Herefordshire Council

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at Online meeting only on Tuesday 12 January 2021 at 1.00 pm

Present: **Councillor Carole Gandy (chairperson)**
Councillor Diana Toynbee (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Paul Andrews, Kath Hey, Phillip Howells and Mike Jones

Co-optees: Sam Pratley

In attendance: **Councillors Hitchiner and Harvey**

Officers: **Director for children and families, Interim Head of Legal Services, Assistant Director Safeguarding and Family Support, Assistant Director Childrens Safeguarding Quality and Improvement, Chief finance officer and Assistant Director Education Development and Skills**

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Graham Andrews and Mr Andy James.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

19. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting on 1 December are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

20. 2021/22 BUDGET SETTING

The Committee considered a report by the Leader of the Council which outlined the draft budget proposals for 2021/22 relating to Children and Families. The report was introduced by the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) and the Director of Children and Families (DCF) who provided the presentation attached to the report. The Committee considered a report by the Leader of the Council which outlined the draft budget proposals for 2021/22 relating to Children and Families. The report was introduced by the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) and the Director of Children and Families (DCF) who provided the presentation attached to the report and also noted the risks that have been increasing in recent years regarding contextual safeguarding, including county lines. These may be increasing as a result of the impact of the pandemic. It was recognised that a number of elements were demand led and that some of the work already taking place such as early help and the edge of care service was having an effect to address some of the demand. The spend on placements had been more than planned in the budget for a number of years. Many local authorities faced overspends in this area. The council had taken an approach to treat spend over planned as a corporate pressure and this was to continue as part of the overall budget setting. The DCF explained that the whole family approach outlined in the diagram in the presentation would be explored in greater detail with the

committee at a future scrutiny session. The DCF explained that the whole family approach outlined in the diagram in the presentation would be explored in greater detail with the committee at a future scrutiny session.

The principal points below were raised during the debate:

- The committee recognised the progress that the Children and Families directorate had achieved and the improvement in performance and leadership of the directorate.
- The increase in the funding to the directorate's base budget was welcomed.
- Concern was raised regarding the feasibility of the stretch savings target for the recruitment of 30 foster carers per annum over the next five years. It was felt that the target may be achievable in the medium term but it was questioned whether it was realistic during 2021/22 and 2022/23. The executive was recommended to review the feasibility of the savings target during the next two financial years.
- It was felt that to assist the committee to assess the budget and savings for the Children and Families directorate further detail regarding the overall budget of the directorate and the council would be useful to provide vital context. *The DCF explained that further detail regarding the budget of the Children and Families directorate could be circulated after the meeting. The CFO explained that work could be undertaken with officers to determine how to present regular budget data to the committee in future.*
- The impact of the COVID19 pandemic on the budget was queried and what additional funding may be forthcoming from the government to support mental health services for young people. It was requested that the committee receive an update on forms of funding for mental health support for young people. *The Assistant Director Education, Development and Skills explained that Department for Education funding was available to allocate to schools for mental health support for young people which would be reported to the committee. The CFO explained that regular returns were submitted to the Ministry Housing Communities and Local Government* (MHCLG) *with details of the impact of the pandemic on the council but there was not an awareness of any further forms of funding from central government.*
- The committee queried the savings accruing from the supported accommodation arrangements for care leavers. *The DCF explained that the new facility in Wide Marsh Street, that had been recently been completed, would help in the realisation of savings as the council was less reliant on out of county placements. The completion of the facility in Bath Street would also assist in the savings associated with supported accommodation.*

The Leader explained that it was correct that the committee focus on the savings element. A balance needed to be achieved between the proposed savings and the rate of Council Tax that was set. It was acknowledged that the full impact of COVID-19 was not yet understood but lobbying of MHCLG was being undertaken.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services explained that in future the Chairpersons of the scrutiny committees would be consulted to determine what detail to include in the scrutiny budget reports in future years. It was acknowledged that there were significant pressures in the Children and Families directorate and a balance was sought between realising savings where possible and continuing to provide services.

The Cabinet Member Children and Families spoke and explained that there was uncertainty about the final impact of the pandemic and the Children and Families directorate was having to be reactive to changing advice from government. Improvements had been made in the performance of the directorate demonstrated and it was acknowledged that it would be useful for the committee to have the overall budget context contained in the report.

Councillor Carole Gandy proposed and Councillor Phillip Howells seconded the recommendations below which were agreed unanimously by the committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- **Recognises improvements in the performance of the service and welcomes the additional funding to the base budget;**

- **Queries the feasibility of the stretch target for the recruitment of foster carers in the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years and recommends to the executive that the target in those next two years in reconsidered;**

- **Requests an update to a future of meeting of the committee on funding available from government to address the mental health impacts of the pandemic on young people;**

- **Requests that in future years the scrutiny committee Chairpersons are consulted over the detail required in the report to the committees; and**

- **Acknowledges the efforts of members and officers in the work that has been undertaken to compile the budget for 2021/22.**

21. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The Committee considered it work programme in the current 2020/21 year and a scoping document for a proposed task and finish group concerning paediatric therapies.

The report concerning school examination performance which was scheduled for the meeting of the committee in March was discussed and it was felt that the report should be changed to a review of what measures schools had undertaken during the lockdown (e.g. remote learning) and the success of such measures as well as covering what was to happen for students in the summer 2021.

It was felt that the approval of the scoping document for the paediatric therapies task and finish group should be deferred to a later meeting of the committee when the pressures of the pandemic on the health service had eased.

It was stated that an exercise would be undertaken to update the recommendation tracker attached to the work programme.

Councillor Carole Gandy proposed and Councillor Diana Toynbee seconded the recommendations below which were agreed unanimously by the committee.

RESOLVED: That the committee:

(a) reviews the 2020/21 work programme at appendix a, discusses any additional items of business or topics for inclusion in the work programme and agrees the changes since the previous meeting of the committee, as listed in paragraph 3 and including the change set out above to the school performance item at the March meeting;

(b) defers approval the scoping document (appendix b) for the paediatric therapies task and finish group and consideration of its membership (including any co-optees) and the appointment of a chairperson to a later meeting date; and

(c) notes the recommendation tracker in appendix c and asks that outstanding issues are identified and followed-up.

22. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 19 January at 10.00 a.m.

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm **Chairperson**