

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education held on Thursday, 15 July 2021 at 4.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)
Councillors Terry Norton
Jeanette Smith
Judith Smyth

15. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

16. Declarations of Members' Interests

Councillor Horton declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as she is Vice Chair of governors at Craneswater Junior School. Councillor Norton declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as he is employed at Mayfield School through a cover agency. Councillor Smith declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as she is a paid official for Hampshire branch UNISON and represents support staff in Hampshire schools.

17. Change of age range for Manor Infant School

The report was introduced by Chris Williams, Pupil Place Planning & Capital Strategy Manager.

DECISIONS:

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education:

(1) Considered the response to the statutory consultation carried out on the proposal to change the age range of Manor Infant School

(2) Authorised the Director for Children, Families and Education to implement the proposal so that Manor Infant School becomes a school for pupils aged 2 to 7 years of age from 1st September 2021

18. School Modernisation and Sufficiency Programme Update

The report was introduced by Chris Williams, Pupil Place Planning and Capital Strategy Manager.

In response to questions officers clarified the following:

Officers try to plan school places as much as possible to meet the needs of the year 6 pupils as they come through into secondary school; these are based on secondary school catchments. There are occasions where school places get very tight and there are limitations on the number of pupils that can be accommodated on site. Officers try to plan the provision widely across the city to accommodate the numbers where possible. In the past officers have planned on the basis of permanent numbers however the projects currently being planned are more on a temporary basis, as the likelihood is that the secondary numbers will eventually drop, based on the current forecast in primary provision.

Officers work very closely with the Admissions Team on the provision of school places. Currently the school places are becoming tight in the secondary sector and a number of schools are already full. Generally places will be filled to the published admission number (PAN), working closely with the school and admissions which keeps the process fair when allocations are made. The Inclusion Support Panel Processes are set up to ensure that schools collectively provide for the children who need a change of school.

The Clifffdale expansion is a four phased expansion programme, which is currently on phase one. Officers are currently looking for accommodation to move the family centre from that site. As soon as officers have some alternative options they will report back to members.

With regard to the number of starting school applications being below the forecast number at starting school age, officers had been in discussions with all schools where the largest numbers have not appeared. Some have chosen to continue operating with the same forms of entry but with less pupils in each class. The local authority are having discussions with them about options going forward and whether to lower their PAN in the future. Financially there will be an impact going forward for the schools if they chose to operate under their existing models whilst running with surplus accommodation.

Officers said they could explore financial options available and it would be down to the Schools Forum as it would be using contingency within the Schools Forum. There are no covid grants for schools that cover a drop in numbers. The authority has given lots of advice and worked with early years settings to get the message out to parents about applying to schools. It may just be down to general population changes that had not been predicted. This will be revisited in September and the applying for schools places messaging will keep going throughout the summer.

Pupil numbers were falling so there was always going to be a surplus of school places across the city. The authority would never remove the places where it was expected that many of the EAL pupils would return at some point.

DECISIONS: The Cabinet Member

- (1) Noted the progress on the school modernisation "urgent condition" projects, the secondary school sufficiency projects and the special school sufficiency projects.
- (2) Approved the schemes agreed with the Lead Member since the last report.

19. Local Authority Maintained School Balances as at 31st March 2021

The report was introduced by Angela Mann, Finance Manager.

DECISIONS: The Cabinet Member noted the level of Local Authority maintained schools' revenue balances and capital balances as at 31st March 2021 as shown in Appendices 2 & 3 and the monitoring action taken by the council.

20. Early Years Sufficiency Update (information report)

The report was introduced by Mindy Butler, Early Years and Childcare Manager. She explained that during the pandemic there were a large number of settings that were over £20k down on their income from the previous year due to a lack of children in the settings. Since the pandemic started four nurseries had closed and four childminders had resigned their posts. Two nurseries had opened during this time and there had been a lot of enquiries from people regarding becoming a childminder which was encouraging.

Councillors expressed regret that a number of providers had closed and noted there was a particular gap in the Baffins locality. Mindy said they had been trying to find additional provision in Baffins for a long time and they would be continuing to find some more provision in this area of the city.

Councillors wished to thank Mindy and her team for all their professionalism shown throughout the pandemic and also thanked the providers as it had been a very difficult time. Providers had shown such diligence and professionalism and were an asset to the city.

The Cabinet Member noted the report.

21. Dedicated Schools Grant 2020/21 Outturn report (information report)

The report was introduced by Angela Mann, Finance Manager.

In response to a questions, officers clarified the following:

With regard to the carry forward balance of £5.0m, the DSG has rules and conditions that govern how the authority can use the money. The money is for the purposes of education and early years and would not be used for anything else.

DECISION:

The Cabinet Member noted the year end budget position for the Dedicated Schools Grant as at 31 March 2021, together with the associated explanations contained within the report.

22. Children, Families and Education Portfolio 2020/21 Outturn report (information)

The report was introduced by Angela Mann, Finance Manager.

In response to questions, officers clarified the following:

Officers are looking strategically to maximise working together to respond to the obvious demand of support for young people across the city. The holiday activity and food programme will provide a rich offer over the summer and officers are promoting this. There was very high take up of the offer at Easter.

Councillor Norton asked for assurances that any underspend will stay in the portfolio. Councillor Horton said she had been in discussions with officers and they are looking to lean into the Stronger Futures investment and family safeguarding and employing more people to do that on an invest to save basis. Councillor Norton was not entirely satisfied with this assurance; he felt that other portfolios would be fighting for this money.

Councillor Smith said she felt that the most important thing was to look after Children and Families, Adult Social Care and health. She was confident that Councillor Horton would fight hard for the portfolio and that the Children and Families portfolio could keep the underspend to develop the Stronger Futures and family safeguarding services further.

Alison Jeffery added that the authority is on a good trajectory and should in principle, not return to a significant overspend next year as the investment in family safeguarding has enabled the authority to keep families together and they are therefore spending less on alternative care. In terms of CAMHS the current waiting list issue relates to problems with staff recruitment not sufficiency of funding.

DECISION:

The Cabinet Member noted the Children, Families and Education portfolio revenue and capital outturn positions, as at the end of March 2021, together with the variance explanations.

23. Variation to Admission Policies 2021/22 & 2022/23 for community and voluntary controlled schools (information report)

Sarah Christopher, Portsmouth Education Partnership and School Inclusion Manager introduced the report.

The Cabinet Member noted the report.

24. An evaluation of initiatives to promote greater inclusion and manage the Dedicated School's Grant (DSG) High Needs Block spending

Sarah Christopher, Portsmouth Education Partnership and School Inclusion Manager introduced the report.

DECISIONS:

The Cabinet Member noted:

- (1) The progress that has been made in achieving greater inclusion in education in Portsmouth, in line with the aim of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy.**
- (2) The progress the SEND Monitoring and Review Hub has made and that a full evaluation of the impact of the work after 18 months will be brought to the Cabinet Member in 2022.**
- (3) Continued funding of 6 AV1 'No Isolation' robots at £15k per annum.**

The Cabinet Member approved:

- (1) Funding the Turnaround project circa £100k per annum with a minimum commitment of 3 years. Any future funding would be based on a full evaluation of the project.**

Schools Forum discussed and were in support of all of the above.

As this was Alison Jeffery's last portfolio meeting, all members passed on their thanks to Alison Jeffery for her hard work and said she had worked tirelessly for the portfolio. Members commented that the portfolio was very turbulent before Alison joined the authority and slowly it became very stable which is testament to leadership and her extremely professional officers.

The Cabinet Member added that Alison was very inspirational in her leadership and values that she brings to the portfolio. She added that Alison was leaving the portfolio in a good place. Members wished her the best in her new post.

Alison thanked members for their comments and said in Portsmouth officers are fortunate to have strong cross party support for this portfolio. She thanked members for all their support and interest members show in the directorate.

The meeting concluded at 5.14 pm.

Councillor Suzy Horton
Chair