

# **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

## **Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 8 February 2023**

### **Present:**

Councillor Reid – in the Chair  
Councillors Abdullatif, Alijah, Amin, Bano, Bell, Cooley, Hewitson, Johnson, Judge, Lovecy, Sadler and Sharif Mahamed

### **Co-opted Voting Members:**

Mr G Cleworth, Parent Governor Representative  
Mr Y Yonis, Parent Governor Representative

### **Co-opted Non-Voting Members:**

Miss S Iltaf, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

### **Also present:**

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People  
Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Finance and Resources  
Jordan Navarro, Parent Carer Forum  
Tom Dainty, Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership

### **Apologies:**

Councillor Gartside  
Canon S Mapledoram, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester  
Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

### **CYP/23/6     Minutes**

### **Decision**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023.

### **CYP/23/7     Annual report on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Education which outlined the continued work coproduced with parents/carers and children/young people to improve the experience of children with SEND and their families and provided information on the local offer available to support them to achieve these outcomes. The report also provided an update on progress with actions following the Local Area SEND inspection in November 2021 and ILACs inspection in March 2022 as well as an update on the new inspection framework for SEND.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- New inspection framework;
- Overall school population with SEND;
- Provision in Manchester;
- Education;
- Health;

- Care;
- Joint commissioning;
- Coproduction with parents, carers, children and young people; and
- Next steps.

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

- To welcome the positive report and thank everyone involved for the work that had been done;
- Children who had not yet been assessed as having SEND and were not receiving the support they and their families needed;
- Concern about children with SEND in Elective Home Education;
- Preparation for adulthood, including moving towards greater independence and transition to adult social care, where necessary;
- The benefits of parents receiving support from other parents with children with SEND, including recognising the work of the Parent Carer Forum;
- The barriers to accessing activities for children with SEND, including children who were neurodiverse, and the benefits of projects which enabled them to access physical activities such as climbing and gymnastics;
- Families with English as an Additional Language; and
- To request that a breakdown of children with SEND by ethnicity be included in a future report.

The SEND Lead reported that there were some waiting lists for assessment, particularly in relation to the social communication pathway, which included autism, and that these had been lengthened because of the pandemic. She reported that once children were on the pathway the experience and outcomes were more positive. She advised that, due to the pandemic, children had experienced much less social interaction, and, therefore, more children, particularly children in early years, were displaying difficulties in communication and interaction with their peers and the level of referrals into a range of services had significantly increased. She reported that the Council was working with a range of partners, including the health service, schools and parents, to ensure that needs were met while children were waiting for a diagnosis, including providing training for schools and special schools supporting mainstream schools. She also reported that the Riding the Rapids course for parents and carers of children with autism had been extended to those who were waiting for a diagnosis and that parents and schools could refer a child to the M-Thrive hubs if they were concerned about their well-being while they were waiting for a diagnosis. She informed Members about the SEND information, advice and support service, which, she advised, could provide interpreters where necessary, and SEND Local Offer drop-ins, which were another way for parents to get advice and information in a range of community languages and which were attended by representatives of the Parent Champion Group. In response to a Member's question, she informed the Committee about the role of specialist Health Visitors who supported children aged 0 – 5 with SEND and their families. She also informed Members about a new tool being piloted which Health Visitors would be using to screen children from age 1 upwards. In response to a question about the reasons for the higher percentage of children with SEND in Manchester and why this was increasing, she reported that there was a range of factors including the higher levels of disadvantage in the city

and, that due to legislative changes, parents now viewed getting an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) as a way of getting support for their child so they were more likely to request one. In response to a Member's question about the late diagnosis of autism in girls, she informed Members about the Autism in Schools programme, which she advised there was a lot of learning from, and she offered to provide further information on this in a future report. In response to the comments about accessing leisure activities, she reported that there was now an extensive community offer for children with SEND and that she would welcome suggestions of other providers. She advised that the Local Offer and Engagement Team was working to break down barriers to accessing community activities with the aim of making all activities accessible to all children and young people.

Tom Dainty from Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership confirmed that there had been a higher level of referrals but that this had not necessarily led to a higher level of diagnosis. He informed the Committee about four autism hubs which were being set up in Manchester and the development of a new model for under-5s which identified needs and looked at ways to meet the needs rather than waiting for a diagnostic pathway, advising that this approach had worked successfully elsewhere, notably in Portsmouth. A Member welcomed this and requested that further information on this model be included in a future report. In response to a question about how parents and carers could be supported, including while they were waiting for an assessment, he informed Members about a neurodiversity toolkit for parents and carers which was being used elsewhere the country and which they were looking at utilising in Manchester.

Jordan Navarro from the Parent Carer Forum highlighted the benefits of responding to the child's observable needs. He welcomed that the SEND Community Offer was open to children who did not have a recognised diagnosis and that the whole family could attend the activities, not just the child with SEND. In response to a Member's question, he outlined how the Forum was being, and could continue to be, supported, including financial and resource support, promotion of activities and good communication and co-production with partners, including partners communicating with smaller groups set up to support parents.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Education reported that, where a mainstream school commissioned a temporary place at another school for a child on their roll, the school where they were on roll was responsible for issues such as transport, rather than the local authority. The Member requested that officers look into this issue as she reported that in some cases families were not receiving support with transport when it was needed.

The Service Manager (Transition) reported that early identification was important to a smooth transition to adult social services and working systematically to identify people who the service already knew about. She reported that a Project Manager was being recruited to recognise from the age of 14 who might require adult social care or adult health services and to encourage people to make a referral at an earlier stage. She advised that preparation for adulthood should be considered from Year 9 for a young person with an EHCP and she outlined multi-agency work to address this. She reported that her team were working alongside Children's Services and Education Services to meet with young people and their families to discuss what they

wanted for their future at an early stage. The Assistant Director of Education reported that, in addition to the transition work outlined, independence was embedded in planning for children with SEND throughout their childhood, from when they were diagnosed, for example, looking at travel training to help them to become more independent.

In response to a question about Home School Transport, the Director of Education informed Members that a new policy was being implemented. She highlighted some of the challenges in this area, including recruitment of drivers and passenger assistants and access to transport, and advised that a range of solutions were used, including giving families budgets to get their child to school and providing travel training to help children with SEND learn to travel independently.

The Chair highlighted the shift towards greater independence and independent learning for young people with SEND. She expressed concern that Early Years provision could be too chaotic for autistic children and that not all staff in the sector had a good understanding of the needs of children with SEND. She praised the Grange School and encouraged Members to visit it. She expressed concern that there were not sufficient numbers of Health Visitors to identify all children with SEND at the earliest stage. She also expressed concern that there was insufficient funding for the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant and about the impact of the pandemic. She welcomed the adoption of the new approach referred to which had been used successfully in Portsmouth, the Health Visitor pilot for screening children from the age of 1 and the planned new special school in north Manchester.

## **Decision**

To request that a breakdown of children with SEND by ethnicity and further information on the Portsmouth model be included in a future report.

## **CYP/23/8 Thriving Babies, Confident Parents Service**

The Committee considered the report and presentation of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an overview of the Thriving Babies, Confident Parents Programme.

Key points and themes in the presentation included:

- Think Family approach;
- Overview of the Thriving Babies programme;
- Impact and evaluation; and
- Next steps.

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

- To welcome the excellent work taking place;
- Specialist support for families from ethnic minority communities; and
- The role of housing and homelessness services.

The Assistant Director (Early Intervention and Prevention) reported that the teams working in this area were diverse but that she recognised the Member's point about specialist support for families from ethnic minority communities and that they would look into this. She outlined how they worked with the interpreting service, including them in the training and having the same interpreter throughout their work with a family so they had a consistent team around them. She stated that they had good relationships with the Housing and Homelessness Services, ensuring that homelessness prevention work took a whole family approach and training Early Help practitioners on the duty to notify where there were damp and other housing issues. She reported that the Thriving Babies, Confident Parents Programme included responding to and addressing some of these housing issues. Officers outlined some of the pathways now available to respond to housing issues, including a pathway for responding to mould issues.

In response to a Member's question, the Assistant Director (Early Intervention and Prevention) informed Members about the partnership work with the national voluntary and community organisation HomeStart and with Manchester Mind. The Team Manager (Early Help) advised that it was hoped that some parents who had been through the Thriving Babies programme would volunteer to help other parents.

In response to a Member's question, the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services reported that the Committee would receive a report on fostering at a future meeting and that this would include information on support for families with Special Guardianship Orders.

The Chair reported that the Committee had previously looked at the issue of homeless families and that she had attended a recent meeting of the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee, looking at the issue of homelessness. She highlighted some of the challenges facing families in Manchester. She welcomed the work of the Thriving Babies, Confident Parents Programme to support families and enable them to stay together. She suggested that the universities could measure the outcomes for families over a number of years. She praised the valuable work of Early Help and Sure Start.

In response to a question from the Chair about Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, the Team Manager (Early Help) reported that staff and volunteers were trained on this and were educating parents on the risks. Councillor Cooley stated that she had a contact who was an expert on this subject and could present her experiences to the Committee. She suggested that the Committee could consider an item on this at a future meeting, to which the Chair agreed.

## **Decision**

To consider an item on Foetal Alcohol Syndrome at a future meeting.

## **CYP/23/9 Revenue Budget Update**

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that set out the latest forecast revenue budget position, and the next steps.

Following the provisional finance settlement announced on 19 December the Council was forecasting a balanced budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25. The risk had moved to the next spending review period 2025/26 where a shortfall of £57m was forecast. This reduced to £40m after the proposed use of £17m smoothing reserves.

The report further described that in November 2022 scrutiny committees were presented with cuts and saving options totaling £42.3m over three years for consideration. The provisional settlement on 19 December reflected a change in government policy and provided more funding than initially expected. This had given the opportunity to review the quantum and phasing of savings. It was now proposed that options of £36.2m were progressed. The settlement also gave some scope for targeted investments which would put the Council in a more sustainable position to face the next spending review in 2025.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources paid tribute to the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer and her team for all their hard work in bringing forward the suite of budget reports following the settlement announcements. He stated that the budget settlement needed to be considered in the context of over a decade of austerity that had been imposed on Manchester. He stated that the Government had failed to recognise or apologise for the instability they had caused to the national economy and referenced the impact of inflation, population growth in the city and the cost-of-living crisis on budgetary pressures. He commented that the Government had failed to communicate their financial decisions for the city.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources stated that the funding decisions of the Government had effectively forced the Council to increase Council Tax. He advised that the Council was able to deliver a balanced budget and that Council Tax would be used to support the most vulnerable residents in the city; support the social care sector and invest in the future of the city. In response to a Member's question, he provided an update on the Mayoral precept to fund policing and the fire and rescue service.

## **Decision**

To note the report.

## **CYP/23/10 Children and Education Services Budget 2023/24**

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided a further update to Members on the priorities for the services in the remit of this Committee and detailed the changes to the initial revenue budget options proposed by officers in November 2022. The 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 on 15 February 2023.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Service overview and priorities;
- Service budget and proposed changes;

- Use of reserves and new grants; and
- Workforce implications.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer and the Head of Finance (Children, Education and Schools) for their support. He reported that the position of Children's Services was positive, with service improvements having been made, which had been recognised in the service's most recent Ofsted report, and he highlighted the investments that had been made in Children's Services in recent years, which had supported this. He outlined some of the key points from the budget report, including how investments would be used to save costs later on, for example, early intervention to prevent children from needing to enter the care system. He highlighted that an additional £500,000 had been invested in Youth and Play services last year and that earlier budget proposals which had been presented to the Committee in November 2022 had included a reduction in that; however, he reported that this reduction was no longer being considered.

A Member welcomed the approach being taken, the innovative work and that the service was investing to save. The Chair highlighted how the investing to save approach had successfully been used over recent years, during a period where the Council had experienced continuous cuts from the national Government, and how this success compared favourably to the position of many other local authorities.

A Member commented that the Neighbourhood Investment Fund was supporting food pantries and food banks, which many families with children were sadly needing to access at the present time. The Chair stated that Free School Meals should be available for all children.

## **Decision**

To note the report.

## **CYP/23/11 Schools Budget 2023/24**

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided a summary of the confirmed Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation from the 2023/24 settlement announced in December which was reported to Schools Forum on 16 January 2023. It stated that schools would receive a new grant from April 2023 and this grant was also outlined in the report.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- DSG 2023/24 allocation;
- Additional schools funding 2023/24; and
- Schools Forum.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Finance (Children, Education and Schools) reported that work had been taking place with the Schools Forum in relation to maintained schools which had built up a large balance. She advised that her team analysed the plans that the schools in this position had for this funding and

that, if they did not have appropriate plans for using the funds, the money was taken back. She advised that previously the balances had been looked at over a five-year period but that, following approval by the Schools Forum, they were now being looked at over a two-year period. The Director of Education reported that the money taken back from these schools went into the High Needs Block of the DSG to be used for the benefit of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

### **Decision**

To note the report.

### **CYP/23/12 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.