

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES BUDGET SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 18 January 2022

Present:

Councillor Judi Ellis (Chairman)

Councillors Nicky Dykes, Hannah Gray, Christine Harris and Simon Jeal

Also Present:

Councillor Kieran Terry, Executive Assistant to the Children, Education and Families Portfolio

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Dykes.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

There were no questions

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2021 AND MATTERS OUTSTANDING

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2021, excluding exempt information, were agreed and signed as a correct record.

5 CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING FSD22008

On November 24th 2021, the Executive received a report summarising the current position on capital expenditure and receipts following the 2nd quarter of 2021/22 and agreed a revised Capital Programme for the four-year period 2021/22 to 2024/25. The report before the Sub-Committee highlighted the current position agreed by the Executive and the Leader in respect of the Capital Programme for the Children, Education and Families Portfolio. The latest programme for this portfolio was set out in Appendix A of the report and detailed comments on

individual schemes were shown in Appendix B.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to note and acknowledge the current position in respect of Capital Schemes, as agreed by the Executive on 24th November 2021.

**6 CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PORTFOLIO DRAFT
BUDGET 2022/23
Report CEF22008**

The report considered the Portfolio Holder's Draft 2022/23 Budget which incorporated the future cost pressures and initial draft budget saving options reported to Executive on 12th January 2022. Members were requested to consider the initial draft budget being proposed and identify any further action that might be taken to reduce cost pressures facing the Council over the next four years. Executive were requesting that each PDS Committee considered the proposed initial draft budget savings and cost pressures for their Portfolio with the views of each PDS Committee be reported back to the next meeting of the Executive, prior to the Executive making recommendations to Council on 2022/23 Council Tax levels. There were still outstanding issues and areas of uncertainty remaining. Any further updates will be included in the 2022/23 Council Tax report to the next meeting of the Executive.

In opening the discussion, the Chairman noted that at the last meeting in January 2021, the Committee had considered issues around the minimum funding guarantee, the slowing of the rate of increase of Education Care and Health Plans (EHCPs) which it now appeared had not happened, and the ending of the (Covid) redeployment of health colleagues who would be returning to their substantive posts. It was also noted that the Committee had previously considered the potential deficit in future years. Members noted that the Chairman of the PDS Committee had circulated a report which had recommended establishing a specific contingency fund for children's social care to address cost pressures arising from placements. The Chairman noted that the current position seemed similar to the previous year.

In response to a question, the Director of Children, Education and Families confirmed that no specific amount had been set aside for Covid catch up activities for children looked after, although a Government Grant was available for Covid catch-up. Evidence suggested that children looked after were doing well and continued to make progress in all areas. The progress of children looked after was kept under review, especially in terms of attainment, and these reviews were undertaken every six months. The Sub-Committee noted that the issue of Covid Catch-up had been raised by both the Living in Care Council (LinCC) and the Bromley Youth Council (BYC).

In relation to SEN Transport, the Sub-Committee noted that mitigations to address the ongoing cost pressures continued to be a work in progress and there were a number of areas that were being reviewed. A Transport Group had been established to look at a range of options, although the Sub-Committee noted that

none would have an immediate impact on the ongoing budget pressures. The Director of Children, Education and Families highlighted that pressures within SEN Transport were a national issue and as such a range of approaches were required such as travel training, personalised budgets, and options around the delivery of the in-house fleet. The Sub-Committee also noted that the Service had recently procured software to assist with route optimisation to enable the most effective routes to be planned.

The Committee received reassurance that co-production would be at the heart of any proposals and that parents would be as fully engaged as possible. The Director of Education confirmed that the proposals in the draft budget were within existing policy. Going forward there would be full and meaningful consultation on any proposals outside existing policy.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Director of Education confirmed that typically a placement was made for a key stage or for a specific phase of education and when transport was agreed it was for that period meaning there should not be a requirement for parents to apply every year. However, there may be specific individual circumstances that necessitated additional consideration and that may be around the nature of the placement or considerations that needed to be made at the annual review.

The Sub-Committee suggested that in future it would be useful for the Sub-Committee to receive a breakdown of the number of families accepting the additional offers and travel training along with the reasons given for families declining the additional offers and travel training.

A Member noted that the report referenced the increasing costs of secure placements and questioned whether any options, from a capital funding perspective, were being considered in relation to buying property that could be commissioned and leased out for secure placements or other suitable accommodation. In response, the Director of Children, Education and Families reported that conversations were underway across London to identify suitable properties London-wide. This would enable secure accommodation placements to be available pan-London and as a contributor the London Borough of Bromley would be able to call on the resource where necessary.

In response to a question from the Chairman concerning whether there was any additional Covid Support Grant to support schools, especially smaller one form entry schools, with additional utility costs resulting from the need to have increased ventilation in classrooms during the winter months, the Head of Education and Children Social Care Finance confirmed that the Covid Support Grant contained an element for such increased costs however, schools were primarily funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and this funding had been increased for 2022/23.

The Chairman noted that referrals through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) were increasing and sought assurances that support was being provided by the other partner agencies.

The Chairman noted that there were a number of areas of savings that may not immediately be apparent including, but not limited to:

- The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Team was fully staffed thus reducing costs on agency staff.
- There had been improvements in the stability of placements.
- A very good Foster Carer training scheme was in place which supported placement stability, and this was a growth area for which Bromley should be commended.

The Chairman expressed concerns in relation to SEND Tribunals, noting that head teachers had reported that it took an average of 30 hours to put together a report for a tribunal. It was therefore important to review the reasons why decisions made by the Local Authority were being overturned as this had financial implications. In response, the Director of Education confirmed that this was an area that was under close review. The Sub-Committee received reassurance that efforts were made to mediate with families and enhanced support was provided. Throughout the statutory assessment process, the Local Authority worked extensively with families. It was further noted that this was a national issue and the outcome of the national SEND Review was expected sometime in the Spring. This review would need to address some of the existing systemic issues.

In relation to a question concerning the shortage of Educational Psychologists, the Sub-Committee noted that additional funding had been allocated to support recruitment and the position had improved from the previous year. The Director of Children, Education and Families highlighted that the shortage in Education Psychologists was a national issue. Work was underway to improve existing terms and conditions to make the London Borough of Bromley a more attractive option for prospective staff. The Committee noted that there were many important elements to the work of Education Psychologists and their role was not limited to work on statutory assessments.

RESOLVED: That

- i) The update on the financial forecast for 2022/23 to 2025/26 be noted;**
- ii) The initial draft 2022/23 budget be noted as a basis for setting the 2022/23 budget; and**
- iii) The Executive be recommended to note the comments of the Children, Education & Families Budget Sub-Committee on the initial draft 2022/23 budget at its meeting on 12 February 2022.**

7 2022/23 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT
Report CEF22009

The report provided an outline of the final DSG allocation for 2022/23 and an overview of how this would be spent.

The Head of Education and Children's Social Care Finance confirmed that no funding had been transferred between the Schools' Block and the High Needs

Block. The Local Authority followed the strict guidelines from the DfE for the distribution of funding to schools under the National Funding Formula. The Sub-Committee also noted that the Minimum Funding Guarantee was set at 1%.

In response to a question, the Director of Education confirmed that the School Admissions Team was resilient and whilst it was the Team's busiest time of year, staff were holding up well in terms of the pressures. The Sub-Committee noted that an experienced Admissions and Transport Manager had been recruited.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to approve the Dedicated Schools Grant allocation and the methodology of its distribution.

The Meeting ended at 7.46 pm

Chairman