

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 22 January 2025

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Colin Foster (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Rosemary Barratt (Vice-Chair); Councillors Shan Alexander, Angie Clark, Graham Greenhalgh, Helen Hibbert, Dallas Jones, Gary Lawson, Leah Taylor, Dr Chris Gordon (Church of England Diocesan Education Committee Representative) and Christopher Read (Parent Governor).

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 27 November 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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.

The following interests were declared:-

Personal Interests

<u>Councillor/Co-opted Member</u>	<u>Interest</u>
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Dr Chris Gordon	Agenda Item 5 – ‘School’s Admission Arrangements September 2026 and School Organisation Proposals’ as Chair of the Stockport Disability Forum.
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	Agenda Item 6 – ‘Schools Finance Settlement 2025/26’ as Chair of the Stockport Disability Forum.
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3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. RESPONDING TO OUR MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN: UPDATE

The Executive Director People and Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining how the programme fitted into the context of the wider change proposals, budget setting and the in-year financial position and provided more details following the November scrutiny committees on how this programme fitted into the wider context of the budget.

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 enquired about the package of savings of £8.9m and the details and data that was available. In response, it was noted that the details and data had been provided in the previous report to committee including the pressure position and the recovery proposals. It was stated that it was a savings proposal and would not reduce the budget of £63.353m for 2025/26 and included a programme of actions and activities that are underway within the recovery programme. It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Committee detailing the actions and activities that had been programmed relating to the savings proposals.
- Clarification was sought regarding the children's recovery programme and the adjustments to the local system. In response, it was noted that there had been a number of multidisciplinary panels that had taken place to review current external placements and to identify the challenges across the wider system in achieving the permanence plans for young people in care of which there were currently 503, which would inform an improvement plan to be monitored by an improvement board going forward. It was agreed that further details would be provided to the Committee.
- It was explained that the £10.4m deficit referred to in paragraph 2.3 of the report was referencing the deficit position across the council and not just children's services.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Director of Education, Works & Skills in consultation with the Chair provides further details to the Committee relating to:

- the actions and activities relating to the savings proposals; and
- the children's recovery programme.

5. CHILDREN IN POVERTY REPORT

The Executive Director for People and Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the work underway to understand, identify and address child poverty.

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 enquired about what was being done to advertise and access the support. In response, it was noted that schools had an action plan together with information relating to early start vouchers, family support vouchers and support in schools with 'poverty proofing' including food and school uniforms. In addition, there was a telephone hotline and other things being done proactively.
- It was highlighted that 9,000 vouchers had been sent out and this was also supplemented by social media posts and parents being contacted directly by emails with just over 93% of the vouchers being redeemed.
- Clarification was sought on what the 'poverty proofing programme' was and how the schools had become involved. It was noted that 47 schools had already undertaken the programme with a few more to begin from July 2025. It was commented that the

programme produced a number of changes in schools and families to ensure there was no discrimination and that families and pupils were protected and supported.

- It was confirmed that communication was sent to all schools and that families were also involved and communicated with in a variety of ways.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. SCHOOL'S ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS - SEPTEMBER 2026 AND SCHOOL ORGANISATION PROPOSALS

The Director of Education, Works & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the recent consultation on the admission arrangements and published admission numbers for community and voluntary controlled infant, primary, junior and secondary schools in Stockport for which Stockport Council is the admission authority and also outlining the consultation that has taken place on the proposal to amalgamate Lark Hill Nursery School and Lark Hill Primary School and change the age range at Lark Hill Primary School following the announcement of the retirement of the Headteacher at Lark Hill Nursery School.

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:-

Section 3 – Admission Arrangements

- Members enquired about the Office of the School Adjudicator (OSA) investigation into the Queensgate catchment area and whether it was fair and transparent. In response, it was noted that the outcome of the OSA investigation was to review every single catchment area of all primary schools in Stockport.
- The admission arrangements was consulted on every seven years and the outcomes reported to Cabinet for approval and implementation.
- It was stated that any recommended changes had already been built into the admission arrangements for 2024/25 including any guidance since August 2024. However, Appendix One has the proposed co-ordinated admissions scheme for all maintained schools for 2026/27.

Section 4 – Proposed Reduction in Published Admission Numbers (PAN) for September 2026 and Rationale

- Members enquired about the residents of Bredbury Hall and the proposed reduction in the PAN from 90 to 60 at Arden Primary and whether it would be sufficient for the growing number of children of refugee and asylum seeker families in the area. In response it was noted that the current situation in the area has been taken into account when proposing the reduced PAN.
- Clarification was sought regarding the impact of the quality of education for those schools where the PAN was being reduced. In response, it was stated that all schools were funded per pupil and a number of these schools who were already experiencing financial difficulties, or those with limited provisions were selected to support these challenges and to improve the school's ability to plan at full class levels.

- It was highlighted that all of the schools in Stockport need more funding, but it was all about working with the schools, having a forward plan, forming formal partnerships between schools, the governing body and the council to carefully manage these challenges.
- It was commented that in paragraph 4.11 of the report that there needed to be a correction to the word “Arden’s” being replaced with “Lum Head”.

Section 7 – closure of Lark Hill Nursery School and Expanding the Age Range at Lark Hill Primary School

- It was noted that it was an amalgamation of both schools.
- Members enquired about the provision of teaching between the nursery and primary school. In response, it was highlighted that the proposal would expand the age range between the two schools, but not to reduce the capacity only. It was commented that there was confidence in the quality of the leadership in the schools and the quality of colleagues who work in both schools to be able to see their way through this change.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the recommendations to Cabinet be endorsed.

7. SCHOOLS FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2025/26

The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the key announcements made by the Department for Education (DfE) on the education funding settlement for 2025/26.

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 enquired about additional funding from the High Needs Block from schools and what the detail of those requests might be. In response, it was noted that there were two main funding streams, including capital and revenue funding streams with this report dealing with the revenue funding position. However, it was commented that the requests for additional funding was currently uncertain at the moment, but there had been a substantial increase in funding to mainstream schools.
- It was commented that there was no detail relating to the £740m announced in the chancellor’s statement.
- Clarification was sought relating to the difference between maintained nurseries and private nurseries and the increase costs of national insurance and how it would impact parents. In response, it was noted that in relation to the national insurance threshold change, that the public sector bodies were exempt from that change. It was also noted that local authorities, schools including maintained nurseries will receive recompense for the additional employer’s contribution.
- It was highlighted that the funding provided by the council to maintained nursery classes and the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector was for the extended 30 hours and as such all of the funding was going towards the providers for children whether they were accessing 15 hours or the 30 hours and were all being funded equally.

- Members enquired about the minimum funding levels for primary and secondary schools and how it compared to the Greater Manchester area. In response, it was noted that the total funding received per pupil across all blocks was about £7,800 per pupil. It was further noted, that the minimum funding levels for primary schools was £5,300 for 2025/26 and for secondary schools it was just under £7,000 for 2025/26 in comparison to Manchester who receive £6,000 for primary pupils and £8,000 for secondary pupils.
- Clarification was sought relating to the central retention reducing from 5% down to 4%. It was noted that because of the total amount of funding due to the expansion of entitlements was increasing the Government has decided to reduce the retention from 5% to 4%.
- Members enquired about the 'central pot for the early years block' and what it was used for. In response, it was stated that it was a method by which services were funded to support children in the early years. It was used to fund specific services in the early years including 'early years funding team' and 'early years improvement team' and also supports the delivery to children in the early years.
- It was commented that a breakdown of the information relating to the 'early years block' and funding had been submitted to the Schools Forum and a link to that information would be shared with the Committee.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted and the recommendations to Cabinet be endorsed.

(2) That the Director of Education, Works and Skills be requested to circulate to the Committee the link to the School's Forum agenda that related to the 'early years block funding'.

8. SCHOOLS SUFFICIENCY INVESTMENT PLAN

The Director of Education, Works & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing a framework on which a school place plan can be devised for short, medium, and longer-term sufficiency and sits alongside the Borough Plan, Children and Young People's Strategy, the Schools Strategy, the SEND Strategy, the Skills Plan, and other associated strategic documents.

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 were provided with an update relating to Bramhall High School and were informed that the school were continuing to provide all the school places it was providing before, however, there were no expansion in places being provided as planned due to the challenges. It was noted that there had been a consultation with the DfE, the Council and the school capturing everyone's needs and wants for a potential rebuild and this was now being considered by architects to provide details relating to the developmental plans and costs.
- Clarification was sought regarding the Woodley Primary School and the issues relating to the drainage. It was noted that the update was not available and would be shared with the Committee following the meeting.

- Members enquired about the pupils from Manchester attending Stockport schools and if there was funding provided. In response, it was stated that no funding was received from Manchester, but it should be noted that funding was received for pupils in Stockport schools.
- It was highlighted that regarding extra places being created through the development of new homes in the borough, there were sites being looked at and feasibility studies being completed at this stage with a view to plan in the short and long term regarding pupil numbers.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. SCHOOLS STRATEGY

The Director of Education, Works & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the progress made against the Schools Strategy that was adopted by Cabinet in September 2023. It provides an update on each of the priorities which were set to provide a roadmap to guide the partnership work over the next five years.

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 enquired about the drivers for Priority Three and the relation to the “White Paper in 2022. In response, it was stated that both Priority One and Three were linked and that formal partnerships between schools were still a good thing and was part of the Schools Strategy, that could be done through the academy route. It was noted that if schools were to change to academies, then it would be encouraged to do this through Stockport Trusts.
- Clarification was sought regarding the growth of ‘Trusts’ and the strategic commissioning relationship. In response, it was noted that the school effectiveness service worked with all schools drawing on the responsibilities to improve schools as it was part of the legal responsibility for school improvement. It was stated that there was ‘brokering’ for school improvement for support and challenges needed including the academy schools.
- It was highlighted that the whole school approach relating to the mental health & wellbeing was in line with the implementation mental health in school’s programme which was a national programme and driven by the NHS long term plan outcomes. It was intended to have a mental health lead as part of the senior leadership team in schools and the expectation would be that each school would have this in place in order for access and support through the teachers, pastoral services and other more targeted elements.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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 Forward Plan items.

Members requested an update on the EHCP report that was due to be submitted to the Committee.

It was noted that the EHCP report would be scheduled as early as possible following the updates provided to the SEND Board and Stockport Family Partnership Board.

RESOLVED – (1) – That the report be noted.

(2) - That the Director for Education, Works & Skills be requested to submit the EHCP report as early as possible to a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting closed at 7.58pm.