

**CABINET - 25 June 2024****CABINET RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE SELECT COMMITTEE**

Item under consideration: Children, Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL) additional budget allocation – Prevention activities

**Recommendations:**

- 1) The 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.
  
  - 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, Chairman - Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee**

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#### **Cabinet Response:**

- 1) Cabinet thanks the Select Committee for its endorsement of the allocation of £0.05m to support the extension of the current pilot being delivered in partnership with one of SCC's main providers of short play and leisure short breaks. The initial pilot phase has been positive, and this funding will support roll-out with other providers, creating more valuable opportunities for eligible children and their families. For clarity, it is important to note that the scope of the pilot and planned expansion does not cover overnight respite provision, as mentioned by the Select Committee, with a focus instead on play and leisure schemes.

Cabinet also thanks the Select Committee for endorsing the one-off allocation of £0.05m to support the implementation and roll-out of the Foster Carers' charter. This will enable additional capacity and activity within the fostering service to publicise the Charter, embed it within day-to-day practice and enable measurement and evaluation of its effectiveness. This will be alongside ongoing involvement of the community of foster carers and:

- Additional communication and implementation activity across the wider children's services workforce and corporate parents.
- Development of learning opportunities and improved awareness for social work staff about the fostering role.
- Reporting and action planning from follow up activity with foster carers linked to the Charter's commitments.

- Development of an integrated suite of measures in a dashboard (pulling together existing and identifying new measures) that contribute to evaluating how well the Charter is working in practice.
- Working with the Surrey County Fostering Association to consider how a 'maturity model' will be defined and measured, linked to the Charter.
- Support with reporting to governance forums on progress of the implementation plan, and delivery against the Charter' commitments.

Work in this area will also be linked with the ongoing foster carers portal project, which will be a key delivery vehicle to enable improved effectiveness against the Charter's commitments.

**Cabinet agrees these proposals.**

- 2) The recommendation for additional investment into recruitment and retention for social workers was prepared by the service and reflects the work undertaken via the Recruitment, Retention and Culture Board. This board has explored a wide range of options and used information from staff feedback, exit interviews, stay interviews and from national research and neighbouring local authorities related to best practice for recruitment and retention. The proposals outlined would assist in stabilising the social work service by securing more permanent staff.

Cabinet notes the Select Committee's endorsement of the proposals to:

- Invest in overseas social work recruitment.
- Increase the number of practice supervisors to support a planned increase in recruitment of newly qualified social workers (NQSW) for Sept 2024 and January 2025 intakes.
- Implement a Market Supplement for additional social workers.

**Cabinet does not agree** with these proposals as the priority for additional investment into the directorate has been for early intervention and prevention work. Cabinet recognises that the service remains with the current challenges related to social worker recruitment; this is a risk to service delivery and accordingly the Cabinet Member will monitor the position with the service closely.

- 3)
  - a) The Commissioning for Transformation Team will be undertaking a data deep dive to ascertain the geographical spread of incidence of neuro-diversity as a primary need across the county. We will use existing data to understand and identify any links with disadvantage or deprivation. This information can be used to ensure that support is targeted appropriately. This work will be completed by the end of November 2024.
  - b) The Commissioning for Transformation Team working alongside the SEND Team, will design and model a funding stream – in collaboration with partners, ATLAS, Family Voice Surrey, school leaders and the All Age Autism Team to support schools to access the identified initiatives and then embed learning and improved practice.

- 4) Since launching in February 2024, with the support of innovation funding from the Department for Education, the short breaks co-production programme has been through a period of discovery with parents and carers of children with disabilities. This has highlighted a range of opportunities for development and improvement within SCC-funded short breaks and the wider system of support for children with disabilities, where we are beginning to develop and test prototypes with families. We are also in the detailed planning stages of a broader programme of work, informed by the co-production activity, that aims to drive equity and inclusion, as well as communication and quality. This programme of work will be wide ranging and will consider the key stages of commissioning and accessing play and leisure schemes, including eligibility and booking processes. We intend to work closely with families on this work and would welcome the input of the Select Committee. We would be happy to bring back a report outlining the future strategy in due course.
- 5) Following confirmation of an increased budget for Play and Leisure short breaks to CFLL Commissioning in early March 2024, the team has rapidly worked through the governance and legal processes required to allocate the funding to providers and collaborated with provider partners to develop proposals for additional short breaks provision for implementation in year. As a result of this work, the team has now confirmed that this funding is expected to create 19,350 additional hours of play and leisure short breaks. This brings the total estimated hours of play and leisure provision commissioned in 2024/25 to over 99,000, compared to around 92,000 in 2022/23. As previously highlighted to the Select Committee, this increased capacity also includes increased 1-to-1 provision for children with the most complex needs, aligning to the shifting profile of need of children accessing the service.

For many children with additional needs and disabilities, the opportunity to participate locally alongside their peers and maximise their sense of belonging in Surrey's communities will contribute to positive long-term outcomes. Moving forwards, we will be striving to ensure a short breaks programme that is focussed on maximising independence, inclusion and belonging, whatever that might look like for the individual children who access our services. Alongside this, we appreciate that there will be an ongoing need to commission a range of complementary specialist services that are accessible to those with the most complex needs, forming a pathway of support, but, even here, we want to ensure that inclusion is a priority. The development of new, more inclusive options is primarily about making the right investments now to support the best possible long-term outcomes for children with disabilities and their families.

Whilst the additional investment of £370k in 2024/25 has increased capacity relative to 2022/23 levels, it will be important to consider the level of ongoing funding for short breaks as part of budget setting for 2025/26, given the likely end of the additional Short Breaks Innovation Grant from the DfE in March 2025. If we were to respond to the recommendation of the Select Committee and secure ongoing play and leisure capacity equivalent to 2022/23 for Surrey's historical "All Additional Needs & Disabilities" schemes at current unit costs, this would require an estimated additional investment of £260k. Equally, if SCC wishes to sustain

capacity at 2024/25 levels, this would require allocation of £430k in 2024/25. This will need careful consideration, alongside other statutory calls on our budgets for children and families, as we prepare for 2025/26.

**Clare Curran**  
**Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning**  
**25 June 2024**

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