

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 6 December 2023 at Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, Reigate, RH2 8EF.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 15 February 2024.

**Elected Members**

\* Fiona Davidson (Chair)

\* Jonathan Essex

r Robert Hughes

Rebecca Jennings-Evans

Rachael Lake

\* Bernie Muir

\* John O'Reilly

\* Mark Sugden

\* Ashley Tilling

\* Liz Townsend

\* Chris Townsend (Vice-Chairman)

\* Jeremy Webster (Vice-Chairman)

Fiona White

**Co-opted Members:**

Mr Simon Parr, Diocesan Representative for the Catholic Church

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

\*Present

r remote

**45/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

Apologies were received from Cllr Rebecca Jennings-Evans, Cllr Rachael Lake, Cllr Fiona White, Mr Alex Tear and Mr Simon Parr.

**46/23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: 2 OCTOBER 2023 [Item 2]**

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

#### **47/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

Jonathan Essex declared a non-pecuniary interest as a trustee at Voluntary Action Reigate and Banstead in relation to the budget item.

#### **48/23 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]**

##### **Key points made in the discussion:**

1. There were two Member questions and no public questions or petitions. The responses to those questions are annexed to these minutes.
2. A Member asked a follow up question on what changes were planned for the adult education budget. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning noted that there were no plans to reduce the budget for Surrey Adult Learning for the coming year. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning added that the budget for Adult Learning did not include any centre closures in 2024/25.

#### **49/23 ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PLAN [Item 5]**

##### **Key points made in the discussion:**

1. On action 29/23 regarding a written response on the multi-agency network and school absences for girls with ASD, the Director for Education and Lifelong Learning said that the initial answer was not satisfactory and would send an updated response by the end of the week to the Committee.
2. The Director for CFL Commissioning assured the Committee that as soon as procurement regulations allowed, action 40/23, a written response outlining the scale of Health Service Investments in the EHCP process and data on the recruitment and retention of Occupational Therapists would be provided.

#### **50/23 HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE UPDATE [Item 6]**

##### **Witnesses:**

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning

Rachael Wardell, Executive Director – Children, Families & Learning

Gerry Hughes, Interim Assistant Director – Support Services (Home to School)

Chris McShee, Travel and Assessment Team Manager

Lucy Clements, Director – CFL Commissioning

Liz Mills, Director – Education and Lifelong Learning

Leanne Henderson – Participation Manager, Family Voice Surrey

Kate Goode – Participation Manager, Family Voice Surrey

**Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Participation Managers from Family Voice Surrey gave a short presentation on Home to School Travel Assistance. They noted that Family Voice had seen good progress but highlighted that families were still experiencing communication issues with the transport team. The Chair thanked Family Voice for the informative presentation.
2. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning thanked Family Voice for their engagement with the transport team and the production of the parent guide. She noted that issues brought up in the survey were issues the sector faced as a whole.
3. A Member asked a question on independent travel allowance. The Participation Manager answered that parents were now being paid for four journeys instead of two a day. However, the allowance did not consider the cost of vehicle maintenance. The Participation Manager noted that it was difficult to find drivers who were understanding of complex needs and stressed the importance of the independent travel allowance.
4. A Member asked if plans in place since the results of last year's Family Voice Survey had had the desired impact. The Member stressed that many children did not have travel arrangements in time for the start of term. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) answered that 31 July was the cut-off for applications for transport arrangements but that when applications were received late, the service had a 30-day turnaround. The Interim Assistant Director said she hoped to make significant improvements to the process in time for the next academic year.
5. A Member asked if applications within timescales deteriorating between July (2%) and September/October (8%) were expected or normal. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) noted that the rise was due to an unprecedented volume of applications and the Home to School Transport team expected elevated levels in August.
6. A Member asked if the service was measuring adherence to the policy of having travel arrangements in place within six weeks of an application. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) answered that applications were assessed within 20 days and arrangements confirmed seven days before the start of term. The Member asked if parents were updated on plans between application and term starting. The Interim Assistant

Director said that parents who had applied early were alerted with an update in August.

7. A Member asked how the SEND and Home to School Transport teams communicated and if there were aspirations for better communication. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) explained that she met with the Director for Education and Lifelong Learning on weekly basis and had a Microsoft teams chat. This year they had seen a marked improvement in collaboration. The Travel and Assessment Team Manager noted that access to information had been better and weekly meetings had resulted in better key stage transfers.
8. A Member asked why vehicles were travelling 5% further in 2023/24 when the strategy was to reduce distance travelled and reduce journey times. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) answered that the timing did not take in variables such as getting children on and off vehicles or road works. The Member asked if the transport team received highway work plans to better plan routes. The Interim Assistant Director said they did not receive anything currently, but schools alerted the team on areas around the school that had changed, the legacy systems used currently did not have live data.
9. A Member queried the high turnover of drivers. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) noted that the service had struggled to find skilled drivers who could meet the demand of transport for children with additional needs. The Interim Assistant Director emphasised that the service was working to provide greater stability for children and families.
10. A Member asked how the Council could enable parents to arrange their own school transport for monetary compensation. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) answered that the Council was doing this through the Personal Travel Budget pilot. Feedback received so far was positive and indicated it made more financial sense than other travel arrangements.
11. A Member asked who was consulted on which children needed their own solo taxi. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) answered that the parameter around solo arrangements came down to medical needs. Case Officers also utilised the advice of schools on whether children needed certain arrangements.
12. A Member asked how safeguarding incidents were being logged and actioned. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) noted that incidents were logged throughout the year and the most appropriate next steps such as suspensions were discussed in whole team meetings. The Chair noted concern about the timeliness of the process. The

Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning said that swift action in line with statutory process must be taken when a safeguarding concern was raised. Ensuring the safety of the child was the utmost priority.

13. A Member asked what the scale of the issue of providing off-site Alternative Provision was. The Interim Assistant Director Support Services (Home to School) noted that there were 250 children in this year's cohort, and most required solo arrangements. This was costly and logistically difficult as children had different finish times for different schools. The Interim Assistant Director noted that new draft guidelines were being produced and would be completed in the next couple of months after consultation with Alternative Learning providers.

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. The Interim Assistant Director -Support Services (Home to School) to provide a written answer on what proportion of journeys meet the maximum guidance of 45 minutes for primary school children and 75 minutes for secondary school children.

**Resolved:**

The Select Committee recognises the significant improvement in H2ST at the start of the autumn term and wholeheartedly commends the team's effort and commitment. This Committee:

1. Endorses all the recommendations in the Family Voice Surrey report and requests that they provide an update to the Committee on progress against each recommendation at the June 2024 committee meeting.
2. Welcomes ongoing efforts to join up the SEND and H2STA processes and recommends these are pursued so that when decisions on placements are made, there is visibility of the transport implications at an early stage to facilitate effective planning and ensure that families are informed of transport arrangements as early as possible.
3. Recommends that a KPI is introduced – and reported to each Select Committee meeting from April 2024 onwards – to monitor compliance with the Service Level Agreement that for in-year applications, transport is arranged *and communicated to families* within 10 working days of eligibility being confirmed.
4. Recommends that for applications submitted by 31 July, families are notified what home to school transport has been arranged no later than 7 days prior to the start of term. Performance should be monitored and reported to each select committee meeting from April 2024 onwards.

5. Recommends that a replacement for the Mobisoft route planning system is investigated as a priority. An updated route planning system to enable efficient pupil pick-up and drop-off sequencing, as well as taking into account traffic and road conditions, would improve journey times for children and young people and ensure that route costs are managed effectively.
6. Recommends that a cost analysis is undertaken to interface all the software packages used in the home to school travel process, in view of the budget sub-group's finding that eight stand-alone systems are currently being used throughout the process. Replacing both the outdated dynamic purchasing system as well as the route planning system have the potential to generate efficiencies.

## **51/23 DRAFT 2024/25 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2028/29 [Item 7]**

### **Witnesses:**

Denise Turner-Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities

David Lewis, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Nicola Kilvington, Director - Corporate Strategy & Policy

Louise Lawson, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Customer & Communities

Nikki O'Connor, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Corporate

Rachel Wigley, Director – Finance Insights & Performance

Daniel Shurlock, Customer & Communities Strategic Lead

Susan Wills, Assistant Director for Cultural Services

Jean-Pierre Moore, Head of Community Partnerships and Prevention

Matt Marsden, Strategic Finance Business Partner – CFL

### **Key points made in the discussion:**

1. A Member asked witnesses why library income levels were declining and what plans were in place to counteract that. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities said that extensive efforts had been made to find alternative provisions due to the temporary closures recently. The Deputy Leader noted that the service had faced risks such as planning issues or procurement, but this had all been tracked timely and vigorously.

The Assistant Director for Cultural Services noted that while the library went under refurbishment in Redhill, a temporary library in a Council owned site would be in place. This new library space directly under the current library would mean as little disruption as possible to residents and the Council would still be able to utilise the space for events. The Assistant Director offered to meet with the Member outside the meeting to hold a discussion about the Redhill library interim and refurbishment plans.

2. A Member noted that there was a proposed £100,000 shared reduction in funding from the Council to the Voluntary Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) in 2024/2025. The Member asked how the diverted funding would be used and the repercussions for the organisations. The Deputy Leader noted that there would be a period of transition. The Head of Community Partnerships and Prevention noted that during the period of transition they would help the charities be more independent. The actual amount of the efficiency was £68k, rounded to £0.1m for the purposes of the budget papers. The Council had invested £100,000 in the Strategic Strength Transformation Fund from the Community Foundation for Surrey that was available for the whole voluntary sector. The Head of Community Partnerships and Prevention noted that the VCFS would also be putting around £230,000 in the same fund. This funding would empower smaller grassroots organisations to access better funding as part of a long-term funding strategy. The Member asked to see the impact assessment of the funding reductions. The Head of Community Partnerships said that he could share it with the Committee.
3. A Member asked to hold a conversation with the Head of Community Partnerships and Prevention regarding the voluntary sector within Surrey. The Head of Community Partnerships and Prevention agreed.
4. A Member noted that Surrey Youth Focus's funding had already been cut, impacting their work. The Deputy Leader said that there had been a safety net around this transformation with additional funding to create capacity and resource around infrastructure organisations.
5. A Member emphasised the need to create a longer-term financial plan for the voluntary sector. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources said that there was a budget gap and if more funding was being asked for, it had to be considered where it would be drawn from.

### **Draft CFL Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy**

6. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning noted that the proposed budget did not impact funding for children with additional needs and that the Council was bound by statutory duties to provide certain services. The Chair noted the need to comply with statutory duties but felt that the Council should invest more heavily in early intervention.
7. A Member asked witnesses how achievable the £9 million in efficiencies identified were. The Strategic Finance Business Partner for CFL said that

although the efficiencies were ambitious, he wanted to provide assurance to Members that they were achievable.

8. The Chair asked if the Cabinet was being pessimistic on the achievability of efficiencies, 60% of which were rated as amber or red. The Strategic Finance Business Partner for CFL noted that with time and better data, the Council would become more confident in the deliverability and achievability of efficiency savings. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning noted that there was a distinction between delivery as expected and delivering services that achieved efficiencies as well. Services such as solo taxis which had experienced a rise in route numbers and allocations had all delivered to their intended targets, but the offsetting pressures of inflation outweighed any efficiencies.
9. A Member asked what the effect of the 10% spend reduction on contracts being procured during 2024/25 would be. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning said this referred to new contracts that had been commissioned and would expect changes to service delivery models to be more efficient or to redirect budget to another high priority area to ensure a balance of priorities was found.
10. A Member asked for clarification of when there had been robust consideration of the reversing of the 10% reduction policy. The Chair asked to see a response from witnesses in writing.
11. A Member asked how savings could be achieved through the expansion of children in fostering care considering the shortage of foster parents. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning said that there was increased investment in the recruitment and retention of foster parents. The Service was also looking to maximise current resources such as ensuring foster parents had the maximum number of children they could look after and looking at utilising capacity elsewhere in the system when possible.
12. A Member asked if the budget took account of the increase in the number of children needing Home to School Travel assistance. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning said that the demand for EHCPs was considered in the budget process and the Service worked on the assumption that 30% of EHCP children would need transport assistance.
13. A Member asked a question on skills development and adult learning in Surrey and noted that community skills could be paid for by individuals to help offset the cost of the programmes. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning noted that different programmes could be commissioned or funded through various organisations. The Service was reviewing changes, but the priority was to still ensure programmes were affordable to residents but also generating income for the Council.



14. A Member asked what the outcomes of the recommendation from June 2023 regarding prioritising community-based play and youth schemes budget for children with disabilities had been. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, formerly Cabinet Member for Children & Families, answered that the Council was committed to keeping the budget under review. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning noted that there had been no further budget for short breaks but there had been a one-off grant from the Department for Education which would re-occur next year as a one off. The Member emphasised the importance of short breaks to families and children. The Cabinet Member said that the budget was not being cut but the priority had to be providing statutory services to thousands of children in Surrey.
15. A Member emphasised the importance of short breaks to families and children. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning noted that the core budget would not be reduced for non-statutory additional services. To improve short breaks the budget would have to be diverted from another area. The need to meet statutory obligations had to be prioritised.
16. A Member noted that not providing short breaks had a knock-on impact on the finances of other services. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning said there was no budget to increase capacity for play and leisure. The Chair noted that the reduction in short breaks and play and leisure had profound negative impacts on the mental health of residents. The Cabinet Member regretted that there was no budget to meet the demand for play and leisure.
17. A Member asked if all changes identified as a result of the SEND inspection findings could be accommodated within the budget envelope. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning expressed confidence that it could be. The Cabinet had agreed to an extra £15 million funding over next few years and that was ringfenced for children with additional needs.

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. The Assistant Director for Cultural Services will hold a discussion with Jonathan Essex on the Redhill library interim and refurbishment plans.
2. The Head of Community Partnerships and Prevention to share the EIA impact Assessment with the Committee.
3. The Head of Community Partnerships and Prevention and Bernie Muir to discuss issues currently faced by the voluntary sector.
4. The Strategic Finance Partner – Corporate to provide a written response on whether there are different policies between adults' and children's social care

in respect of inflation or efficiencies automatically applied when recommissioning.

5. Cabinet Member for CFLL to outline evidence of the robust consideration given to reversing the policy of applying a blanket 10% reduction to the financial envelope for each service when it is recommissioned.
6. Director – CFL Commissioning and Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning to provide what evidence was considered in the evaluation that led to the decision to reduce the budget for community-based play and youth schemes for children with disabilities from 2023/24, explaining how they evaluated the impact of the cut as well as the financial value and clinical value (mental and physical) of the initiative.

**Resolved:**

The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee recommends that:

1. In order to give the voluntary sector stability, Cabinet should increase funding to VCFS organisations in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy in line with inflation and outline how it can offer the organisations longer term stability. These organisations play a crucial role in enabling and empowering communities and voluntary sector organisations.
2. The aspiration of prevention should be supported by restoring the £0.37m play and leisure short breaks cut from the 2023/24 budget, which has had significant detrimental repercussions on some of the most vulnerable families. This is in addition to applying for the Department for Education’s Short Breaks Innovation Grant, which supports new and complementary short breaks services. It should be noted that the DfE funding, if awarded, would not replace the play and leisure short breaks which were cut in 2023/24.
3. Rather than being classed as an overspend, the £16.3m 2023/24 pressures identified as historic (in CLA placements, home to school travel assistance, Special Guardianship Order rates, children with disabilities packages of care, care leavers) should be incorporated into the CFLL budget envelope going forward.
4. If the Council is to stay on track with “getting to good” whilst meeting demands for statutory services and supporting the ambition of “no one left behind”, the CFLL budget envelope for 2024/25 should increase to £283.91m. This comprises:
  - 249.8m opening budget
  - + 39.9m pressures
  - + £0.37m play and leisure restoration

- 6.16m for the green and 60% of red and amber identified efficiencies that the Committee considers are likely to be achieved.

A smaller budget risks both the “getting to good” strategy and the guiding principle of the 2030 Community Vision that no one is left behind.

5. Should any proposed changes to the delivery of adult education come from the current review of cost to run the Council’s sites versus fees earned, there should first be a full and formal exploration of how any changes would impact residents’ access to community learning and adult skills. This recommendation is made in the context of the Council’s strong commitment to deliver the Surrey Skills Plan and promote skills and education to grow a sustainable economy, together with the proposed Level 2 County Deal which would devolve Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education Budget to the Council.

## **52/23 CHILDREN’S HOMES – OFSTED REPORTS PUBLISHED SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 8]**

### **Witnesses:**

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning

Rachael Wardell, Executive Director - Children, Families & Learning

### **Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Chair noted there had been one Ofsted report published since the last meeting and was pleased that it continued the trend of positive reports and commended the work of all staff involved and thanked them for enabling the continuity of that trend.

## **53/23 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW [Item 9]**

### **Witnesses:**

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning

Rachael Wardell, Executive Director - Children, Families & Learning

Patricia Denney, Director – Quality and Performance (remote)

### **Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Chair asked if more up to date information on additional needs and disabilities key performance indicators (KPIs) could be brought to the February 2024 Full Select Committee. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning said that it would be shared as soon as possible.
2. The Chair asked when the social worker recruitment and retention statistics would this be available. The Executive Director for Children, Families &

Learning noted that it was a priority to access the data and would be shared once received.

3. A Member asked how the Service was increasing the number of Children In Need visits. The Director for Quality and Performance noted that there were only marginal increases to Children In Need visits, but this was being rectified under the new delivery model that would address this issue.
4. A Member asked if everything promised to be delivered around EHCPs was on track, The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning and the Director for Quality and Performance confirmed yes.
5. The Chair asked to see a comparison of progress to date of improvements of KPIs 2.3, 5.2, 6.4 and 6.8 against the original target plan ahead of the February 2024 Select Committee Meeting.
6. A Member asked a question on the 341 looked after children who were not placed in Surrey. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning agreed that sufficiency issues around placements in Surrey were an issue but that solutions were being explored to improve it, such as working with independent foster providers and the work around the Extended Kinship Network or reunification. The Director for Quality and Performance noted that there were constant conversations with health colleagues to notify them of children coming into care in order to provide medical care such as EHCP demands.
7. A Member expressed concern over the number of pupils absent from schools and asked witnesses to send further information on school attendance in Surrey. The Director for Quality and Performance noted that Surrey had high school attendance during the pandemic as compared with other counties.
8. A Member noted that MindWorks was closed for referrals. The Executive Director for Children, Families & Learning noted that there had been no further recent data from MindWorks and that neurodivergent pathways had stopped accepting referrals.
9. The Chair thanked witnesses and Members.

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. Director – Quality and Performance Extend action CFLLC41/23 [Provide a short report explaining performance in and steps to improve KPIs 4.3, 5.2, 6.4 and 6.8] and have a comparison of progress to date against the original target plan in July 2023 and the current reprofiled plan, ahead of the February Select Committee meeting.
2. Committee to make the Adults and Health Select Committee aware that the percentage of Looked After Children Initial Health Assessments completed

dipped below 90% in September due to both Initial & Review Health Assessments continuing to be affected by health staffing issues.

3. Executive Director – Children, Families & Learning to share report on school attendance in Surrey and reasons why parents were keeping children at home as opposed to attending school.

*Jonathan Essex left the meeting at 14:46*

**54/23 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 10]**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 15 February 2024.

Meeting ended at: 14:52

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**Chair**

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