

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**
held on Monday, 9th June, 2025 in the The Capesthorne Room - Town Hall,
Macclesfield SK10 1EA

PRESENT

Councillor L Crane (Chair)
Councillor E Gilman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, R Moreton, B Posnett, J Saunders,
G Smith, L Wardlaw, C Bulman and J Place

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Karen Shuker, Democratic Services Officer
Richard Nash, Interim Director for Early Help and Children's Services
Tracy Stephen, Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care
Lisa Davies, Interim Improvement Director Children's Services
Claire Williamson, Director for Education, Strong Start and Integration
Martyn Baggaley, Head of Service, Integrated Commissioning
Jo Prophet, School Organisation and Capital Manager
Alex Cooper, Project Manager, SEND Transformation Team
Rhiannon Edwards, Domestic Abuse Development Advisor
Nikki Wood-Hill, Finance Manager
Diane Green, Finance Manager

The Chair varied the order of business. Notwithstanding this the minutes are in the order of the agenda.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Bailey, J Bird, G Hayes, B Puddicombe and B Wye.

Councillors C Bulman, J Place and L Wardlaw were present as substitutes.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to item 12 – Proposal to formally increase the number of places at Park Lane School, Macclesfield Councillor S Bennett-Wake declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of the fact that she had friends and former pupils who worked in the school and other schools in Macclesfield.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2025 be agreed as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no registered public speakers.

5 CHESHIRE EAST DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICE

The Committee received a presentation and considered a report which outlined the council's approach to domestic abuse support within the borough including the current service offer and the initial stages taken to review the service. The report provided details on the planned review activity and co-production with the public and stakeholders to shape the future service offer for safe accommodation provision.

As this item also cut across the Adults and Health Committee, officers had provided those members with a briefing and shared the report with them to enable them to provide comments and feedback which had been incorporated into the final report.

Members provided feedback and asked questions in respect of

- The Current provision by MyCWA was 21 units, while only 16 were being commissioned (25% over provision), why was a reduction to 16 units proposed when data does not show a 25% drop in need?
- Concerns raised about lack of a line in the MTFs for commissioning.
- Members sought assurance that the new procurement process would be successful.
- Concerns were raised about the adverse effect on vulnerable individuals and staff morale due to the Cheshire East Domestic Abuse Hub currently not being able to meet its referral target.
- How was success measured and how did the 360 process support staff?
- Were contingency plans in place for future funding gaps?
- Concerns raised that the 2025/26 budget appeared to have been set before consultation had taken place.

In response officers stated that:

- The 16 units were based on an outdated needs assessment; a rapid review was underway for 2026/27. The service accessed safe accommodation on a nationwide basis, and this was in addition to the 16 units.

- The previous procurement had largely failed due to insufficient funding; an additional £100k had now been built in.
- The 2023/24 budget was £1.69m and £1.74m had been committed for the 2025/26 budget.
- Most of the funding was from the Domestic Abuse grant (central government), with some partnership funding (Police, ICB).
- Safe accommodation was funded via a DLUHC grant, but the duration of the funding was uncertain.
- Over the last 6-8 months, the DAFSU service had been developed which had eliminated capacity issues, removed waiting lists, and meant the service was meeting practice standard targets.
- Staff wellbeing was supported through clinical supervision and regular team meetings.
- Domestic Abuse navigators were IDVA-trained and provided education, safety planning, and risk assessments. They handled self-referrals and initial assessments via phone and home visits were conducted only after risk assessments had been completed.

The Committee thanked officers for their transparency regarding the reasons behind the failed procurement exercise.

RESOLVED: (By Majority)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the review of the provision for safe accommodation across Cheshire East for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.
2. Note the engagement and co-production outlined to develop service model for safe accommodation and a refreshed Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy.
3. Note that the outcome of the review will be reported back to Committee together with a proposed future service delivery model.

6 **CHESHIRE EAST SEND AND AP 'ONE PLAN'**

The Committee considered the final version of the Cheshire East Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Partnership's SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy and Development Plan, referred to as the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan', including the high-level priorities identified within the document and the associated reporting mechanisms for tracking progress against the plan.

The three high level priorities of Right Support in the Right Place at the Right Time aligned with DSG Management Plan, the Council's Corporate Plan and the National Send Improvement Plan.

Members asked questions and provided comments in respect of

- whether the banding system was now fully implemented?
- Was there sufficient capacity to halt the upward trajectory of EHCPs?
- What were the Council's statutory duties involved with parent/carer discussions and decisions about individual support
- Concerns shared in respect of the impact of reduced funding on school provision and the DSG deficit.

In response officers stated that

- the system was being expanded to all age groups, with full implementation planned by September 2027
- Actions in the One Plan aimed to reduce EHCP demand through school training and early intervention.
- The Council must ensure appropriate provision and wraparound support for all children with EHCPs.
- The DSG deficit was not included in the MTFs; at the time of writing the report, the final outturn was not available. The current position was £112.1m deficit as of March 2025.

Concerns were raised about the lack of certainty around AP and SEND capital projects, including the £300k cost of maintaining Westfields. The Chair confirmed a meeting had been held with local MPs, and they were lobbying central government to get a speedy resolution. The Chair agreed to share the letter with members.

An options paper was also being developed in case government approval was not secured and the outcome of that would be shared with members.

RESOLVED (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the contents of the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan', including agreeing the high-level priorities of: Right Support in the Right Place at the Right Time.
2. Agree the proposed ongoing reporting mechanisms for the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan'.

7 FINAL OUTTURN 2024/25

The Committee received the report which provided an overview of the Cheshire East Council final outturn for the financial year 2024/25 and the financial performance of the Council relevant to the committee remit.

There had been an improvement of £1.9m since quarter 3 in Children and Families closing with an overspend position of £3.5m.

The contributing factors behind the overspend in Children and Families included children's social care placements, the use and cost of agency staff, home to school transport costs and school catering.

The overall DSG deficit was £112.1m at the end of the year which was an improvement on the budget gap as determined by the Council's DSG Management Plan that was reported to Children and Families Committee in April 2024.

During discussions concerns were raised in respect of the implications if the statutory override was not extended. Officers report that if that was the case and the council had to pay back the reserve the council would instantly be in S114 territory. Cheshire East Council was not alone in this, and officers agreed to share a list of other Local Authorities who were in a similar position.

It was noted that the DSG management plan spanned 7 years, with the plan that income would match expenditure, but that 5 years remained, and risks would persist.

Concerns were expressed in respect of the 59% capital spending figure and there was a request for a breakdown of this figure. Officers clarified that Children & Families capital items were primarily grant-funded and that the 59% figure was council-wide.

Members hoped that the upcoming spending review would provide some clarity which would support better decision-making and discussed the importance of having certainty in the direction of travel to inform future planning and budgeting.

RESOLVED (by Majority)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Considered the overall financial performance of the Council in the 2024/25 financial year, as contained within the report, as follows: a) A Net Revenue Overspend of £17.6m against a revised budget of £365.8m (4.8% variance) funded by conditional Exceptional Financial Support (Capitalisation Direction) via borrowing. b) General Reserves closing balance of £6.3m. c) Capital Spending of £88.4m against an approved programme of £215.8m (59% variance).

2. Considered the contents of Annex 1.

3. Approve the new Reserves in the Reserves Section (Annex 1, Section 5, Table 1) which includes proposed movements to reserves.

4. Recommend to Council to approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate (SRE) Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £1,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 3, Table 1.

5. Approve the Children and Families Committee Supplementary Revenue Estimates (SRE) Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding (Specific Purpose) over £500,000 up to £1,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 3, Table 2.

6. Approve the Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCE) and Capital Virements between £500,000 and £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules for the following Committee's as detailed in Annex 1, Section 4, Table 4

7. Recommend to Council to approve the Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCE) over £1,000,000 in accordance with Budget and Policy Framework Rules as detailed in Annex 1, Section 4, Table 5.

8 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CAPITAL PROGRAMME - SCHOOL CONDITION PROGRAMME 2025/26

Councillor B Posnett left during consideration of this item and did not return.

The Committee considered the report on the Children and Families Capital Programme – School Condition Programme 2025/26.

It was noted that there was a typo on page 348 paragraph 16, which should read 'Do nothing and not progress the school condition programme'.

Officers would bring updates to committee on schemes as required.

Members raised questions in respect of

- Had RAC had been identified in any buildings
- whether wider use of S106 money could be discussed with planning colleagues
- Was there any funding to put fire suppressors in as part of the projects which were having roofing work undertaken?

Officers reported that

- RAC had not been found in any of the Council's maintained schools.
- Discussions had taken place with planning colleagues in respect of the use of S106 monies, but there were restrictions in terms of policy and DfE recommendations.

- Colleagues in facilities management would go out and review schools if needed, but there was an overall programme to look at any fire related issues.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the School Condition Programme of schemes as detailed in Appendix 1.

2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to approve uplifts to Project Costs of schemes approved in the School Condition Programme (and the updates received during the financial year) to a maximum of 20% of the approved capital budget, this will ensure that schemes will be progressed in a timely way and to provide updates to committee as required. Where the decision process includes financials or contracts, this will be done in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer and the Executive Director of Place.

3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to determine the school sites and works to be instructed from the block funding allocations set out in Appendix 1 and take all steps to deliver these works. Where the decision process includes financials or contracts, this will be done in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer and the Executive Director of Place.

9 COUNCILLOR FRONTLINE VISITS

The Committee considered a report which proposed new arrangements for councillor visits to frontline children's social care services which would help strengthen councillor oversight of the impact of services on children's outcomes.

The report also provided the themes raised through the previous councillor frontline visits undertaken between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

A report would come back to committee to share findings and how those would be implemented into the Improvement Plan.

In response to a request for information around the DSG funding and what it was spent on to be included as part of the programme the Chair noted that a specific in-depth session would be beneficial for some members to look at that as a separate area as outside of the scope of front-line visits. The Chair agreed to take this forward.

In response to a question raised in respect of ensuring councillors were able to attend visits officers reported that they would work with each councillor around availability and would circulate to all councillors to ensure cover for any cancelled sessions. Councillor Bennett Wake also

agreed to take on the additional visit to ensure the schedule could be delivered.

The Committee thanked officers for the comprehensive report.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the arrangements for councillor frontline visits as outlined in the report.

10 **SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION FOR 16-25-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the Supported Accommodation project established in response to ILACS improvement plan recommendations. The report provided details of the planned recommissioning activity and co-production with the stakeholders to shape the future service offer. It also detailed the work completed to date, including the current service pressures and proposed future pathway.

As this item also cut across the Adults and Health Committee, officers had provided those members with a briefing and shared the report with them to enable them to provide comments and feedback.

There were currently only 29 commissioned beds for 16–17-year-olds in the borough:

- 21 beds with the YMCA in Crewe
- 8 beds with P3 in Macclesfield
- 81 of the 155 young people in care were migrant young people representing a significant increase
- In addition, following the ILACS inspection, 3 new contracted beds were sought, and the council was working with Apollo Buckingham based at the former MMU campus in Crewe to utilise one of their blocks of accommodation to house 6 young migrant people.
- Spot-purchased placements cost approximately £1,500 per week, compared to contracted rates of £400 (YMCA) and £800 (P3).

The proposal of work would see an increase in capacity of commissioned beds for each cohort, with the number of beds scaling up across the life of the contract as young people transitioned into them.

The Committee supported the proposals and raised questions and comments in respect of

- Why wasn't the block contract model adopted earlier?
- What was the timeline for securing additional beds?

- Were there plans to extend the project manager's contract?
- Could planning colleagues assist with accommodation for young people?

In response officers stated that

- Consideration was being given to review the former Children's Commissioning Team function, and it was acknowledged that the project manager role had been pivotal to driving the programme forward
- Timescales included: - April 2026 an increase to 66 block beds and 80 spot purchased, 92 block beds and 54 secured by spot purchase in 2026/27 and by 2028/29 to secure all 126 set out in proposal and 20 via spot purchase.
- There was a Strategic housing policy group which included the head of service for integrated commissioning and the programme lead.

RESOLVED (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Review and approve in principle the new service model and pathway for supported accommodation.
2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Service's in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer to procure and award the Supported Accommodation contracts for 16–25-year-old Children in Care and Care Leavers Service.

11 IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS

Councillors C Bulman and R Moreton left the meeting during this item and did not return.

The Committee received an update on the progress to date against the improvement plan and an update on the findings from the Ofsted monitoring visit on the front door. The update included the findings from a review by the council's sector led improvement partner (SLIP), North Tyneside, of improvements to services supporting care leavers, carried out during May 2025 and a summary of the LADO findings and actions being taken. It also included the findings from the DfE progress review in April 2025.

Members asked questions and provided comments in respect of

- Staffing – asked for an indication of what sick leave was like, what were exit interviews revealing

- Why was there no information in respect of the number of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) in place on the vital signs document
- Concerns were raised in respect of quality assurance not picking up the LADO situation.

In response officers stated that

- There was regular oversight of caseloads and any cases exceeding 23 children were reviewed for additional support.
- Regarding LADO it was explained that the QA service was independent of the social care service prior to a decision for a new Director post at the end of February 2024. Once the team was then moved and reorganised it was clear areas had not been provided with the focus and oversight it should have. Therefore, it was quickly identified we required SLIP work to get a robust plan of improvements in place which is now being addressed.
- Agency staff were used to maintain service quality above establishment to support and longer-term caseloads would be addressed in the Families First Re-design.
- Exit interviews were not electronically recorded so a gap had been identified in this area and the newly appointed S151 officer who has responsibility for the HR monitoring/recruitment had reported to the improvement board issues with 'clunky' systems and would be reviewing.
- There was an enhanced recruitment strategy in place with a strong pipeline of applicants and work would be done on the recruitment process to facilitate getting staff started. A business case was pending to facilitate this work.
- Measures were now being built into the Liquid Logic system with support from Business Intelligence to capture more information such as SGO's as it was something officers felt was important to report and so they were looking to make changes that would enable this reporting.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Note the progress against the improvement plan.
2. Note the findings from the sector led improvement partner review of improvements to services for care leavers and the summary of the LADO and associated action plans.
3. Note the findings from the DfE progress review.

12 PROPOSAL TO FORMALLY INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PLACES AT PARK LANE SCHOOL, MACCLESFIELD

The Committee considered a report which outlined the outcomes of the public consultation as to whether Park Lane School, Macclesfield should formally increase the number of places being offered. The proposed increase would provide additional places for 34 pupils between the ages of 4 – 19 from September 2025., increasing the overall capacity to 156 places.

All those who had responded to the consultation agreed with the proposal.

The Committee welcomed the proposed scheme to increase capacity and agreed that it would help with meeting the Council's priority to increase opportunities for children, young adults, and adults with additional needs through the expansion of the local Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities (SEND) provision and would allow more children to attend a school within Cheshire East and their local community.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the proposed formal expansion of Park Lane School, Macclesfield to provide additional 34 places for pupils aged 4-19 from September 2025 and to progress with works.

2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award a construction contract to facilitate the provision of additional places at Park Lane School, and to enter into any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract. Where the decision process includes financials or contracts, this will be done in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer and the Executive Director of Place.

13 APPOINTMENTS TO SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING GROUPS, PANELS, BOARDS AND JOINT COMMITTEES

The Committee received the report which sought to nominate members to the bodies outlined in the report.

The proposed membership of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee, in line with the political proportionality, was noted as follows: Councillors M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, D Clark, L Crane, R Fletcher, G Hayes, S Holland, E Gilman, R Moreton, B Posnett, B Puddicombe and J Saunders.

The Committee nominated Councillor L Crane as the representative to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The proposed nominations of the Home to School Transport Task and Finish Group (Joint T & F Group with Highways & Transport Committee) were noted as follows: Councillors M Beanland, L Crane, E Gilman, and B Puddicombe.

The proposed nominations of the Families First Task and Finish Group (Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill) were noted as follows: Councillors L Crane, S Bennett-Wake, E Gilman, G Hayes, G Smith, and J Saunders.

RESOLVED (Unanimously):

That the Children and Families Committee: -

1. Appoints the sub-committees, working groups, task and finish groups, panels, boards, and joint committees for 2025-26, and the member appointments to them, as set out above.
2. Where appropriate, agrees to submit member nominations to the bodies to the Head of Democratic Services.
3. Approve the draft Terms of Reference for the Home to School Transport Joint Committee Task and Finish Group.
4. Approve the draft Terms of Reference for the Families First Task and Finish Group (Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill).

14 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the Work Programme. The following was noted:

- There was a request for the Dedicated Schools Grant item to be added to September Committee.
- The Chair reminded members that the September Committee would be the twilight meeting and would start at 5.30pm in Macclesfield,
- The Chair put forward a proposal for members to take away and discuss in respect of starting meetings at 10.30am in line with the other service Committees and alternating the venue once the new Committee Suites in Crewe were completed.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted

15 **SEND SUFFICIENCY STATEMENT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AN EDUCATION, HEALTH, CARE PLAN (EHCP)**

The Committee considered a report on the SEND Sufficiency Statement for children and young people with an education, health, care plan (EHCP).

During consideration of the item, the Committee resolved to move into part 2 to consider the confidential appendix to the report. The Committee moved back into part 1 for questions and debate.

During debate on the item, an amendment was proposed and seconded in respect of recommendation 3 which sought the inclusion of additional wording as follows:

'Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with chair and vice chair of the Children and Families Committee to proceed with consultation on the proposals in Appendix 1 and undertake relevant actions in line with the school organisation process, with a report back to committee on the outcome in due course for consideration and decision'

The amendment became part of the substantive motion.

RESOLVED (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Review the information as presented within the SEND Sufficiency Statement academic year 2024/25 to 2030/31 (Appendix 1)
2. To note the proposals detailed in the SEND Sufficiency Statement at Appendix 1 of the report (not for publication)
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with chair and vice chair of the Children and Families Committee to proceed with consultation on the proposals in Appendix 1 and undertake relevant actions in line with the school organisation process, with a report back to committee on the outcome in due course for consideration and decision.

16 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

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 involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

17 SEND SUFFICIENCY STATEMENT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AN EDUCATION, HEALTH, CARE PLAN (EHCP)

The Committee considered the information in the confidential appendix.

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm and concluded at 5.52pm

Councillor L Crane (Chair)