

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**
held on Monday, 23rd May, 2022 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors M Addison, L Anderson, M Beanland, J Buckley, S Handley,
G Hayes, J Saunders, L Smetham, J Nicholas, A Critchley and A Moran

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Jacky Forster, Director of Education and 14-19 Skills
Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Mandy Withington, Legal Team Manager
Steve Reading, Principal Accountant
Nichola Thompson, Director of Commissioning
Dave Leadbetter, Head of Children's Commissioning
Dan Coyne, Community Development Manager
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Edwardes,
Councillor Macfarlane and Councillor Smith. Councillor Nicholas,
Councillor Moran and Councillor Critchley attended as substitutes.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A query was raised regarding a written response on the annual cost of spot purchasing for care at home services which had been provided following the previous meeting. It was agreed that a further response would be provided to clarify the figure of actual annual spend.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Lisa Hodgkinson, Head Teacher of Springfield School, and Gemma Bailey, Head Teacher of Oakfield Lodge School attended the meeting and spoke at item 7 and item 8 respectively.

5 UKRAINIAN REFUGEE POSITION IN CHESHIRE EAST (VERBAL UPDATE)

The committee received a verbal update on the Ukrainian refugee position in Cheshire East including the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

It was agreed that a written response would be provided regarding the impact of the scheme on school places.

A suggestion was made for officers to look into whether current hosts for the Homes for Ukraine scheme could be approached at a later date as potential foster carers.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

6 COVID-19 SCHOOLS UPDATE (VERBAL UPDATE)

There had been a significant fall in reported case figures which reflected the current position of testing no longer being a requirement. Nationally, all statutory guidance for schools had been removed. From June, the additional Covid support from the Council would also be removed. Schools maintained their mechanism for reporting any critical incidents to the Council and enhanced guidance had been issued. The Education Recovery Group continued to meet every two weeks and were looking ahead to managing attendance, wellbeing, the curriculum, SEND and behaviour. The vaccination programme in children was progressing well.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

7 PROPOSED EXPANSION OF SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL, CREWE

Lisa Hodgkinson, Head Teacher of Springfield School, attended the meeting to speak in support of the proposed expansion.

The committee received the report which sought approval for the proposed expansion scheme to increase capacity at Springfield School. This was in line with the strategy to increase local specialist provisions as set out in the high needs management plan.

A query was raised regarding the Children and Families Committee having sight of the planning permission. It was noted that planning applications were not within the remit of the committee but that Members would be able to attend the Planning Committee and speak on this application if they wished. It was agreed that the committee would be notified when this application had been published in the public domain.

A written response was requested from Planning colleagues on current delays and any risks this may pose to this expansion.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Approve the proposed expansion of Springfield School from 170 to 250 places for implementation in September 2023 having given due consideration to the responses to the statutory public notice and consultation process without modification.
2. Provide authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to procure and award a construction contract for the provision of additional places at Springfield School (Crewe), inclusive of any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract.

8 SCHOOL ORGANISATION: ACADEMISATION OF SCHOOLS: OAKFIELD LODGE SCHOOL (PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT)

Gemma Bailey, Head Teacher of Oakfield Lodge School, attended to speak in support of this item.

The committee received the report which set out the arrangements in place to support the intended academy conversion of Oakfield Lodge School to become part of the Manor Hall Academy Trust.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Supports that Oakfield Lodge School, Warmingham Road, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 4PP will convert to academy status on or after 1 September 2022 as per the Department for Education (DfE) Academy Order dated 16 September 2021 (see appendix 2).
2. Supports that Oakfield Lodge School joins the Manor Hall Academy Trust which currently consists of 12 schools.
3. Authorises the completion of a Commercial Transfer Agreement to the Manor Hall Academy Trust and the management committee of Oakfield Lodge School relating to the transfer of all staff under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, and assets to the trust.
4. Authorises the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to

take all steps necessary to agree and execute the Commercial Transfer Agreement.

5. Authorises the grant and completion of all transactions in relation to land as are necessary in order to facilitate the conversion, including (but not limited to) the grant and completion of a lease to the Manor Hall Academy Trust for 125 years substantially in the form of the model lease produced by DfE at a peppercorn rent.
6. Authorises the Executive Director of Place and Director of Finance and Customer Services to take the steps necessary to agree the required transactions in relation to land to enable the transfer, in line with the agreed heads of terms.
7. Notes that the Chief Finance Officer has authority to take all steps necessary to agree, transfer and adjust relevant budgets and allocate balances in accordance with Department for Education Guidance.

The meeting adjourned for a short break at 15.50.

Councillor Addison left the meeting at this point and did not return.

9 SCHOOL ORGANISATION: ACADEMISATION OF SCHOOLS: FORWARD PLAN

The committee received the report which set out those schools across the borough who were seeking to move to academy status and join a multi-academy trust. The forward plan indicated where committee approval is required or where it will be progressed through delegated authority.

A query was raised regarding the Best4Business programme and issues for academy conversions. The committee were advised that general queries should be directed to the Corporate Policy Committee who had oversight of this programme but assurances were given that work was ongoing with payroll to ensure they were aware of future conversions to mitigate any issues with the transfer of staff.

A further query was raised in relation to the Best4Business programme in schools and questions that a Member had received recently regarding the transfer of contracts for long serving staff. It had been reported that there was an issue with locating original, paper contracts from when schools were part of the Cheshire East HR system. It was agreed that this would be looked into and a written response would be provided.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

10 PARTICIPATION IN DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION, DELIVERING BETTER VALUE PROGRAMME

The committee received the report which provided an overview of the Department for Education Delivering Better Value programme for which Cheshire East had received an invitation.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

11 REVIEW OF TRAVEL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The committee received the report which outlined the independent review being carried out to consider travel support for children and young people.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

12 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BUDGETS 2022/23

The committee received the report which determined the allocation of the approved budgets for 2022/23 to the Children and Families Committee.

A concern was raised that some schools appeared to be accessing the Educational Psychologist traded service while others were not and that the message needed to be publicised consistently. It was agreed that a written response would be provided.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Note the decision of the Finance Sub-Committee to allocate the approved capital and revenue budgets, related policy proposals and earmarked reserves to the Children and Families Committee, as set out in Appendix A.
2. Note the supplementary estimates already approved as set out in Appendix B, Tables A and B.
3. Approve the supplementary estimates set out in Appendix B, Table C and Table D.
4. Recommend to Council to approve the supplementary estimates set out in Appendix B, Table E.
5. Note the financial reporting timetable as set out in Appendix C.

13 CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONING

The committee received the report which provided an overview of the principles, approach and reach of Children's Commissioning activity.

A query was raised regarding the funding for Crewe nurseries, outlined on page 126 of the agenda, and what this funding provides in addition to standard early years funding and pupil premium, as well as the impact on these specific communities. It was agreed that a written response would be provided.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

14 OFSTED ACTION PLAN AND PROGRESS UPDATE

Councillor Nicholas left the meeting during this item and did not return.

The committee received the report which provided an update on progress on the recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in November 2019.

A request was made for the red, amber and green ratings against the progress updates to include further detail on how closely the targets are being met. It was agreed that the Director of Children's Social Care would look at strengthening this for future reports.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

15 APPOINTMENTS TO SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING GROUPS, PANELS, BOARDS AND JOINT COMMITTEES

The committee received the report which sought approval to appoint members to the Corporate Parenting Committee, the Local Authority School Governor Nominations Sub-committee and to nominate a member to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Appoints members to the Corporate Parenting Committee as follows:
Con:4; Lab:4; Ind:3; Lib Dem:1; R. Ind:0; NGI:0
2. Appoints the Local Authority School Governor Appointments Sub-Committee with a membership of 5; the proportionalities being as follows:
Con:2; Lab:2; Ind:1; Lib Dem:0; R. Ind:0; NGI:0

3. Nominates one member to the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board
4. Agrees that the names of Members appointed to them be submitted to the Head of Democratic Services and Governance.

16 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor Buckley and Councillor Handley left the meeting during this item and did not return.

It was agreed that officers would give consideration to the September meeting, as this appeared to be a particularly busy agenda, and that this may involve extending the length of the meeting slightly.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

17 **MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Local Authority School Governor Nomination Sub-Committee meeting held on 24 November 2021 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 14.00 and concluded at 16.55

Councillor K Flavell (Chair)

**Responses to questions raised at Children and Families Committee
23 May 2022**

Query - Minutes of previous meeting:

A query was raised regarding a written response on the annual cost of spot purchasing for care at home services which had been provided following the previous meeting. It was agreed that a further response would be provided to clarify the figure of actual annual spend.

Response:

The original table showing average costs per client per week (pcpw) shown on p115 of March cttee agenda - was there to set the context of current unit costs for fostering and residential care. They resulted in actual spend per annum of £20m. The aim of the care at home framework is to provide services that meet need at a lower unit cost. The new system is the best way of achieving that with providers - rather than spot purchase. Spot purchasing spend was £1.363m per Kerry for 2021/22. We don't have a figure for the new framework yet. The table on page 116 of the March agenda was context in terms of estimated spend through the new framework at £4.4m per annum - totalling £22m over 5 years. I do not regard it as a pre- authorisation of funds and that was not requested in the report. It's the expectation of £4.4m pa eventually being spent that way instead of the higher cost options above. This detail on the mix of spend would form part of in year reporting / the subsequent report the committee requested.

Query - Ukrainian refugee position in Cheshire East:

It was agreed that a written response would be provided regarding the impact of the scheme on school places.

Response:

Ukrainian children are placed in schools across the borough. Where local schools are oversubscribed then in some cases secondary school places have been offered through Fair Access Panels (a process where local schools meet and decide which school will offer the child a place). It has not been necessary to date to do this for primary school places.

The table below shows the number of school place applications and the distribution across the borough:

PRIMARY

Locality	Sum of Total Applications
Central	24
North	15
South	23
Grand Total	62

SECONDARY

Locality	Sum of Total Applications
Central	17
North	21
South	10
Grand Total	48

50 primary school places have been offered within 15 days of application, 3 have taken longer than 15 days and 9 are still awaiting an offer of which 3 are still within 15 days of receiving application.

29 secondary school places have been offered within 15 days of application, 6 have taken longer than 15 days and 13 are still awaiting an offer of which 10 are still within 15 days of receiving application.

While we aim to offer school places within 15 days there are genuine reasons where it may take longer than the 15 days to offer a place which includes:

- The need to go through the Fair Access Panel
- Requests for out of cohort admissions where advice and liaison with the school and families may be needed
- Schools taking longer to respond or seeking advice whether they should admit e.g. as sympathetic to Ukrainian child but wish to ensure that they are acting legally and not wishing to disadvantage another applicant
- Data protection issues – enquiries from sponsors and need to ensure that the application is in accordance with the parent's wishes.
- Where there is an indication that there may be special educational needs (SEND) and liaison with the SEND team is needed.

There is a dedicated section on the Cheshire East website to support sponsors and guests in accessing education. ([Cheshire East support for Ukrainian Crisis.](#)) We have appointed a support worker and additional capacity within the admissions team to support schools and families from Ukraine.

Query - Proposed expansion of Springfield School, Crewe:

A written response was requested from Planning colleagues on current delays and any risks this may pose to this expansion.

Response:

Whilst there are delays in the planning process this will not necessarily of itself pose a significant risk as we have set up a regular liaison meeting with relevant officers in the school infrastructure team to track priorities and manage risk. This must also be separated from any delays or issues that may arise through the normal course of the statutory planning process (i.e. objections / environmental issues etc that need to be dealt with) or delays which may arise from third party stakeholders and statutory consultees. In summary, we can work together to prevent any administrative delays but I cannot predict or account for potential planning issues until the planning application has been submitted and we have been through the statutory consultation process.

Query - Academisation of Schools Forward Plan:

A query was raised in relation to the Best4Business programme in schools and questions that a Member had received recently regarding the transfer of contracts for long serving staff. It had been reported that there was an issue with locating original, paper contracts from when schools were part of the Cheshire East HR system. It was agreed that this would be looked into and a written response would be provided.

Response:

There has been a recent query about contractual information of its staff from a former maintained Cheshire East school which became an academy in 2011. Personnel records stored electronically on the CEC HRDocs system are usually transferred to a school when it becomes an academy. The HRDocs system had only been available for a short time in 2011. There will therefore only be limited information on HRDocs in respect of staff at this particular school. An export of this data can be provided to the school if needed. Hard copy personnel files are normally held in deepstore and should be accessible via the record of storage on request. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to locate the personnel files for this school in deepstore. Due to the passage of time since 2011, we cannot determine the timeline or what may have happened to the files in relation to this specific query.

Query - Children and Families Budgets 2022/23:

A concern was raised that some schools appeared to be accessing the Educational Psychologist traded service while others were not and that the message needed to be publicised consistently. It was agreed that a written response would be provided.

Response:

The offer to schools is promoted on our Cheshire East Education Support Services system (CHESS). Schools buy back all services from the local authority through this system. The offer for next year is still being finalised and it is planned to be published in July. The service have not received any concerns from schools.

Query - Children's Commissioning:

A query was raised regarding the funding for Crewe nurseries, outlined on page 126 of the agenda, and what this funding provides in addition to standard early years funding and pupil premium, as well as the impact on these specific communities. It was agreed that a written response would be provided.

Response:

The straightforward answer to the question posed at Committee is that there is **no** Local Authority funding attached to the commission of Crewe Nurseries. The nurseries are funded through the passing through of Free Early Education Entitlement (2/3/4 year old funding, Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Disability Access Fund (DAF), SEN Inclusion) allocated by the DFE. EYPP, DAF and SEN Inclusion are only provided as appropriate. The three nurseries also bill directly for any fee paying parents that access the nurseries.