

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**  
held on Monday, 3rd June, 2024 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,  
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

## PRESENT

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)  
Councillor E Gilman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, J Bird, B Posnett,  
J Saunders, G Smith, J Clowes, G Marshall, J Snowball and M Edwards

## OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services  
Claire Williamson, Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration  
Andrea Stone, Interim Director of Family Help and Social Care  
Gill Betton, Head of Children's Development and Partnerships  
Alex Cooper, Project Manager - Education  
Joe Carter, Project Manager  
Simon Hodgkiss, Capital Development Officer  
Janet Witkowski, Head of Legal  
Nikki Wood-Hill, Lead Finance Partner  
Jennie Summers, Legal Team Manager  
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Cook, Cllr Hayes and Cllr Puddicombe. Cllr Marshall, Cllr Clowes and Cllr Snowball attended as substitutes.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:

Cllr Bennett-Wake declared that she worked at Puss Bank Primary School and had a close connection with Hurdsfield Primary School.

Cllr Beanland declared that he had previously worked with the academy auditors.

Cllr Bailey declared an interest as a food producer.

Cllr Bulman declared an interest in relation to item 7 which referenced a payment from Middlewich Town Council to Cheshire East towards a Youth Support Service. Cllr Bulman was a Middlewich ward member and the

Chair of a residents committee in Middlewich which ran the youth club. Cllr Bulman left the meeting for the duration of item 7.

Cllr Smith declared in relation to items 10 and 11 that he was a secretary for NASUWT. Cllr Smith left the meeting for the duration of items 10 and 11.

### **3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

### **4 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION**

There were no public speakers present.

### **5 OFSTED INSPECTION FINDINGS**

The committee received the report which set out the findings from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) conducted in February and March 2024, the plans in place to improve services in relation to the findings, and monitoring arrangements from Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE).

The Executive Director of Children's Services introduced the report and reiterated apologies to the care experienced young people for whom the support and services were found to be inadequate. The Executive Director thanked the staff in Children and Families Services who were working to deliver the required improvements that had been identified and expressed the view that, while the findings were extremely disappointing, they were believed to be a positive catalyst for continued improvement and would be used to reflect, learn and move forward.

The committee raised questions and provided scrutiny in relation to the outcome.

It was queried whether the letter from the DfE had been received and whether the committee could have sight of it. It was confirmed that a draft letter had been received and officers were due to meet with the DfE to discuss. A copy of the letter in its final form could be shared with the committee.

Regarding the Improvement Board, it was noted that the DfE had advised that it was not normal practice for this to be a political meeting with member attendees, other than the committee Chair in her role as statutory lead member. It was requested that this advice be reviewed to consider the inclusion of another member of the committee.

The following members were nominated to sit on the Corporate Parenting Working Group:

- Cllr Rachel Bailey
- Cllr John Bird
- Cllr Jos Saunders
- Cllr Geoff Smith

**RESOLVED:**

That the Children and Families Committee:

**Unanimously:**

1. Note the inspection findings, implications for monitoring from Ofsted and the DfE, and plans to improve services

**Unanimously:**

2. Agree to hold a task and finish workshop for Children and Families committee on 2 July 2024 to review and scrutinise the draft improvement plan

**By majority:**

3. Agree to the onward referral of the improvement plan for approval at full Council on 17 July 2024

**By majority:**

4. Approve the terms of reference for the Improvement Board

**By majority:**

5. Agree the development of the terms of reference for the Corporate Parent Working Group and agree member membership

**Unanimously:**

6. Include in the committee's work programme receipt of assurance reports updating the committee on progress and impact measured against the agreed improvement plan, to all future meetings

**6 UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE KEY AREAS OF THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024/25 TO 2030/31**

The committee considered the report which outlined progress against the DSG management plan based on the outturn financial position 2023-24 and the relevant performance data of the January 2024 SEN2 DfE return, compared to the previous two years. The report acted as a baseline as the

committee began to receive regular monthly reporting, as agreed at the 29 April 2024 committee meeting.

There was a request for a short briefing paper to set out a summary and expected outcomes of the management plan, particularly to assist new members of the committee in their understanding.

**RESOLVED (unanimously):**

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Scrutinise the key areas of progress outlined in this report regarding the DSG Management plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 to achieve a balanced budget by 2030- 31
2. Note that this briefing report outlines the progress of the DSG management plan based on the outturn financial DSG high needs position and includes the relevant performance data of the January 2024 SEN2 DfE return, compared to the previous two years
3. Agree the monthly reporting schedule for committee to scrutinise progress against the plan
4. Approve the draft terms of reference for the SEND executive oversight panel. (Appendix 1)

**7 FINAL OUTTURN 2023/24**

The committee received the final outturn for the Children and Families services for the financial year 2023/24.

Officers reported that there was an error in paragraph 4 of the report which stated that the full report would be received by the Corporate Policy Committee on 13 June 2024. This was corrected to refer to the Finance Sub-Committee meeting on 25 June.

A query was raised regarding the reference to the Springfield Satellite Site (Dean Row) on page 96 of the agenda and whether this was government funded or from the Children and Families budget. The committee were advised that this was requesting a virement for an already approved fund and officers undertook to check and confirm whether this was fully DfE funded.

A request was made for an item to be added to the work programme regarding the school catering service, with further detail to be submitted to officers in writing.

A query was raised regarding page 99 of the agenda which referred to the Dedicated Schools Grant and stated that funding had not kept pace with the increasing numbers and cost of children with an education, health and

care plan and what the difference was between the funding provided and the cost per child. Officers undertook to provide the detail in a written response.

**RESOLVED (by majority):**

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Consider the factors leading to an adverse Net Revenue financial outturn of £8.2m against a revised budget of £81.9m (10.0%), for Children and Families Committee services
2. Scrutinise the contents of Annex 1 and note that any financial mitigation decisions requiring approval will be made in line with relevant delegations
3. Approve the Capital Budget Virements above £500,000 up to and including £5,000,000, as detailed in Annex 1, Section 3 Capital Strategy, Table 3
4. Note that Finance Sub Committee will be asked to approve the Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCEs) over £1,000,000 and Capital Budget Virements over £5,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Annex 1, Section 3 Capital Strategy, Table 4

*Cllr Bulman left the meeting for the duration of this item, having declared an interest.*

**8 SERVICE BUDGETS 2024/25 (CHILDREN & FAMILIES COMMITTEE)**

The committee received the report which set out the allocation of the approved budgets for 2024/25 to the Children and Families Committee.

Officers reported that there was an error within the table on page 105 of the agenda and that the headings in that table were not correct. The table on page 121 was correct for the earmarked reserves.

A request was made for the committee to be kept updated on the costs associated with Crewe Youth Zone. It was noted that a report had gone to the Economy and Growth Committee but that members of the Children and Families Committee had not been aware. It was requested that consideration be given to adding this to the work programme.

**RESOLVED (by majority):**

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Note the decision of the Finance Sub-Committee to allocate the approved revenue and capital budgets, related budget policy changes and

earmarked reserves to the Children and Families Committee, as set out in Appendix A

2. Note the financial reporting timetable for 2024/25 set out in Appendix B as approved at Finance Sub-Committee on 22 March 2024

3. Review progress on the delivery of the MTFS policy change items, the RAG ratings and latest forecasts, and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget

*Cllr Bailey and Cllr Saunders left the meeting during this item and did not return.*

## 9 **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CAPITAL PROGRAMME - CAPITAL SCHEMES**

The committee received the report which provided an update on progress in delivering the school capital programme for 2024/25.

A request was made for a cashflow forecast to be shared with the committee. Officers undertook to provide detail on how many places were needed in different settings and the full forecast.

During consideration of the item, the committee resolved to move into part 2 to consider the confidential appendices.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Children and Families Committee:

### **Unanimously:**

1. Agree the allocation of the Children and Families Capital funding as approved in the budget by full council on 27 February 2024 to the schools and projects as set out in Appendices 1 and 1a

2. Approve the new, named and amended schemes as detailed in Appendices 2 and 2a

3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Childrens Services to determine the school sites and works to be instructed from the block allocations set out in appendices 2 and 2a and take all steps to deliver those works

### **By majority:**

4. Approve the school condition programme of schemes as detailed in Appendix

5. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Childrens Services to determine the school sites and works to be instructed from the block funding allocations set out in Appendix 3 and take all steps to deliver these works

6. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Childrens Services to approve uplifts to project costs of individual schemes approved in the Capital Programme to a maximum of 20% of the approved capital budget or £500,000 whichever is the lesser sum

7. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Childrens Services to allocate uncommitted funds to enable the progression of feasibility studies, design development and project delivery, where projects will be for the purpose of supporting additional pupil places and SEN schemes

**Unanimously:**

8. Delegate to the Executive Director of Childrens Services the authority to approve Virements and where necessary enter into grant agreements with Academies and Diocesan bodies to facilitate the delivery of the projects identified in the Children and Families Capital Programme

9. Note that the Executive Director of Childrens Services will provide a regular update to committee on the implementation of the Children and Families Capital Programme and the exercise of the delegations set out in this report

10. Note the overview of schemes undertaken and those completed over the last year as detailed in Appendix 4

**10 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item pursuant to Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing this information.

**11 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CAPITAL PROGRAMME - CAPITAL SCHEMES**

The committee considered the confidential appendices.

**12 ACADEMISATION OF CLEDFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL, GEORGE IV AVENUE, MIDDLEWICH**

The committee received the report which set out the arrangements in place to support the intended academy conversion of Cledford Primary School to become part of the Alexandra Academy Trust.

**RESOLVED (unanimously):**

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Authorise the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer to take all steps necessary to agree and execute the Commercial Transfer Agreement (Appendix 1) to the Alexandra Academy Trust relating to the transfer of all staff under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, and assets

2. Authorise the Executive Director of Place and Chief Finance Officer to take the steps necessary to agree the required transactions in relation to land, facilities or shared use agreements as are necessary in order to facilitate the conversion, including (but not limited to) the grant and completion of a lease (see Appendix 2) to the Alexandra Academy Trust for 125 years substantially in the form of the model lease produced by DfE at a peppercorn rent. The school site is identifiable as shown on the accompanying redline lease plan (see Appendix 3)

*Cllr Smith left the meeting for the duration of this item, having declared an interest.*

**13 ACADEMISATION OF GAINSBOROUGH PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOL, BELGRAVE ROAD, CREWE**

The committee considered the report which set out the arrangements in place to support the intended academy conversion of Gainsborough Primary and Nursery School to become part of the Alexandra Academy Trust.

**RESOLVED (unanimously):**

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Authorise the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer to take all steps necessary to agree and execute the Commercial Transfer Agreement (Appendix 1) to the Alexandra Academy Trust relating to the transfer of all staff under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, and assets

2. Authorise the Executive Director of Place and Chief Finance Officer to take the steps necessary to agree the required transactions in relation to land, facilities or shared use agreements as are necessary in order to facilitate the conversion, including (but not limited to) the grant and completion of a lease (see Appendix 2) to the Alexandra Academy Trust for 125 years substantially in the form of the model lease produced by DfE



at a peppercorn rent. The school site is identifiable as shown on the accompanying redline lease plan (see Appendix 3)

*Cllr Smith left the meeting for the duration of this item, having declared an interest.*

#### **14 APPOINTMENTS TO SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING GROUPS, PANELS, BOARDS AND JOINT COMMITTEES**

The committee received the report which sought to nominate members to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Head of Legal advised that there had been a slight change to the wording of the recommendations and clarified that the committee were being asked to nominate representatives to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee and to the Health and Wellbeing Board and agree to submit the names to the Head of Democratic Services and Governance.

The proposed membership of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee, in line with the political proportionality, was noted as follows: Cllrs M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, C Bulman, D Clark, N Cook, E Gilman, G Hayes, S Holland, B Posnett, J Saunders, B Puddicombe. A non-grouped representative had not yet been submitted.

The committee nominated Cllr C Bulman as the representative to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

#### **RESOLVED (by majority):**

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Nominate representatives to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board
2. Agree to submit the nominations to the Head of Democratic Services and Governance

#### **15 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES QUARTER 3 SCORECARD 2023/24**

The committee received the Children and Families scorecard for quarter 3 of 2023-24.

A request was made for a report to be brought forward on dentistry. Officers advised that a report was due to come to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee where health colleagues would be present to discuss the detail.

A query was raised regarding the budget allocation to address figures for care leavers who were not in education, employment or training. Officers undertook to provide further detail.

The following requests for further detail to be added into future scorecards were raised for consideration by officers:

- A breakdown by area of the borough or by north/central/south
- Further information on care leavers up to age 25 to ensure target were being met

**RESOLVED:**

That the scorecard be noted.

16 **WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 and concluded at 18:53

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)