

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION**

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education held on Wednesday, 30 October 2024 at 4.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

### **Present**

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)

Councillors Tom Coles

### **Apologies for Absence**

#### **17. Apologies**

No apologies had been received.

#### **18. Declarations of Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interest. For transparency, Councillor Suzy Horton declared that she is Vice-Chair of Governors at Craneswater Junior School. Councillor Tom Coles similarly declared that his brother works at Portsmouth Academy as Head of Maths.

#### **19. Care Experienced Local Offer**

The Head of Service, Adolescents and Young Adults, introduced the report and informed members that approval was sought for the Care Experienced Local Offer set out in Appendix 1 attached to the report. The local offer includes details of the services and support that will assist care experienced young adults in, or moving to, adulthood and independent living that the local authority provides in relation to health and wellbeing, relationships, education and training, employment, accommodation and participation in society. It was intended that the Local Offer will be reviewed again in 2026.

#### Members' Comments

Councillors welcomed the report and thanked officers for their work to bring the offer together. Councillor Horton commented that during the Covid pandemic she had watched a series of podcasts by DfE including one story about a young care leaver saying that the support they had been receiving had come to an abrupt end when they went to university, and that they had nowhere to stay during the Christmas holidays. Councillor Suzy Horton noted that it was important that all the extended care parents usually give their children should also be made available to care leavers as they enter young adulthood.

#### **DECISIONS - the Cabinet Member:**

- a) **Approved the revised local offer for our care experienced young people and agreed that the offer is adopted by the Council.**
- b) **Agreed that the offer is reviewed every 2 years.**

## **20. Intensive Foster Family Bridging Care twelve month Pilot**

The Service Leader for the Fostering Service, introduced the report and explained that against a national year on year increase in the number of children we care for, coupled with a national shortage of suitable homes, there is an identified need for children with complex backgrounds and high support needs to have a period of care with resilient, highly skilled carers who are able to stabilise children reacting to significant trauma. Currently Portsmouth does not provide this model of care, and it may result in an expensive bespoke spot purchase arrangement for a small number of children, and this may be outside the city. Working with partners, the purpose of Foster Family Bridging Care will be to provide care for 28+ days and support the child's transition to a longer term home arrangement. The role and responsibilities of the foster family will be to provide a safe family base for children who have experienced disruption and trauma. The Service Lead informed Members that in addition to improved outcomes for children, the pilot could also make savings for the local authority. The skills based fees and allowances have been benchmarked against other local authorities.

### Members' Comments

Members agreed that the project would provide better outcomes for children and young people with the potential to make savings. Councillor Suzy Horton noted that this aligns with the council's values and ambitions and that foster carers recruited to the project would find it very rewarding to help children and young people in this way.

**DECISION - the Cabinet Member approved the Intensive Foster Family Bridging Care twelve month Pilot proposal set out in the report.**

## **21. Portsmouth School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2029**

The Head of Sufficiency and Resources introduced the report and provided Members with an update on the key issues affecting school place planning in Portsmouth. She explained that the strategy attached to the report aimed to address the seven identified key priority areas set out in section 4 of the report including ensuring there are enough secondary school places and suitable places for the growing number of children with SEND while also responding to the declining birthrate which is reducing the number of places needed in infant and junior schools.

### Members' Comments

Councillor Tom Coles welcomed the approach taken in the strategy and noted that ensuring there was flexibility to respond was important. He commented that his child's primary school had cut back from three form entry to two, but that it had retained the potential to increase back to three form entry if

needed. Councillor Suzy Horton agreed, noting that over the past ten years there had been unforeseen increases in SEND needs and that it was important to be able to respond to a constantly changing situation.

**DECISIONS - the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education agreed the Portsmouth School Place Planning Strategy for 2024-2029 (attached to the report).**

## **22. SACRE proposed revised constitution**

The Head of Sufficiency and Resources introduced the report and explained that the Portsmouth SACRE had last reviewed its constitution in 2019 and with this review had provided additional clarity on its membership and some procedural aspects relating to the organisation of meetings. The SACRE had met on 12 June 2024 and had agreed to recommend the revised draft to the Cabinet Member for approval.

### Members' Comments

Councillor Suzy Horton commented that the SACRE is an interesting group, and its meetings are well attended. In these times where we need to embrace differences in people, not just in religion, there is a place for this. She added that the work the SACRE does to support teachers and this area of the curriculum is important in our multi-cultural city.

Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director (Education), noted that the majority of schools adopt and deliver Living Difference IV, the locally agreed syllabus.

**DECISIONS - the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education:**

- a) **Accepted the request by the SACRE to revise its constitution; and**
- b) **Endorsed the proposed Portsmouth SACRE constitution as amended by the SACRE at its meeting on 12 June 2024.**

## **23. Dedicated Schools Grant 2024-25 Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring and Revised Budget**

The Group Accountant informed Members that the projected revenue expenditure of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the current financial year 2024-25 as at the end of June 2024, along with proposed budget revisions was forecast to overspend by £30,500. She explained that the overspend relates to the High Needs Block and increased levels of needs at the Harbour School in the first half of the summer term. It is expected to report the Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring figures at the Cabinet Member's next meeting on 3 December 2024.

### Members' Comments

Members thanked for the report. Councillor Suzy Horton commented that the pressure on the budget is enormous, and she offered her thanks and

appreciation to officers for all work that goes on behind the scenes to ensure that the budget is balanced.

**DECISIONS - the Cabinet Member:**

- a) **Noted the forecast year end budget position for the Dedicated Schools Grant as at 30 June 2024 together with the associated explanations contained within this report.**
- b) **Approved the revisions to the 2024-25 budget as set out in Appendix 1 and section 8 of the report.**

**24. Annual Fostering Service Report 2023-2024**

The Service Leader for the Fostering Service introduced the report and provided a summary of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service for the 12-months to 31 March 2024 as well as an action plan for future work.

Members' Comments

Councillor Suzy Horton commented that it was important to understand the enormity of the work behind supporting children in our care. Councillor Tom Coles agreed. The Cabinet Member went on to note that having spoken to many foster carers over the years she was aware of all the different opportunities there were to change the lives of young people and that the old perception that fostering meant looking after babies had changed. The report reflected the breadth and depth of the work in this area, she was particularly delighted to note the continued success of the Mockingbird project, and she welcomed launch of the Hub. Councillor Suzy Horton offered her thanks to the foster carers who come along to events and take part in promoting the service to future foster carers.

**The Cabinet Member noted the information report.**

**25. Adoption Agency Annual Report 2023-2024**

Dave Crew, Team Manager, introduced the report. He explained that it provided an update on the activities of the Portsmouth Adoption Service for the 12-months to 31st March 2024, as required by the Adoption regulations. The Portsmouth Adoption Service is provided directly by the Adoption Team within the Council and the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt South, who find, assess and support adopters. The report also describes the work of the in-house adoption team and Adopt South, provides an update on the progress on the priorities set out the previous year and the priorities for the year ahead.

Sarah Daly, Director of Children's Services, commented that as Chair of the Regional Adoption Agency Board, the positive outcomes we continue to achieve for the children across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight when compared to other RAAs is a credit to all involved. She noted that a themed inspection had been undertaken in the past 12 months and this noted the positive outcomes of Adopt South. The other work around listening to lived

experiences and the impact of adoption and positive work around ongoing family contact is important and a significant shift. The whole service should be proud of the work they are doing to improve outcomes for young people.

Members' Comments

Members welcomed the report. Councillor Suzy Horton endorsed the Director of Children's Services comments, adding that the myths and stereotypes around adoption need to be updated as the rigor around adoption and the adoption journey is very different now.

**The Cabinet Member noted the information report.**

**26. Local Authority Maintained School Balances at 31 March 2024**

The Group Accountant introduced the report and explained that it sets out the level of Local Authority maintained schools' revenue and capital balances at 31 March 2024. She also explained that whilst some schools may not have met the agreed criteria for reducing balances at the end of the previous financial year, the authority is in contact with those seeing financial pressures in 2024-25 and are with working with them to maintain financial stability.

Comments

Councillor Suzy Horton thanked officers for all the work done to support schools manage their budgets during these tough times, adding that she was aware that this support is valued by schools.

**The Cabinet Member noted the information report.**

The meeting concluded at 5.02 pm.

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Councillor Suzy Horton  
Chair