

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**
held on Monday, 16th September, 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 S Bennett-Wake, N Cook, G Hayes, B Posnett, B Puddicombe,
A Burton, L Crane, S Gardiner, J Clowes and L Wardlaw

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

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29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bailey, Cllr Beanland, Cllr Buchanan, Cllr Saunders and Cllr Smith. Cllr Wardlaw, Cllr Gardiner, Cllr Crane, Cllr Clowes and Cllr Burton attended as substitutes.

30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Bennett-Wake declared that she has worked with speech and language professionals and is a member of Unison which has campaigned for increased pay.

Cllr Gardiner declared in relation to item 12 that he sits on the Adults Learning Disabilities Board.

31 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July be agreed as a correct record.

32 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Cllr Corcoran attended the meeting as a visiting member to speak in relation to item 12 – SEND Partnership Strategy and Governance.

Cllr Corcoran acknowledged that the current SEND system was a national problem and referenced the possibility of converting Westfields for use as a SEND facility which would bring benefits both to local children with special educational needs and for the Council to reduce the spend on private placements outside the borough. Cllr Corcoran raised the following queries:

- Who was making the decision on whether to self-build a SEND facility at Westfields (as opposed to the facility being built by government)?
- What were the figures and other factors on which that decision was being taken?
- What scrutiny was there of that multi-million pound decision?

Officers undertook to provide this detail in writing.

33 IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

The committee received the report which provided an update on progress against the Children's Services improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) conducted in February and March 2024.

It was requested that the issue of finance associated with the improvement plan be included in the committee's second financial review report, which was due to be presented at the November meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee note the progress against the improvement plan.

34 YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2024-27

The committee received the report on the Youth Justice Plan 2024-27. Local authorities had a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan relating to their provision of youth justice services. Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 set out the youth justice partnership's responsibilities in producing a plan. It stated that it was the duty of each local authority, after consultation with the partner agencies, to formulate and implement a youth justice plan, setting out how youth justice services in their area are to be provided and funded, how they will operate, and what functions will be carried out.

An amendment was moved and seconded which sought to amend the recommendation as set out in the report to:

That the Children and Families Committee recommend that full Council approves the 2024-27 Youth Justice Plan.

This amendment was carried by majority and became the substantive motion.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Children and Families Committee recommend that full Council approves the 2024-27 Youth Justice Plan.

35 FIRST FINANCIAL REVIEW 2024/25

The committee received a report on the first financial review for Children's Services for 2024/25. The report provided the current forecast outturn for the

financial year 2024/25 based on income, expenditure and known commitments as at the end of July 2024. It also identified actions that were being taken to address adverse variances to urgently address financial sustainability.

It was requested that a report be brought forward to committee to provide an update on school transport including an update on cost.

It was queried what the initial cost was for the consultants who were working on the school transport review and what that cost would be moving forward. Officers undertook to provide this detail in a written response.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Review the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of:

Council: £26.5m against a revised budget of £387.6m (6.8%)
Children and Families: £7.3m against a revised budget of £91.5m (8.0%)

To scrutinise the contents of Annex 1, Section 2 relevant to services within the committee's remit, and review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget 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.

2. Consider the in-year forecast capital spending of:

Council: £164.5m against an approved MTFS budget of £215.8m
Children and Families: £37.9m against an approved MTFS budget of £38.9m

due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years.

3. Note the available reserves position as per Annex 1, Section 5
4. Note the Capital Virements above £500,000 up to and including £5,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 4, Table 3 will be approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution
5. Note that Council will be asked to approve Supplementary Revenue Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £1,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 3, Table 1

36 UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE KEY AREAS OF THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024/25 TO 2030/31 - QUARTER 1 2024/2025

The committee received the report which provided an update on the progress of the mitigations detailed within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management

plan and provided a forecast outturn position in relation to the DSG deficit reserve. The progress and the forecast outturn position within the report were based on quarter 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024. Monthly updates outside of the committee system had also been provided to the committee and details of these updates were uploaded to the members' hub. This report captured the previous updates.

A request was made for future reports to include detail within the highlight report on progress of mitigations (appendix 1) on the reasons behind mitigations being categorised as red/not on track.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Scrutinise and note the key areas of progress outlined in this report regarding the DSG Management plan 2024/25 to 2030/31
2. Note that this briefing report outlines the progress on mitigations and the forecast outturn position, based on quarter 1 April 24 to 30 June 2024
3. Note the caveat of the financial forecast

37 PAEDIATRIC SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION THERAPY SERVICE

The committee received the report which provided an update following the review, consultation and engagement by the Council and Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) of the paediatric speech, language, and communication therapy (SLCN) services. The report provided oversight of the proposed service model and sought authorisation to follow a competitive tender process and award the successful provider the joint service contract from 1 April 2025.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Approve the new service model and authorise the procurement for a new service contract for a 5-year term with a 1 + 1 year extension period
2. Approve the joint commissioning of the SLCN service between the council and ICB, formalised with a Section 256 Agreement
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Service and/or equivalent authorised officer to award the contract for the jointly commissioned Paediatric Speech Language and Communication Therapy Service

38 CHILDCARE EXPANSION CAPITAL GRANT AND WRAPAROUND CHILDCARE REVENUE GRANT POLICIES

The committee considered the report which sought approval of the Childcare Expansion Capital Grant Policy and the Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant Policy.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Approve the Childcare Expansion Capital Grant Policy set out in Appendix 1
2. Approve the Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant Policy set out in Appendix 2
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the grants in accordance with relevant guidance
4. Delegates authority to the Head of Service for Early Years, Family Help and Prevention to enter into contracts with grant recipients in accordance with the proposed funding policies

39 CONSULTATION ON ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2026-27

The committee received the report which sought approval to consult on the Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements to comply with the statutory duty.

A request was made for paragraph 2.2 of the draft admissions arrangements to be amended to clarify that the local authority could not admit additional pupils over the published admission number, except in specific circumstances outlined in the admissions statement.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee approve that the Draft Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements be put for consultation in line with the School Admissions Code in Autumn 2024.

40 SEND PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

The committee received the report which sought approval for revised governance arrangements for the Cheshire East 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Partnership, which aimed to ensure improvement actions undertaken through the partnership were completed effectively and at pace and supported the achievement of best outcomes for children and young people with SEND within a financially sustainable framework.

It was noted that there had been an administrative error within appendix 4 (terms of reference) and that Cllr Jos Saunders was part of the board.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Approve the revised Cheshire East 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Partnership Governance structure
2. Note the new and/or revised terms of reference for the following boards, groups and panels:
 - Terms of Reference for SEND Task and Finish Groups
 - Terms of Reference for the SEND Transformation Action Group
 - Terms of Reference for the 0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board
 - Terms of Reference for the SEND Executive Oversight Panel
3. Note the proposals for developing the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy and Improvement Plan 2025-27

41 SCHOOLS CAPACITY RETURN (SCAP RETURN)

The committee received the report on the outcome of the 2024 primary and secondary mainstream forecasts which would be submitted to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The forecasts would inform the amount of Basic Need grant awarded to the authority for the 2027/2028 academic year. Notification of any award was usually received around April/May of the following year.

Officers undertook to provide written responses to the following queries:

- Regarding the expansion of schools in Sandbach and Wheelock, how confident were officers that this expansion would protect the choice for a parent/carer to send two or more children to the same school in this area
- As increased mandatory planning targets were expected, had this been worked into the school provision figures
- Regarding the Glebe Farm development in Middlewich, would money allocated for secondary education provision go with the child if they chose to attend a secondary school in Sandbach rather than Middlewich

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee note that the SCAP return was completed and submitted prior to the deadline of 26 July 2024 and acknowledge the information provided.

42 WORK PROGRAMME

A request was made for a report to be scheduled for a future meeting to provide information on finance within maintained schools, as the information from the Schools Forum suggested that in the 2022/23 financial year there were 10 maintained schools which submitted deficit budgets.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

43 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee meeting held on 5 December 2023 be noted.

The meeting commenced at Time Not Specified and concluded at Time Not Specified

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)