

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

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

held on Wednesday, 5th August, 2020 at Virtual Meeting

PRESENT

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

Councillors M Addison, A Critchley, M Beanland, D Brown, J Buckley, D Edwardes, S Handley, A Moran and M Houston

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor K Flavell, Portfolio for Children and Families

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People
Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Early Help and Prevention
Jacky Forster, Director of Education and 14-19 Skills
Jacquie Sims, Director of Children's Social Care

9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Barber (substituted for by Councillor A Critchley), P Butterill (substituted for by Councillor D Edwardes), L Smith (substituted for by Councillor M Houston), and N Wylie (substituted for by Councillor R Bailey).

10 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED –

- 1 That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 June 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
- 2 That the request by Councillor Bailey for the committee to receive an overview of how the authority looked at and managed the skillsets of pupils leaving school, be discussed with key officers and portfolio holders outside of the meeting.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

12 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of a party whip.

13 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

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

14 COVID-19 EDUCATION UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report on the impacts of Covid-19 to education and schools in Cheshire East, and the work that has been undertaken in response to the public health emergency in line with the government decision to reopen schools from September.

Members asked questions and put comments in relation to;

- how the catch-up learning sessions would work operationally and be rolled out, and how the council planned to measure/benchmark the success and effectiveness of the sessions;
- whether the Government's national tutoring programme would use agency staff, or if school staff would be expected to undertake it in addition to their existing duties;
- what advice was to be given to secondary schools about pupils walking to and from the schools;
- whether public transport would be able to cope with the return of schools and a sudden jump in the numbers of people using it; and
- whether there was a backlog of Early Help and Care Plans and how this would be managed.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

15 REVIEW OF FOSTERING SERVICE

The committee considered a report updating on the work that had been undertaken since January 2020 when an independent fostering review was commissioned to inform the council's strategic approach and operational practice in respect of the recommendation made to "improve the quality and consistency of support and engagement with foster carers" following the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in November 2019.

Members asked questions and put comments in respect of;

- recruitment and retention of foster carers and what the council did to ascertain supply and demand; and
- the examination practice for to-be foster carers being shortened, and whether the council was satisfied that the changed process was still as detailed and thorough.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

16 REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY INTEGRATED SERVICES AGREEMENT

Consideration was given to a presentation on the work of the Regional Adoption Agency against its four key objectives to:

- (1) Increase the number of children adopted
- (2) Reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted
- (3) Improve the post-adoption support services to families who have adopted
- (4) Reduce the number of adoption agencies, thereby improving efficiency and effectiveness.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

17 MEMBER FRONTLINE VISITS

Consideration was given to a report on the proposed reinstatement of elected member frontline visits on a virtual basis following Covid-19.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

18 YOUTH ZONE UPDATE

A verbal update was provided to the committee on the council's plans to introduce a Youth Zone in Crewe. It was noted that the council planned to work with the charity Onside to develop the proper partnership arrangements required to establish this Youth Zone, before producing a funding bid to initiate the project.

Members asked questions and put comments in relation to;

- how the ongoing revenue cost of the Youth Zone would be covered; and
- how the council could 'future proof' the project beyond the ceasing of central government Revenue Grant Funding.

RESOLVED –

1 That the update be received and noted.

- 2 That future reports on the proposed Youth Zone provide more detail on how the council planned to future proof the project and ensure it was sustainable.

19 FORWARD PLAN

The committee reviewed the council's Forward Plan of key decisions.

RESOLVED –

That the forward plan be noted.

20 WORK PROGRAMME

The committee reviewed its work programme.

RESOLVED –

- 1 That the item request relating to managing the skills of students leaving school be added to the work programme at an appropriate date.
- 2 That the items crossed through or noted as 'date to be determined' be resolved outside out of the meeting, and the work programme be updated accordingly.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.39 pm

Councillor J Saunders (Chairman)