

# **Title of report: Children and Young People directorate budget task and finish group**

**Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 23 January 2024**

**Report by: Statutory Scrutiny Officer**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

This report provides Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with the findings and recommendations of the board's task and finish group tasked with scrutinising the current expenditure and future budget of the children and young people directorate.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee notes the report; and**
- b) agrees to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:**
  - a. Financial performance data to form part of the 'measures that matter' and performance dashboard data, and should be reported back to staff teams so that they are aware of the financial consequences of the service performance alongside other measures.

- b. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to examine how SEND Transport demand and costs are managed, including a review of operations in other rural local authorities.
- c. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise work to step children down from residential care, and to reunify families where children have become looked after.
- d. Dedicated financial resource to continue to be embedded within the children and young people directorate to provide challenge and assurance that day-to-day costs are being captured and forecast correctly.
- e. Each monthly financial outturn report for the Children and Young People directorate, and weekly Children's Service Analysis Tool (CHAT) be provided to the chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
- f. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee undertake a piece of work to examine the robustness of the council's data and management information supporting the children and young people directorate.
- g. Savings as proposed to be targeted for Children's directorate to deliver in 2024-25 but assured funding to be found from elsewhere to balance the council's budget.

### **Alternative options**

1. The committee could choose to not agree that the recommendations contained in the report be forwarded to Cabinet.
2. The committee could also choose to make different recommendations to Cabinet.

### **Key considerations**

3. At the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board on 7 November 2023, the chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee raised concerns about the high levels of agency staff used by the council to operate services for children and young people which is a major contributing factor to the Directorate's current forecast overspend the 23/24 financial year of nearly £12m. Other committee members stated that they shared similar concerns, as well as concerns regarding the likelihood of the service making a planned £4.5million of savings in the current financial year.
4. The committee agreed to draft a terms of reference for a task and finish group to scrutinise the delivery of the current year's budget, the factors contributing to the large overspend in the financial outturn, and the detailed planning sitting behind the developing budget for services for children and young people for the 24/25 financial year. The terms of reference for the group are contained in the committee's final report, which is attached as **appendix B**.
5. The task and finish group has made a number of recommendations to Cabinet and to other scrutiny committees. These are listed above, and contained in the task and finish group's report attached as **appendix A**. As there was insufficient time to produce this report in time for the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board on 16 January 2024, the committee agreed to forward this report to the next meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

## **Community impact**

6. Safeguarding children and young people, as well as ensuring they receive a good education, are fundamental statutory duties of Herefordshire Council. Key to providing an effective service for Herefordshire people is the service receiving adequate funding, and that it uses its budget effectively. An adequately funded, effective service would mean children and young people were safer, healthier and received a better education.

## **Environmental Impact**

7. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.

Whilst this is a decision on back office functions and will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

## **Equality duty**

8. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows: A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
  - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
  - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this is a decision on back office functions, we do not believe that it will have an impact on our equality duty.

## **Resource implications**

9. This recommendations in this report are merely advisory. Cabinet – when considering these recommendations – may choose either to accept or reject the recommendations. If it chooses to accept any recommendations from the Scrutiny Management Board, officers of the council are then required to present Cabinet with its proposals to implement the scrutiny committee's recommendations. It is at that stage that Cabinet will need to consider the resource implications arising from any proposals.

## Legal implications

10. Section 9F (2) (b) of the Local Government Act 2000 provides that a scrutiny committee can make reports and recommendation to the Executive with respect to the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Executive. Section 9F (2) (e) allows a scrutiny committee to make reports or recommendations to the Executive on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area. If any recommendations are made by the committee to the executive (Cabinet) then Cabinet is requested to provide an executive response within two months.

## Risk management

11. As this report contains recommendations for consideration, rather than recommendations to pursue a particular cause of action, there are no foreseen risks associated with considering this report and its recommendations. If Cabinet chooses to accept any recommendations from the Scrutiny Management Board, officers of the council are then required to present Cabinet with its proposals to implement the scrutiny committee's recommendations. It is at that stage that Cabinet will need to consider the risks arising from any proposals, and any mitigations required to manage those risks.

## Consultees

12. There has been no public consultation undertaken in producing this report and its appendices.

## Appendices

- a. Children and Young People directorate budget task and finish group final report
- b. Children and Young People directorate budget task and finish group terms of reference

## Background papers

None

## Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Legal	Sean O'Connor	Date 19/01/2024
Communications	Michala Lee	Date 19/01/2024Click or tap to enter a date.
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
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