

**EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE
MONITORING SUB-COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 10 April 2019

Present:

Councillor Neil Reddin FCCA (Chairman)
Councillor Will Rowlands (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Marina Ahmad, Nicholas Bennett J.P., Kevin Brooks,
Judi Ellis and Stephen Wells

Emmanuel Arbenser

Also Present:

Councillor Nicky Dykes, Executive Assistant to the Children,
Education & Families Portfolio

49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Marina Ahmad. Councillor Kevin Brooks attended as substitute.

50 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

**51 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE
PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING**

There were no questions.

**52 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2019 AND
MATTERS OUTSTANDING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2019, excluding exempt information, were agreed and signed as a correct record.

53 PRE DECISION SCRUTINY OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISIONS

**a BUDGET MONITORING
Report ECHS19033**

The Sub-Committee considered a report providing the budget monitoring position for 2018/19 based on activity levels up to the end of December 2018.

The Sub-Committee noted that issues remained around the High Needs element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Nevertheless, a £281k

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underspend would be added to the £1.180k carried forward from 2017/18 giving an estimated DSG balance of £1,295k at the end of the financial year. This figure included the additional £788k High Needs funding for 2018/19 that the Government announced in December 2018. In response to a question, the Head of Education and Children's Social Care Finance confirmed that in light of the increasing pressures on the High Needs Block it would be prudent to retain the surplus around this level. The final 2018/19 outturn would need to be evaluated before any decisions could be taken.

In relation to Adult Education; in response to a question the Head of Education and Children's Social Care Finance explained that the £128k overspend was a result of, amongst other things, possibly overestimating the fees that would be generated in 2018/19. The Director of Education explained that there had been a focus on supporting corporate priorities and the courses that were required to do this were the less lucrative courses to run. There had also been an element of overspend around staffing and this would be resolved going forward. The current projections for 2019/20 were that the service would be cost neutral as growth had been included in the budget. The Sub-Committee also noted that some of the overspend had been the result of action that had been taken in response to recommendations from Ofsted.

Members noted that the Children's Social Care Division was currently overspending by £3,051k (net of management action of £800k). The overspend before management action stood at £4,250k. Placements for children continued to be a pressure. Members were reminded that the number of placements was volatile and had further increased above budgeted levels, particularly in residential homes, independent fostering arrangements and special guardianship arrangements. This was in part due to the increase in the number of children reaching the threshold for secure placements and no secure placements being available. There had also been a significant increase in the cost of outreach services connected to the placements. Officers were being proactive in addressing this issue. In addition to the £800k already received from Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) an additional contribution of £900k had been secured following positive discussions. The Local Authority had been able to put a strong case to the CCG with good evidence and the additional funding would go towards addressing the increasing pressures. Members noted that in particular Fostering, Adoption and Resources was a needs-led service and as a result figures were volatile. The Head of Education and Children's Social Care Finance confirmed that growth had been assumed for 2019/20 in addition to the £900k received from the CCG. The Service continued to identify ways in which further pressures could be mitigated.

A Member noted that Bromley was still below statistical and national neighbours in relation to the number of children in care and queried the explanation that had been given to Ofsted. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that Ofsted had challenged the low numbers of children taken into care in Bromley. In order to identify an answer it was necessary to go back to 2016 when there was clear evidence that children were not being

safeguarded. Since that time the Local Authority had continued to see an appropriate increase in the number of Children Looked After. However, the Director was confident that the right children were now being cared for and the Courts were validating the decisions being taken by the Local Authority. Ofsted accepted that Bromley was moving from a low trajectory but had seen an appropriate increase.

In response to a question, the Director of Children's Social Care explained that the West London Alliance was a result of a number of Boroughs coming together as a hub. Together the Boroughs were in a stronger position to negotiate. The Alliance also reviewed the quality of placement as well as providing a central hub for reviewing placements. Colleagues in Commissioning were reviewing the options and it was possible that Bromley may choose to join or not to pursue this route however it was important that all options were being considered. The Sub-Committee noted that there were national challenges around secure residential placements. The Director of Children's Social Care confirmed that one of the new units that was proposed would be located in Medway whilst the location for the unit in the North was not known. Members noted that it was likely to be a couple of years before the units were fully functional. In response to a question concerning whether there would be any value in considering working with LB Bexley to develop a joint business case for a secure unit; the Director of Children's Social Care reported that there were challenges around responsibility for the number of children that would be placed and the range of safeguarding issues that this would bring. The main cost to the Local Authority came from cost of the level of supervision that could be required to safeguard the young people, which was 2:1 or in some more complex cases 3:1. Once a young person was in a secure placement the Local Authority would ensure that therapy and education was put in place within the placement. The Director of Children's Social Care also reminded the Sub-Committee that a case was published by the court which supported Bromley in its efforts to find a secure bed for young person who was deemed "too risky" for secure accommodation due to the mix of young people already within the placement.

In response to a question concerning whether any further management action would be taken, the Head of Education and Children's Social Care Finance confirmed that in 2018/19 specific management action projects had been put in place. As a result of this some savings had been identified and delivered and some had not. The Director of Children's Social Care reported that one specific project that had delivered savings involved identifying up to 4 in-house foster carers being trained as step down specialist foster carers for more complex young people leaving secure accommodation. There had already been one successful matching which, more importantly, delivered a benefit to the young person whilst releasing a saving of £250k for the Local Authority. If a further 3 successful cases could be delivered a significant pressure on the Local Authority's budget could be mitigated.

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In relation to the recruitment of in-house foster carers, the Team was working hard to be creative about attracting foster carers to Bromley. There were currently 29 prospective foster carers in the pipeline.

Members thanked and congratulated the Head of Education and Children's Social Care Finance, the Director of Children's Social Care, and the Children's Social Care Division on the successful delivery of innovative savings and securing additional funding from the CCG.

The Sub-Committee noted that a further risk area for placements was the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children cohort. Bromley were experiencing higher levels of children coming into the Borough. Whilst there was grant available, it did not cover the costs of the children being looked after. Due to the cultural match and complexity of the young people a number were in independent fostering agency placements which were more expensive. The Department was in the process of setting up specialist fostering services to support the young people and provide more in-house carers for emergencies. This would reduce costs but ensure that young people received wrap around services from the Council. Although the Council was given a grant (£91 per day for a 16+, £114 per day for an U16) this did not cover the costs of the placement and on costs.

Members noted that 51 Unaccompanied Minors had now been placed in Bromley. Bromley had now withdrawn from the London rota although it was inevitable that in the future quotas would be increased and Bromley would be placed back on the rota. Directors of Children's Social Care across London were currently in negotiation with the Government around the funding issue. Members again noted that the first 25 children were not funded with funding for the remaining children not covering the costs, and on costs of providing care.

In response to a question concerning levels of demand for support from the Virtual School by adopters who under the new Social Work Act could request support from the Virtual School. The Director of Children's Social Care confirmed that this was being closely monitored. Detailed records of any queries made to the Virtual School were being kept as it was not yet possible to predict levels of future demand and this may result in a growth bid going forward.

In relation to recruitment and retention of staff, the Director of Children's Social Care confirmed that the target for permanent staff was 95%. The Service had been reasonably successful in attracting good quality newly qualified social workers. In addition to this the Service had invested in 'Grow Your Own'. There was currently 18 social worker vacancies across the service (excluding management vacancies). Nationally there was stiff competition for social workers and this made it more difficult to attract staff. It was acknowledged that the Council's Caseload Promise did help to support recruitment and retention initiatives.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to note that the latest projected overspend of £2,997,000 is forecast on the controllable budget, based on information as at December 2018.

**b CAPITAL MONITORING Q3 - ECF PORTFOLIO
Report FSD19040**

The Sub-Committee considered a report summarising the current position on capital expenditure and receipts following the 3rd quarter of 2018/19. On 13th February 2019, the Executive had agreed a revised Capital Programme for the four year period 2018/19 to 2021/22 as set out in the report.

Members noted that in the 2019/20 Municipal Year the Sub-Committee would be receiving post-completion reports for the following projects: Langley Park Boys School, The Highway Primary, and Universal Free School Meals.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Director of Education reported that the DfE had confirmed that the application for a Special Free School had been approved. A sponsor to run the specialist provision would now need to be identified through a competitive process. An event would be held in May 2019, and potential bidders would be invited to attend. The specification had now been published and was available to bidders. Bids would need to be submitted by September 2019. The Secretary of State, or the Regional School Commissioner as representative of the Secretary of State, would determine the outcome of the applications although there was not yet a timeline for a final decision. The Director of Education confirmed that there had been a significant amount of interest however the event in May would provide a good indication of the number of interested bidders.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to note and confirm the changes agreed by the Executive on 13th February 2019.

**54 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT 2018/19
Report ECHS19034**

The Sub-Committee considered its regular update on the performance of services for children. The Assistant Director for Strategy, Performance and Engagement reported that there were 4 indicators not meeting expectation and the report provided detailed management commentary around these indicators.

In response to a question concerning whether, in relation to the percentage of Care Leavers (aged 19,20, 21) who were in Education, Employment and Training, the Local Authority had comparative data for residents who were not care leavers, the Assistant Director confirmed that the national measure on the whole population related to 16 and 17 year olds. There was a need to considered whether it was a fair comparison as Care Leavers faced very different challenges to young people who had not been living in care.

In response to a question concerning the initiatives that were being utilised to

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increase employment amongst Care Leavers the Sub-Committee heard that Bromley had been working with Lewisham to jointly secure DfE funding for a specific project. The Virtual School had also been arranging educational based trips (for example, to colleges and the theatre) for Care Leavers in order to expose young people to the wide range of learning opportunities that were available.

Work was also ongoing in relation to apprenticeships. The DfE had offered opportunities for apprenticeships for Care Leavers that would be taken up. In addition to this Bromley CCG had also offered 1 apprenticeship opportunities and one of our contractors 2 placements . Work continued in relation to ensuring that there was a contractual requirement for companies providing services on behalf of the Local Authority to offer apprenticeship opportunities for Care Leavers. So far, 5 apprenticeships had been secured against a target of 6 but there was always more that could be done.

In relation to average caseloads, the Director of Children's Social Care confirmed that the most recent data demonstrated that caseloads in the Referral and Assessment Service (RAS) had reduced to, on average, 16. Some of the issues around caseloads had been due to vacancies within RAS. The Sub-Committee noted that RAS was effectively the 'front door' to Children's Social Care and there would always be a need to deal with what came through the front door.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director confirmed that current performance around adoption was positive. The Service was performing well in terms of adoption and matching. The Director of Children's Social Care reported that Early Permanency Panels were being held at an earlier stage in the process, and foster-to-adopt performance was positive. In addition to this the fortnightly Fostering and Adoption Panels ensured that there was no delay at any stage of the process. It was too early to assess the impact of the Regional Adoption Agency supported by Coram however this would be monitored.

A Member who also sat on the Fostering and Adoption Panel remarked that through her role on the Panels she felt that the performance culture in the organisation had changed. Officers were more performance driven with a greater understanding of quality and timeliness and she passed her thanks to Officers. The Assistant Director welcomed her comments advising that Officers had worked hard to implement the Performance Management Framework and that management oversight was considered and consistent.

RESOLVED: That the January 2019 outturn of key performance indicators and associated management commentary be noted.

**55 EXPENDITURE ON CONSULTANTS 2017/18 & 2018/19
Report CSD19039**

At its meeting on 7th February 2019, the Executive, Resources and Contracts PDS Committee considered the attached report on expenditure on consultants across all Council departments for both revenue (appendix 2) and capital (appendix 3)

budgets. The Committee requested that the report be considered by all PDS Committees.

The Sub-Committee noted that some of the revenue expenditure related to the Ofsted Inspection and would now be coming to an end.

The Head of Education and Children's Social Care Finance reported that some of the capital spend was in relation to consultancy for basic need school building works.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

56 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (VARIATION) ORDER 2006 AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded during consideration of the items of business listed below as it was likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

57 EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2019

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2019. were agreed, and signed as a correct record.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Chairman noted that this would be his last meeting in the Chair. The Chairman and the Sub-Committee thanked all Officer and Member colleagues, both past and present, for their support and input into scrutinising the budget and service performance and holding both officers and the Portfolio Holder to account.

Councillor Nicholas Bennett proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman. Chairing the Sub-Committee had involved a great deal of work and the Sub-Committee had done a lot of good work, especially in relation to considering annual reports, which had enabled the Select Committee to undertake in-depth scrutiny reviews.

Councillor Judi Ellis seconded the vote of thanks, noting that the calm and patient manner in which the Chairman had managed the Sub-Committee meetings had enabled Members to develop a detailed and secure understanding of budget and performance monitoring.

The Meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Education, Children and Families Budget and Performance Monitoring Sub-Committee
10 April 2019

Chairman