

ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN JOINT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 14 March 2018.

PRESENT:

RBKuT

Councillor Kevin Davis (Chairman)

Councillor Richard Hudson

Councillor Margaret Thompson

RBW&M

Councillor David Evans

Councillor Natasha Airey

Councillor Phillip Bicknell (for Councillor Dudley)

LBRuT

Councillor Paul Hodgins (Co-Chair)

Councillor Stephen Speak

Councillor Susan Chappell

Also present:

Charlie Adan, Alison Alexander, Nick Whitfield, Rob Henderson, Ian Dodds, Mark Maidment, Mandy Skinner, Chris Smith, Lucy Kourpas, Elizabeth Brandill-Pepper, Kirsty Hogg, David Cook, Chris Smith

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Dudley sent apologies and was substituted for by Councillor Bicknell.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

22. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING

The minutes from the meeting on 6th December were agreed and signed.

23. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

24. AFC TREASURY PLAN - RESERVED MATTER

Lucy Kourpas introduced this item, which is a Reserved Matter delegated to the Joint Committee for decision. The Treasury Plan is an essential part of the financial governance of the Company and enables the owning Councils to exercise control over the Company's financial arrangements. The Plan needs to be approved at least annually and whenever events require a review. The Plan was last approved and reviewed in September 2017 and the key features for the new Plan remain the same. Approval of the Plan is an element that supports the 'Teckal' exemption.

The Revolving Credit Facility (RCF) provides the primary funding for AfC, and the only funding in the foreseeable future. The RCF sets out the terms for AfC borrowing from the Councils. The shares are to remain the same for this Plan, as the changes are less than 5% for each Council.

RESOLVED: The Joint Committee noted the contents of the report, considered the Revolving Credit Facility and approved the Treasury Plan.

25. RESERVED MATTER - APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Lucy Kourpas introduced this item, explaining that the appointment of an auditor for AfC is a Band 3 Reserved Matter that is delegated to the Joint Committee for decision.

The current auditor is Grant Thornton UK LLP (GT), who were originally appointed in 2014 for a period of 3 years to end with the 2016/17 financial year audit. GT were appointed as they were auditors for both Richmond and Kingston Councils and there were cost efficiencies from the 'group'. AfC is about to start the procurement process for new auditors, who need to be in place for handover from GT, to start on 9th July. The contract period will be 3 years, with the option to extend for a further two years. GT are part of the ESPS framework and there is the possibility that they might be re-appointed, in which case there will not be a handover.

As the dates of AfC's Audit and Risk Committee and Board and the Joint Committee mean that there are more than the 28 days statutory period between the despatch of AfC's accounts and the meeting of the Joint Committee, the decision to appoint an auditor needs to be delegated to officers. The terms of reference for the Joint Committee provide for this and it is suggested that the decision to is delegated to the Chief Executives of the owning Councils.

In response to member questions, Lucy Kourpas informed the Joint Committee that it is mandatory to reappoint auditors every three years, and Mark Maidment added that certain internal controls are required and that auditors must change every 10 years.

RESOLVED: The Joint Committee noted the contents of the report and the proposed procurement route and agreed to the delegation of the decision to appoint an auditor for AfC to the Chief Executives of the three owning Councils.

26. AFC BUSINESS PLAN PRESENTATION

Ian Dodds gave a slide presentation, giving context for the AfC Business Plan including; service quality, regulatory compliance, service developments, financial sustainability, business opportunities and operational effectiveness.

The Business Plan shows the contract budget for the next year as being £46,283,000 for Kingston, £51,964,000 for Richmond and £33,779,000 for Windsor and Maidenhead. These figures take into account planned efficiency savings and demand pressure for each Council.

The strategic beliefs are about building resilience so that families and communities can support children without the need for costly, statutory interventions and develop more inclusive services for children and young people with disabilities (SEND), complex needs and challenging behaviours. The strategic beliefs also include creating local provision and supporting children and young people to develop independence. For the Company, the strategic belief is to develop the skills and resources the company needs to deliver efficient, cost effective and financially sustainable children's services.

For each project the following would be considered:

- Benefit or outcome to be achieved
- Key success measured
- Financial investment required (GANT charts to be used)
- Identified financial saving
- Service lead
- Milestones and timescales

To develop resilience the Signs of Safety practice model, family-based solutions and systemic family therapy would be used, consistency of social work practice would be developed (sharing best practice) and emerging mental health needs considered.

In response to members' questions, Ian Dodds confirmed that the work to be carried out would be informed by the recent government Green Paper on CAMHS, although the final version was awaited. Some programmes would be completed more quickly than others and the Mayor of London initiative, 'Thrive London' and any additional resources available would be considered. The overall aim was to prevent children and young people needing intervention such as becoming looked after, and progress would be checked (through target setting) to ensure the programme was working. The aim was also to improve recruitment and retention of staff within AfC.

Members noted the importance of co-ordinating work with the CCG.

The programme for inclusion would provide specialist SEND resource bases, respite care facilities, early intervention pre-early health care plan (EHCP), reduce gaps in educational achievement (using the pupil premium), alternative education provision (improving consistency across the boroughs) and engagement with parents, schools etc around the inclusion agenda.

The capacity programme includes sustainable school place planning, IFA and increasing foster care capacity (to reduce residential provision requirement), placement commissioning (to ensure the right number of placements available), residential children's homes, supported accommodation for care leavers and integrated health and social care.

In response to members' questions, Ian Dodds explained the importance of finding sustainable school places.

Nick Whitfield noted that new members (after the election) would benefit from training about school admissions. There were issues about parents who put local grammar schools on their application forms, and sent children who did not get in to private schools – and how these cases were included in the figures. Pre-school provision outside the AfC area also could not be measured for the effect on data. A better narrative was needed around school places.

Ian Dodds explained the programme for independence, which covered SEN transport criteria, vocational opportunities and pathways and support and skill development for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). This would require systemic leadership, including other areas such as housing services.

Ian Dodds explained the resources programme, aiming for a permanent

and resilient workforce, making HR and ICT services the best they can be, support and skills for UASC, improving the organisational culture and growing the Company and diversification.

In response to members' questions, Ian Dodds noted that the organisational culture improvements would be developing new ways of working. For example, supporting all levels of the workforce to take more responsibility, improving career pathways so that practitioners could step up to management roles, removing any 'blame culture' and building resilience.

Rob Henderson also explained that independence included giving staff the ability to promote independence – looking at what skills and abilities were required to enable a child to stay with their family or return to their family. Parents would also be encouraged to take responsibility.

Nick Whitfield noted the need to improve the interface between the Councils and AfC, and that the Councils needed to be aware of what AfC could provide. Charlie Adan noted that the organisational culture was learned behaviour and the responses to stimuli, such as bad press creating a culture of risk aversion. Charlie Adan also noted the growth agenda in Kingston, which was expected to benefit the most vulnerable children.

RESOLVED: The Joint Committee noted the verbal report.

27. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

A member requested that key performance data from all three Councils should be brought to the Joint Committee for discussion, as it was the only meeting where all three boroughs' members were together. Sharing data would facilitate sharing of best practice. A member suggested that a different area's performance could be examined at different Joint Committee meetings. After discussion, it was felt this might be carried out at a separate workshop session.

A member also requested that information regarding budget setting should be brought to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

Date of next meeting: 11th July 2018 at 11am – Windsor and Maidenhead

Members were informed of the rotation of clerkship to Windsor and Maidenhead for the July meeting.

RESOLVED: That a workshop session on performance data should be held after the next Joint Committee meeting. That budget setting information should be brought to the next Joint Committee meeting.

CHAIRMAN