

## **Responses to questions raised at Children & Families Committee 7 April 2025**

### **Item 3:**

#### **Question**

Could poor attendance at School Forum be addressed on the Work Programme?

#### **Response**

Directorate management will consider this as part of work planning.

### **Item 5: Finance Budget report**

#### **Question**

What member involvement is there in the Capital Programme Board?

#### **Response**

Currently this is an officer attended board - S151 Officer, Executive Director of Place and CE.

#### **Question**

Page 39: Who is reviewing costs on project budgets and delivery costs? As the committee have to vote on acceptance but there is no information on subsequent delivery of projects.

#### **Response**

The team work with colleagues in finance to keep the reported position on open capital programs up to date. The updated position on capital projects is reported in each quarterly Finance report to committees.

**Question**

As so much development is dependent upon external funding -which come first, development or funding? As current financial issues are based on delivery of projects asap.

**Response**

There is always going to be a significant level of capital program expenditure and investment linked to our schools and education, for both new projects and improvement works, and with the relevant capital grants being announced annually by the DfE. In many cases we may have reasonable estimates of the likely levels of these grants which are included in the MTFS, and any adjustments can then be made once final grant determinations are received. So, a certain level of planning in advance can be made, and schemes adjusted accordingly, if need be, once grant levels are received.

**Question**

Page 47: Are the benefits of Transformation (£3.5m) included in the MTFS? If so, where?

**Response**

Each service has Transformation savings included in their MTFS items, for example in children's the items on page 31 (and highlighted in yellow in the below screen shot) those with a T by the MTFS ref number are transformation savings. As well as the savings in the service areas there are some centrally held transformation savings yet to be allocated out to services, these can be seen on page 32 at the bottom of that page, again the ones with a T next to the MTFS ref number.

| MTFS<br>Ref<br>No | Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes –<br>Service Budgets                               | 2025/26<br>£m | 2026/27<br>£m | 2027/28<br>£m | 2028/29<br>£m |
|-------------------|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                   | <b>Childrens and Families</b>   | <b>+8.659</b> | <b>-0.064</b> | <b>-0.201</b> | <b>-0.258</b> |
| 14                | Pension costs adjustment  | -0.537        | -0.923        | -0.155        | -0.167        |
| 15                | Growth to deliver statutory Youth Justice service, and meet Safeguarding Partnership duties | +0.203        | +0.167        | +0.031        | +0.034        |
| 16                | Growth in School, SEND and Social Care Transport budget                                     | +1.501        | +1.548        | +0.476        |               |
| 17                | Pay Inflation   | +2.624        | +1.096        | +1.124        | +1.152        |
| 18                | Fully Funding current care demand levels 2024/25  | +3.295        |               |               |               |
| 19                | Court Progression Improvement   | +0.023        |               |               |               |
| 20                | Growth for annual contribution to the Regional Adoption Agency                              | +0.213        | +0.048        | +0.048        | +0.048        |
| 21                | Growth for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children due to emerging pressures                  | +0.500        |               |               |               |
| 22                | Reversal of a one year policy change for traded services                                    | +0.120        |               |               |               |
| 23                | Schools Improvement   | +0.175        |               |               |               |
| 24                | Funding the staffing establishment  | +2.739        |               | -1.000        | -0.600        |
| 25                | Safe Walking Routes to School   | -0.250        |               |               |               |
| 26T               | New accommodation with support offer for 16-25 young people                                 | -1.100        | -0.700        |               |               |
| 27T               | Birth to Thrive   | -0.500        |               |               |               |
| 28T               | Right Child, Right Home   | -1.320        | -1.300        | -0.725        | -0.725        |
| 29                | Extended Rights to Free Transport   | +0.388        |               |               |               |
| 30                | Children's Social Care Prevention Grant – Expenditure                                       | +0.905        |               |               |               |
| 31                | Children's Social Care Prevention Grant – Grant Income                                      | -0.905        |               |               |               |
| 32                | Foster4   | +0.114        |               |               |               |
| 33                | Foster Carers uplift of National Minimum Allowance (NMA)                                    | +0.471        |               |               |               |

## **Item 6: - Capital Report**

### **Question**

Page 56: Point 5: This year's new starters are the first year of Covid affected birth intake. New intake numbers have reduced and help match parental desires with capacity. What forecasts are there for future year intakes and school capacity?

## **Response**

Amongst other data sources, School Organisation monitor the live birth rate. Based on current live birth data the potential number for Reception 2026 in take has seen a very small increase from 3714 for 2025 to 3755 for 2026. However, it would appear that this figure falls by approximately 100 for Reception 2027 and Reception 2028.

Please note these figures are not indicative of the actual number of children due to start in 2025 due to the time elapsed; children may have moved out or moved into the borough in that time. As more houses are being built, more children are expected to move into the borough, which will subsequently change the intake number for each academic year.

Our current 2024 forecasts were submitted to DfE in July 2024 as part of the statutory School CAPacity (SCAP) return and a summary presented to the Children and Families Committee at the meeting on 16 September 2024.

We are currently working on the draft 2025 forecasts which will be submitted to the DfE, via the SCAP return, in July 2025 and a summary reported to the September Children and Families Committee.

## **Question**

Page 62: Point 27: what examples of need are there for this pressure?

## **Response**

An example would be unplanned emergency condition work.

## **Question**

Point 31: the double negative of "... to not do nothing..." is to do something – which is viewed as a High Risk

## **Response**

A typo error and should have read "to do nothing." This is a standard report format to be completed and aims to provide info on alternative options. For this report, the only options are to continue with the programs in line with the content of the report, or to stop capital work, which would leave us in a position of not meeting our statutory responsibilities and not using the relevant grants for the specified purposes.

### **Question**

Page 63: point 32: it is not just places. What are the teacher vacancy rates in CE? With 6 in a thousand nationally – double the pre covid rate

### **Response**

This is not data that we can access, schools have the option of using an external advertising platform (Jobs Go Public) for job vacancies, so we do not have any data available. It is open to all CE schools including Academies on a buy-back basis but not all of them use it.

### **Question**

Why must the committee approve the increases in funding given in Appendix 3 (Page 77) without anything that could be classed as information?

### **Response**

The appendix aims to summarise the extent of changes in one place so that it is easy to review, on pages 75 and 76 it details these new or amended schemes in the context of the wider Capital program. The Team will aim to provide more detail going forward.

### **Item 7 - the Improvement Plan Progress Report**

- 1) Clarity was sought in respect of frontline visits as the report stated that the weeklong partnership learning opportunities that had taken place in February had replaced the previous programme of frontline visits, and that Councillors had been invited to participate in the programme, when the invite had only been sent to the Chair and Vice Chair of the committee. (Cllr Saunders)**

This was an error in the report, which should have read that the Chair and Vice Chair of the committee had been invited, not all members. A new proposal around councillor frontline visits will be presented to committee in June for agreement to ensure that councillors are provided with the opportunity to hear from frontline practitioners and understand the quality of frontline practice.

- 2) Officers stated it was the intention to facilitate Councillors to have those conversations with frontline practitioners, however, the terminology and understanding of what “frontline visits” entailed had evolved over time. To address this a paper would be presented to committee to clearly define and outline the structure and expectations of those visits.**

A paper will be presented to committee in June on a new proposal for councillor frontline visits. This has been added to the work programme.

- 3) Previous information from frontline visits undertaken throughout the year by councillor’s work had ceased, but officers committed to reinstating the process which would be accompanied by an overview of practice and activities to ensure councillors had a comprehensive understanding of the service and issues faced by frontline practitioners. (Cllr Bailey)**

The paper on frontline visits in June will include the findings from the last visits undertaken, which covered the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

- 5) In response to a question raised in respect of the types of contracts overseas social workers were on and whether these would be made permanent like the agency workers contracts, officers agreed to provide a written response outside of the meeting. (Cllr Puddicombe)**

The overseas social workers have received permanent offers of employment from inception. These offers are conditional upon providing all necessary pre-employment information, including proof of the right to work in the UK. As with any permanent employee they would still be required to pass our probation period to be confirmed in post and their continued employment would be subject to them maintaining their right to work in the UK.

- 6) There were concerns raised around para 34, page 91 of the report and not being able to recruit and retain. There was a request for an updated position in respect of the progress on the improvement plan funded posts and how the improvement Board was addressing this issue. (Cllr Bailey)**

In terms of an update against the recruitment to the additional posts, the latest position is provided below. Please note that these posts were agreed to be recruited to permanently to support effective recruitment, however it is recognised that after the 18- month funding period has expired we will need to remain within the original establishment.

| <b><u>Roles</u></b>                      | <b><u>Update</u></b>  |
|--|---|
| Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) x 2 | Both roles are currently covered by agency. The roles are about to be advertised for permanent recruitment.   |
| Connected carer assessors x 2            | <p>We have appointed to one post and the post holder commenced in February 2025.</p> <p>The other post was re advertised, interviews were held in February 2025. We have appointed to this post with a start date in mid May 2025.</p>  |
| Social worker x 6                        | As outlined in previous reports to committee, 4 agency social workers have been appointed into Macclesfield and Crewe within Children in Need and Child Protection as these are experienced workers. This is the same cost as 6 non-agency social workers. However, as part of the workforce strategy, we have now also recruited 8 international social workers commencing in April and converted 3 agency staff to permanent contracts. |
| PA's x 3                                 | Recruited 3 additional staff on an agency basis, however, due to turnover within the service they are now no longer additional capacity and additional resource is being sourced through recruitment agencies. 1 of the agency staff has been successful in securing a permanent role.  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | We have also noticed a process challenge in terms of adverts for PAs, which meant adverts were not live for PAs for nearly 8 weeks, which has contributed to a delay in recruitment.     |
| Quality Assurance Officer                                  | This post started on 3 December 2024. The postholder has since resigned so will be going back out to advert, initially to agency to ensure this is covered while we recruit permanently. |
| Project Manager to lead development of 18-25 accommodation | Internal secondment appointed on 1 July to enable work on this area to start immediately. Post funded by the service until 1 September.  |
| Family Group Conferencing Leads x 2                        | Appointed starting 1 April 2025.   |

**6) Performance Scorecards to be published alongside the minutes rather than waiting until June Committee (Cllr Bailey)**

The vital signs scorecard has been circulated to members and published on the website, alongside the minutes.



## Item 8 - Household Support Fund April 2025 – March 2026

The Cheshire East Household Support Fund (HSF) package continues to offer support to financially vulnerable adults, children and their families living in Cheshire East. Three levels of support are available:

1. Food and energy support, based on household composition

*One referral for financially vulnerable adults or families is available for food and energy between April 2025 – March 2026. One referral can only be accepted within this timeframe.*

2. Support for household essentials (found under the Triage network of support on the professional HSF webpage)
3. Financial assistance for exceptional costs

**As HSF support is only accessible through a professional referral, the HSF team request that you do not miss the opportunity to support and help our most vulnerable residents. Please ensure that you raise awareness and talk to the financially vulnerable adults and families that you work with to see if they would benefit from this valuable support.**

The following webpage can be shared with your families so that they are aware of the support that is potentially available to them - [Cheshire East Household Support Fund](#)

Further information for professionals about the eligibility criteria and the referral process is available by emailing the HSF team via [HSFFamily@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:HSFFamily@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

Please note, the HSF grant is subject to grant conditions, and only referrals which satisfy the grant criteria can be accepted, please [here](#) for more info

Please come back to us if you have any further queries,

Household Support Fund team

Area Level Breakdown

| Area                   | Number |
|------------------------|--------|
| Crewe and Rural        | 2064   |
| Nantwich and Rural     | 399    |
| Congleton and Rural    | 622    |
| Sandbach and Rural     | 383    |
| Alsager                | 161    |
| Knutsford              | 231    |
| Poynton                | 82     |
| Macclesfield and Rural | 1612   |
| Wilmslow               | 228    |
| Middlewich             | 158    |
| Haslington             | 84     |
| Alderley Edge          | 38     |
| Out of Area            | 198    |

#### Funding Breakdown via themes

| Spend area       | Final spend   | Volume |
|------------------|---------------|--------|
| Food             | £534,816.00   | 5088   |
| Energy           | £1,039,858.00 | 6818   |
| Triage Network   | £578,304.73   | 666    |
| Exceptional Cost | £24,423.71    | 50     |
| Total            | £2,177,402.44 | 12622  |

| Triage Deep Dive (final stats) | Final Spend | Volume |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--------|
| Housing Prevention             | £272,460.17 | 219    |
| Housing Adaptions              | £29,178.17  | 22     |
| Adult Crisis Support           | £51,730.33  | 37     |
| Resource Allocation Panel      | £1,411.80   | 4      |
| Transport                      | £47,856.76  | 21     |
| St Pauls (white goods)         | £70,446.00  | 133    |
| CLT (white goods)              | £105,221.50 | 230    |
| Total                          | £578,304.73 | 666    |

### **item 9: Academisation of St Mary's**

#### **Question**

Page 173: Point 10: What is the "Specific Time Period": with 116 schools now academies how many have successfully achieved completion of the process within this period?

The standard target is 6 months from formal notification; however, the actual date is agreed between council and school so could be longer. Issues on school condition and legal transfers can add complication and time to the process.

### **Item 12: Mins of sub committee (cared for and care leavers committee)**

#### **Question**

Page 262: Point 22: Can C&F committee be updated on progress and implementation of the listed suggestions?

#### **Response**

Directorate management will consider this as part of work planning.