



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Gee (Chair)
Councillor Cole (Vice Chair)

Councillor Batool
Councillor Crewe

Councillor Riyait
Councillor Willmott

Councillor Pandya
Councillor Pickering

In Attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor for Education and Housing
Councillor Russell – Deputy City Mayor for Social Care and Anti-Poverty

Standing Invitees (Non-Voting)

Janet McKenna
Joseph Wygeldacz

Unison
Teaching Unions

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

It was noted that Councillor Moore was present at the invitation of the Chair to contribute to the Millgate School item.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Moore declared that she was on the advisory board for Millgate School, but as she was present at the invitation of the Chair this was not a conflict of interest.

6. DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2022/23 AND DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022/23

The Deputy Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the City Mayor's proposed budget for 2022/23. The Commission was recommended to consider and comment on the Children, Young People and Education element of the report. The Commission's comments would be forwarded to the Overview Select Committee as part of its consideration of the report before presentation to the meeting of Council on 23rd February 2022.

Martin Judson, Head of Finance, presented the item. The background to the budget was outlined initially, it was noted that:

- The main issues affecting the budget were the decade of austerity, the Covid pandemic, and the rising costs of Adult Social Care. Of these Adult Social Care was most significant.
- The Government Finance Settlement was better than expected but was still only for one year.
- Reserves from previous years would be used to balance the budget, however it was projected that these reserves would run out by 2023/24 and that other savings would have to be found in that case.
- There was currently no indication that the Government would provide a systematic method of funding the increasing costs of Adult Social Care for Local Authorities.

The impacts of the budget on Children, Young People, and Education Services were next outlined. It was noted that:

- The two main areas of increasing costs were CLA and SEND Services.
- Due to uncertainty around placement costs, there was no permanent budget growth for CLA Services. However, any overspend in this area would be covered by social care reserves.
- Expansion of in-house CLA placements was being looked into. Additional support for foster carers would also be provided.
- The number of requests for Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) had risen significantly, in line with national trends. Therefore, a budget increase had been put into the SEND Service to ease the staffing strain. It was uncertain if this increase in requests would be sustained.
- Another reason for the budget growth in the SEND Service was the failed renegotiation of contracts for taxis for EHCP pupils in December 2020.

In response to Member's questions, it was noted that:

- The Department for Education was running a review of EHCP policy to understand the rise in requests for EHCPs. The Council itself was working with other nearby Local Authorities to try and understand why requests were increasing.

- Providing the assessment process for EHCPs was a statutory duty of the Council. Therefore, if requests for EHCPs continued to grow at the current rate then additional funding would need to be sought.
- Funding for support for those with EHCPs was provided by the ringfenced High Needs Block only, the general fund was not allowed to be spent in this area.
- The trends for the increase in requests for EHCPs such as by age and specific conditions had yet to be examined but would need to be.
- Most other Local Authorities were seeing a significant overspend in their Children's Social Care Budget, with Leicester being an exception to this trend.
- Permanence targets for different age groups and trends in CLA numbers were used as the main predictive measure of numbers in the future. Current considerations were older children with complex needs entering the system, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who were placed in Leicester, and those in semi-supported accommodation.
- Court proceedings for adoption orders and other permanence options were being slowed down by the backlog of court cases from the pandemic. Once this cleared up it was thought that numbers of CLA would stabilise and decrease.

There was a discussion on the budget increase for taxi provision for EHCP pupils. Frustration and disappointment were expressed over the increase, and it was suggested that an overhaul of the provision such as bringing it in-house would improve the Service and save money. More detail was requested on the increase. Officers and Members of the Executive noted the following:

- Had the previous procurement process been successful it would have made savings for the Service. Despite having been closely involved in the design of the new approach, the taxi companies withdrew from the process immediately before the contracts would have been signed.
- The provision of transport was mentioned in the EHCP and therefore was a statutory duty for the Council.
- A consultation process had recently concluded looking at a new transport policy for EHCP pupils. It was anticipated that this would lead to less of a reliance on taxi contracts, with other transport modes being given higher priority.
- It had previously been determined that an in-house provision would be more expensive than the current arrangements. However, due to several industry issues, the fares for private taxis had recently significantly increased. Meaning that the potential of bringing provision in-house may need to be looked at again.
- One of the options being considered in the consultation process was the Personal Transport Budget. As part of this school attendance was monitored and the budget could be withdrawn if it was being abused.
- Another option was the expansion of the Yellow Bus Service, however this was not the appropriate option for many pupils. This was an example of the importance of working with each family to determine the best transport option.

- A renegotiation of taxi contracts was ongoing, and it was hoped that this could lead to a longer term saving. Contracts were based on individual pupils.
- A number of those who use Council funded travel to school had disabilities that would make it difficult for them to travel with other pupils.
- The most suitable transport mode for a pupil might change over time, the new policy would aim to give families independence to make those choices.
- An EHCP assessed if the child needed additional support for travel to school. Meaning that not every child with an EHCP would need Council funded travel.
- It was not possible to require that any taxis providing the travel service were licensed in Leicester.

AGREED:

That:

1. The Commission noted that Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme for 2022/23.
2. The Commission noted that the Department for Education had not properly funded SEND Services and would need to provide more funding in the future.
3. The Commission requests more details on the budget increase for taxi provision for EHCP pupils.