

CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING (CFLL) ADDITIONAL BUDGET ALLOCATION

Date Considered: 17 April 2024

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1. Cllr Catherine Powell submitted a proposal for the 2024/25 Budget to the Council's Budget Meeting on 6 February 2024. Four of her seven suggested amendments related to the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL) Directorate and the Leader requested these be scrutinised by the appropriate Select Committee. As a result, the Committee placed this on the agenda for its 17 April meeting and asked the Service to provide analysis of the proposals with supporting data, to enable it to make an informed judgement on the best strategy.
2. At its April meeting, the Committee scrutinised how best to allocate the additional CFLL budget originating from Surrey's share of the £600m from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for English Councils to spend on key services, additional to funding outlined at the provisional settlement. The Directorate's expectation was that up to £8.3 million may be available to support prevention objectives in Surrey's Children's Services, so after a follow-up meeting on 30 April, the Committee put forward recommendations for the allocation of up to £8.3m.
3. Children's Services identified three programmes to assist schools in giving additional support for neurodiverse children. The Chair submitted that in two of these three initiatives, rather than giving direct support, they provided advice that would require extra time and energy on the part of the schools. She shared Cllr Powell's concern that where the need is greatest, the pressure on schools is such that implementing support, rather than just providing advice, was essential. The Cabinet Member explained the Council could not insist that any schools take up an offer of support or direct them to do so. Asked why a school would choose not to, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning responded they might feel they cannot give it the attention needed to have impact if they had other ongoing initiatives, or perhaps they may have an alternative idea to meet need. While recognising the autonomy of schools, the Chair asserted it was important to 'reach in' for the most pressured schools, rather than wait for them to reach out.
4. Concern was raised that the three services identified by the Service were universal, rather than directed specifically at areas of deprivation. While there was acknowledgment that all schools need these services, it was argued by some Members that there was most need for targeted support for neurodiverse children in areas of deprivation. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning questioned whether targeting would take into account just the school location or its catchment area, explaining that although none of the 18 schools included in the Schools Inclusion for Autism pilot were in those

areas, many of the pupils lived in such areas. She proposed deprivation was one of a number of factors that should be considered when targeting, including attendance, exclusions and percentage of pupils within the school with additional needs and disabilities. The majority of the Committee was satisfied that at this stage more deprived areas should not be offered the three initiatives as a priority, but that the idea should be revisited when more evidence was available and the Committee should request more research is done into what factors contribute to the greatest presentation of neurodiversity need.

5. At its June 2023 meeting, the Select Committee recommended that the Cabinet Member prioritised the restoration of funding for community-based play and youth schemes for children with disabilities to enable the FY 2022/23 capacity to be restored in FY 2024/25, given the widespread feedback that the change had been detrimental to the mental health of parents, carers, children and young people, as well as adversely impacting the Council's prevention strategy. There are currently 350 children and young people on a waiting list for the discretionary service, which the Cabinet Member acknowledged was highly valued by families and promoted preparation for adulthood. The Commissioning Team subsequently modelled that resetting the capacity of community-based play and youth schemes to 2022/23 levels would require an increase of around £370,000 in the 2024/25 budget. As part of the budget-setting process it was agreed to allocate £370,000 for this purpose. However, in April 2024 and in a follow-up query in June there was not yet confirmation of whether this figure would be sufficient to restore the 2022/23 level of provision in 2024/25. Taking into account a submission that the increased pressure on families of children with disabilities would likely lead in some cases to the contribution of family breakdown if not mitigated, and that this may lead to increased costs for SCC, the Committee reaffirmed that the same number of hours should be restored, even if this required the use of some of the £500,000 proposed by the Service for a programme developing more inclusive practice in mainstream provision.
6. Leaving the use of the aforementioned £370,000 aside, the Service's proposal for play and leisure short breaks for children with additional needs and disabilities differed from what Cllr Powell proposed, in that the Service's preference was for inclusive practice in mainstream provision. The Head of Commissioning – Corporate Parenting submitted that they could learn from other local authorities such as Hampshire and Wandsworth who were already following this approach in, for example, allowing children with additional needs to access sports clubs in their community, an idea which Surrey was discussing with parents in a co-production programme. The Cabinet Member was hopeful this could help young people with additional needs to feel more included and welcome in their community. Cllr Powell asserted that this approach would not work for all children with sensory difficulties, learning difficulties and physical disabilities and some Members were concerned there was a risk that children and young people could be left behind in the time it took to develop and deliver such an integrated approach. Some preferred to get rid of the deficit in the current offer before introducing another scheme. It was suggested that an integrated play and leisure offer was piloted to see

how well it could serve needs in each quadrant, in the meantime identifying the cohort who would continue to need specialist provision. Some Members did not think focus should be split in this way, and the Cabinet Member said she was not generally in favour of pilots. The Committee was assured that inclusive play would not undermine the current £370,000 play and leisure offer.

7. The Select Committee questioned the value of international social worker recruitment proposed by the Service, as they understood from a visit to a quadrant that on the last occasion those recruited did not remain as front-line social workers, after some encountered cultural differences and experienced racism from service users. Committee was informed that out of the 33 recruited via an agency in 2022, 20 still worked for Children and Families and four had transferred to Adult Services. A Member suggested a need to understand why social workers were leaving the profession rather than bringing workers from abroad who may have to deal with loneliness in addition to the demands of the role. Some suggested the £470,000 spent on international recruitment would be better invested in key worker housing and one questioned the ethics of encouraging social workers to depart their native country. Others were persuaded the exercise could be effective with a greater pastoral focus and more preparation with employees before they left their native countries.

Recommendations

- 1) The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee endorses the following:
 - **£4.84m** spending on prevention work proposed by CFLL;
 - **£0.05m** of one-off funding to support the expansion of the current pilot, where providers of SEND Play and Leisure or Overnight Respite groups would allow parents and carers who struggle to recruit Personal Assistants for respite to fund a session or place using their personal allowances;
 - **£0.05m** one-off funding to support the implementation and roll out of the Surrey Foster Carer Charter.
- 2) It also welcomes the Service's proposed **£1.8m** spend on social worker recruitment and retention, with the proviso that special measures are put in place to ensure that social workers recruited from overseas for front line roles are retained in those roles, and the effectiveness of these measures is reviewed six months after recruitment and reported back to Select Committee by the end of April 2025.
- 3) The Committee supports the Service's **£653,105** proposals for additional support in schools for neurodiverse children, and makes the following recommendations to demonstrate and reinforce SCC's commitment that no one is left behind:
 - a) To better understand where the need is and why, by the end of November 2024 the Service undertakes research to identify where the greatest

presentation of neurodiversity need exists in the county and what the contributory factors are.

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- b) The offer for the Whole School Autism Friendly Reviews and the Schools Inclusion for Autism Initiatives is underpinned by the offer of implementation support to take the pressure off the schools, with **£0.3m** allocated to provide such implementation activity in schools which are struggling to cope. It will be for the Service to ascertain which schools would require this to enable them to take up the offer.
 - 4) The Committee asks that, on completion of the co-production programme's research, a written report is produced to outline the strategy for developing and delivering integrated play and leisure across Surrey. The report should detail what integrated play will be delivered by whom, to whom, where, and by when. It should also address how interaction with voluntary sector providers will work, along with an assessment of the strategy's anticipated impact, by comparison with existing provision, and how the transition will be achieved. It should also identify where integrated play will not meet the needs of children with additional needs and disabilities, and how it is anticipated these needs will be met.
 - 5) Including £0.5m that the Service proposes for a programme developing more inclusive play and leisure in mainstream provision (which the Committee reserves judgement on until it learns the outcome of recommendation 4), the above initiatives cost a total of £8,196,227. The Committee understands up to £8.3 million may be available to support prevention objectives in Children's Services, which potentially leaves £103,773.

Thus the Committee recommends that all hours of SEND play and leisure provided in 2022/23 are restored in 2024/25. It has been indicated that this will now require more than the £370,000 uplift originally advised by the Service, and championed by the Select Committee. It recommends using what remains of the £8.3m to ensure that the objective of the Select Committee as originally intended is achieved – i.e. restoration of the hours of SEND play and leisure in 24/25 to 22/23 levels. If this is not sufficient to restore 2022/23 hours, it recommends the necessary funding is taken from the **£0.5m** that the Service proposes for a programme developing more inclusive play and leisure in mainstream provision.

**Fiona Davidson, Chair - Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture
Select Committee**

Background papers

Item 5(i) Amendment by Catherine Powell (Farnham North) to item 5 – 2024/25 Final Budget and Medium-Term Finance Strategy report to Council, 6 February 2024

Report to Children, Families, Lifelong Learning Select Committee 17 April 2024, Item 6 and [Draft Minutes](#)