

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 January 2025 at 4.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillors Steve Pitt (Leader)
 Hannah Brent

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Suzy Horton, Cabinet Member for Children Families and Education. Councillor Steve Pitt, Leader of the Council had delegated the decision-making powers for the Children, Families & Education portfolio to himself in respect of the decision meeting on 9 January 2025. This delegation commenced at the start of the meeting and ceased at its close.

Apologies had also been received from Councillor Tom Coles and were noted.

2. Declarations of Members' Interests

There were none. For transparency and as further education is referenced Item 4 - SEND Update, Councillor Hannah Brent declared that she works for the City of Portsmouth College.

3. South East Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) - Invest to Save proposal

The report was introduced by Mark Jowett, Head of Children We Care For who informed Members that the South East Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) is seeking a contribution of £250,000 from Portsmouth City Council over a three year period to support the operation of the RCC, with the aim of saving money and improving outcomes for all participating Local Authorities. If approved, the contribution would be £50,000 in 2025/26, and £100,000 in the two subsequent years.

The Head of Children We Care For explained that the RCC will be formed of 18 local authorities with the overarching purpose to increase the number and quality of placements available for children in the region, develop a regional view of sufficiency through data sharing and shape the market to provide more appropriate placements locally, thus improving children's outcomes and experiences of care over the long term.

Members' Comments

Councillor Pitt noted that the provision of a placement for one child in a stable placement could cover the cost of joining the RCC as well as ensuring that placements will be in the South East and therefore provide better local provision for children and families. He also welcomed the opportunity of working closely and more strategically with partners.

DECISIONS - the Leader:

- 1) Agreed the proposed scope and purpose of the South East Regional Care Cooperative (RCC).**
- 2) Agreed that Portsmouth City Council will make contributions of £250,000 over the next three financial years.**

4. Annual SEND Update

The report was introduced by Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director Children's Services (Education). Cate Mullen, Head of Inclusion was present to answer questions. The Deputy Director informed Members that at the Ordinary council meeting of 16 July 2024, the Council requested an annual update about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Portsmouth. He explained that the report sets out the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) strategy which has recently been redeveloped and the workstreams in place to meet its objectives. He noted that the Local Authority is due an inspection this year, has a self evaluation framework in place and is well prepared. The Deputy Director commented that the authority is in a stronger position than others as it is carrying a Dedicated School Grant (DSG) reserve. He added that it is important to address the high levels of demand being experienced and forecasted as based on current forecasts the reserve will be quickly eroded, despite the uplift of £3m for the High Needs Block in 25/26. The backlog in timeliness in assessing pupils for Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) which has built up following the pandemic is being addressed and the authority is on track to clear this and improve performance.

Members' Questions

In response to Members' questions, the Deputy Director and Head of Inclusion provided the following points of clarification:

- Although Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) may be valid to age 25 and some post-16 provision is captured within specialist provision such as the Mary Rose Special School and the City of Portsmouth College, the authority does not necessarily commission post-16 places in the same way as for schools as post-16 pupils move into employment, further education or other training provision.
- For many children with EHCPs, the authority also provides home to school transport and as the backlog is addressed there will be some impact on home to school transport, as well as the High Needs Block of the DSG. However, this is being managed very carefully and home to school transport is currently within budget. Other authorities are seeing significant overspends on home to school transport, but Portsmouth is not in that position.
- There had been an unprecedented increase in the number of children and young people with SEND support post-pandemic, but this is beginning to

slow down. The reasons for this are complex and include a decline in the birth rate and earlier identification and intervention. Although data has not always behaved as expected since the pandemic, the authority is confident in the information presented in the report.

Members' Comments

Councillor Hannah Brent asked for it to be placed on record that compared to neighbouring authorities, Portsmouth is excelling in delivering SEND provision, and she thanked officers for the information contained in the report.

This item was for information and was noted.

5. School Funding Arrangements 2025-26

The report was introduced by Angela Mann, Finance Manager who explained that the report sought approval for the final stage submission to the Department for Education (DfE) of the 2025-26 mainstream school revenue funding pro-forma for the Primary and Secondary Phases. The deadline for submission to the DfE is 22 January 2025. The report also sets out the progress made towards the initial determination of the schools budget (including individual schools budgets for 2025-26) and seeks the necessary approvals and endorsements required. The Finance Manager confirmed that the detailed High Needs Budget would be brought to the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education decision meeting in February 2025 as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2025-26 report.

DECISIONS - the Leader:

- 1) Approved the proposed changes to the mainstream schools revenue funding arrangements as set out in Section 5 and Appendix 2.**
- 2) Approved the school revenue funding pro-forma at Appendix 3 for submission to the ESFA on 22 January 2025.**
- 3) Approved the use of the carry forward on the Schools Specific Contingency for the same purpose in 2025-26 as set out in Section 6.**
- 4) Approved the budget to be held centrally for the payment of central licences negotiated nationally for all schools by the Secretary of State.**
- 5) Endorsed the use of the 2024-25 underspend on the Growth Fund for use for the same purpose in 2025-26.**
- 6) Endorsed the budgets to be held centrally specifically as set out in Appendix 1 of the report:**
 - Schools Forum**
 - Admissions**
 - Duties retained by the local authority for all schools**
 - Centrally employed Teachers' pay and pensions grants.**
- 7) Approved the place numbers for Special Schools, Inclusion Centres and Alternative Provision Settings as set out in Section 9 and Appendix 4.**

- 8) Approved the Early Years Funding formula for under twos, two, three and four years olds as set out in Section 8 and the budget as set out in Appendix 1**
- 9) Endorsed the de-delegated unit values in relation to the School Improvement, Monitoring and Brokerage Grant of £10.65 for each pupil.**

The meeting concluded at 4.20 pm.

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Chair