

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**
held on Monday, 5th June, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)
Councillor L Anderson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, D Clark, E Gilman,
R Kain, B Posnett, J Saunders, J Rhodes, L Wardlaw and A Critchley

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Mark Bayley, Acting Director of Education and 14-19 Skills
Claire Williamson, Director of Strong Start, Family Help and Integration
Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Deborah Nickson, Legal Team Manager (People)
Nikki Wood-Hill, Lead Finance Partner
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Hayes, G Smith and L Smith. Councillors A Critchley, J Rhodes and L Wardlaw attended as substitutes.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

5 SERVICE BUDGETS 2023/24

The committee received the report which set out the allocation of the approved budgets for 2023/24 to the Children and Families Committee.

A request was made for fewer non-decision reports to be brought to committee going forward as this was a decision making meeting.

A query was raised as to the Supporting Families Programme and how much funding each area of the borough received from this programme. The Director of Strong Start, Family Help and Integration suggested that a quarterly report could be shared with the committee to provide this breakdown and updates going forward.

It was noted that finance training sessions were being arranged for Councillors. A request was made for this to include training on the Dedicated Schools Grant and for this to be offered to all Members. Members expressed a view that this should be as a separate session due to the complexity of the Dedicated Schools Grant and the Executive Director of Children's Services agreed to take these comments away and look into how it could best be delivered.

Members put forward comments in relation to Cheshire East being under-funded and suggested that there was a need to lobby central government on this issue. A request was made for consideration to be given to bringing an agenda item to this committee to show collective intent.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee:

1. Note the decision of the Finance Sub-Committee to allocate the approved revenue and capital budgets, related budget policy changes and earmarked reserves to the Children and Families Committee, as set out in Appendix A.
2. Note the financial reporting timetable for 2023/24 set out in Appendix B due to be approved at Finance Sub-Committee on 7 June.

6 COUNCILLOR FRONTLINE VISITS ANNUAL REPORT

The committee received the report which provided an update on the themes, strengths and issues raised through councillor frontline visits to the Cheshire East Consultation Service, Child in Need and Child Protection Teams, and the Children with Disabilities Social Work Team and Short Breaks Team over the last 12 months 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

A query was raised as to what means are available for Councillors providing feedback on issues they come across in their role. The Director of Children's Social Care advised that contact details would be shared for the relevant teams to contact with urgent safeguarding issues and that any more general issues can be raised through the Member Enquiry Service.

A request was made for the frequency of this report to change to bi-annually for committee to review on a more regular basis.

There was significant discussion in relation to staff recruitment and retention, and supporting the wellbeing and morale of staff. Officers gave assurances that work was being done to monitor this and address any issues to ensure that Cheshire East was seen as an employer of choice.

A query was raised regarding the scrutiny of commissioned services as this was not within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee and therefore should be done by Children and Families. The Executive Director of Children's Services responded that a report had previously been brought to this committee on commissioned services and that this can be re-visited to look at bringing it back on an annual basis. A suggestion was made for the information available on the Cheshire East website regarding commissioned services to be circulated to committee for information.

Members thanked officers for the transparency of the report.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation set out in paragraph 3.2 of the report was formally voted on to show the committee's support. This was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Children and Families Committee note the contents of the report and approve the continuation of councillor frontline visits and the process associated with them.

And (unanimously)

2. That, as the integrated children's strategy is developed, consideration be given by committee to extend these frontline visits across the breadth of services within children's services. This proposal will come to committee in November 2023 in the Integrated Children's Strategy paper.

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

The committee received the report which sought approval from the Children and Families Committee to appoint members to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee, the Local Authority School Governor Nomination Sub-Committee and to nominate a member to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

A query was raised as to whether a place on the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee could be given to the Liberal Democrat Group. The committee were advised that the proportionality of this sub-committee was based on the overall proportionality of the Council which did not currently allow for a Liberal Democrat place on a sub-committee of 12. A further query was raised as to previous arrangements whereby a Liberal

Democrat Member had taken a place as an associate non-voting Member of this sub-committee and then subsequently became a voting Member the following year. A suggestion was made for this to be clarified following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

By majority:

1. That the Children and Families Committee appoint Members to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee as follows: Con: 5; Lab: 5; Ind: 2; Lib Dem: 0; NGI: 0

By majority:

2. That the Children and Families Committee appoint Members to the Local Authority School Governor Nomination Sub-Committee as follows: Con: 2; Lab: 2; Ind: 1; Lib Dem: 0; NGI: 0

Unanimously:

3. That the Children and Families Committee nominate one Member to the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board

And that the Children and Families Committee:

4. Agree that the names of the Members appointed will be submitted to the Head of Democratic Services and Governance
5. Note the Terms of Reference for these committees

8 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 and concluded at 15:40

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)