

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**  
held on Monday, 10th February, 2025 in the The Capesthorpe Room - Town  
Hall, Macclesfield SK10 1EA

## **PRESENT**

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)

Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, J Bird, N Cook,  
B Posnett, B Puddicombe, J Saunders, G Smith, S Adams, D Edwardes and  
H Seddon

## **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Joanne Bowkett – Team Manager, Admissions, Transport and Fair Access

Alex Cooper – Project Manager - Education

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

Nikki Wood-Hill, Finance Manager

Karen Shuker, Democratic Services Officer

Janet Witkowski - Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer

## **76 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Crane, E Gilman  
and G Hayes.

Councillors S Adams, D Edwardes and H Seddon were present as  
substitutes.

## **77 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In relation to item 8 Academisation of Hurdsfield Community Primary  
School Councillor S Bennett-Wake declared that she was an employee of  
the Aspire Academy Trust, and a shop steward for the Schools Union and  
in the interests of openness and transparency would not take part in the  
debate and vote.

In relation to item 8 Academisation of Hurdsfield Community Primary  
School Councillor B Puddicombe declared that he was a governor at Ivy  
Bank Primary School which was part of the Aspire Academy Trust and in  
the interests of openness and transparency would not take part in the  
debate and vote.

## **78 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2025 be agreed as a correct record.

## **79 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION**

There were no public speakers.

## **80 SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA AND EARLY YEARS FUNDING FORMULA 2025/26**

*Councillors G Smith joined the meeting during consideration of this item.*

The Committee considered a report on the Schools Funding Formula and Early Years Funding Formula for 2025/26.

The Committee were asked to take into account the recommendation from the Schools Forum when considering the schools funding formula.

Officers reported that from a financial perspective linked to the DSG management plan the recommendation would be to approve the 0.7%.

It was noted that there was a typo in the table at paragraph 11, page 30 of the report and that the third column heading should say 2025/26.

Officers referenced the 7-year plan that was in place to reduce the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit and explained that the plan had been built around a 0.7% transfer so further mitigations would be required if the 0.7% transfer was not agreed. Despite not being approved for the Safety Valve programme, officers had continued to work alongside a Department of Education (DfE) advisor and they had provided support for the 7-year plan.

Although officers had provided additional support for schools giving a breakdown and clearer understanding of the schools funding formula, and encouraging more attendance at the Schools Forum, there were concerns raised by the Committee that there had been a low turnout at the meeting of the Schools Forum at which the recommendations to Children and Families Committee were voted on. Members requested update reports in year on the steps being taken to improve attendance.

The Committee also raised concerns around the poor response to the consultation and asked what impact it would have on the Councils relationship with schools if the Committee agreed to approve a transfer of 0.7% from the school's block to the high needs block despite the Schools Forum recommending a transfer of 0.5%.

Officers assured the Committee that the difference between the 0.5% and 0.7% of £600k would be redistributed to schools, focusing on inclusion and providing support such as bringing support staff directly into classrooms which was already having an impact. Historically money remaining in schools had not worked and to drive transformation support needed to be put in place for schools to start doing things differently and this was being done as a partnership with the Council.

Officers agreed to take the Committees comments back to the Schools Forum.

The recommendations were proposed and seconded, and on being put to the vote a recorded vote was requested for recommendation 1va with the following results:

**FOR**

Councillors S Adams, R Bailey, N Cook, D Edwardes, B Posnett, J Saunders

**AGAINST**

Councillors C Bulman, B Puddicombe, H Seddon, G Smith

**NOT VOTING**

Councillors M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake

The motion was declared carried with 6 votes for, 4 votes against and 2 not voting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Children and Families Committee:

**Schools Block** (by Majority)

1. Approve a formula for the adoption of the Schools Funding Formula 2025/26:
  - i. The use of a local funding formula that uses the Department for Education (DfE) national funding formula factors, uplifted for the Cheshire East area cost adjustment, and with any additional funding being allocated via the basic entitlement factor. The formula factors are set out at Appendix 2 of the report.
  - ii. The use of -0.5% as the minimum funding guarantee percentage.
  - iii. The use of notional SEN formula of 100% Low Attainment, 50% FSM and FSM6, 25% IDACHI.
  - iv. Setting a local Growth Fund at a value of £0.757m.
  - v. a. Approve the level of block transfer of 0.5% to implement from the school's block to the high needs block.
2. Provide delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the schools block grant and the mainstream

schools additional grant in accordance with relevant guidance during 2025/26.

3. Provide delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to make disapplication's to the DfE should it be required during 2025/26.

**Early Years Block** (by Majority)

4. Approve the following for the adoption of the Early Years Funding Formula for 2025/26:
  - i. The continued use of the current funding formula that passes 95% of the funding allocation to providers of the early education entitlements and increase the hourly rates by the same percentage increase as the increased funding from the DfE.
  - ii. Continue to allocate up to 2% of the funding allocation to create a Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF).
  - iii. The new funding rates. The proposed rates for 2025/26 are set out at Appendix 4 of the report.
5. Provide delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to accept in-year budget increases and use the early years grant in accordance with relevant guidance during 2025/26.
6. Delegate authority to the Head of Service Early Years, Family Help & Prevention to enter into revised contracts with providers in accordance with the DfE funding increase during 2025/26.

**High Needs Block** (by Majority)

7. That the committee approves the provisional budget allocations of the high needs block and additional high needs funding as set out in **Appendix 5**.
8. Provides delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the high needs block and additional high needs funding in accordance with relevant guidance during 2025/26.

**Central Schools Services Block** (by Majority)

9. That the committee approves the provisional budget allocations and use of the central schools services block as per Appendix 6 of the report.
10. Provides delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the Central Schools Services grant in accordance with relevant guidance during 2025/26.

*Councillor J Bird joined the meeting.*

## **81 DETERMINATION OF THE CO-ORDINATED SCHEME AND ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2026-27**

The Committee considered a report which sought approval to determine the Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements to comply with the statutory duty.

Consultation feedback had been largely positive, and the key changes were outlined which were included in appendix 6 of the report.

**RESOLVED:** (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Determine the Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements for 2026-27 in line with the School Admission Code.

## **82 ACADEMISATION OF ST BENEDICTS PRIMARY SCHOOL**

The Committee considered a report on the proposed academy conversion of St Benedict's Catholic Primary School to become part of the Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Academy Trust.

**RESOLVED** (By Majority)

The Children and Families Committee

1. Authorise the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and the Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer to take all steps necessary to agree and execute the Commercial Transfer Agreement (Appendix 1) to Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic 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, and completion of a lease (see Appendix 2) to Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Academy Trust 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).

## **83 ACADEMISATION OF HURDSFIELD COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

*Councillor S Bennett-Wake & Councillor B Puddicombe left the meeting during consideration of this item*

The Committee were asked to consider a report on the intended academy conversion of Hurdsfield Community Primary School to become part of The Aspire Educational Trust.

Prior to consideration of the item Councillor S Adams requested information from officers that was considered to be exempt. The Committee agreed to defer the item to later in the agenda so that officers could provide a response to the question raised.

*Councillor S Bennett-Wake & Councillor B Puddicombe returned to the meeting.*

#### **84 BRIEFING AROUND SCHOOLS FORECASTING FINANCIAL DEFICITS IN 2024/25**

The Committee received an update regarding maintained schools which were currently forecasting to end 2024/25 in a financial deficit position, and information on the activity taking place in order to support those schools with their recovery planning.

In respect of a question raised about what support was being given to help those schools put business plans together to help them with their financial situation officers reported that plans would be monitored every 3 months and there had been a balanced approach of challenge and support.

During consideration of the item, the Committee resolved to move into part 2 to consider the confidential appendix to the report.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the update be noted.

#### **85 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.

#### **86 BRIEFING AROUND SCHOOLS FORECASTING FINANCIAL DEFICITS IN 2024/25**

The Committee considered the confidential appendix.

**RESOLVED:**

That the confidential appendix be noted.

**87 ACADEMISATION OF HURDSFIELD COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

*Councillor S Bennett-Wake & Councillor B Puddicombe left the meeting during consideration of this item and took no part in the vote.*

The Committee considered the exempt information in relation to the academisation of Hurdsfield Community Primary School.

**88 READMITTANCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED:**

That the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

**89 ACADEMISATION OF HURDSFIELD COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

The Committee considered the recommendations in the report.

**RESOLVED:** (By Majority)

The Children's and Families committee:

1. Authorise the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and the Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer to take all steps necessary to agree and execute the Commercial Transfer Agreement (Appendix 1) to The Aspire Educational 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 Aspire Educational 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).

*Councillor S Bennett-Wake & Councillor B Puddicombe returned to the meeting*

**90 WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee considered the work programme.

Members were asked to review the work programme and contact the Chair or Democratic Services with any suggestions of scrutiny items that they would like to put forward for the Committee.

The following was noted

- A request was made to receive an update, or a report be brought back to Committee on the Kingsbourne Academy Primary School.
- Household Support Fund – Suggested as a potential topic for a scrutiny task and finish group.
- A request was made for the Chief Executive to write to the DfE and lobby local MPs in respect of the Capital Programme specifically in relation to the future use of Westfields.
- That an item on the work of the Schools Forum be included on the work programme so that the Committee could assure themselves that the relationship between the Council and Schools was moving forward.
- That the annual report item on frontline visits be added to the work programme.
- That an update on the schools forecasting a financial deficit be brought back to Committee.
- That topical issues were included on the work programme rather than themed issues.

Additionally, there were concerns raised about the Cheshire Without Abuse Service being brought in-house without prior discussion at the Children and Families Committee. Assurance was sought for future decisions to be discussed at Committee, and an update on the in-house service was requested.

Councillor C Bulman confirmed that the decision to review MyCWA funding was discussed and agreed in November 2023 Committee

Officers reported that the Cheshire Without Abuse contract had concluded, and the provider had withdrawn from the procurement process. Officers agreed to bring a report to Committee with plans around the domestic abuse and child exploitation position.

Members raised concerns about the consistency of decision making across committees, and it was requested that Task and Finish Groups have clear timescales and report back to Committee for accountability and reassurance for residents.

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.55 pm

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)