

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, 20 October 2022 at 11.30 am at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)

Councillors Terry Norton
Tom Coles

25. Apologies

There were no apologies.

26. Declaration of Member's Interests

Councillor Horton declared a non-prejudicial interest in that she is Vice-Chair of Governors at Craneswater Junior School; For transparency, Councillor Terry Norton declared a non-prejudicial interest in Item 5 - The inclusion of Police Community Support officers in Early Help and Prevention as he is the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire and Isle of Wight.

27. Dedicated Schools Grant 2022-23 Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring and Revised Budget

The report was introduced by Alison Egerton, Group Accountant, informing members that the report provides an update on the position at the end of Quarter 1 of 2022/23 financial year. The forecast position as at the end of June 2022 is an underspend of £340,500 and this relates to the planned under spend on the growth fund which will be carried forward at year end to support the committed expenditure to schools in 2023/24; the SEND and some of the early years budgets are forecast to be on budget.

Alison Egerton highlighted the table in table in section 7 of the report which sets out the forecast position, the proposed use of any uncommitted balances and sets out proposals requesting the delegated authority for the section 151 officer or their representative to adjust the early years budget in line with the early years block allocation adjustments that are received in July every year from the Department for Education. She added that the report also requests approval to provide Wymering School with a grant to support the school through the first term of opening and section 8 sets out the proposed budget revisions for the 2022/23 financial year, the details of which are set out in the report including the proposed use of the carry forward balanced to support the changes.

The Cabinet Member noted that the quarterly report comes regularly to this meeting, that the Schools' Forum supported the investment in the Wymering School and that it will be valued by schools so that they are very willing to support that decision.

Councillor Norton added his support for the investment in Wymering School adding that given the current climate it is reassuring that this level of support has been allocated to it.

Councillor Tom Coles joined the meeting at 11.37am.

DECISIONS:

- 1. Noted the forecast year end budget position for the Dedicated Schools Grant as at 30 June 2022, together with the associated explanations contained within this report.**
 - 2. Approved the delegation to the Section 151 Officer or their delegated representative, the responsibility to adjust the Early Years block budget in line with the DSG allocation adjustments annually in July 2022.**
 - 3. Approved the proposed pre-opening grant to the Wymering Free School of £250,000 as set out in paragraph 7.8 of the report.**
 - 4. Approved the revisions to the 2022-23 budget as set out in Appendix 1 and section 8 of the report.**
- 28. Children, Families and Education Portfolio Budget Monitoring Report for the First Quarter 2022/23**

Angela Mann, Finance Manager, introduced the report which covers the rest of the budget. She informed members that overall, there is a budget pressure of £1.9m, just over £1m of which relates to covid costs. The remainder includes pressures relating to school transport, family safeguarding, placements for looked after children and indigenous care leavers. There is also pressure due to cost of living and energy cost increases and staffing pressures in homes and in the fostering service.

The Finance Manager explained that these are offset by underspends elsewhere including in the budget for under 18s asylum seeking children, asylum seeking care leavers and she noted that some high-cost placements are forecast to reduce. In terms of the capital projections, the Finance Manager stated that these are detailed the report and that on budget.

The Cabinet Member commented that the costs associated with covid seem to be segueing into increases to the cost of living and it is no surprise that they translate into pressures on children, families and education. There had been good progress on home to school transport, but increased costs and demand have had an impact and thinking needs to be done around this

national issue. We had been seeing positive impact of using the family safeguarding model and it is very difficult to tease out what would have happened current pressures had not arisen. We are not complacent about the overspends and are constantly thinking creatively around how to manage them. The capital projections provide a good news story in some ways, but it has been a result of sort of descopeing some projects to managing within the budget. It is therefore worth noting that some things which would have been beneficial will not happen as the money does not have the same value it had before.

In response to members questions about home to school transport, Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director of Children's Services and Education, explained that:

- The main reasons for the increased costs are due to increased demand and increased fuel costs.
- There are strict criteria for claiming home to school transport and these children and young people have complex SEND and meet those criteria.
- There is a discretionary element to it and so transport will be provided where possible, eg. if there is space on route then it will be offered at a charge.
- In a very small number of cases, there it is not possible to offer a child a school place within three miles for a secondary school or two miles for a primary school, those costs will be covered.
- In terms of mitigating the increased costs, the service is looking at making routes more efficient, trying to broaden the market and also having a review to see can we do things differently such as using our own transport and relook at independent travel training word where appropriate.
- Despite this it is unlikely that the overspend will come down significantly in the short term, but the service is doing everything it can to try and bring that cost down.

In relation to questions about high-cost placements, Sarah Daly, Director of Children's Services informed members that:

- There is a national crisis around the lack of appropriate placements settings and the national care review will follow up proposals made by Josh McAllister's report.
- Two years ago, a high-cost placement was one that cost £7,000 a week, now some authorities are paying £30,000-£60,000 per week to support children with significantly complex needs.
- In the past week there have been 34 children waiting for one bed in secure accommodation.
- These are children with exceptional needs who need bespoke packages with three carers to one child and specific wrap around care.
- Portsmouth is working with several other local authorities in the southeast on a proposal to work with a provider to provide wrapping care and a specific focus on young adolescents.
- This responds to concerns around exploitation, criminality, or criminal behaviour and how it might be possible to them keep them close to home and wrap around that trauma informed approach.

Councillor Terry Norton offered his support as Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner including lobbying.

In response to questions on care leavers seeking asylum, the Director of Children's Services explained that:

- The duty of care was extended from up age 21 to up to 25.
- Many of these care experienced young people have suffered significant trauma.
- Portsmouth has a larger number of children and young people who are awaiting asylum outcomes than many other authorities because of larger numbers coming through the port.
- Those children do not have any access to public funds until they get their outcome decision from the Home Office and there are significant delays.
- These delays have a significant financial impact on the local authority and also in terms of the emotional wellbeing of those young people.
- This can lead to a vicious circle as without a sense of stability anxiety levels are high, which in turn leads to increased costs because of placement needs.
- Portsmouth is working across the DCS group to lobby the Home Office about speeding up some of these decisions.

Following questions on where savings might need to be made, the Director of Children's Services commented that this is under constant review. The impact of covid continues to be felt in children's services and education and is already being affected further by the cost of living and increasing numbers of looked after children in recent months. The city has pockets of significant deprivation and inequality and there are concerns about capacity to services knowing the pressures already within our system. Children's services is reviewing everything it does, is working with other authorities and looking at what could be streamlined or delivered differently.

The Cabinet Member thanked members for the questions which provided an opportunity both to be challenged and explain the challenges being faced day in day out. She added that the department was scrutinising every penny without ever putting children in unnecessary risky situations.

DECISIONS:

- 1) Noted the Children, Families and Education Portfolio forecast revenue and capital budget positions, as at the end of June 2022, together with the variance and pressure explanations.**
- 2) In consultation with the Cabinet Member, Directors develop a savings plan which will eliminate the overspend currently being forecast, progress against which is monitored by the Cabinet Member and the Director of Finance on a regular basis.**

29. The inclusion of Police Community Support officers in Early Help and Prevention

The Cabinet Member explained that she had requested this information item as early help can interrupt the patterns that put children in crisis situations.

Katy Willcox, Service Lead Early Help and Prevention, introduced the report informing members that the report provides an overview of the early help and prevention service with a particular focus of the introduction of the Police Community Support Officers. The service provides support to families with children are aged between nought to 19 and covers services provided both by Portsmouth City Council and by Solent NHS including specialist family support workers working in partnership with the Youth Offending Team and the inclusion of Police Community Support Officers (PSCOs) in Early Help and Prevention. PSCOs use two main tools to reduce anti-social behaviour and child exploitation and more efficient joint working and interventions have improved outcomes for children and young people. Among the first cohort of children, re-referrals have decreased dramatically, and the risk of exploitation has either been eliminated or reduced to 'low', among more recent contacts, although some cases remain open, risk of exploitation has reduced to low or there are no further concerns. A case study was included as part of the report.

The Cabinet Member thanked the Service Lead for the detailed and rich report, adding that it brought to life many issues being faced by young people and the importance of early intervention to improve outcomes. She noted that this had a longer-term financial benefit and the intensive support provided was worth the investment to turn a child's life around.

Members welcomed the report and the positive impact on behaviour changes.

In relation to the role schools play, the Cabinet Member noted that there is pressure on schools relating to educational attainment but that for most schools' relationships and what's best for the child comes first. There had been work earlier in the year to refresh contacts in key services for schools, including the Police.

Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director of Children's Services and Education, confirmed that schools are looking for greater engagement with the Police and work is underway to help improve those relationships and that schools are very inclusive.

Sarah Daly, Director of Children's Services, clarified that the service had a very good standard of referrals from schools and the link co-ordinator role is embedded in the service and helps keep in touch with vulnerable children and families. Demand at the front door is being supported by strong systems, schools can pick up the phone to discuss the best way forward and there are very few complaints from school leaders about social care systems.

Councillor Terry Norton noted that six liaison officers will return, and the Police has a comprehensive child centred policing approach. He commented

that health partners are working together and asked if there was more cross-portfolio work to be done to create environments where children and young people can be safe.

The Cabinet Member commented that despite all the pressures on services, strategic work is being done to break down silo working although joint working, particularly with health partners is well established.

Sam Bushby, Deputy Director Children and Families, added that there is a commitment across the whole partnership to support adolescents as individuals and to move beyond this to address risk by looking at place and context within the whole community. This involves working with new partners, including for example, the British Transport Police and other third sector organisations.

In response to questions, Katy Wilcox clarified that neurodiversity, and the role of speech and language development is an important indicator in young people and there are specialists in the early intervention team to support this work.

Mike Stoneman added that the four priorities of the Portsmouth Education Partnership include literacy and oracy and with the Portsmouth Education Investment Area it has submitted its priorities to the Department for Education to proceed with those priorities over the next three years to build on what has already been achieved.

The information contained in the report was noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.26 pm.

Councillor Suzy Horton
Chair