

MINUTES of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 3 December 2024 at Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, Reigate, RH2 8EF.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 13 March 2025.

Elected Members:

- * Fiona Davidson (Chairman)
- * Jonathan Essex
- * Robert Hughes
- * Rebecca Jennings-Evans
- * Frank Kelly
- * Rachael Lake BEM
- * Bernie Muir
- * John O'Reilly
- * Ashley Tilling
- * Liz Townsend
- * Chris Townsend (Vice-Chairman)
- * Jeremy Webster (Vice-Chairman)
- * Fiona White

Co-opted Members:

Mrs Julie Oldroyd, Diocesan Representative for the Catholic Church

Mr Alex Tear, Diocesan Representative for the Anglican Church, Diocese of Guildford

- * *present*

53/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Mrs Julie Oldroyd.

54/24 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: 14 NOVEMBER 2024 [Item 2]

The Committee **AGREED** the minutes from the previous meeting as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

55/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

None received.

56/24 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

None received.

57/24 CABINET RESPONSE TO SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS [Item 5]

WITNESSES

- Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Rachael Wardell, Executive Director for Children, Families & Lifelong Learning

KEY POINTS MADE IN THE DISCUSSION

a CHILDREN NOT IN SCHOOL [Item]

1. On the serious implications of school absences on children's life chances and safeguarding, the Cabinet Member highlighted the team's efforts to address the various causes, including the recently approved Lifetime of Learning Strategy which prioritised attendance. The Chair said the Committee had reserved endorsement of the strategy while awaiting an actionable plan.

b EARLY HELP BUDGET [Item]

2. The Chair noted that the committee had recommended protecting early help spending have inflationary costs built in, as preventive spending had a positive impact on outcomes for children and reduced statutory demand. The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning responded by saying that while the early help budget was important, statutory spending demands had to come first. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Lifelong Learning said that there would be £250 million nationally for children's social care prevention in the local government settlement, though how this would be distributed across local authorities was unknown.

58/24 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 6]

The Chair invited the committee to review the progress and updates related to the actions and recommendations tracker and forward work programme.

The Chair said that it was unclear whether all agreed recommendations from the February 2024 meeting had been implemented by the Children, Families & Lifelong Learning (CFLL) Directorate.

The Committee **NOTED** the action and recommendation tracker and the forward work programme.

ACTIONS OR REQUESTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Alternative Provision & Participation Manager: Update the Committee on the status of the implementation on the following recommendations: CFLLC 1/24, CFLLC 2/24 and CFLLC 3/24.

59/24 2025/26 DRAFT BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2029/30 [Item 7]

a VOLUNTARY SECTOR ELEMENT OF THE ADULTS, WELLBEING AND HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS DIRECTORATE

The Chair said that the Committee was unfortunately unable to provide a budget recommendation on the planned changes to Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector funding. Without an equality analysis, or prior information on the changes which the budget proposals were designed to support, the Committee was unable to assess the effects of the budget proposals, and the choices put before it. Following representations from Surrey Community Action, the Select Committee had requested a further meeting to understand the impact of the proposed removal of its funding, however the view of the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Partnerships Directorate was that an additional meeting was not warranted. The Chair argued their request passed the test of reasonableness and would discuss with the Monitoring Officer the Articles of the Constitution in relation to Select Committees' Terms of Reference and their role.

b CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING DIRECTORATE

WITNESSES

- Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Lifelong Learning
- Maureen Attewell, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Lifelong Learning
- David Lewis, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
- Rachael Wardell, Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Patricia Denney, Director for Quality and Performance
- Nicola Kilvington, Director for Corporate Strategy & Policy
- Rachel Wigley, Director for Finance Insights & Performance
- Kay Goodacre, CFLL Strategic Finance Business Partner
- Nikki O'Connor, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Corporate

KEY POINTS MADE IN THE DISCUSSION

1. A Member asked what the CFLL Directorate's target for additional efficiencies was and what might be sacrificed within CFLL if the Council's overall gap of £17.4m were unable to be closed. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Lifelong Learning said it would be a challenge to achieve the £11m efficiencies currently planned. The Cabinet Member for Finance said the gap would be closed, either by additional government grants, increased council tax or use of reserves. The Council's available reserves had been built up in the last six years and were now 12% of the net revenue budget. Additional efficiencies were being looked for across the organisation, but there were no specific targets related to the CFLL Directorate. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning added that should any further efficiencies be required, they would look to protect statutory duties first.
2. The Chair asked where anticipated job losses (a net decrease of 71 FTEs) in CFLL were expected to occur. The Executive Director said the number was notional and not tied to specific roles and reflected efforts to manage vacancies, redeploy staff and adjust work. She assured the Committee that the focus was not on cutting front-line jobs

and roles working directly with families in social care and SEND would be protected.

3. A Member asked whether an increase of 135 special educational needs and disability (SEND) staff proposed by the end-to-end review had been included in the 2025/26 budget. No assurance was given, though the Cabinet Member said current SEND staffing was funded until the end of the 2026/27 financial year, by the £15m recovery funding approved by Cabinet last year. Asked whether the use of artificial intelligence would be in addition to, rather than replace, the aforementioned staffing increase, the Cabinet Member responded that AI should have no impact on staffing in the 2025/26 budget.
4. The CFLL Strategic Finance Business Partner told the Committee that social worker salaries were above national living wage thresholds, so recruitment would not be impacted by the rise there. Central Government had announced there would be compensation for the national rise to employer National Insurance contributions, though the amount was not known ahead of the Local Government Finance Settlement. The Chair feared the impact of the rises on voluntary sector organisations doing work for the Council. A Member added that future strategies relied on leaning more on the third sector, which already had to deal with short-term contracts and reduced donations. The Executive Director said they would work with charities on a case-by-case basis to ensure sustainability of contracts, and commissioning would take into account inflationary pressures.
5. A Member raised concerns about the risks of delivering £11.1 million efficiencies, particularly considering a £10.7 million pressure for home to school travel assistance demand. At the suggestion of bringing some vehicles back in-house, the Executive Director explained this had been explored under the Freedom to Travel programme but was found to be impractical. They had not yet been able to identify a better way than external commissioning of transporting 10,000 children at one time. She gave a reasonable assurance of delivering the efficiencies, explaining lessons had been learned from past under-achievements.
6. A Member asked how SCC would ensure early help was prioritised given the need to focus on increased demand for statutory services. The Executive Director explained they were not able to prioritise early help over statutory services but were focusing on targeted intervention. Early help funding was a shared responsibility among safeguarding partners, not just the Council. Despite the ongoing demand, fewer children were in care or under a protection plan due to both partnership work and the Council's family safeguarding model. The family support programme funding for districts and boroughs was ending, though the Government had announced a national £250m Children's Social Care Prevention Grant.
7. A Member asked whereabouts in early help and family support the £2.1 million efficiencies across the next two years were planned. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning said they would look to deliver early help more efficiently when it came to contract renewal. This would involve focusing spend on what has been

shown to deliver outcomes. Efficiencies also related to community services covered by early help and adolescent work.

8. A Member asked whether there was any flexibility in the budget to support highly valued short breaks to reduce families' stress. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Lifelong Learning said efficiencies would be made after 2025/26 and the Council had been reviewing short breaks with Family Voice Surrey to understand need. Eligibility criteria for play and leisure would likely be introduced. The offer would in the future be redesigned to maximise inclusive provision like holiday clubs where siblings without additional needs could also access them. Plans, when developed, would be brought to Committee for scrutiny.
9. The CFLL budget for 2025/26 was expected to increase by 6.3% compared with the current year's budget – more than double the anticipated increase to the Council's overall budget. A Member asked if, notwithstanding the growth, service users would be negatively affected. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning said that residents may be upset by changes in service delivery, such as altered access points or longer waiting times, however statutory services had been prioritised to ensure vulnerable individuals still received the necessary support. These had consistently improved, while acknowledging there had been shrinkage in discretionary services. The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning added that difficult changes in home school travel assistance, and in the future Surrey adult learning and potentially short breaks, would sadly be felt.

[At 12.04pm, the meeting was suspended.]

[At 12.14pm, the meeting resumed.]

RECOMMENDATIONS

RESOLVED,

- I. The Committee notes the significant pressures on the Directorate's budget of pay inflation, and the efficiencies planned through staff restructuring. As the EIA is not yet available for the planned restructuring we are concerned at the impact on front line staff and at the risk that we will not have sufficient capacity to deliver vital preventive and statutory services. We are aware of high vacancy rates for social workers, with only some of these roles covered by agency staff.
- II. The Committee was reassured that frontline staff (including social workers, SEND caseworkers and residential caseworkers or alternatively qualified professionals) have been exempted from recruitment controls. It is important to the Committee that plans do not impact the continuing need to improve our communications and responsiveness in the area of additional needs and disability (SEND).
- III. We are aware that there has been some growth in senior roles over the past few years and we recommend that restructuring does not disproportionately fall on front line roles which are so vital to the delivery of services.

- IV. The Committee recommends that recruitment into vacant – or currently agency filled - front line roles is prioritised, and that difficulty recruiting some roles does not lead to budget being redirected or reallocated away from the frontline.

ACTIONS OR REQUESTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Director for Family Resilience and Safeguarding: Once the local government settlement is received, inform the Committee of the potential impact of Surrey's share of the £250 million Children's Social Care Prevention Grant.
- Director for Family Resilience and Safeguarding: Deliver more detail on where exactly in early help and family support the £2.1 million efficiencies across the next two years were planned.
- CFL Executive Director: Follow up with Cllr Essex what waiting list in the children's social care system he referred to.

c CULTURE (CUSTOMER, DIGITAL AND CHANGE)

WITNESSES

- Denise Turner-Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities (re. libraries, arts and culture)
- David Lewis, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
- Liz Mills, Strategic Director for Customer, Digital and Change
- Susan Wills, Assistant Director for Cultural Services
- Rachel Wigley, Director for Finance Insights & Performance
- Nicola Kilvington, Director for Corporate Strategy & Policy
- Louise Lawson, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Customer & Communities
- Nikki O'Connor, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Corporate

KEY POINTS MADE IN THE DISCUSSION

1. The Strategic Director for Customer, Digital and Change said that the libraries transformation programme had been delivered on budget, with £2.1 million spent between 2019/20 and 2023/24, an investment that resulted in ongoing efficiencies of £3.5 million.
2. Asked about the impact of staffing reductions on library staff, the Strategic Director said that for the upcoming year, the library network had planned £30,000 in staffing reductions through natural turnover and changes in library assistant roles, without affecting opening hours or services. Additionally, £77,000 had been saved by deleting a long-vacant senior management position, with work shared among the remaining team members. The library had also planned for a £57,000 loss in income due to refurbishments, which carried over into the next financial year but was expected to return to normal afterwards.
3. A Member asked what the plan was to bring customers back to Surrey Arts following cancellations during COVID and the drop in income. The Assistant Director for Cultural Services said that student numbers for art lessons had returned to pre-COVID levels, school programmes had

increased, and music ensemble membership was recovering as part of an ongoing plan.

4. A Member asked about the consequences and implications of cutting the Surrey County Archaeological Unit, particularly on planning and historical research. The Assistant Director for Cultural Services said that the responsibility for archaeological investigations in planning had been handled by Surrey County Council's Historic Environment Planning Team, not the Surrey County Archaeological Unit. The Archaeological Unit had been one of several commercial organisations providing services, which had not been competitive in the marketplace. Stopping the archaeological service would not affect planning applications or the Historic Environment Planning Team's work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RESOLVED,

- I. The Committee notes the success of the transformation programme which has delivered significant efficiencies whilst also transforming libraries into inclusive hubs for the community giving access to a range of community events and services.
- II. The Committee welcomes and supports the new partnerships and funding streams that are being developed to deliver additional services.
- III. The Committee recommends that the 2025/26 CDC Budget and MTFs should ensure there are sufficient staff to provide community hubs, identified as an important aspect of the library's strategy and a key factor in helping to reduce isolation in society.

60/24 MODERNISATION OF THE LIBRARIES ESTATE [Item 8]

WITNESSES

- Denise Turner-Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities
- Liz Mills, Strategic Director for Customer, Digital and Change
- Susan Wills, Assistant Director for Cultural Services

KEY POINTS MADE IN THE DISCUSSION

1. A Member asked how many of Surrey's 52 libraries were currently used for adult learning and other activities. The Strategic Director for Customer, Digital and Change said that the libraries were developing into multi-purpose hubs offering a range of services, including adult learning, through partnerships with other local services. Progress had been slow due to space constraints, but Sunbury was a key example where adult learning had been integrated. Removing income generation barriers had enabled more effective use of library spaces for such activities.
2. A Member asked how residents had been involved in designing the transformation process, as well as what the strategy had been for promoting the transformation. The Strategic Director explained staff

had been trained in co-design skills, and resident feedback through events and surveys, like those in Weybridge, had helped shape the design and services to better meet community needs. The Assistant Director for Cultural Services said that Surrey County Council had invested in transforming libraries by modernising facilities, increasing access hours, and launching a communications campaign to attract new and returning users. As a result, library events, attendees, and registered borrowers had significantly increased, making it the busiest library service in the country.

3. Asked if the refurbishment of the Weybridge Library had been on schedule and within budget, the Strategic Director for Customer, Digital and Change said it had remained on budget. A delay due to operational and safety concerns meant the opening was now expected by June 2025.
4. A Member asked how security had been maintained at the unstaffed Super Access buildings and whether there had been any issues that could affect its continuation. The Assistant Director for Cultural Services said that the technology had allowed users to access libraries outside of normal working hours after completing a sign-up process that included an induction on extensive security and safety measures, and since its rollout in December 2023, there had been no reported security incidents.
5. Asked about the programme's popularity, the Strategic Director said that since its rollout, Super Access had gained over 2,600 additional registered users across various locations, with 10% of users aged 16-24, mainly students. There had been nearly 7,600 visits during Super Access hours.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

61/24 ALTERNATIVE PROVISION UPDATE [Item 9]

WITNESSES

- Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Rachael Wardell, Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Sandra Morrison, Assistant Director for Inclusion & Additional Needs SE
- Dee Turvill, Alternative Provision and Participation Manager

KEY POINTS MADE IN THE DISCUSSION

1. A Member asked for clarification on the reduction since February 2024 in children receiving fewer than 15 hours of alternative provision (AP) a week, and what the target was for this. The Alternative Provision and Participation Manager said the target was to increase provision to 15 hours for every child where suitable. Training had been rolled out to increase officers' understanding of their responsibilities and there had been a focus on reviewing individual support packages to ensure

referrals met the minimum 15-hour threshold. Those children who received less due to their complex needs had regular reviews conducted to adjust provision where appropriate.

2. Several members questioned whether alternative education for children met expectations for quality, achievement, and hours, stressing the need for consistent standards across all funding sources and providers, such as local authorities and schools. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning said full-time mainstream education was considered the best option for children and should always be the goal where possible, however, some children required alternative provision due to their individual needs. She expressed concern about setting percentage targets as children's needs varied and rigid percentages might not be helpful; the focus should be on meeting each child's needs and not comparing figures across different services.
3. The Committee wanted to know how well individual education plans had been working. The Alternative Provision and Participation Manager clarified that a case officer tracked the progress of children in alternative provision, regularly reviewing and adjusting their plans. The Committee requested that, in order to help assess the effectiveness of current strategies, any future report on AP include more detailed information on outcomes, especially whether children had successfully reintegrated into schools or reached other important goals.
4. A Member asked whether schools, parents, officers, and other stakeholders had a clear understanding of what alternative provision was, its objectives, and when it should be used, and whether the same was true for Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP). The Alternative Provision and Participation Manager said that the service was in the process of developing a suite of documents to improve clarity on roles, responsibilities, and the purpose of alternative provision, including resources for families and schools. These documents aimed to ensure transparency regarding AP services, their suitability, and expected outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RESOLVED, The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee notes the significant improvement between February 2024 and October 2024 in the number of children and young people receiving 15 or more hours of education each week. It is encouraged by the Service's increased focus and attention on children not in school and applauds the efforts so far to ensure that this easily forgotten cohort is not neglected.

The Committee recommends that the CFLL Service:

- I. Prioritises achieving the target of 15 hours a week for all Children and Young People, except those who have complex medical or mental health needs that mean they can cope only with fewer hours.
- II. Delivers a strategy and plan to assess the quality of Alternative Provision provided based on whether the provision is meeting the needs of the CYP receiving it and enabling the CYP to return to full-time education or appropriate alternative employment/training.

- III. Considers – with safeguarding partners – how children not in school (and not just those who are electively home educated) could be better safeguarded. The Committee remains concerned that this sizeable cohort of children are particularly vulnerable and the issue warrants increased attention.
- IV. Works with schools to understand why 2,303 children and young people are missing more than half of the school year, and how this number can be reduced - particularly the 514 severely absent pupils with an EHCP in mainstream, given the SCC strategy of ensuring more children with EHCPs are educated in mainstream environments.
- V. Presents to the Select Committee the findings of the Surrey Virtual School review into 'suitable education', which was due to go to the education subgroup of the Corporate Parenting Board in November 2024.

ACTIONS AND REQUESTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Alternative Provision and Participation Manager: Please provide an explanation about how the Council ensures that a similar level and number of hours of alternative provision is being provided by those funded by schools.
- Assistant Director for Inclusion & Additional Needs SE: (For written response) What can the progress made between Feb-Oct (reduced number of children receiving fewer than 15 hours of AP a week) be attributed to? Is this change sufficient – are we now where we want to be, and if not how much progress is needed (quantitatively and qualitatively)? What are the cost implications of any further improvement needed?

62/24 CHILDREN'S HOMES - OFSTED REPORTS PUBLISHED SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 10]

WITNESSES

- Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Rachael Wardell, Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning

KEY POINTS MADE IN THE DISCUSSION

1. The Chair noted that the home had been inspected in September 2024 and was judged to be "Good" overall, following an "Outstanding" rating in January 2024. Despite the lower grade, it was acknowledged that the report highlighted the home as well-managed and child-centric, with a continued focus on care.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

63/24 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW [Item 11]

WITNESSES

- Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Rachael Wardell, Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Patricia Denney, Director for Quality and Performance

KEY POINTS MADE IN THE DISCUSSION

1. The Chair noted a significant rise in speech and language therapy waiting times and an increase in MindWorks referrals, expressing disappointment in the consortium's lack of progress. A Member emphasised that while overall performance was improving, MindWorks remained a significant outlier, and the Committee agreed further joint scrutiny with the Adults and Health Select Committee was needed.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

64/24 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 12]

The Committee **NOTED** its next meeting was scheduled to be held on 13 March 2025.

Meeting ended at: 2.21 pm

Chairman

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