPOSAL FOR THE PROVISION OF A NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL, BASFORD EAST, SHAVINGTON, CREWE

The committee received the report which outlined the proposal to progress with the free school presumption process to open a new primary school in Basford East, Crewe.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

1. To proceed with the free school presumption process which will include undertaking a consultation with the local community, local schools, local councillors, town council and local MP. This is not the formal statutory consultation which sponsors are required to undertake.
2. To report back to committee the outcomes from the consultation process so that feedback is considered from the local communities.
3. To proceed with the transfer of the proposed school site into the Council ownership, as detailed in the Section 106 agreement,

- together with any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the transfer.
4. To progress with the process of attracting potential sponsors to run the new school and to complete any agreements or land transfers associated with appointing a suitable sponsor. Ultimately, the Secretary of State will approve the sponsor following due process.

49 2021/22 FINANCIAL YEAR REVIEW

The committee received the report which provided a review of the 2021/22 financial year.

A concern was raised about establishing an Educational Psychologist traded service due to issues with the capacity to carry out statutory work and potential inequality of opportunity for children depending on the financial position of their school. Assurances were given that there was no intention to take capacity away from statutory work and that this area remained the priority.

A concern was raised about the increase in costs of external placements for cared for children, with a view put forward that the savings were not realistic.

A further concern was raised about relying on reserves which were believed to be low. The committee was advised that mitigations were in place as well as ongoing monitoring by officers with the aim of reaching a balanced position.

A question was raised regarding the accuracy of the forecast £0.4m overspend in the Place directorate and a written response would be provided to clarify this.

It was suggested that, for future reports, when referencing numbers of cared for children it would be useful to include the percentage of the population in Cheshire East that this accounts for, as well as the national position for context.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

- 1.1. Notes the report of the Finance Sub-Committee, specifically the recommendations of that committee:
 - 1.1.1. Finance Sub-Committee recommend Service Committees to:
 - 1.1.1.1. note the financial update and forecast outturn relevant to their terms of reference.

1.1.1.2. note that officers will seek to improve outcomes and the financial outturn across all committees to mitigate the overall forecast overspend of the council.

1.2. Notes Appendix 4 and the following sections specific to this committee:

- Changes to Revenue budget 2021/22
- Policy Proposals Update
- Corporate Grants Register
- Debt Management
- Capital Strategy
- Reserve Strategy

1.3. Approves the additional specific grant supplementary revenue estimate over £500,000 and up to £1,000,000 in Appendix 4, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2.

Councillor Addison left the meeting and did not return.

50 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2022/23 - 2025/26

The committee received the report which aimed to capture the committee members' responses to consultation on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022 to 2026. Comments were put forward on the following proposals:

Investment in Cared for Children and Care Leavers:

- This investment was welcomed and noted to be a good news story.

Increase capacity to support Statutory SEND service:

- Councillor Flavell acknowledged the deficit in SEND but welcomed the increase of capacity.

Revenue costs for Crewe Youth Zone:

- Councillor Flavell highlighted the positive impact for Crewe and that, if successful, this is something which could be rolled out wider in the long term.
- Councillor Saunders expressed a concern about the perceived inequality of access for young people depending on their geographical location due to a lack of public transport in some areas, particularly Macclesfield.
- Councillor Saunders expressed a further concern about the youth zone model not always being successful and the committee not having seen the business plan yet.
- Councillor Saunders raised a concern about taking £400,000 out of Early Help to fund this service and expressed the view that this was counter intuitive as it would have a negative impact on families elsewhere.

Safeguarding Children – legacy staffing pressure:

- The committee noted this proposal.

Growth in Children & Families Commissioning Contracts

- The committee noted this proposal.

Increase capacity to support Statutory Education Psychology Service:

- Councillor Hayes advised he was broadly in support of this in order to meet statutory requirements, although had concerns about what would happen at the end of financial year 2024 to sustain the increase in provision. A request was made for detail on what would happen from 2024 onwards.

A redesign of Early Help Services into a Locality model:

- Councillor Saunders raised a concern about the reference to change to items 10, 11, 50, 72 in 2021/22 budget (page 141) and requested that it is noted that what is being proposed to be taken out next year is greater than what was originally proposed. It was agreed that a written response would be provided for clarity on this.
- Councillor Hayes noted from other reports received today that more extreme and complex cases were coming through Early Help services resulting in additional pressure. Councillor Hayes expressed a concern that there could be a double risk of some children being missed by the system due to not having capacity and thresholds being reduced meaning less impact from Early Help.
- A question was raised as to whether there is likely to be a reduction of frontline staff proposed through this saving and what that would look like for communities. The committee were advised that the proposals were not for a reduction in frontline capacity but that a written response would be provided with more detail.
- A further question was raised regarding the total of earmarked reserves and it was agreed that Jo Wilcox would circulate a full list to the committee.

Restructure Early Help Budget for Crewe Youth Zone:

- It was requested that comments detailed above regarding concerns about restructuring Early Help to fund the Youth Zone also be noted for this proposal.

School Transport:

- Councillor Saunders raised a concern that this proposal was unrealistic going forward as, historically, it had not been possible to achieve.
- The committee put forward the general concern about ongoing savings in school transport after next year.

Establish an Education Psychologist traded service:

- Councillor Hayes requested that concerns raised under item 10 be noted for this proposal, specifically the concern about establishing traded services while not meeting the statutory timeline and about creating inequality in the system.

Establish a traded service for non-statutory elements of Attendance Service:

- The committee noted this proposal.

Development and Partnerships Service:

- The committee noted this proposal.
- A request was made for a written response to provide detail on the saving of £300,000 in year 2.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Review the MTFS 2022 to 2026 Consultation Document and provide feedback to the Corporate Policy Committee on the proposals relevant to the responsibilities of the Committee as outlined in the Constitution
2. Note those proposals that are rolling forward from the MTFS 2021-25 relevant to the committee
3. Note the impact of the local government financial settlement as provided at Appendix 2 on the MTFS Consultation Document.
4. Comment on any other element of the MTFS Consultation Document related to the responsibilities of the Committee (including WOC Business Plans, and Reserves levels).
5. Note that the minutes of this meeting will form the consultation response of the Committee for the consideration by the Corporate Policy Committee.

The committee adjourned for a short break. Councillors Beanland and Hayes left the meeting and did not return.

51 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WINTER 2021 ACTIVE GRANT BRIEFING

The committee received the report which provided an update on government grant funding for Children and Families, including active grants over the winter period (Household Support Grant and Holiday Activity Fund) and the impact of grants over summer 2021.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

52 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2 2021-22

The committee received the report which set out the performance for Children's services for quarter 2 of 2021-22.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

53 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the committee's work programme.

Two items were requested to be brought to committee:

- The business plan for Crewe Youth Zone
- A report providing a detailed look at Children's Commissioning

It was suggested that focused, deep dive reviews of topics could be considered for the committee to participate in over the next year and further discussion of this would take place at a later date.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 and concluded at 13.33

Councillor K Flavell (Chair)

**Responses to questions raised at Children and Families Committee
10 January 2022**

Query - Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report 2020-21:

A query was raised regarding the 518 cared for children referenced on page 26 as it appeared the breakdown in percentages did not total 100%. It was agreed that a written response would be provided to clarify this data.

Response:

The data presentation was not as clear as it should have been and the “20.7% that live over 20 miles away from where they went into care” should have been on a separate line. The 20% is a percentage of the entire cohort of cared for children and not a subset of the total. The other percentages in this section were intended to be examples rather than exhaustive. The following list provides the full detail:

- 8% live in residential children's homes
- 1% lived in residential specialist school
- 67% children and young people in foster placements (including friends and family approved foster placements)
- 11% placement with parents
- 2% children placed with adopters
- 5% supported accommodation and independent living for children aged 16+

The remaining 6% are children who are in placements such as NHS provision, Secure Youth Offender Institutions or mother and Baby Units. Where there are very small numbers, below 5, we don't normally release that data into the public domain to ensure that someone cannot be identified. In the future we will add this explanation in where it is required for clarity.

The Safeguarding Children's Partnership is constantly reviewing how it structures its annual report and will consider how it presents this data for 2021/2022.

Query - Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report 2020-21:

A question was raised about data on page 26 regarding the 148 children who had ceased to be cared for by the local authority as the figures provided did not refer to all 148 children. A written response would be provided.

Response:

The other percentages in this section were intended to be examples rather than exhaustive and that should have been made clear. The following list provides more detail of the 148 children who ceased to be cared for by the Local Authority in 2020/2021. Of these:

- 26 children have been adopted;
- 13 children became subject of special guardianship orders;
- 60 individuals have left care due to turning 18
- 11 supervisions orders
- 7 care order discharged
- 5 sentenced in criminal proceedings
- 8 returned to their families
- 5 proceedings completed and discharged from care

The remaining 13 are in categories with numbers under 5, such as Care Order Transferred to another Local authority, End of a Police Protection Order, Accommodated under Section 20 at a parents request, and we don't normally release that data into the public domain to ensure that someone cannot be identified. In the future we will add this explanation in where it is required for clarity.

The Safeguarding Children's Partnership is constantly reviewing how it structures its annual report and will consider how it presents this data for 2021/2022.

Query - 2021/22 Financial Year Review:

A question was raised regarding the accuracy of the forecast £0.4m overspend in the Place directorate and a written response would be provided to clarify this.

Response:

Paragraphs 22-25 non-covid Place expenditure amounts to £0.431m. Paragraphs 33-35 Covid place expenditure amounts to £6.2m. This agrees to the figures quoted on the Place line in the tables on pages 3 & 4 of the appendix.

Query - Medium Term Financial Strategy: Increase capacity to support Statutory Education Psychology Service:

A concern was raised regarding what would happen at the end of financial year 2024 to sustain the increase in provision. A request was made for detail on what would happen from 2024 onwards.

Response:

The report agreed at the last full council meeting (15/12/21), detailed the work that the EP service is currently progressing to a ‘grow your own model’ in response to the national shortages of EP specialist staff. This will, over time, reduce the demand for locum EPs thus saving costs to the council and generating a larger and skilled workforce to meet the needs of SEN assessment processes.

The budget proposals within the papers shared at C&F committee (10/01/22) identified a small savings target based around a traded service model. The rationale for this was that one of the critical ways to reduce potential demand for needs assessments by meeting children’s needs within existing schools/settings is to upskill staff who work every day with these children so that they are better equipped to support them in a mainstream setting. Training and development of our workforce therefore is a priority for us. The EP service are currently utilising a small amount of their time to provide high quality training on key themes including ‘ELSA’ (behaviour management/wellbeing modules) as well as emotional coaching – these are being well received by schools and are a response to the increasing demands from schools to meet their training needs.

The EP service have a statutory duty to meet the needs of all SEN learners through the needs assessment process – this work is absolutely essential and is universal to every setting where needs assessments are required. Therefore, this is not impacted by the ability of a school to purchase EP time.

In addition, some of our more vulnerable Cared for Children are benefitting from the training options as outlined above utilising funding made available via our Virtual School.

This shows our commitment to supporting schools who educate our C4C to ensure that we are providing the best opportunities as corporate parents.

The demands and needs of the EP service are regularly reviewed based upon the levels/demand for SEN needs assessments – beyond 2024, we will need to future review future options and levels of need and therefore it is unrealistic to offer a more detailed position at this stage. However, rest assured that future updates to Committee on the SEN agenda have been planned into the calendar and will allow for further debate. We are also awaiting the delayed report on the review of the 2014 SEND reforms, which is anticipated will be published in the first half of this year. It is important that we consider this when looking to develop future plans.

Query - Medium Term Financial Strategy: A redesign of Early Help Services into a Locality model:

A question was raised as to whether there is there likely to be a reduction of frontline staff proposed through this saving and what that would look like for communities. The committee were advised that the proposals were not for a reduction in frontline capacity but that a written response would be provided with more detail.

Response:

There is no proposed reduction in frontline staff as we have used the income generated through our improved Troubled Families performance to offset the need for redundancies. However, we will see a reduction in Business Support and Administration roles but again will see no major impact on the front line as we have carefully managed vacancies in light of the required saving target. We will be redefining management arrangements in order to create a more efficient and integrated structure aligned better to the local communities they will service and by better integrated use of buildings so that the children and young people are able to utilise facilities close to where they live as family hubs.

Query - Medium Term Financial Strategy: A redesign of Early Help Services into a Locality model:

A concern was raised about the reference to change to items 10, 11, 50, 72 in 2021/22 budget (page 141) and requested that it is noted that what is being proposed to be taken out next year is greater than what was originally proposed. It was agreed that a written response would be provided for clarity on this.

Response:

To reassure you that the Early Help savings in the consultation are actually reduced compared to the proposed savings that were originally proposed and agreed. This is a cautious step essential to take in light of the impact of the pandemic, greater needs of children and families and the requirement to preserve as much delivery as possible. The original savings for 2022-23 and 23-24 have reduced from £700K to £420K and in addition we have been able to utilise the additional income we secured from the Troubled Families grant to reduce the need to remove any frontline workers from the Early Help structure in the redesign of the service.

I hope this offers you some assurance and to say that this has only been possible from the way we have transformed the Troubled Families performance over the last two years and maximised income. All of the financial savings will come from a realignment of management, a reduction in administration functions and some changes in goods and services budgets that were already agreed by Council last year.

Query - Medium Term Financial Strategy – Development and Partnerships Service:

A request was made for a written response to provide detail on the saving of £300,000 in year 2.

Response:

The Children's Development and Partnerships Service lead by Gill Betton provides the Business Management, Inspection Preparation and specialist Partnerships support functions for the whole of Children's and Adults' services. They also deliver project management and important income generation activity for the Council in respect of new services and transformation work, management of grants and new funding streams including Household Support Grants and Holiday Activity Fund. The proposal is to reduce Council base funding for the service and replace this with external grant opportunities as they come available to ensure that the size and expertise of the service can be maintained in future years.