

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**
held on Monday, 11th November, 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 M Beanland, J Bird, N Cook, L Crane, G Hayes, B Posnett,
B Puddicombe, J Saunders, G Smith, L Wardlaw and D Clark

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Theresa Leavy, Interim Executive Director Children's Services
Claire Williamson, Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration
Lisa Davies, Interim Improvement Director Children's Services
Richard Nash, Interim Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care
Annie Britton, Participation Lead
Lauren Conway, Business Manager
Alex Cooper, Project Manager – Education
Danielle Holdcroft, Head of Early Years, Family Help and Prevention
Heather Baron, Head of Prevention, Early Help and Domestic Abuse
Joanne Prophet, School Organisation and Capital Manager
Nikki Wood-Hill, Finance Manager
Janet Witkowski, Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

44 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bailey and Cllr Bennett-Wake. Cllr Wardlaw and Cllr Clark attended as substitutes.

45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to item 10 (Children's Centre Remodelling into the Family Hub Outreach Model), Cllr Saunders and Cllr Beanland both declared that they were members of Poynton Town Council which was due to make a decision as to whether to fund Poynton Library and therefore would leave the meeting for the duration of this item.

46 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

47 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Ms Paula Riordan attended the meeting to speak in relation to item 12 (Proposed Expansion of Springfield School). Ms Riordan was Principal of the Guild for Lifelong Learning which was an adult education provision based in Wilmslow and was the primary user of the Dean Row Community Centre prior to closure. Ms Riordan stated that she was not objecting to the expansion of the school but, as primary day time user of the centre, requested to know what would be available to replace the provision for day use by older adults. Officers undertook to provide a written response.

48 NOVEMBER CHILDREN'S RIGHTS MONTH CAMPAIGN 2024

Members of the Cheshire East Youth Council attended to deliver a presentation marking the November Children's Rights Month campaign. The presentation highlighted some current issues including raising awareness of hate crime and improving mental health services.

The committee discussed these issues with the Youth Council and thanked them for their work and engagement.

49 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.

The improvement plan rating overview highlighted the status of actions within the plan and members requested that future reports include expected completion dates for any actions which were delayed.

The committee discussed staff recruitment, retention and wellbeing and reference was made to the Staffing Committee which had been in existence prior to the introduction of the committee system in 2021 to provide oversight of human resources matters. It was queried where this oversight now came from and the Chair agreed for this to be looked into.

RESOLVED:

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

50 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024/25 TO 2030/31 UPDATE

The committee received the report which provided an update of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan for the period 2024/25

to 2030/31 to reflect the financial outturn position and the reduced growth of Education, Health and Care plan numbers as of 31 March 2024.

The recommendations within the report stated that the DSG management plan was approved by Children and Families Committee on 29 April 2024. It was requested that the minutes clarify that this was by majority and was not supported by all members of the committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families:

1. Note the DSG Management plan for 2024/25 to 2030/31 (approved by Children and Families Committee on 29 April 2024) has been reprofiled/re-cast to reflect the lower number of Education, Health, and Care plans and the lower deficit position as recorded on 31 March 2024
2. Note the impact of the reprofiling:
 - a. an in year balanced position by year 7 is still achievable
 - b. a reduced forecast deficit reserve position of £1.07 billion unmitigated and £236.7 million mitigated by the end of March 2031
3. Note the mitigations within the original plan remain in place (approved by Children and Families Committee on 29 April 24)
4. Note the reprofiled DSG management plan has been sent to the Department of Education, to advise of the achievements to date and to demonstrate the impact of the reduced deficit position at 31 March 2024 and the reduced number of EHCPs at January 2024, compared with the original forecast

51 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW OF 2024/25 (CHILDREN & FAMILIES COMMITTEE)

The committee received the report which provided the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2024/25 based on income, expenditure and known commitments as at the end of August 2024. The report also identified actions that were being taken to address adverse variances to urgently address financial sustainability.

Officers undertook to provide written responses in relation to the following queries:

- A financial breakdown regarding the removal of the school catering subsidy (MTFS ref 16) on page 185 of the agenda

- A request for detail on the financial scheme of delegation, including whether there had been any recent changes

Queries were raised regarding costs associated with the school transport review and officers advised that an update report would be brought to committee in January to provide detail.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Review the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £20.1m against a revised budget of £395.4m (5.1%). To scrutinise the contents of Annex 1, Section 2 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. Review the in-year forecast capital spending of £157.7m against an approved MTFS budget of £215.8m, due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years
3. Note the available reserves position as per Annex 1, Section 5

52 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE 2025/26 - 2028/29 (CHILDREN & FAMILIES COMMITTEE)

The committee received the report which set out progress and further development activity required before the final MTFS 2025-29 would be presented for approval to the budget setting Council meeting in February 2025.

A concern was raised that member engagement on development had been late and it was agreed that this feedback would be reported back to the Finance teams.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Note the progress to date on the development of the MTFS for 2025-29
2. Note that officers will continue to challenge draft proposals and develop further proposals in consultation with Members prior to approval by Council

3. Note that Committees will be presented with the opportunity to review the full set of financial proposals, designed to achieve a balanced budget, as part of their January cycle of meetings prior to recommendations being made to Council for approval

53 CHILDREN'S CENTRE REMODELLING INTO THE FAMILY HUB OUTREACH MODEL

The committee received the report on the children's centre remodelling into the family hub model.

Cllr Saunders and Cllr Beanland declared an interest and left the meeting for the duration of this item.

Where children's centres were being transferred to the control of primary schools, it was queried whether the transfer agreements would provide sufficient protection to ensure that the buildings would be used for additional SEND places or expanding early years provision outside of the protected delivery of health services currently onsite. Officers undertook to provide detail in a written response.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Approve the commercial transfer of the childrens centres listed below back to the onsite primary schools for alternative education purposes:
 - Poynton Children's Centre
 - Knutsford Children's Centre
 - Nantwich Children's Centre
 - Hurdsfield Children's Centre
 - Broken Cross Children's Centre
 - Sandbach Children's Centre
2. Endorse the relocation of the Council run early years start for life services to a flexible outreach program to be provided from family hubs, libraries, and other community venues

54 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 2024/25 (HSF5 REVIEW AND HSF6 PROPOSAL)

The committee received the report which provided an evaluation of the Household Support Fund (HSF) 5 and proposed delivery model of HSF 6.

A request was made for a breakdown to ward level of how the funding had been allocated to be shared with the committee.

The use of the fund to support care costs and council tax arrears was queried. Officers advised that this use of the funding was transparent and in line with criteria set by government and further detail could be shared in writing for assurance.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Recommend to full council to approve the supplementary estimate on the 11 December 2024
2. Endorse the findings from the HSF5 evaluation
3. Approve the HSF6 delivery model
4. Delegate authority of the Household Support Fund delivery to the Executive Director of Children's Services

55 PROPOSED EXPANSION OF SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL

The committee considered the report on the proposed expansion of Springfield School.

Cllr Lata Anderson spoke as a visiting member and expressed concern on behalf of residents about the use of the Dean Row Community Centre in Wilmslow. Cllr Anderson asked the committee to consider deferring the decision until the community use of Oakenclough and Springfield outside of school hours had been agreed and criteria for use provided.

During debate on the item, an amendment was proposed and seconded which sought the inclusion of an additional recommendation as follows:

'For the Communities and Assets teams to work in liaison with community groups affected by these proposals to find alternative facilities.'

This amendment became part of the substantive motion.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Approve the proposed expansion of Springfield School, Crewe onto the satellite site formally known as Cledford House, Middlewich to provide 60 places for pupils aged 4- 11 from September 2026
2. Approve Springfield school satellite – Middlewich (former Cledford House) as a named scheme within the Children and Families capital programme

3. Approve the procurement of a contract of works and delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award a construction contract to facilitate the provision of additional places at Springfield School satellite – Middlewich (former Cledford House) together with any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract
4. Approve the proposed expansion of Springfield School - Wilmslow campus to provide an additional 20 places for pupils aged 4-16 from September 2025
5. Approve Springfield School - Wilmslow campus expansion as a named scheme within the Children and Families capital programme
6. Approve the procurement of a contract of works and delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award a construction contract to facilitate the provision of additional places at Springfield School – Wilmslow campus (former Dean Row Community Centre) together with any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract
7. Agree for the Communities and Assets teams to work in liaison with community groups affected by these proposals to find alternative facilities

56 PROPOSAL FOR THE REUSE OF FLAG LANE BATHS SITE FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN ALTERNATIVE PROVISION SCHOOL

The committee considered the report on the proposal for the reuse of the Flag Lane Baths site for the purpose of an Alternative Provision school.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Support the preferred option that the former Flag Lane baths site is utilised for the purpose of a new free Alternative Provision School
2. Approve the inclusion £500,000 in the Childrens and Families Capital Programme to indemnity up to that amount to any free school 'abnormal site development' costs

57 PROPOSED CHANGE IN AGE RANGE AT ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, MIDDLEWICH

The committee considered the report on the proposed change in age range at St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Middlewich.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Consider the consultation responses received to the change in age range at St Mary's Catholic Primary School
2. Approve the proposed change of age range at St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Middlewich, from 4 -11 to 3-11 to accommodate a nursery provision for implementation in January 2025

58 ACADEMISATION OF LOWER PARK SCHOOL

The committee considered the report on the academisation of Lower Park School in Poynton.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Authorise the Interim 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 Halliard 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 Halliard 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)

59 ACADEMISATION OF ST JOHN'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

The committee considered the report on the academisation of St John's CofE Primary School in Sandbach.

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 North West Academies Trust Limited 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, and completion of a lease (see Appendix 2) to the North West Academies Trust Limited for 125 years substantially in the form of the model lease produced by DfE at a peppercorn rent. The school playing field is identifiable as shown on the accompanying redline lease plan (see Appendix 3)

60 **ACADEMISATION OF GAINSBOROUGH PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOL, BELGRAVE ROAD, CREWE - IDENTIFICATION OF REMEDIAL WORKS**

The committee considered the report which sought approval for an amendment to the proposed Commercial Transfer Agreement as part of the academy conversion process for Gainsborough Primary School, to allow for the funding of the required remedial works post conversion. This follows the identification of a failure to the floor screed at the school in areas that were extended in 2007.

It was queried whether the Council had any recourse for the significant delay as a result of the contractors. Officers undertook to provide a written response.

A request was made for the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services to ensure that this had been brought to the attention of colleagues with responsibility for health and safety compliance of the Council's estate. Officers suggested that a report on the health and safety assessments of Cheshire East schools could be brought to committee.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Approve the capital expenditure required to carry out the remedial works at Gainsborough Primary School. The details of this are referred to in appendix 1
2. Give authority for an amendment to the proposed Commercial Transfer Agreement to allow for the funding of the required remedial works post conversion and to avoid further delay to the conversion date
3. Agree that the funding for these works be provided through a formal grant agreement process, in accordance with existing arrangements for funding of Academy projects.

61 WORK PROGRAMME

The committee considered the work programme.

It was agreed that two reports would be added to the January meeting to consider the schools deficit and an update on the school transport review.

A further report would be brought to committee in February or April to provide an update on health and safety of Cheshire East school sites.

A suggestion was made for consideration to be given to bringing forward a report on staff wellbeing and the implications on cost and retention.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

62 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The committee did not require discussion of the confidential appendix during the meeting; therefore the public and press were not excluded.

63 ACADEMISATION OF GAINSBOROUGH PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOL, BELGRAVE ROAD, CREWE - IDENTIFICATION OF REMEDIAL WORKS

The committee did not require discussion of the confidential appendix during the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 and concluded at 18:21

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)