

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 9 November 2022

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Abdullatif, Alijah, Amin, Bano, Cooley, Hewitson, Johnson, Judge, Sadler and Sharif Mahamed

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mr G Cleworth, Parent Governor Representative

Co-opted Non-Voting Members:

Miss S Iltaf, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children Services

Claire McNicholls, Named Nurse (Safeguarding), Manchester NHS Foundation Trust

Detective Chief Inspector Ian McNabb, Greater Manchester Police (GMP)

Apologies:

Councillors Gartside and Lovecy

Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

CYP/22/50 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2022.

CYP/22/51 Revenue Budget Update - Cover Report

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that set out the financial challenge facing the Council, the latest forecast position, and the next steps.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- The Council was forecasting an estimated budget shortfall of £44m in 2023/24, £85m in 2024/25, and £112m by 2025/26. After the use of c£16m smoothing reserves in each of the three years, this gap reduced to £28m in 2023/24, £69m in 2024/25 and £96m by 2025/26;
- Setting out the high-level position;
- Describing the officer-identified potential savings options to reduce the budget gap totalling £42.3m over three years;
- Noting that even after these proposals there remained a budget gap of £7m to close to get to a balanced budget in 2023/24 and further savings options would be developed between now and January 2023 and be reported back to scrutiny committees in February; and

- Each scrutiny committee was invited to consider the current proposed changes which were within its remit and to make recommendations to the Executive before it agreed to the final budget proposals in February 2023.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/22/52 Children and Education Services Budget 2023/24

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which was the first in the cycle for the budget programme 2023-26. It set out an overview of the services within the remit of this Committee and their key priorities. The budget growth assumptions in the Medium-Term Financial Plan were set out. The report provided a draft set of officer proposals for further savings for 2023-26, developed in the context of the financial challenge facing the Council.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Service overview and priorities;
- Service budget and proposed changes;
- Future opportunities and risks;
- Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG); and
- Workforce implications.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- Concern and frustration about the Council being forced into the position of having to make cuts over many years and the impact of this on children and families, particularly when they were also facing the cost-of-living crisis;
- Concern about the financial position that schools were in and what could be done to continue to make improvements to schools with less money;
- Noting that Manchester's Children's Services had recently been judged as "good" by Ofsted, were there concerns about maintaining that improvement, especially in light of the cuts that would need to be made;
- The impact of cuts to youth services;
- Recruitment of foster carers and support for kinship carers;
- How could the budget pressures in the High Needs Block of the DSG be addressed;
- Concern about the costs of travel to school for children whose families had been placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in a different area;
- Concern about how some academies managed their budgets; and
- Concern about families not being able to afford school uniforms and that many families who were on low incomes were not eligible for free school meals.

The Chair highlighted the combination of pressures affecting families and the importance of universal free school meals. She stated that the Council had been forced by the government to make cuts over a number of years, that services had been cut to the bone, the impact this was having on children and families and that it

was not possible to keep finding more cuts. She stated that the government had said it was committed to levelling up in the most deprived areas but that this had not happened.

The Executive Member for Children Services reported that the Council had made youth services a big priority and that it was very disappointing to have to be considering this reduction; however, he highlighted that the Council had significantly increased its investment in youth services in 2022 so, while this proposal represented a decrease in this additional investment, it was still a higher budget for youth services than in previous years. He expressed concern that, while the Council was working with partners to improve the lives of children and young people, these partner organisations were also experiencing funding cuts, which made this more challenging.

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services acknowledged the concerns that Members had raised, and the challenges presented; however, he reported that Children's Services had officers who were very committed to Manchester and to children and young people. He advised that the Council had in place good partnership working, leadership from senior officers, political leadership and a focus on the quality of social work practice. He reported that the first priority when considering budget options was always that children and young people in the city were safe. He advised that his service was focused on the well-being of children, rather than achieving Ofsted judgements, which should validate what his team already knew about how they were performing. He highlighted the valuable role of foster carers and the need to consider what the cost-of-living rise would mean for them. He reported that their mileage costs had already been reviewed, along with an inflation uplift from next year, and that consideration was being given to what more could be done in the immediate and short-term. He suggested that the Committee might want to consider a report on foster carers at a future meeting. The Deputy Director of Children's Services highlighted the recommendations in the Care Review about benefits available to kinship carers, advising that it was expected that the government would provide a response to this later in the year.

The Head of Finance (Children, Education and Schools) reported that many Headteachers were very concerned about their schools' future financial position. She advised that most of the DSG was distributed to schools, that a smaller amount was retained by the Council for the services it provided and that the Council was spending more than the amount it received on these services, with the High Needs Block being an area of overspend. She outlined some of the support and advice that the Council was providing to schools, including on budgets, energy costs and procurement. In response to a question from the Chair, she explained how schools with excessive balances were dealt with, with some money being clawed back from 11 schools.

In response to a Member's question about support for children arriving in the UK, the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services highlighted the Council's pledge to support Looked After Children and Care Leavers with insecure immigration status. He reported that specific commissioned support was provided to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and that the Council's New Arrivals Team had been highly commended in a national awards scheme. In response to a question from the Chair about the High Needs Block, he advised that the number of

children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) had increased by around 2000 in recent years and he outlined how the Council was now working with partners on joint commissioning for children who needed a specialist provision, with costs being shared. He clarified that Home To School transport was specifically for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) but that families who were re-located to a different area from their school could receive a free travel pass.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed Members that the Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services and the Education Business Partner were currently auditing schools on their offer for free school uniforms. He acknowledged the Member's concern about the limited eligibility for free school meals and expressed support for a universal offer of free school meals. In response to a Member's question, he advised that Manchester paid a good rate to its foster carers compared to some local authorities but would be looking into making an one-off additional payment.

Decisions

1. To note the report, subject to Members' comments.
2. To recommend that Councillors lobby the government to address the issues raised.
3. Noting that the Committee is not expecting a further budget report until February 2023, to request that Councillors be kept updated on the financial situation outside of the meetings.

CYP/22/53 LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) Annual Report 2021-2022

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an overview and analysis of the management of allegations against adults who worked with children in a paid or voluntary capacity in Manchester, for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. This included how effective the safeguarding partnership was in discharging its statutory responsibilities. The report considered the learning and development over the last twelve months and set the priorities for 2022-2023 based on the analysis of activity.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Keeping children safe;
- Overview of enquiries and referrals data;
- Managing allegations;
- Service reflection;
- Service achievements; and
- Key priority areas.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- What happened in situations where an allegation could not be proven;
- Information-sharing and support on safeguarding for voluntary organisations and faith groups; and
- Were there any concerns about under-reporting.

The Service Lead (Safeguarding) reported that LADO investigations were multi-agency, including the individual's organisation, and that, in cases where allegations were not proven, any training needs, for example, understanding that they should not be alone with children, would still be identified. She informed Members about the training that was available for organisations, including sessions to make them aware of the role of the LADO and that they could ring the LADO for advice if there was anything they were not sure about.

The Strategic Lead (Safeguarding and Practice Improvement) advised that, although they could not be sure of what was not being reported, when compared to other north-west councils, Manchester appeared to be doing well in terms of people knowing about and using the service. She advised that they wanted to be able to focus on prevention, helping organisations to have recruitment and work practices which kept children safe, and making parents aware of what standards should be put in place for groups involving children.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Service Lead (Safeguarding) advised that in the previous year the LADO had received no referrals from Youth Justice and Youth Work but that, following training, enquiries and referrals from these areas had increased. She agreed with a point from the Chair about using a range of methods, such as billboards and libraries, to make people aware of the safeguarding measures that they needed to put in place if they were running a group for children and young people. In response to a question from the Chair about private tuition, she advised that the service had a responsibility in relation to making parents aware of safeguarding, including when arranging private tuition for their children, and the role of the LADO. The Chair advised that information should also be provided in other languages.

Decisions

1. To note the report, including the progress and impact being achieved by the LADO service in Manchester.
2. To agree the goals set out for 2021/2022 with regards to the continuous drive for improvement of service delivery and the impact on the children's workforce and children.

CYP/22/54 Adoption Counts Annual Report

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which fulfilled the reporting obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Contextual information;
- Performance;
- Quality of children's reports;
- Marketing, recruitment and assessment of adopters;
- Practice developments;
- Adoption Panel;
- Adoption Support;
- Recommendations; and
- Governance and future opportunities.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- The importance of providing training on developmental trauma;
- The recruitment of potential adopters from a range of communities, including work in mosques in north Manchester to encourage people to consider adoption, and that this kind of work should be replicated elsewhere;
- The importance of making people aware of the package of support that Manchester offered to adoptive parents; and
- The importance of life story work.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services expressed his support for work to recruit adopters from diverse communities through community leaders, which he advised, Adoption Counts and the councils wanted to continue. In response to a Member's question on how many black children had been adopted by non-black families, he advised that he could obtain this information and provide it. He outlined the support available to adopters before and after adoption, including high quality training and support in relation to trauma, and confirmed the use of an ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) trauma-informed approach in the service. In response to a Member's question, he advised that there were a range of factors leading to the increase in Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). He recognised the importance of life story work and advised that there had been a focus on the quality of this area of work for some time. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services shared positive comments from an Ofsted inspector about a Later Life letter they had seen as part of their inspection.

In response to a Member's question about the adoption of older children, including cases where a foster family wanted to adopt a young person they were fostering, the Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that this should remain open as an option for an older child, if it would meet the child's needs and give them a sense of permanency. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services highlighted that, after a child had been living with a foster carer for 12 months, the foster carer could apply for adoption without needing the permission of the local authority.

In response to questions from the Chair, the Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that there was a sophisticated advertising campaign to recruit potential adopters, including targeted advertising on social media, and work to find people to

adopt sibling groups. In response to a further question, he reported that there were still some delays in legal proceedings but that these were easing.

Decision

To note the report, subject to the above comments.

CYP/22/55 Manchester Complex Safeguarding Hub

The Committee received a presentation of the Strategic Lead (Complex Safeguarding) and Claire McNicholls, Named Nurse (Safeguarding) on the Manchester Complex Safeguarding Hub Annual Report 2021/2022.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- Overview of the Complex Safeguarding Hub;
- Partnership arrangements;
- Governance, accountability and assurance arrangements;
- Performance and outcomes;
- Impact; and
- Priorities 2022/2023.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- Grooming via social media;
- Disproportionality in terms of referrals in relation to young people from black and minority backgrounds and that it would be useful to receive an update when more work had been done in relation to this;
- What support was available for families of children who were being exploited by criminal gangs;
- Support for child victims with SEND, in particular from the police; and
- How to increase awareness, for example of the signs to look out for in the exploitation of children and new online threats, including engaging with parents, communities and faith organisations.

The Strategic Lead of the Complex Safeguarding Hub explained that the methods used to target children for exploitation were dynamic and that, in particular since the pandemic, exploitation of children had moved online in relation to both child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual exploitation (CSE). In response to a question about why referrals for CSE were much lower than for CCE, she reported that this kind of exploitation could often be hidden. She reported that very young children often now had devices, that social media and games were used to target children and that work was taking place to raise awareness about these risks. She outlined the support available for families whose children were being exploited by criminal gangs, including Early Help, support from a Social Worker and commissioned early intervention support.

Detective Chief Inspector Ian McNabb from GMP informed Members about support which would be available for families in relation to CCE from the not-for-profit

organisation Catch22. He highlighted some of the challenges for the police in dealing with CCE and the need to look at a range of ways to respond to it, including disruption. In response to the question about children with SEND, he advised that the police had made significant improvements in how it dealt with vulnerable victims and he outlined some of the approaches that could be used, such as finding the best way to communicate with the child, ensuring the child was supported through the process and looking for other evidence. In response to a Member's question about "paedophile hunters", he reported that most cases ended in successful prosecutions, although sometimes these cases did present additional risks for the police in managing the perpetrator and in the prosecution, due to the way the evidence was presented. He advised that a case-by-case assessment was carried out in these situations. In response to the question about the use of social media in the exploitation of children, he advised that a lot of work was taking place on this, including at a regional, national and international level. In response to a question from the Chair about parents who colluded with an abuser, he advised that this would have to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, working with partners, with the safety of the child underpinning the approach. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services reported that the safeguarding and welfare of children was the first priority and, while wanting to work with parents, if they were not able to safeguard their child, the Council had a statutory duty to intervene.

The Executive Member for Children's Services recognised the importance of raising awareness of safeguarding, including the evolving risks in relation to social media. He stated that it was important to hear young people's voices and informed Members about a young people-led safeguarding awareness conference which had been organised by Manchester Safeguarding Partnership.

The Strategic Head of Early Help advised that they were utilising some of the successful approaches to community awareness raising which had been used in relation to modern slavery and human trafficking, working with organisations who identified community champions and faith-based leaders. She reported that they were using social media, targeted radio programmes and local groups, in addition to work with foster carers and schools. In response to a question from the Chair, she informed the Committee about place-based work taking place in part of the city on early prevention, working with a range of partners.

Claire McNicholls, Named Nurse (Safeguarding) informed the Committee how, in response to CSE referrals decreasing, the Specialist Nurse and Social Worker had visited hospitals across the city to raise awareness, including promoting the risk tool staff could use to identify exploitation. She also informed Members about the training package on complex safeguarding which had recently been developed.

The Strategic Lead of the Complex Safeguarding Hub outlined a range of work to raise awareness and reported that the Hub gathered information on emerging themes and shared this information.

Decision

To note the report, subject to the above comments.

CYP/22/56 Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report contained key decisions within the Committee's remit, responses to previous recommendations and the Committee's work programme, which the Committee was asked to approve.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme.