

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2018

PRESENT: Councillors Eileen Quick (Chairman), Marion Mills (Vice-Chairman), Charles Hollingsworth, John Story, Edward Wilson and Wesley Richards

Also in attendance: Councillor Natasha Airey

Officers: Lynne Lidster, Kevin McDaniel and Andy Carswell

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Jones, Luxton and Pryer. Cllrs Hollingsworth and Story were attending as substitutes.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on November 21<sup>st</sup> 2017 were approved as a true and correct record.

### MINUTES OF THE JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL- EAST BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE

The Chairman informed Members that officers had agreed to hold a joint scrutiny panel between Slough and the Royal Borough as both authorities shared the same provider for community learning and skills services. Meeting attendees considered a report that outlined the changes and improvements that had been made to the service, and a series of recommendations that had been made. Members were informed that it was agreed the joint panel would meet twice a year and an annual report that would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels at Slough and the Royal Borough would be produced. It had been agreed that officers would decide on the timescales for producing the reports and arranging the meetings themselves.

The Vice Chairman stated she had attended the meeting and found it very worthwhile. The Chairman agreed and stated that it had been helpful to meet officers who were in charge of delivering services. Members were informed that attendance at training sessions and courses was now being monitored more effectively.

The contents of the minutes were noted by Members.

### BUDGET REPORT- 2018/19

The Director of Children's Services introduced the item and highlighted to Members the key aspects of the budget, and in particular those relevant to Children's Services. He stated:

- A 1.95 per cent increase in Council Tax – equivalent to £28.85 for a Band D property - had been proposed. This would mean the Royal Borough would have the lowest rate of Council Tax outside of London
- A 3 per cent Adult Social Care Precept was proposed

- Savings of £5.4million had been identified
- Resident parking would remain free and the Advantage card would be retained
- A range of services would continue to be provided by the ten Children's Centres
- The 14 libraries in the Royal Borough would remain open, some with amended opening times
- Road, bridge and lighting improvements would continue to be made, as would an expansion to CCTV provision
- The £300,000 grant funding would continue to be available to community organisations, and there would be increased support to the Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Increases to fees and charges would be capped at the 3.9 per cent Retail Price Index, unless market benchmarks could justify a higher increase. It was noted that parking charges in the Royal Borough were cheaper than those in neighbouring authority areas
- There would be a consultation on changing the Council Tax Benefit threshold from 10 per cent to 8.5 per cent
- There was a proposed expenditure of £350million up to 2025 on education, transport and infrastructure to help support the Borough Local Plan and the regeneration of Maidenhead town centre. Much of this figure would come through borrowing; however it was anticipated that the projected borrowing would be below £5million by 2025.

The Director of Children's Services said a large number of capital investments worth £54million would be undertaken between 2017-2020. However the Council would be able to recoup most of this from returns on housing across the Borough. Members were advised that the Council's debt was projected to be £200million at 2020. The Director of Children's Services advised Members that it was important to take into consideration the short term investments and savings being made against the long term picture of improvements to the Royal Borough.

Responding to a question from the Chairman regarding the apprenticeship levy, the Director of Children's Services informed Members that the figure of £280,000 quoted in the report related to the Council as an employer of apprentices.

Cllr Story asked the Director of Children's Services which improvements in the service that had been made over the past year was he most proud of. The Director of Children's Services said the most significant improvement was a better understanding of how to support families through earlier interventions and engagements. Earlier engagements led to fewer crisis cases being reported. As a result of this the number of children subject to protection plans had fallen from 153 to below 100. The Director of Children's Services identified the function of Children's Centres as being key to this, and confirmed that there was sufficient money in the budget to continue their funding. Regarding other achievements the Director of Children's Services highlighted continuing support for schools; 86 per cent were good or outstanding, with a third being outstanding, and none had been inspected as inadequate. Of those requiring improvement six were Academies; the Director of Children's Services stated that the Council was working with the Academy Trust to find improvements. The Director of Children's Services also informed Members that the number of complaints relating to children's services had halved in the last two years and there had been an overall improvement in the quality of work provided.

Cllr Story asked if particular schools were receiving funding to improve infrastructure as part of expansion plans. The Director of Children's Services said the Windsor Boys and Girls Schools had expanded and there were expansion plans for Charters, Cox Green and Furze Platt Senior Schools; however there had been delays in getting the appropriate planning permission for Charters. The Director of Children's Services also highlighted the community facility that had been incorporated into Wraysbury Primary School.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services explained that the budget had taken a long time to work through in order to ensure appropriate levels of funding for each service area, and she thanked officers for their diligence in preparing the budget. She said she was particularly pleased with the levels of funding available for children in care, particularly with regards to

protection plans, and home to school transport. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services stated that more social workers had been involved with training with the Royal Borough, which in turn had helped to fill vacancies.

Cllr E Wilson entered the meeting at 6.58pm.

Cllr Hollingsworth asked if full provision for SEND pupils had been accounted for in the budget. The Director of Children's Services said there was no extra funding mentioned in the budget as £450,000 had been secured through the Better Care Fund – which was jointly funded by the Council and CCG – and schools had provided a further £416,000. This had been deemed sufficient for 2018/19.

The Vice Chairman asked which areas had been identified by schools as being most in need of additional funding. The Director of Children's Services informed Members that schools and health colleagues had enquired about the ability to increase capacity in relation to healthcare needs. It had been identified that those with complex needs were causing the greatest delays; either because their cases were continually being put to the back of the queue, or because staff were tied up dealing with their case, which impacted on their ability to help other people. Members were also informed that access to mental health services for pupils had improved after being identified as a particular need; this was evidenced in a paper that was presented to the most recent Schools Forum. The Director of Children's Services also stated that the £416,000 that had been pooled by schools was to be used chiefly for funding services that would allow children experiencing difficulties to remain in mainstream education. Members were informed that there was an expectation that schools should be as inclusive as possible, and that pupils should only be taken out of a mainstream classroom environment if their needs were particularly complex. Government funds of £750,000 over the next three years would also help to fund this. Members were informed that Ascot schools were working on the concept of 'nurture groups' to facilitate this process. Members were informed that a number of key initiatives regarding inclusivity were to be launched at an event on April 19<sup>th</sup> which all were welcome to. Further details would be circulated on this when they were confirmed.

Cllr E Wilson asked if the risks associated with smaller schools had been considered while setting the budget. The Director of Children's Services said a strategy was being worked on through a working group and it was hoped this could be implemented for the start of the next academic year; therefore it was more likely there would be a reference to smaller schools in the next budget. Members were informed that it had been noted that some smaller schools were sharing specialist resources.

Responding to a question from Cllr E Wilson about the role of Achieving for Children, the Director of Children's Services stated that they had helped provide greater expertise in terms of social care. Their expertise and advice on best practice had led to a reduction in children's services cases from more than 1,000 to just under 800, allowing staff to focus on children in need. AfC had also had experience of using the virtual school. Members were informed that as a result of AfC's input there had been no need to employ an interim Director of Social Care, as had been planned. A permanent appointment had been made however.

Cllr E Wilson asked about the provisions for SEND pupils over the age of 16. The Director of Children's Services explained that they were considered under the age ranges of 16-18 and 18-25. This had been done since 2014 when the legislation changed to ensure SEND pupils up to the age of 25 who were capable of being in education should be given a place. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that this had placed additional pressures on the children's services budget; conversely however, this had taken pressure away from the adult social care services budget. Members were informed however that there were few provisions for 18 to 25 year olds in the local area. Regarding 16-18 year olds, the Director of Children's Services stated that a more diverse range of needs, many of which required more specialist provision, was being noticed. It was also anticipated there would be a greater need for provision in this sector in the coming years, as there was a particularly large cohort in the 13-15 age bracket who required provisions under SEND.

Cllr Hollingsworth asked which of the savings identified in Appendix F had been achieved. The Director of Children's Services stated that some staff in the Early Years team had retired but there had been no need to replace them, while additional savings had been made through the centralisation of funding for the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. Savings had also been made on the basis that 86 per cent of schools in the Royal Borough were good or outstanding, meaning less provision to improve standards was necessary. A reduction in necessary funding for the Education Welfare team had been identified following work on early interventions; there had been no requirement to replace a member of staff who left.

Cllr E Wilson asked what were the main pressure points that had been identified for budgeting over the next few years. The Director of Children's Services stated that ensuring inclusivity in mainstream schools for pupils with specialist needs, and maintaining early help and support services had been identified as the main areas where budget pinch points were likely. Responding to a question from the Chairman regarding children with complex needs, the Director of Children's Services stated that the Council always looked to find provisions for children within 20 miles of their homes. However due to some children's particular needs it was often necessary to place them in specialist settings, which were sometimes far outside the Royal Borough.

Regarding children outside mainstream education, the Director of Children's Services stated that the Council had use of the virtual school, which was used for pupils under its care. The Council had a Pupil Referral Unit for permanently excluded pupils and use was also made of PRUs in Slough and Buckinghamshire as there was the provision; however there was a low number of permanently excluded pupils in the Royal Borough.

The Chairman asked the Director of Children's Staff to thank officers for their hard work in preparing the budget report.

**It was:**

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Panel noted the report and approved that Cabinet approves:**

- i) Detailed recommendations contained in Appendix A which includes a Base Council Tax at band D of £933.42, including a 1.95% increase of £17.85.**
- ii) Adult Social Care Precept of 3% (an increase of £28.85 on the £45.89 precept included in the 2017/18 budget) to be included in the Council's budget proposals, making this levy the equivalent of £74.74 at band D.**
- iii) Fees and Charges contained in Appendix E.**
- iv) Capital Programme, shown in appendices I and J, for the financial year commencing April 2018.**
- v) Prudential borrowing limits set out in Appendix L.**
- vi) Business rate tax base calculation, detailed in Appendix P, and its use in the calculation of the Council Tax Requirement in Appendix A.**
- vii) Deputy Director and Head of Finance in consultation with the Lead Members for Finance and Children's Services is authorised to amend the total schools budget to reflect actual Dedicated School Grant levels.**
- viii) Responsibility to include the precept from the Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority in the overall Council Tax charges is delegated to the Lead Member for Finance and Deputy Director and Head of Finance once the precept is announced.**

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 7.38 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....