

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, 9 December 2021 at 4.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)
Councillor Terry Norton

29. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Jeanette Smith.

30. Declarations of interest

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.

31. Living Difference IV: the agreed syllabus for Religious Education in Portsmouth

The report was introduced by Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement.

Councillor Horton said that having spent many years on SACRE she was aware that there is a lot of hard work and debate that goes into SACRE. She felt that a great deal of thought goes into the RE curriculum and what that curriculum can do when embedded in schools to support teachers.

DECISION: the Cabinet Member formally adopted the new religious education syllabus (Living Difference IV) for Portsmouth

32. Children, Families and Education quarter 2 budget monitoring report

The report was introduced by Angela Mann, Finance Manager.

Councillor Horton said she appreciated the seriousness of the situation however felt that there are some circumstances that explain it. Covid is one factor however it is not only the direct covid spend, it had also caused the interruption of a number of successful strategies that had been taking place. There are a series of plans to mitigate the overspend which are being pursued with rigour.

Sarah Daly added that the Council is taking this budget very seriously. The long tail of covid and the ongoing impact has been significant on all children in the service and beyond. There has been an impact on the savings plans and the ability to see the impact of the innovation work that has been supported in the city. There has been an impact on market and placement provision with

the ability nationally of children to step down and move on from the placements causing a real shortage in the system and a challenge in the ongoing cost of placements as the market becomes increasingly profit driven.

In response to questions officers clarified the following:

During the covid pandemic the home to school transport budget was underspent due to the Council not providing the service as schools were closed. Prior to the pandemic this budget was under control. The overspend is there as there are now more routes due to social distancing and keeping children in their bubbles, which means there is additional pressure on the budget. There are several measures in place to reduce the pressure on the budget including implementing independent travel training with some schools, broadening the transport operator market to bring in more competition and developing a partnership with Solent Academies Trust to use their fleet of minibuses, which should reduce the reliance on the big operators that are currently used.

With regard to out of city placements, the Council is mirroring some of the behaviours across other authorities and weekly reviews of placements, are being held. Officers are looking at the internal children's home to identify where there was a delay to reunification plans. The plan was always for those children to return home but during the pandemic doing that work with families and entering homes became difficult. Over the last week officers have agreed reunification plans over the next three months for a number of children within the internal children's homes and also planning for those children who are in out of city placements for them to come back into the city. She wished to thank Angela and finance colleagues for their support they have provided to help officers have a closer scrutiny on the budgets at this time.

DECISIONS: the cabinet member noted the Children, Families and Education Portfolio forecast revenue and capital budget positions and mitigating actions, as at the end of September 2021.

Councillor Norton wished to thank Councillor Horton and all involved on the recent news regarding Ofsted inspections and the percentage of schools that are rated Good or Outstanding. Councillor Horton thanked Councillor Norton and said it was a case of hard work all round with and it was good to have some positive news

The meeting concluded at 4.25 pm.

Councillor Suzy Horton
Chair