



Leicester
City Council

MINUTE EXTRACT

**Minutes of the Special Meeting of the
CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND SCHOOLS SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

Held: TUESDAY, 28 JANUARY 2020 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dawood (Chair)
Councillor Cole (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Hunter Councillor Rahman
Councillor Pantling Councillor Riyait
Councillor Whittle

In Attendance:

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

Also Present:

Joseph Wyglendacz - Teaching Unions Representative
Janet McKenna - Unison

* * * * *

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Carolyn Lewis (Church of England Diocese).

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

53. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21 TO 2021/22

The Chair referred to the draft report due to be considered by Council on 19 February 2020 which outlined the City Mayor's proposed budget for 2020/2021 and invited the Deputy City Mayor (Social Care and Anti-Poverty) to introduce the item.

It was noted that an expected overspend had been identified due to the requirement to ensure the correct and appropriate levels of care services were in place. The Deputy City Mayor (Social Care and Anti-Poverty) advised that the safety and protection of children was an absolute priority of the Council as it was for all other local authorities.

To supplement the information in the report, data was also circulated which explained the pressures on the service, principally arising from increased costs of external care provision. The importance and impact of the early-help service to provide care and protection was recognised. The need to challenge placement companies in terms of their charging structures and competition policies was highlighted. It was accepted that this issue could not be tackled locally but required a national campaign and lobbying.

The Director of Finance then submitted the draft report due to be considered by Council and clarified that the proposed budget was for one year, as significant changes to local government finance were expected. The impact of delayed decisions concerning the extent of future Business Rates retention and the Fair Funding Review, due to pressures including Brexit and the General Election were reported and noted.

It was clarified that there would be a recommendation to allow a rise in Council Tax and that a proposed use of reserves would be effected to ensure that the overall funding gap could be filled, at least in part. In respect of the information circulated showing a summary of the situation, the Commission noted the impact of the spending review programme and the savings expected from revisions to services such as Connexions and the Educational Welfare Service were explained.

In response to data from comparable neighbouring authorities and the position nationally, the number of looked after children (LAC) was noted and it was recognised that the type and suitability of provision was the principal influencing factor in terms of overall cost. It was reported that numbers of new LAC entering the system was difficult to predict with any certainty and therefore some assumptions on likely trends had to be made. The Director of Social Care and Early Help commented on the monitoring of LAC as a cohort and advised of the work undertaken to ensure that suitable placement arrangements could be made, including family placements and increased delivery of fostering and adoption options. The internal monitoring efforts and the value of the work of the Placement Sufficiency Board in this regard were reported and recognised.

The proportions of cost by type of provision compared the proportion of LAC in those provisions was highlighted, and in response to a question from the Vice-Chair it was accepted that the internal placement costs were also significant when compared to the proportion of the overall cost. In response to a question from the Chair it was reported that options for providing a higher proportion of internal placements were being explored, including increasing the numbers of fostering placements.

In terms of local government finance and in response to questions, it was confirmed that no information was available on the likely level of funding beyond 2020/21. The increases in the average costs of placements and the effect of inflation were reported and noted.

In response to questions concerning staffing it was confirmed that the numbers of agency social workers had dramatically reduced and information concerning the savings from vacant posts was provided.

The challenges concerning mental health assessment and the role of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) was discussed and it was noted that the Council did care for a number of children with very severe mental and emotional needs.

The Assistant City Mayor (Education) was invited to comment on the report and it was reported that the suggested changes to services, including Connexions, were currently subject of a consultation exercise.

AGREED:

1. That the report and proposed budget to Council be noted.
2. That the uncertainties concerning future government funding be noted and recognised.
3. That updates concerning the results of consultation on the proposed alterations to service provision be submitted to future meetings of the Commission at the appropriate time.
4. That any other significant impacts on services as a result of the Spending Review Programme be submitted to a future meeting of the Commission at the appropriate time.

