

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, 22 February 2024 at 5.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)

Councillors Ryan Brent
George Fielding

7. Apologies

No apologies had been received.

8. 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; Councillor Ryan Brent declared that he is an employee of City of Portsmouth College; and Councillor George Fielding declared that he is a community governor of Priory School.

9. DSG Budget 2024-2025

Angela Mann, Finance Manager, introduced the report and explained that the report seeks to inform members of the progress towards the initial determination of the schools budget (including for individual schools) for 2024-25. The report details information about the High Needs Block budget and seeks to approve proposals to use carry forward balances to fund the shortfall in 2024-25 and manage any potential financial pressures during the financial year. It also seeks approval for Element 3 Top-up values for Special Schools, Inclusion Centres, Alternative Provision Settings and Mainstream Schools as set out in Appendix 2 of the report. The Finance Manager explained that the Maintained School members of Schools Forum had recently approved the de-delegation of the Education functions related the Monitoring and Brokering grant for 2024-25 at £10.42 per pupil and asked the Cabinet Member to note this decision.

There were no questions. The Cabinet Member reminded members that the Early Needs Dedicated Schools Grant 2024-25 Budget had been agreed on 9 February 2024 as the Department for Education had asked councils to publish their hourly rates earlier than usual, by 20 February 2024.

DECISIONS - that the Cabinet Member:

- a) **Approved the determination of the Schools Budget for 2024-25 as set out in Appendix 1.**
- b) **Approved the proposal to use carry forward balances to fund the shortfall in 2024-25 and manage any potential financial pressures during the financial year.**
- c) **Approved the 2024-25 Element 3 Top-up values for Special Schools, Inclusion Centres, Alternative Provision Settings and Mainstream Schools as set out in Appendix 2.**
- d) **Noted the decision by the Maintained School members of Schools Forum to approve the de-delegation of the Education functions related the Monitoring and Brokering grant for 2024-25 at £10.42 per pupil.**

10. Carers' Fees and Allowances Policy for Portsmouth Fostering Service

Mark Jowett, Head of Children We Care For, introduced the report and informed members that the proposed foster carers fees and allowances would take effect from 7 April 2024. He explained that there is a national shortage of foster carers and that although there is a thriving foster carers community in Portsmouth, it is important to invest in our foster carers. The cost of living crisis is having an impact on foster carers and the policy, alongside comprehensive training and wraparound care such as provided through the Mockingbird project, aimed to provide a competitive package of support.

Members' questions

In response to members' questions, the Head of Children We Care For, clarified that:

- During the consultation period, travel expenses claims generated a mix of views and the policy has been designed to be in line with other similar local authorities.
- The fostering allowance includes an element for travel and additional payments are made for exceptional travel needs.
- Some elements of the policy had been increased to be in line with other authorities, some were at parity and overall the policy aims to offer the best possible offer within the council's financial constraints.
- Portsmouth does well in that 73% of children in care live with our own foster carers; 10% live with carers provided through independent fostering agencies and we are working hard to bring that number down.
- The 63 mile threshold for travel payments is in line with other authorities - though Hampshire, for example, does not have a threshold as it assumes all travel payments are made as part of the fostering allowance.
- The Refer a Friend payment was confirmed to be £500, and it is intended to offer £500 payment to foster carers who are recruited via this route.

- Refer a Friend payments were made to 10 referring individuals in the last financial year.
- The policy includes an Activities Allowance which is not generally offered by other authorities.

Councillor Suzy Horton commented that local foster carers have a great reputation and that this has been enhanced by the Mockingbird project. She welcomed the report, which she said was needed and timely given the cost of living crisis. There had, she added, been a lot of engagement on the new policy and she believed that it focused the money available in the right places. Councillor Horton thanked officers for all the work which had gone into developing the policy on behalf of foster carers.

DECISIONS - that the Cabinet Member:

- a) **Approved the proposal to change the payment structure and increase the Skills Fees for Foster Carers and related Allowances. It is proposed that that this updated policy takes effect from 7 April 2024.**
- b) **Agreed that delegated authority is with the Deputy Director, Children & Families (in conjunction with the Section 151 Officer) to approve an annual uplift to the standard fostering allowance in line with the national minimum guidance. This will include the following which are linked to the standard fostering allowance:**
 - **Birthday & Religious Festival Allowance;**
 - **Foster Carers Leave;**
 - **Family Link; and**
 - **Activities Allowance**

11. School Travel Assistance Policies

Alison Critchley, Head of Sufficiency and Resources, introduced the report and provided some background to the development of the updated Travel Assistance Policy for children of statutory school age (5-16) and the Travel Assistance Statement for post-16 learners for 2024/25. She explained that travel assistance policies must be updated annually and that this year the consultation period had started earlier than usual, before Christmas. However, the government had issued additional guidance in January and the council's aim to introduce a banding system had therefore had to be abandoned. Other areas of focus had included eligibility for disabled persons bus passes and preparing people for adulthood. The consultation had received six responses which was more than usual.

Councillor Suzy Horton noted that this report was unusual in that it presented the information as a narrative and that this reflected the move away from banding because of most recent government guidance.

Members' questions

In response to a question, the Head of Sufficiency and Resources, explained that unsafe route eligibility usually applies in rural areas in counties or the shires. She confirmed that there were no unsafe routes in Portsmouth which generated travel assistance payments.

DECISIONS - that the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education agreed the attached Travel Assistance Policy for children of statutory school age (5-16) and the Travel Assistance Statement for post-16 learners for 2024/25.

12. Appointment to UTC Board

Alison Critchley, Head of Sufficiency and Resources, introduced the report and informed members that agreement to appoint Portsmouth City Council's Chief Executive, Natalie Brahma-Pearl, to the UTC Portsmouth as a member of the company was sought. She explained that the previous Chief Executive, David Williams, had previously held this role for UTC Portsmouth.

Members' questions

In response to a question, Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director of Education, confirmed that UTC only has a few members and that these include the Vice Chancellor of the University, the Naval Base Commander, and the Chief Executive of the Council.

Councillor George Fielding welcomed the appointment and Councillor Suzy Horton commented that she believed the Natalie Brahma-Pearl will make a significant contribution in the role as she is a strong advocate for young people.

DECISION - that Natalie Brahma-Pearl, Portsmouth City Council's Chief Executive, be appointed by the Council to the UTC Portsmouth as a member of the company.

Before the meeting ended, the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education noted that this was the last scheduled meeting of the municipal year, and she thanked members and officers for their support during the last 12 months.

The meeting concluded at 5.19 pm.

Councillor Suzy Horton
Chair