

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Education, Children and Families Policy Committee

Meeting held 19 March 2024

PRESENT: Councillors Dawn Dale (Chair), Maroof Raouf (Deputy Chair), Mohammed Mahroof (Group Spokesperson), Dianne Hurst (Group Spokesperson), Nighat Basharat, Jayne Dunn, Maleiki Haybe, Ian Horner and Ann Whitaker

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 No apologies for absence were received.

2. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

2.1 There were no exclusions of the press and public on this occasion.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 No declarations of interest were received.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting of the Education, Children and Families Committee, held on the 26th of February 2024, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 No public questions or petitions were received from members of the public.

6. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

6.1 No Members' questions were received on this occasion.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 The Committee received the Committee's Work Programme for consideration and discussion. The aim of the Work Programme is to show all known, substantive agenda items for forthcoming meetings of the Committee, to enable this Committee, other committees, officers, partners, and the public to plan their work with and for the Committee. Changes since the Committee's

last meeting, including any new items, had been made in consultation with the Co-Chairs, Deputy Chair and Group Spokesperson, via their regular pre-meetings, and these were set out at the beginning of Appendix A of the report.

- 7.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Committee's work programme, as set out in Appendix 1, be agreed, including the additions and amendments identified in Part 1.

8. **2023/24 Q3 BUDGET MONITORING**

- 8.1 This report brings the Committee up to date with the Council's General Fund revenue outturn position for 2023/24 as at quarter 3.

- 8.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee:-

1. notes the updated information and management actions on the 2023/24 Revenue Budget Outturn as described in this report; and
2. requests that an in depth briefing and fact finding session on Home to School Transport costs be added to the Committee's Work Programme.

8.3 **Reasons for Decision**

- 8.3.1 To record formally changes to the Revenue Budget.

8.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

- 8.4.1 The Council is required to both set a balance budget and to ensure that in-year income and expenditure are balanced. No other alternatives were considered.

9. **SCHOOL CALENDAR 2025/26**

- 9.1 This report is submitted in order to secure agreement of the school calendar for 2025/26 Academic year for Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools.

- 9.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee approves the school calendar for the 2025/26 academic year, as attached at Appendix A.

9.3 **Reasons for Decision**

- 9.3.1 It is recommended that Appendix A be approved as the model school calendar for the 2025/26 academic year. The calendar applies to all Community schools, Voluntary Controlled Schools, Community Special Schools and maintained nursery schools. Voluntary Aided Schools, Trusts and Academies that are their

own Admission Authority are recommended to adopt the model calendar to promote consistency across the City.

9.3.2 It is likely that Church Aided Schools will have their Easter Break around the religious festival. This has always been the case and Aided Schools will continue to set their own dates at Easter.

9.3.3 There was overwhelming support for fixing the Easter break at the beginning of April when the proposal was first consulted upon for the 2017/18 school calendar. It is accepted that there are many different views and opinions on the school calendar. The purpose of the consultation was to invite opinion and comment from all stakeholders. There have not been many responses to the proposed calendar, nor has there been any strong opposition to the proposed calendar for 2025/26 which indicates that the support expressed under last year's consultation continues.

9.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

9.4.1 In response to the overwhelming support for fixing the Easter Break during the 2017/18 consultation process and in subsequent years the Authority has only consulted on this single model for 2025/26.

10. **COMMISSIONING OF A SOCIAL CARE CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

10.1 This report sets out the importance of the Social Care Case Management System and seeks approval to Commission a Social Care System in order to ensure service continuity.

This report also sets out the estimated costs of the system over the maximum contract period.

10.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee approves the commission of a Social Care Case Management System from an external provider for a period of up to 8 years and estimated value of £3.1 million.

10.3 **Reasons for Decision**

10.3.1 This commissioning decision will enable the Council to commence Commercial activity for a new contract commencing from 5th May 2024 for a maximum duration of 8 years.

10.3.2 This commission will also ensure:

- The continuance of a software solution to manage the Council's key Line of Business System for Social Care.
- The Council meets its statutory duties.
- Back-office functions can continue.

10.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

- 10.4.1 Do nothing. The Council requires a Case Management System for Social Care to deliver statutory services. Do nothing means that the current contract ends on 4th May 2024 and there will be no software provision. This is not a viable option – the council must have a system in place to execute its duties.
- 10.4.2 Develop our own system. This would be a significant undertaking, requiring skills and resources that the Council does not have. Those resources would have to be retained for future updates and functional changes as statutory requirements and business needs changed. The Council would also have to consider storage and retention of data. Security and role-based access would need to be managed.
- 10.4.3 Further extend existing contracts. This is not an option as all available contract extensions have been utilised.

11. **REVIEW OF FOSTERING PAYMENTS**

11.1 As part of our sufficiency strategy, Sheffield City Council are committed to expanding our in-house fostering service whilst continuing to work in partnership with the independent fostering sector. To be able to operate competitively Sheffield City Council need be able to pay allowances in recognition of the need to recruit and retain experienced carers able to commit to the varied challenges of the fostering task. The fostering payment scheme is a reflection of the real need within Sheffield City Council to retain skilled and experienced carers and reward carers for their loyalty and commitment.

11.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee:-

1. agrees the Policy on payments for Foster Carers;
2. approves the variation of payments as proposed; and
3. requests that additional allowances for culturally appropriate products be reviewed.

11.3 **Reasons for Decision**

11.3.1 The Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers 2023 – 2026 will ensure the Council has set out its commitment in line with its duty to ensure that there is a range of sufficient placements which meet the needs of children and young people in care.

Reviewing the foster carer payments is a key part of this strategy to ensure that we maximise family based care for children in Sheffield.

11.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

11.4.1 **Do nothing**

Our current pay for foster carers puts us as competitive against our regional neighbours. However:

- Foster cares feel undervalued by the Local Authority and resign.
- Negotiation regarding fostering allowances take place on an annual basis – leading to confusion and dissatisfaction.
- Our current policy does not champion our strategic commitments to education and belonging.
- Paying skills payment before a foster carer has completed their training has led to
 - demotivated cares to complete the Fostering Standards work in a timely manner, meaning that our foster carers are not getting the skills training as swiftly as they did in the past. This training is critical in supporting the challenging situations that foster carers can face supporting our children
 - Secondly it is resulting in significant long term increased spend in situations where connected carers are approved for a short period whilst long terms plans are agreed for children. This creates a massive financial disparity for connected carers in very similar situations.

This option has been discounted.

11.4.2 **Increase all skills payments by the same percentage as the annual fostering national minimum allowance**

Our current skills payments are made per child and are competitive against our regional local authorities. Increasing skills payments by 6.8% would cost £175,200. Fees were increased considerably in 2019, and the decision to pay the full amount per child rather than providing foster carers with a reduction in payment for subsequent children was also introduced. Increasing the skills fee annually given this significant increase in recent years does not represent good value for money for the council and therefore has been discounted.

12. RENEWAL OF CONTRACT WITH NEXUS MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST TO DELIVER THE MEDICAL NEEDS EDUCATION SERVICE

- 12.1 This report sets out the proposal to re-commission the Medical Needs Education Service from an external provider. This will be for a 2-year term and with a total value of £3,347,171 over that period.

This report describes the current service provision and the background to the proposed commission of the Medical Needs Education Service.

This report sets out the need for a recommission of the Medical Needs Education Service.

This report describes the service to be commissioned

- 12.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee approves the commissioning of a service contract with a term of 2

years from September 2024 and a value of £3,347,171 for the provision of the Medical Needs Education Service from an external provider.

12.3 **Reasons for Decision**

12.3.1 Re-commissioning of the service is the preferred option as it will allow the Council to meet statutory duties in regard to providing education for children and young people with medical needs.

12.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

12.4.1 Not to renew this contract. This option was rejected because it would leave the Council unable to meet statutory duties relating to pupils with medical needs that make them unable to attend school.

12.4.2 Providing the service in-house. This option was rejected as the Council does not have the expertise or staffing required for this delivery and could not mobilise this in time for the start of the contract.

13. **ANNUAL UPDATE OF THE BUILDING SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES PROGRAMME**

13.1 This report is to provide an annual update to the Education, Children and Families Committee on the Building Successful Families programme, referred to nationally as the Supporting Families programme.

13.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee:-

1. continues to endorse the strategic developments across the Early Help system in ensuring that Sheffield retains Earned Autonomy and continues to prioritise Early Help for children, young people, and their families;
2. notes the developments and achievements within the Building Successful Families Programme over the 23/24 financial year; and
3. approves the proposed financial plan for the 2024-2025 budget of the programme.

13.3 **Reasons for Decision**

13.3.1 The Early Help System is a network of services, processes and interactions that aim to help children, young people, and families at the earliest opportunity. If we continue to develop our system, we will see vulnerable families thrive, becoming empowered to become resilient over time and build connections to their local community. Our local services will also be joined-up, flexible and responsive to new challenges, becoming sustainable for the long term creating stronger multi-agency partnerships which work together to understand local trends, predict emerging need, and respond to those needing additional help. It is therefore

essential that we continue the ambitions in further developing our data and system maturity with the full approval of the committee.

13.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

13.4.1 Not applicable as this report is an annual report of the development of the Building Successful Families programme.

14. **PUPIL OUTCOMES IN SHEFFIELD SCHOOL SETTINGS AND THE IMPACT OF THE LEARN SHEFFIELD COMMISSION**

14.1 To provide the Committee with an update on Pupil outcomes in Sheffield School settings and the impact of Learn Sheffield.

14.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee notes the progress in relation to pupil outcomes and demographics in school settings following national releases of comparative data and demonstrating Learn Sheffield's impact in supporting settings.

14.3 **Reasons for Decision**

14.3.1 For members to understand the educational landscape of pupil outcomes in Sheffield.

14.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

14.4.1 There are no alternative options to be considered.

15. **UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHILDREN'S SERVICES BELONGING FRAMEWORK**

15.1 This paper provides an update about our work to develop a Belonging Framework.

As a reminder, we are developing a Belonging Framework to drive change - so that everything we do is focussed on developing and deepening children and young people's sense of belonging.

Children and young people's views will be central to the development of our Belonging Framework and will be at the heart of all we do.

Belonging links to our strategic priorities in the Sheffield City Council Plan 2024 – 2028, Together we get things done. In particular, to the first priority outcome:

A place where all children belong and all young people can build a successful future.

15.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee:-

1. acknowledges our update and endorses our next steps;
2. continues to be proactive in the development of the belonging framework, including the proposed engagement plan;
3. notes that the development of the framework continues to be an iterative process as we gain the views of children and young people in ways that work best for them, and review and refine the framework and next steps based on this; and
4. notes the continued intention for an ongoing conversation with the Committee about belonging, including a further update presented at the Committee meeting in Summer 2024.

15.3 Reasons for Decision

- 15.3.1 A Belonging Framework will ensure that everything we do is focussed on developing or deepening children and young people's sense of belonging. It will be designed so that other parts of the Council and other organisations can review and "attach" their contribution to belonging to the framework.
- 15.3.2 Our approach to engagement and plans for consultation will mean that we can carry out authentic consultation with children and young people. It will also ensure that we can fully explore Belonging with other stakeholders, listening to their views and allowing us to develop other opportunities for engagement as they present themselves.
- 15.3.3 Outcomes for the Belonging Framework will have a qualitative and quantitative focus. They will be developed iteratively through the process of co-production. These outcomes may relate to individual experience, happiness, fulfilment, purpose, stability and will relate back to our vision, however we will be led by what children and young people tell us.

15.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected

- 15.4.1 The alternative options are to consult young residents on a smaller scale but more quickly or to use feedback we have already received and not seek any more.
- 15.4.2 We do not recommend either of these approaches given feedback from the Youth Cabinet which has informed our approach and how vital it is to the development of a meaningful Belonging Framework that we carry out authentic consultation that reflects a wide range of children and young people's views. The volume of consultation that we anticipate will be achieved by the Young Residents' Survey, will give us a much wider reach and in doing so provide feedback that reflects the personality and diversity of the city.
- 15.4.3 When children and young people feel a sense of belonging and sense of pride in their families, their peers, and their communities, they can be emotionally strong, self-assured, and able to deal with challenges and difficulties. This creates an

important foundation for their learning and development. Positive messages about their families, backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and languages help children and young people to develop pride in who they are. These messages also give them confidence to voice their views and opinions, to make choices, and to help shape their own learning, development and future.

16. AN UPDATE ON WORK RELATED TO RACE EQUALITY BY CHILDREN'S SERVICES

16.1 To update the Committee on progress made by Children's Services on actions and steps taken towards implementing our Race Equality Objectives.

16.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee notes the Children's Services progress in relation to the implementation of the Race Equality initiatives both corporately and with our children and families.

16.3 Reasons for Decision

16.3.1 This report provides an update of Children's Services in implementing Race Equality.

16.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected

16.4.1 There are no other options to be considered.

17. THE CREATION OF A TASK AND FINISH GROUP TO OVERSEE WORK TO DEVELOP PRACTICE AND POLICY IN RELATION TO HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

17.1 This report seeks approval to appoint a Task and Finish Group to oversee work to develop practice and policy in relation to Home to School Transport. Membership will be drawn from the Education Children and Families Committee. The Terms of Reference of the Group is appended to this report.

17.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education Children and Families Policy Committee agrees to appoint a Task and Finish Group to oversee work to develop practice and policy in relation to Home to School Transport and that the appointment of Members to the working group be decided in the new municipal year.

17.3 Reasons for Decision

17.3.1 The Task and Finish Group will bring together a small, focused group of members to review the home to school transport policy and provide clear advice to officers developing the policy. Cross party representation will mean that political agreement is reached at an early stage of the process allowing the Policy to progress. The Group will feedback advice given, and progress on the work programme to the Education, Children and Families committee so the Committee

can make informed decisions on the Home to School Transport Policy.

17.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected

17.4.1 An alternative would be to deliver a series of Knowledge Briefings for the Policy Committee. This was rejected as it would not enable constructive debate and advice to be provided to officers.

18. UPDATE REPORT FROM THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

18.1 The paper provides a Strategic Director's update on the performance and governance of Children's services, including progress in meeting DCS (Director of Children's Services) accountabilities and delivering on our statutory requirements. It also provides an update regarding progress in relation to the Council's Delivery Plan, key strategic events and issues on the horizon.

18.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee notes the Strategic Director of Children's Services' report and agrees key activity for the coming months.

18.3 Reasons for Decision

18.3.1 This report provides an update regards Children's Services activities for Members.

18.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected

18.4.1 Not applicable – no decision or change is being proposed.