

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 18 JULY 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Edward Wilson, John Bowden (Vice-Chairman), Lynne Jones and Eileen Quick (Chairman).

Also in attendance: Cllr N Airey, Nigel Cook and Paul Louden.

Officers: Rob Stubbs, Alison Alexander and David Cook.

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Resolved unanimously: that Cllr Quick be appointed as Chairman for the municipal year and Cllr Bowden be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr McWilliams, Cllr Mills, Cllr Pryer, Kevin McDaniel, Hilary Hall and Anne Pfeiffer. Cllr Story attended as a substitute.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

Panel members were advised that being a school governor was not a pecuniary interest in relation to the agenda items.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2017 were approved as a true and correct record.

Cllr E Wilson asked if the national ranking chart in relation to the attainment gap had been circulated to all Members as requested. It was noted that the chart had not yet been sent and would be circulated.

Cllr E Wilson mentioned that the confirmation of funding for the Holyport College safe routes had not been circulated to Panel members. It was confirmed that the funds had come from Community Interest Levey.

Cllr Jones asked if trend analysis for agency staff pressure could be circulated. It was agreed that this could be an agenda item on a future meeting.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Managing Director apologised that the two reports under consideration were marked as To Follow. The Financial Update report had required additional work due to a range of mitigating actions being investigated to address overspends. The Schools Capital Programme report had a number of issues that had to be resolved before the report could be published.

The Chairman requested that when a report was To Follow if possible could substantive elements be circulated to the Panel with the full report being circulated when available.

Cllr Jones requested that when reports were To Follow could the reasons be noted.

Cllr Jones also mentioned that the level of To Follow reports was not decreasing and it was agreed that Cllr Jones and the Managing Director would discuss if this was the case.

The Panel received a presentation on the latest Financial Update Cabinet report. The Panel were informed that there was a £828,000 projected overspend on the General Fund due to net overspends being forecast in service budgets.

There was a £153,000 pressure in the Communities Directorate that would be mitigated by over-achievement of income from parking fees and registrars charges. The contract for AFC had also overspent by £1,316,000.

There is a range of pressures in Children's Services for non DSG:

- Home to school transport £226,000
- Placements for young people £602,000
- Legal costs £162,000
- Agency costs £326,000

The Chairman mentioned that there had been an increase to the home to school transport budget but there was still a projected overspend. Cllr N Airey informed that officers had reviewed contracts for suitability and looked at policies for more independent travel. The September intake will impact on future budget.

Cllr Story asked about the agency overspend and was informed that seven social workers would soon be completing their qualification training as a result of the decision to invest in the Frontline training programme. This team of newly qualified social workers will replace seven agency workers. A further eight students are enrolled for the next Frontline cohort, building the pipeline for the future. AFC also used Frontline so this should help with future recruitment.

The Chairman mentioned that this was an excellent way to recruit enthusiastic young people and asked if there was an obligation for them to stay once qualified. The Panel were informed that there was no obligation for them to stay but benefits such as the POD system and being able to be put on correct pay scales due to the experience already gained would help.

Cllr Jones mentioned that with regards to placement pressures then the Government should indicate the impact of new legislation. In response the Panel were informed that the Government would say that it was a local issue. The pressure arose as it was not known how many parents wished their children to go back into education when the SEND reforms were introduced.

Cllr Bowden mentioned that at the Crime and Disorder O&S Panel Members were informed that the increase in parking income would be spent on transport.

Cllr E Wilson questioned the increased costs for AFC and was informed that this was due to the recent pension valuation by the actuary that resulted in an increase in pension contribution requirements from AFC.

Resolved unanimously: that the Children's Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet report and fully endorsed the recommendations in relation to items under their remit.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE - SCHOOLS

The Panel considered the Cabinet report relating to an update to the schools capital programme.

The Panel were informed that in July 2016, Cabinet approved a growth in the capital budget for secondary school places for expansions at six. This programme was designed to meet the demand arising from the population growth currently passing through the primary school system.

This report set out the detail of the tender returns for two of the schemes, at Charters academy and Cox Green academy. The report also sought approval to accept the tender for a section 106 funded scheme which will provide a total of 30 new places at Newlands Girls academy.

The report also outlined the planned schools maintenance programme that had been prioritised by need. The funds for this came from a decreasing government grant that was ring fenced. The Council decision not to provide additional funding for the expansion of Lowbrook Academy had resulted in the release of committed capital and the report requested Cabinet to redirect some of that funding to cover a shortfall in the budget for school maintenance schemes.

Cllr Jones questioned if the schemes in table 7, proposed maintenance programme, had been fully costed and was informed that the schemes had been reviewed and costed. Cllr Jones requested that officers meet with her to go over the costings and where the funds were coming from.

Cllr Story questioned why there was such a variance between costs per place, as shown in table 9. The Panel were informed that costs varied depending on the type of expansion work being undertaken, for example it would be cheaper to construct a lean to extension to an existing building than undertaking certain internal re-configuration of a school. There would also be other variances depending on each school's needs and building equipment needed for specific sites, for example Newlands was a restricted site. It was confirmed that value for money was taken into account when deciding to undertake an expansion programme.

Cllr N Airey and Mr P Loudon explained that Cox Green's expansion required significant infrastructure work and was a very compact site hence its cost per place was higher than some of the other schemes.

Cllr E Wilson mentioned that Holyport College cost £10k per place yet schemes on the list were well over £20k per place and although in response to questions at this meeting it had been explained he felt that residents would question the increased costs. He questioned if there was a limit to cost per place that we would say no to, why were we spending so much when there were places at other schools and what was the national average cost per place. In response the Panel were informed that the national average would be added to the Cabinet report, that it had been explained why there were variances in costs and that we had to consider parental choice when looking at school expansion. The expansion programme assumed that schools would be full by the time the programme of works was completed. A further report in September would show the need for planned expansion in primary and secondary schools.

Cllr E Wilson mentioned that all the schools being expanded were academies yet none of them were accessing school condition improvement funding. The Panel were informed that when a school was required to expand because of growth and need then it was the LEA who was responsible for funding. The Government would not fund expansion due to population growth. Academies within the borough have submitted applications to the Education and Skills Funding Agency but none had been successful.

Cllr Jones mentioned that Members needed to drill down the proposals to see what the money was being spent on and if this was a requirement for expanding a school.

Cllr E Wilson mentioned that there were no proposals to use modular buildings to expand schools. The Panel was informed that modular building have been and would be used when appropriate. The expansion programme was for building schools for the future and thus value for money long term options had been chosen.

Cllr Bowden mentioned that modern modular buildings could last for 100 years and if they had solar panels added they would generate income. Cllr Bowden also mentioned that it would have been useful to have had the whole project cost, not just building costs.

Cllr E Wilson mentioned that with regards to Lowbrook the report mentioned that £1.8 million had been allocated for the expansion but after the Council decision there was only a £1.1 million underspend; what happened to the £700k. Cllr N Airey informed that £150k had been spent on the land transfer with the remaining £550k being spent during phase 1 of the expansion programme.

Cllr E Wilson asked for confirmation that the £550k had been spent for an additional 30 places for last years intake and if they admissions problem in the area still existed. The Panel were informed that the school had not said they would not continue to have an additional class, if they decided they could continue with a two form entry. The school had been told to change their admissions policy and future reports would show there is no pressure in the Cox Green area.

Cllr E Wilson asked why the Council was spending £150k to purchase land it owned from Cox Green academy. The Panel were informed that when a school became an academy land was transferred on a 125 year lease and thus the Council had to purchase a section of land from Cox Green as the school was the lease holder. The piece of land transferred was land locked.

Cllr Jones mentioned that there had been a twitter message that £11 million was to be spent on a leisure centre at Charters School yet there had been no mention of this at scrutiny. The Panel were informed that there had been no decision made and that if there was a report it would be brought to scrutiny.

Resolved unanimously: that the Children’s Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel requested that the national average per pupil costs of building work be added to the report and also felt that more should be done to inform our residents about the Councils investment into school expansion.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.10 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....