

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, 14 December 2023 at 5.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)

Councillors Chris Dike

25. Apologies

Councillor George Fielding had offered his apologies for absence. Councillor Chris Dike apologised for lateness.

26. Declarations of Members' Interests

None. For transparency, Councillor Suzy Horton declared a non-prejudicial interest in that she is Vice-Chair of Governors at Craneswater Junior School.

27. School Funding Arrangements 2024/25

Angela Mann, Finance Manager, introduced the report and informed members that the Schools' Forum makes decisions on school funding arrangements and this report provides an update on the latest developments for the financial year 2024-25. At its meeting on 7 December 2023, the Schools' Forum approved all the recommendations except that secondary schools approve the de-delegation of funding to support the education functions as set out in paragraph 7 of the report. This may be referred to the Secretary of State for approval.

Councillor Chris Dike joined the meeting.

The Cabinet Member commented that she had attended most of the Schools' Forum meeting and had listened to the dialogue about secondary school de-delegation of funding to support education functions.

DECISIONS - that the Cabinet Member:

- a) **Noted the Department for Education's proposed changes to school revenue funding arrangements for 2024-25, as set out in the report.**
- b) **Approved the proposals for implementing the local funding formula arrangements as set out in this report in particular to:**
 - **Implement the National Funding Formula rates for both primary and secondary schools in 2024-25 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.**
 - **Implement a minimum funding guarantee (MFG) of at least 0.0% and up to +0.5% subject to affordability, for 2024-25 as set out in paragraph 5.22 of the report.**
 - **The methods of managing affordability as set out in paragraphs 5.23 to 5.27 of the report.**
- c) **Endorsed the proposal not to set up a Falling Rolls Fund for 2024-25.**
- d) **Endorsed the Growth Fund Criteria as set out in Appendix 2, with the primary and secondary values being brought to the January 2024 meeting for approval.**
- e) **Noted the recommendation that maintained Primary Schools approve the de-delegation of funding to support the Education Functions as set out in Section 7.**
- f) **Noted the recommendation that maintained Secondary Schools approve the de-delegation of funding to support the Education Functions as set out in paragraph Section 7.**

28. Dedicated Schools Grant Quarter 2 Monitoring and Revised Budget

The report was introduced by Alison Egerton, Group Accountant. She informed members that since the report had been published, she could now confirm that overall, the budget is forecast to be balanced.

DECISIONS - that the Cabinet Member:

- a) **Noted the forecast year end budget position for the Dedicated Schools Grant as at 30 September 2023, together with the associated explanations contained within this report.**
- b) **Approved the revisions to the 2023-24 budget as set out in Appendix 1 and section 8 of the report.**

29. PSCP Annual Report

Scott MacKechnie, Independent Chair and Scrutineer, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, and Southampton Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships, introduced the report. He informed members that the PSCP is a statutory partnership and aims to ensure that partner organisations are working effectively independently, and together, to support and safeguard children at risk. He provided members with information about the pressures, priorities and achievements of the PSCP in Portsmouth.

The Cabinet Member noted the work of the Board and its achievements over the past year including evidence of joined up working. Councillor Horton welcomed the level of detail in the report, thanked the Chair of the PSCP for the case study it contained and said that she hoped the annual report would come back for noting each year as it offers an opportunity for scrutinising and celebrating the Board's work.

The information report was noted.

30. Fostering Annual Report

The report, which set out a summary of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, was introduced by Mark Jowett, Head of Looked After Children. He noted that although fostering nationally is under pressure, in Portsmouth the picture is better. New foster carers are being approved and the assessment process which must be robust but streamlined, is being completed within the 6-month target. Fostering has a dedicated marketing officer and several initiatives to recruit new foster carers are on-going. As of 31 March, Portsmouth had 225 foster carers and it is notable that although there are further improvements to be made, foster carers from independent agencies come across to the authority. The Mockingbird approach has been helpful in recent years and there are ambitions to extend it as it provides carers with peer support, and children like feeling part of an extended family. Looking forward, the focus is on finalising foster care fees policies following good quality feedback from carers as well as taking account the offer by neighbouring authorities.

Members' questions

In response to questions, the Head of Looked After Children explained that although more foster carers were always needed, 67% of the 389 children in care in Portsmouth are looked after by in house foster carers.

Members' comments

The Cabinet Member welcomed the report and noted that she enjoys attending recruitment events whenever possible to hear about the fostering journey of foster carers. She noted that the number of foster carers in Portsmouth has not gone down as they have nationally, though the authority was not complacent. She commented that foster carers needed a range of offers, and that the Mockingbird project had gone from strength to strength and was an important part of the offer.

The information report was noted.

31. Adoption Agency Annual Report

Mark Jowett, Head of Looked After Children, introduced the report and explained that it set out details relating to the activity of the Portsmouth Adoption Service for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 as required by the Adoption regulations. He informed members that the Portsmouth Adoption Service is provided directly by the Adoption Team within the Council. The team is responsible for the work with children who have a plan of adoption and works with Adopt South, the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) who finds, assesses, and supports adopters. The Head of Looked After Children commended Adopt South for the short adoption journey for families which enables children to secure permanent families more quickly. The most recent data indicates that in Portsmouth, 13 children were adopted in the year 2022/2023 and 19 children had placement orders granted. 94 new households have been approved as adopters during this year. He explained that looking forward, the service will be working to implement and embed a robust tracking process to improve oversight of permanency tracking and will take a more aspirational approach towards placements for sibling groups and older children.

Members' questions

In response to members questions, officers clarified that placements are managed in a timely fashion and the service does not need to look outside Adopt South to purchase regional arrangements, even for complex cases. Overall, the local authority and Adopt South have a strong relationship and continue to ensure that children identified as needing an adoptive family have been prioritised.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education welcomed the report and the positive outcomes it represented for looked after children.

The information report was noted.

32. SACRE Annual Report 2022-23

Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement, introduced the report informing members that SACREs have responsibility for advising a Local Authority (LA) on its schools on Religious Education (RE) and has a duty to produce an annual report.

The Head of School Improvement informed members that the report aims to hold the LA to account by informing the Secretary of State and key partners on what advice on RE and Collective Worship (CW) SACRE gave the LA during the academic year 2022-2023. She noted that the Portsmouth SACRE is inclusive and moves around different venues and places of worship for its meetings. Last year the SACRE undertook a survey into withdrawals from RE and CW as part of its monitoring function and noted these are very few. The SACRE also monitors numbers of pupils taking RE in public exams and noted that while numbers are generally low, pupils who do take RE at GCES or A Level do well. In addition to its monitoring function through its Monitoring Group, the SACRE has produced a Directory of Places of Worship which is on the PCC website as well as those of the Portsmouth Education Partnership and RE Hubs. SACRE provides CPD for teachers, particularly in relation to the implementation of the locally agreed syllabus Living Difference IV and professional advice from SACRE advisors is welcomed by schools. There were no complaints about RE and CW in the past year.

The Cabinet Member welcomed the report and noted the good attendance at SACRE meetings which she felt was an indication of the common aim shared by faith representatives. She commented that it was a pity that more young people did not study RE at GCSE and A Level. The Head of School Improvement, noted that the SACRE aims to support schools in promoting RE as the study of philosophy and tolerance, not just religious faiths.

The information report was noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.45 pm.

Councillor Suzy Horton
Chair