

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 21 January 2020 at Ashcombe Suite, County Hall, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2DN.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 26 March 2020.

**Elected Members:**

- \* Amanda Boote
- \* Mr Chris Botten (Vice-Chairman)
- Mrs Liz Bowes
- \* Mr Robert Evans
- \* Mrs Kay Hammond (Chairman)
- \* Mrs Yvonna Lay
- \* Mr Peter Martin
- \* Mrs Lesley Steeds (Vice-Chairman)
- Ms Barbara Thomson
- \* Mr Chris Townsend
- \* Mr Richard Walsh
- Mrs Victoria Young

**Co-opted Members:**

- \* Mr Simon Parr, Diocesan Representative for the Catholic Church
- \* Mrs Tanya Quddus, Parent Governor Representative
- \* Mr Alex Tear, Diocesan Representative for the Anglican Church, Diocese of Guildford

**Also in attendance:**

- \* Mrs Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All Age Learning
- \* Mrs Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

Apologies were received from Liz Bowes and Barbara Thomson.

**2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: 13 DECEMBER 2019 [Item 2]**

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

**3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

None received.

**4 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]**

None received.

**5 SCRUTINY OF REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2020/21 [Item 5]**

**Witnesses:**

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning  
Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families

Rachel Wigley, Director of Financial Insight  
Daniel Peattie, Strategic Finance Business Partner  
Dave Hill, Executive Director for Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

**Peter Martin declared a personal interest – grandchild applying for an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) in Surrey.**

1. The Director of Financial Insight gave an overview of the council's budgetary position and strategy. They stated the budget was in the consultation phase and that comments and observations from each of the Select Committees would be communicated back to the Resources and Performance Select Committee ahead of Cabinet. Cabinet would then decide whether to recommend the budget to council on February 4 2020. The budget was underpinned by the concept of financial envelopes for each directorate. Service strategies and proposals had been developed to ensure costs were contained within these financial envelopes.

*[Amanda Boote arrived at the meeting at 10.08]*

2. The Director stated that the financial strategy set out how resources would be directed to deliver on both the organisation strategy and the transformation and ambitions of the council. Significant progress had been made as an organisation from financial recovery towards financial stability, whilst continuing the journey of improvement. The Director stated that two years previously the council had been relying on reserves to balance the budget however, the budget for 2020/21 would be based on sustainability and investment. The Transformation Programme would continue to deliver efficiencies, providing offset against continuing demand for services. For the council's picture as a whole, in terms of revenue, there was £78m worth of demand pressure from services which were partly offset by £38m in proposed efficiencies. Therefore, the council's net budget increased from £928m to £968m in 20/21. The £40m increase was from additional funding from central government. The Capital Programme proposed over the coming years was £1.4bn. The Director highlighted that the cost of borrowing had been included in the council's budget.

*[Peter Martin arrived at the meeting 10.10]*

3. The Strategic Finance Business Partner highlighted placements, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), the High Needs Block (HNB) and transport as being key areas of financial risk for the directorate. The number of children with SEND being transported by

the council had been increasing year on year as was the use of taxis, both of which had exerted great financial pressure on the council. Education had previously been picking up costs that they were not statutorily required to. Members were informed that one of the main areas of commissioning activity over the next few months would be Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), which would be out for tender imminently.

*[Yvonna Lay arrived at the meeting at 10.20]*

4. The Strategic Finance Business Partner stated that the Directorate's 2020/1 budget for HNB is a £24 million budgeted overspend in SEND including £13m of additional funding and requiring efficiencies of £14m to manage demand pressures and inflation. The council's request to transfer funds from the Direct Schools Grant (DSG) to the HNB was rejected by the Secretary of State and a further review had been undertaken, therefore the existing numbers in the report would alter slightly (the base funding of £151m would decrease to £148m, whilst the efficiencies would increase from £14m to £15m).
5. A Member asked what would happen if inflation was higher than predicted and, if so, what restructuring could be done to address this. The Director stated that they had built both flexibility into the overall budget proposals and into the contingency; the general fund balance was higher than previous years. The flexibility in the overall council position therefore would allow for unexpected inflation rates.
6. The Vice Chairman asked how the £14m figure of SEND efficiencies in the main report related to the £11.979m of efficiencies in Annex A. Firstly, it was explained that there was a difference of £5m between the £29m of forecast SEND overspend in 19/20 and the budgeted overspend of £24m in 20/21. The reduction of approximately £5m shown in the General Fund efficiencies was the reduction in annual contribution to the matching SEND reserves. The Director of Financial Insight explained that there would be an overspend in SEND and therefore they had provided an offsetting reserve to ensure resilience in the balance sheet. The deficit of £29m and SEND was charged to the dedicated schools grant. The cumulative deficit is held on the balance sheet. The pressures would increase but there was the transformation programme and the potential to make efficiencies within SEND, which would enable to directorate to reduce its contribution to the offsetting reserve.

*[Chris Townsend arrived at the meeting at 10.26]*

7. The Vice Chairman asked whether the SEND efficiencies had been stress tested against the impact on the front line and whether it would cause SEND provision to be rationed for families in need. The Executive Director stated that the transformation programme was making a number of efficiencies including reducing the number of children placed in non-maintained schools and if these were taken

against demand, it was expected that the directorate would be able to reduce costs.

8. Members asked what the Executive Director considered to be the biggest risks and whether there was anything that could derail the budget proposals. The Executive Director stated that the biggest risks were potential logistical issues such as planning problems that could slow the delivery of the capital plans for more school places. If the speed at which the council could provide the 852 new school places slowed down then the budget would be under pressure. Nevertheless, the Executive Director had confidence that a good plan was in place and the risks were managed.
9. A Member asked whether the additional 852 places would be sufficient to achieve the change required. The Executive Director stated that this was a rolling programme with an infrastructure of three main special schools alongside a smaller number of placements in mainstream schools, within the 852 places. They stated that the three larger schools were two years away from completion and the budget programme had been based on the understanding that these places were coming on stream.
10. A Member of the Committee referred to the comparison in spend per child between Surrey and Essex from 2017-2018 (£700 and £460, respectively) and asked why Surrey County Council's per capita cost was so high. The Executive Director stated that services had been put in place for children with SEND at the point of crisis and, along with the high number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) being issued, had resulted in a high cost for Surrey. They informed Members that they were approaching 10,000 EHCPs and when they had benchmarked themselves on cost, Surrey County Council was higher than other councils. The Executive Director stated that it would take a three to four year plan to achieve the median local authority spend, or below.
11. The Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning highlighted that there were issues with placement and inclusion in mainstream schools; the number of children who received special needs support in the mainstream schools had reduced significantly from 2009, yet there had been a large rise in EHCPs. The number of independent specialist placements had also increased for EHCP children, more than the number of mainstream placements. The Cabinet Member stated that it was crucial to strike the right balance.

*[Lesley Steeds arrived at the meeting at 10.34]*

12. The Committee moved on to review the rest of the Directorate's budget and questioned the level of confidence that the Cabinet Member for All Age Learning had in the savings in their remit. The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that the savings had been looked at in great detail and were backed up by transformation plans.

The schools budget came from the Department of Education and complicated calculations ensured that it protected the minimum funding levels for schools. With regard to the libraries programme, efficiencies were made in the current year by looking at transforming what underpinned the libraries and the services that they provided. Transformation would also be achieved through a capital programme that was in place. Cost efficiencies were also made through shared spaces. The Cabinet Member told the Committee that they believed savings had been identified in the right places. They stated that the refusal from the Secretary of State to transfer £3.3m into the HNB needed to be updated in the budget going forward to council.

13. The Vice Chairman referred to the council's relationship with health and the potential £2m funding from clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and subsequently queried the risk attached to achieving this transfer and whether this sum was achievable. The Executive Director explained that this was not a simple transfer but related to individual children and that the council would negotiate with the NHS on a case-by-case basis. The Executive Director further informed the Committee that management of health and social care commissioning for children now sat within his portfolio and therefore he was now directly managing the children's commissioner for the NHS. There had been a genuine attempt across the council and the NHS via a strategic finance group to think holistically about how the money was being spent across the agencies. The Vice Chairman was pleased that steps had been made towards the joint commissioning of health and social care.
14. The Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning stated that they were also linking the transport assistance team with the transport coordination team, which would also report to the Executive Director.
15. The Chairman asked for examples on how the budget would be supporting key elements of the council's organisation strategy and vision for the following five years. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families informed the Committee that almost everything in children's social care and improvement was about partnership working and the ambition that no one was left behind. The new safeguarding arrangements meant that the police, health and the council were statutory partners in the statutory elements of the work of the Cabinet Member. District and borough councils and schools had also been included in the new arrangements in Surrey. The budget supported this partnership working.
16. The Cabinet Member also highlighted that strong focus had been put on bringing schooling closer to home for SEND children and increasing the number of social workers and foster carers in county, all of which would reduce transport and travel. These would help deliver the efficiencies within the budget whilst contributing to Surrey's greener future and enhancing the wellbeing of the children and families in Surrey. The Chairman considered it important that Cabinet

Members were able to articulate how the budget would help realise the council's vision for 2030.

17. The Cabinet Member for All Age Learning referred to the work undertaken to set the investment up for the Surrey Alliance for Excellence structure which would highlight issues at some of Surrey's schools where support was needed. If there was a case to justify for early intervention of a child, schools could access a small pot of money through the Local Learning Fund. This would enable the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) staff at schools to approach the council for assistance that might enable a child to remain in mainstream education. The Cabinet Member stated that their partnership working was very much around schools continuing to be good and outstanding, the inclusion work in school, and early intervention, all of which was funded by the budget provision.
18. The Chairman questioned what level of confidence there was regarding the sufficiency of contingencies for future possible demand. The Executive Director stated that SEND was the greatest area of volatility and they were hoping that the number of EHCPs would decrease. In relation to children's social care, the numbers had reduced over the previous two years, particularly around the number of child protection cases. The numbers on looked after children (LAC) were stable and the proportion of Surrey's children in care were relatively low and stable. Overall, they were content with the budget that had been set.
19. The Chairman asked whether there were any ways that the budget would be used to recruit and retain social workers. The Committee asked why more progress had not been made in this area. The Executive Director informed the Committee that it was only since the new recruitment campaign began in December that seventeen permanent new social workers had been recruited; more had been recruited throughout the previous year. To be fully staffed, the service needed to recruit 110 social workers. If all vacancies were filled, caseloads would be about twelve per social worker. The service was trying to encourage agency staff to become permanent employees and there was also a return to work programme, a retraining programme, and the option of working flexible hours. The Executive Director also discussed other incentives such as gym memberships, and retainers for social workers who stayed with the council and the possibility of recruitment in North America.

*[Robert Evans left the meeting at 11.10am]*

**RESOLVED:**

- i. The Chairman summarised that the Committee were supportive of the Directorate's budget and agreed to

recommend it to the Resources and Performances Select Committee ahead of Cabinet's meeting.

## **6 CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY [Item 6]**

### **Witnesses:**

Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families

Davie Hill, Executive Director Children, Families, Culture and Lifelong Learning

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Simon Hart, Independent Chair of Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership

1. The Chairman invited the Director – Corporate Parenting to introduce the Corporate Parenting Strategy document. The Director informed the Committee that the principles established in the 2017 Children Social Work Bill were at the heart of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The thinking around this strategy was to bring together the expectations of the Local Authority to make explicit what the duties were and how governance would be managed and monitored. A report would be established to inform council on the annual performance and outcomes for LAC within one document. The Director – Corporate Parenting asked that the Committee to endorse the document and comment on how it had been presented.
2. A Member asked how the strategy had been developed with partners. The Director informed the Committee that there was more that could be done to work with partners albeit they were extending their roles with partners on delivery.
3. The Vice Chairman applauded the strategy for being ambitious and compassionate though he acknowledged existing challenges, the biggest of which seemed to be around leaving care. The Committee suggested adopting a more strategic approach and stepping up work on duties to care leavers, apprenticeships, and supporting care leavers with student loans. The Vice Chairman asked whether there were opportunities for them to consider, with partners and the chamber of commerce, assisting care leavers with scholarship applications, and generally encouraging young people in care to pursue higher education.
4. The Cabinet Member stated that the Corporate Parenting Board had made significant improvement following a restructure that slimmed down the membership of the board. The most recent report from the Children's Commissioner stated that the 'corporate parenting was developing well'. The Cabinet Member stated the importance of partners working alongside the board in all aspects of corporate parenting. They believed that the strategy did express

the desire of the corporate parenting board to give children healthy lives. They suggested that something could be added to the strategy on how to bring partners in more closely to the corporate parenting work.

5. A Member stated that foster parents should be recognised as partners as they are key in looking after Surrey's children on behalf of corporate parents. The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that there was foster carer representation on the Corporate Parenting Board. Nevertheless, the Cabinet Member stated that they were happy to look at the wording of the relevant part of the report to see how it could perhaps be strengthened to greater reflect the importance of foster carers, and the partnership aspect. The Cabinet Member also stated that under levels of corporate parenting responsibility an additional bullet point could be added to summarise that the chair/ members of the corporate parenting board would take a lead role in promoting awareness of applying the corporate parenting principles for looked after children and care leavers in Surrey.
6. Members referred to the leaving care section and the need for support from personal advisors. The Director – Corporate Parenting stated that although there were individual pathway plans for all young people, there were real challenges for care leavers in terms of managing finances and that there was more work that could be done in relation to this.
7. The Independent Chair of Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership stated that there was potential to work with and encourage partnership work with children leaving care and offered to bring the Corporate Parenting Strategy to the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Chair emphasised the importance of demonstrating that the corporate parenting strategy was influencing other organisations to work differently.
8. A Member stated that it was important to clearly define how the council aimed to deliver its priorities and asked how this could be achieved. The Director stated that each individual child had a review and an independent reviewing officer. They stated that there were a number of ways that their views could be heard and opportunity to escalate issues if the independent reviewing officer believed the service to be failing in its duties. The Director – Corporate Parenting stated that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were also used to inform what the outcomes were, and to compare Surrey's performance against other local authorities.

**RESOLVED:**

- i. The Select Committee endorses the corporate parenting strategy.

- ii. Recommended that the Select Committee reviews progress against aspirations in the strategy via an annual report in January and take evidence from partners.
- iii. Recommended that the Select Committee use the corporate parenting principles to inform its scrutiny of the council's services for children who are looked after.

## **ACTIONS**

1. For the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families to consider the addition of the following: 'the chair/ members of the corporate parenting board would take a lead role in promoting awareness of the way of applying the corporate parenting principles for looked after children and care leavers, among the elected members in Surrey more widely' to the document
2. For the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families and officers to review how the partnership aspect of the strategy could be strengthened in the future
3. For the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families to insert additional words to further emphasise how integral foster parents are to the corporate parenting board and more widely in looking after children

## **7 UPDATE ON OFSTED AND CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER INSPECTIONS [Item 7]**

### **Witnesses:**

Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families  
Dave Hill, Executive Director for Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture

1. The Chairman thanked the service for the progress that had been made which had been evidenced through the Ofsted and Children's Commissioner inspections. The Chairman recognised that there was more progress to be made but emphasised the importance of acknowledging the effort that had gone into making these improvements and the drive to ensure that Surrey's children were supported.
2. A Member asked whether all four social care area teams were performing well and whether the Executive Director had any concerns about a particular area. The Executive Director assured that the quest for consistency across the four social care quadrants was critical for the service. It was stated that historically the north east quadrant had most issues but a cultural change had been prompted by the office's move from Leatherhead to Walton upon Thames. The Executive Director summarised that there was an improved situation with a strong group of directors who were working closely together.

3. The Vice Chairman referred to a paragraph on page 67 of the report which discussed how ‘many reports will be further improved by greater concentration on the progress and measurement of planned objectives and fewer lengthy activity descriptions.’ The Executive Director there was day to day management of social workers by the team manager and the service manager. There was also a development and training programme in place and quality assurance measures, such as the audit programme which was focusing on particular areas rather than general practice. There was also a great deal of peer reviewing between the four quadrants which included carrying out mock inspections.
4. The Chairman asked what was being done to improve practice with regard to improving reporting of child protection plans. The Executive Director stated that there were coaching sessions with the relevant teams to improve the quality of practice.
5. The Vice Chairman also asked whether there could be guidance for schools that supported children who had been subjected to trauma and abuse. The Executive Director insisted that chronology of key events, with regard to neglected and abused children, were documented so that patterns could be discerned. They informed the Committee that they were considering a trauma-informed practice and that everyone interacting with a child who had been subject to trauma should be aware of that child’s experience. They stated that good progress was being made albeit it was still an area that required further attention.
6. The Executive Director informed the Committee that at the beginning of April there would be a further monitoring visit from Ofsted with no pre-indication of what area of the service they would be looking at. The Executive Director informed Members that they report on the visit to the Select Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- i. The Select Committee notes the overall findings and feedback from the recent Children’s Commissioner Visit and the fourth Ofsted Monitoring Visit.
- ii. Recommends that the Select Committee receives a further update at the 25 June 2020 meeting on the delivery of the Children’s improvement programme and the findings from the April 2020 Ofsted Monitoring Visit.

**8 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 8]**

1. A Member of the Committee highlighted their concern that EHCPs were not being done quite as robustly as they had been done previously. The Chairman stated that this was discussed with the

performance team and the Chairman and the Vice Chairmen would identify any arising issues with regard to EHCPs and inform the task and finish group.

**Recommendations**

- i. The Committee reviews the attached forward work programme and recommendations tracker at each of the meetings.
- ii. Many items need to be further scoped in terms of purpose and timing – would welcome the Committee’s views on these.

**9 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING: 26 MARCH 2020 [Item 9]**

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on 26 March 2020.

Meeting ended at: 12.27pm

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**Chairman**

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