

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 11 October 2023

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Colin Foster (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Janet Mobbs (Vice-Chair); Councillors Shan Alexander, Jake Austin, Dallas Jones, Becky Senior, David Wilson and Wendy Wild.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 6 September 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject under Minute Item 6 – ‘Fairer Start Local NESTA-Stockport’ Partnership’ to the deletion of the abbreviation ‘FMP’ and its replacement therefor with ‘Family Nurse Partnership (FNP)’.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interest which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. CARE LEAVERS AND PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

The Director of Education, Works and Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) proposing that individuals with care experience are treated as if it were a Protected Characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The Government have not yet made this a legal requirement but that does not prevent the Council adopting this approach.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

Care Leaver representatives attended the meeting and provided a presentation to the Scrutiny Committee in relation to ‘Care Leavers and Protected Characteristics’.

The Care Leaver representatives highlighted a number of concerns associated with the ‘Care Leavers and Protected Characteristics’ as follows: -

- Care Leavers were constantly being discriminated against and should not even be making a presentation to the Scrutiny Committee.
- Difficult for care leavers to use to public transport, apply for housing, access health and education services and were always being stereotyped as care leavers.
- Other ‘protected characteristic’ groups are not discriminated against.

- Care leavers should have the same rights as anyone else and not be discriminated against or stereotyped constantly.
- If care leavers were a 'protected characteristic' then it would improve mental health & wellbeing and improve their way of life.
- Communities should value care leavers and not just their status.

Members expressed their thanks to the 'care leavers' and their representatives in attendance for their voices and sharing their experiences and welcomed the report and the recommendations.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked the 'care leaver' representatives for highlighting their concerns and raising awareness about their experiences.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Scrutiny Committee notes that once the report was approved by Cabinet that officers would work with the Care Leavers Forum to produce an action plan for the implementation of this change which would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in Spring 2024.

5. RESPONDING TO OUR MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education submitted a report (copies of which were circulated) outlining the strategic approach in responding to the review of the medium-term financial plan. The appendix to the report outlined the budget proposals being considered by the Cabinet to address financial and demand challenges, enable longer term transformation, and ensure the delivery of shared strategic partnership ambitions.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Clarification was sought relating to SEN and transport provisions and the impact on budgets. In response, it was stated that as long as provisions are available within the borough and parents choose to seek provisions outside of the borough there was no funding available.
- The ambition was to reduce the costs, manage the pressure and make provisions available within the borough.
- It was stated that the increase in intensive support capacity was to respond to the increase in demand and to target the children and families who needed the support.
- Members noted that Stockport had one of the lowest contributions to residential placements across GM compared to North West average and had recently seen a decrease of 41% in contributions.
- It was noted that the growth in children's services budgets in Stockport was year on year which was a reflection of overspending and being underfunded by Government.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That it be noted that an update on the Medium Term Financial Plan would be submitted to the Committee in January 2024.

6. ACADEMY CONVERSION COST RECOVERY

The Director for Education, Work & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details relating to the Local Authority's plans to charge maintained schools for the costs of conversion to become an Academy School on a full cost recovery model.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- Members welcomed the report and the approach being adopted to cover and recover the Council's costs through the academisation agenda.
- It was noted that the proposals were sensible but clarification was sought relating to the costs to the schools. In response, it was reported that it would depend on the issues at the schools with converting to an academy e.g. land and building which could often be complex.
- Clarification was sought regarding school's refusing to pay the costs. In response, it was stated that it was unlikely for schools to refuse, as it would be a Stockport system for the borough and a pragmatic view would be taken when working with the schools as a partnership to resolve any budget concerns.
- Members enquired about the measurements to be adopted to recover the costs. In response, it was noted that there would be finance officers to assist the process and working with the schools directly.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Cabinet be recommended to:-

- (a) Give approval to the proposed cost recovery policy as detailed in the report.
- (b) Delegate authority to the Director of Education, Work and Skills, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education, to determine what works and costs may be charged to the school, indicated in Section 4 of the report.
- (c) Delegate authority to the Director for Education, Work and Skills to determine whether a school may be charged for a delayed or deferred conversion.

7. MONITORING PANEL UPDATE

The Director of Education, Work and Skills submitted a report (copies of which were circulated) providing an update on the Monitoring Panel post-Covid and proposes a way forward.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Members expressed their disappointment with the recommendations in the report and was concerned that the Scrutiny Committee would not be able to perform the functions in the same way as the Education Monitoring Panel.
- It was noted that the Council was considering doing things differently and how the Local Authority discharged its function taking into account the Schools Strategy and the Council's statutory functions relating to the responsibilities for schools.
- It was reported that the role of the Director and Executive Director had responsibility for monitoring schools across the borough and ensuring that the children in the borough receive the standard of education they deserve.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Council Meeting be recommended to give approval to the dis-establishment of the Education Monitoring Panel and that its functions and duties, with particular regard to education performance, be discharged by the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee, with specific reports on School Performance scheduled for consideration in addition to the regular portfolio performance reports.

8. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the planned agenda items for the Scrutiny Committee's next meeting and any relevant Forward Plan items.

Members enquired about the pupil referral units and alternative provisions report that was due to be submitted to the Committee. In response, it was reported that the report would be submitted to the February 2024 meeting in accordance to the scrutiny work programme.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.03 pm