



**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
13 JANUARY 2023**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR R J KENDRICK (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors W H Gray (Vice-Chairman), S A J Blackburn, R J Cleaver, Mrs J E Killey, C Matthews, N Sear, T J N Smith, J Tyrrell, M A Whittington and R A Wright

Added Members

Church Representative: Mr M Kyle

Parent Governor Representatives:

Councillors: Mrs P Bradwell and S Roe were also in attendance.

Officers in attendance:-

Matthew Clayton (Admissions & Education Provision Manager), Linda Dennett (Assistant Director - Children's Health and Commissioning), Karen Dowman (Team Manager, Children with Disabilities), Charlotte Gray (Head of Service – Children's Commissioning), Tracy Johnson (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Neal Kathel (Property Team Leader, Property Development), Dave Pennington (Head of Property Development), Mark Popplewell (Head of Finance (Children's Services)), Mark Rainey (Commissioning Manager – Commercial), Heather Sandy (Executive Director of Children's Services) and Martin Smith (Assistant Director for Children's Education)

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence received.

23 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest declared at this point in proceedings.

24 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 2 DECEMBER 2022

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 December 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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25 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, COMMUNITY SAFETY, PROCUREMENT AND MIGRATION AND CHIEF OFFICERS

The Chairman announced that Mr. Martin, Kyle, headteacher of St. Faith and St. Martin Church of England Junior School, Lincoln, had been appointed by the diocese as the new Church Representative to sit on the Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Councillor Mrs. P Bradwell OBE, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration informed the Committee that a youth offending service inspection was conducted this week and thanked all officers and partners involved, especially the Youth Offending Service. The Lincolnshire Secure Unit had also been subject to inspection. The results of the inspection were pending, although a positive result was expected.

26 CHILDREN'S SERVICES BUDGET PROPOSALS 2023/24

The Committee received a report from Heather Sandy, Executive Director – Children's Services, which set out the Council's Budget Proposals for 2023/2024 with specific focus on the budget implications for the Council's Children's Services activities. Mark Popplewell, Strategic Finance Lead – Children's Services, was also in attendance for this item. It was reported that:

- The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023/2024 was published on 19 December 2022 and the Executive had considered the budget proposals on 4 January 2023. Current budget proposals were estimated as further budgetary information was required from Lincolnshire's District Councils.
- The 2022 Autumn Statement delivered by the government was more positive than expected for children's services provision which allowed greater detail in the financial plans for the next two years. Forecasts for the third and fourth year were being approached with caution given the significant financial uncertainty of current market conditions.

The Committee considered the risks facing Children's Services which could impact the budget proposals. The following areas of high risk were identified:

1. Children in Care (CiC) – this was considered a key financial risk given the increasing number of CiC, complexity, type and cost of placements, and rising local demand which was difficult to predict. It was expected that the number of CiC would continue to increase due to population growth and migration into the county through the national transfer scheme. It was assured by the Executive Director for Children's Services that assumptions had been built into the budget based on local and national trends over the last year, which was why a cost pressure of £.404m had been

identified. A range of proactive work was being undertaken to support families and prevent children needing to come into care, such as the Early Help Offer and edge of care support. In addition, placement planning was reviewed weekly to ensure options for reducing the number of high-cost external placements were considered. These pressures were being addressed through ongoing CiC transformation work, which included two new children's homes due to be opened in 2023.

2. Social Work Workforce: a financial risk was identified in recruiting and retaining social workers due to the use of agency workers to cover staffing shortages which were more expensive. Consequently, there were now additional social care apprenticeships available and an uplift in pay for social workers in frontline teams being provided to deter staff from agency work where possible. A number of social care apprentices were drawn from other teams in Children's Services such as Early Help, which were easier to recruit to. Assurance was given that these measures were starting to stabilize the social work workforce.
3. Inflation: increased costs due to inflationary pressures was also identified as a financial risk; despite that some inflationary costs were beginning to normalise, they continued to require close monitoring. Significant workforce costs were identified, and inflation and the staff pay award were being built into the budget. The majority of services were delivered in-house meaning the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan had already built-in staff pay assumptions. Furthermore, there was an array of commissioned activities for Children's Services which impacted on the Council's budget, however contractual inflationary costs for these commissioned services had been built into the budget proposals in line with Council-wide recommendations. It was assured work was ongoing with partners to monitor the situation through contract meeting to ensure they remain financially sustainable.

Given the financial and inflationary challenges facing Local Authority maintained schools, the Government's Energy Bill Relief Scheme provided support to schools with rising energy costs, however the energy cap changes from the end of March 2023 would create additional costs for schools. Resultantly, the government had responded to this change by offering additional funding to schools to spend on energy upgrades to help save on energy bills going forward. Schools were also having to manage increased staffing costs and overcome the challenge of teacher recruitment, and there were around ten maintained schools in Lincolnshire which were experiencing a budget deficit. LCC would set a budget recovery plans with these schools on an individual basis. As the Local Authority was not allowed to fund overspends in maintained schools, it was assured there would be no financial risk to the Council. The Autumn 2022 statement had announced a £2bn increase in schools funding in each of 2023/24 and 2024/25 to respond to increased costs, especially through staff pay awards and utilities, which was welcomed.

4. National Funding Formula – the affordability of the policy decision to continue adopting the national funding formula for mainstream schools was being assessed. The Local Authority had to set an affordable schools’ formula and the Local Authority would continue to adopt the same principles as in prior years to ensure fairness in approach. An executive Councillor decision would be taken on the affordability steps, and the funding formula would be published by the 28 February 2023 deadline.

During consideration of the report, the following was noted:

- The Committee expressed concern with the loss of the Local Authorities School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant and the subsequent impact this would have on supporting schools judged as inadequate or requiring improvement. Assurance was provided that maintained schools had supported the Council to repurpose the de-delegated budgets for maintained schools to maintain the provision for school improvement. Members were informed that the de-delegation budget would typically be used to provide other school improvements to schools, such as funding an interim headteacher services, however there was less demand for these services over recent years due to increased stability in the sector.
- It was noted that the Council was receiving additional grant funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to enable children’s service to provide support to other Local Authorities, such as North East Lincolnshire Council. This grant funding was separate to the budget proposals for Children’s Services and was reviewed every three months. The current funding was agreed until the end of March 2023 and work was ongoing to assess what further support would be required for the six-month period following March 2023.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee supports the Children’s Services Budget Proposals for 2023/24.
2. That the relevant comments be passed onto the Executive for consideration on 7 February 2022.

27 ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOLS, ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION AND CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Committee received a report from Jo Carr, Team Leader – Inclusion and Attendance Team, on the School Attendance, Elective Home Education and Children Missing Annual Report for the 2021/22 academic year. It was reported that:

- A strategy to increase attendance was launched in line with the ‘Working Together to Improve School Attendance document which was released in May 2022. This strategy

would be implemented by September 2023 and a pilot project was underway to help schools adjust.

- School attendance had not returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- The strategy would aid the recruitment of attendance officers who would facilitate a closer, collaborative relationship with schools from a multi-agency perspective.
- 87% of schools in Lincolnshire had signed up to a DfE scheme which recorded live attendance data and LCC was adopting a proactive approach in identifying and targeting individual schools to help improve attendance.
- The number of children missing education (CME) had increased with many cases being attributed to children moving which included families urgently returning to their home country without alerting schools. LCC was working to improve how CME were reported.
- Absent notices had increased as more holidays were being taken in term time.
- The number of children on reduced timetables had increased, and anxiety and mental health difficulties were cited as being responsible. It was emphasised that reduced timetables were primarily an approach which offered pupils support in eventually returning to full-time education.
- There was an increased number of children in elective home education which initially had peaked during the pandemic. Assurance was provided that ensuring parents were fully informed and prepared before transferring their children to elective home education remained a priority.

During consideration of the report, the following was noted:

- Members questioned whether elective home educated children were not returning to school following the pandemic. The Team Leader – Inclusion and Attendance Team assured that targeted support meetings were held in these cases to urge children to return to school, albeit with reduced timetables to help address potential anxieties about returning. Emotional issues were exacerbated by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, although it was assured that the support teams were proactive in early interventions to these pupils.
- Government plans to legislate a ‘Children Not In School’ register had been pushed back and LCC was working through the Association of Directors of Children’s Services to encourage the DfE to move plans forward.
- The remaining 13% of Lincolnshire schools that had not signed onto the DfE live data attendance register were being urgently contacted by LCC to encourage them to register ahead of the pilot scheme launch.
- Members sought assurance on whether secondary school children in elective home education were receiving a sufficient level of education, and whether they eventually

returned to classroom teaching. The Team Leader – Inclusion and Attendance Team informed the Committee that there was a key worker who supported specifically key stage 4 pupils who were home educated. Members were informed that these young people rarely returned to a classroom setting, although many accessed higher education.

- Increased CME reflected better absence reporting and LCC was working to further improve the reporting and categorising CME. It was further clarified that a pupil was classed as a CME if they had not attended school without explanation for 24 school days.
- The statistic for CME in August would be re-assessed as schools were not open during this period. The Executive Director – Children’s Services agreed that referrals of CME significantly reduced in August as schools were closed and unable to make referrals. It was agreed that Children’s Services would explore reporting annually from April to ensure the narrative surrounding attendance better reflected the trend.
- Members raised questions surrounding the reduction in home visits despite there being increased numbers of pupils in elective home education. The Team Leader – Inclusion and Attendance informed the Committee that LCC did not have the legal right to visit and check on the child, although it was assured that children’s services maintained a good working relationship with most families. Assurance was given that failed visits led to the pupil being re-classified as a CME which gave LCC the legal right to conduct a check.
- A child would be classified as a CME if they were withdrawn from formal education due to a breakdown in relations between the family and the school, which involved direct home visits and ongoing support in rebuilding the relationship or supporting the family in their applications to other schools.
- The new Attendance Team would monitor targeted schools which included independent, maintained, and special schools.
- Upon members requests, the report would be rectified to reflect ‘Lincolnshire branding’.
- It was agreed that further detail in regard to the increased number of elected home educated children would be circulated to the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be endorsed by the Committee
2. That the relevant comments be taken into consideration by Officers in finalising the strategy.

The Committee considered a report from Tracy Johnson, Senior Scrutiny Officer, which invited members to consider and comment on the content of its work programme, to ensure that scrutiny activity was focused where it could be of greatest benefit.

The following amendments were made to the published work programme:

- The Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership's annual update had been moved forward to the 3 March meeting
- The item regarding the performance of academy schools listed under 'items to be scheduled' would be incorporated into the Lincolnshire Schools Performance 2021-22 report which was also listed on the 3 March agenda.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee's work programme be reviewed and agreed upon.

29 CONSIDERATION OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that if they were present there could be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

30 RECOMMISSIONING OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES SERVICES

Consideration was given to the exempt report.

The Committee raised a number of questions which were answered by the Officers present

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee support the recommendations to the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration as set out in the report
2. That the Committee's comments be passed on to the Executive Councillor in relation to this item.

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31 EXPANSION OF BRANSTON COMMUNITY ACADEMY

Consideration was given to the exempt report

The Committee raised a number of questions which were answered by the Officers present.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee support the recommendations to the Leader of the Council as set out in the report
2. That the Committee's comments be passed on to the Leader of the Council in relation to this item

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm