

Extract of Minutes from Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting 23 November 2017

300 Budget Scrutiny: Reviewing the 2017/18 Budget Position for Children and Families

As part of the Council's development of the 2018/19 budget, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel was asked to review the 2017/18 budget position prior to consideration of the 2018/19 budget at the Panel's January meeting.

The Panel received a presentation from the Head of Strategic Infrastructure Finance and Financial Recovery. In the course of the discussion, the following main points were made:

- Members were reminded that the amount spent on demand-led services was increasing. The majority of the Directorate's budget was spent on placements. It was also noted that the expenditure relating to services at the Family Front Door had grown considerably in recent months.
- A question was asked about work to reduce spend on home to school transport. It was confirmed that this was the subject of ongoing review involving the Corporate Transport Board. Work included providing independent travel training (which reduced the likelihood of students needing transport to be provided) and the use of direct payments, allowing parents to facilitate their own transport arrangements.
- It was confirmed that every young person was looked at as an individual, although the majority of independent travel training was for children in mainstream schools. A question was asked about whether a child would be entitled to assistance with transport even if their parent had access to their own car and they did not need to be accompanied. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure Finance and Financial Recovery agreed to confirm details of the relevant policy following the meeting.
- It was confirmed that officers were still in negotiation with Babcock to identify where efficiencies of £230k could be made. The target was a budget reduction of 10% which had not yet been achieved. However, the service was confident that this would be achieved next year. It was important to balance achievement of savings with ongoing delivery of statutory services.

- With reference to the CAMHS service, which was delivered in partnership with Worcestershire CCGs, it was confirmed that there had been a savings target of approximately £100k for 2017/18. It was confirmed that this saving would not be made. Members were reminded that the service had benefitted from some additional funding from NHS England which would be signed off at Health and Well-being Board in December.
- It was confirmed that all figures were correct up to the end of August 2017 and the main areas of overspend related to children's placements. September figures would be included in the December Cabinet report and were likely to show that the position had worsened as a result of an increase in expenditure relevant to children's placements. Although there was continued investment in recruitment and retention activities, a number of key posts were still filled with agency staff.
- A request was made for comparable salary figures for neighbouring local authorities with whom the County Council might be in competition for staff. It was suggested that this was a particular issue in the north of the County, where transport networks made it easy for people to work elsewhere. It was confirmed that HR colleagues would be asked to provide comparative figures after the meeting. Members were reminded that it was not just salaries that were important when recruiting staff. There was a need to look at the total reward, including training, pensions, re-location packages and staff support.
- In relation to the Placements budget, it was suggested that there was a need to consider providing more small children's homes in Worcestershire as opposed to using more expensive out-of-county placements. Similarly, an increase in in-house foster carers would reduce spend on Independent Fostering Agencies. It was acknowledged that there would always be some children with very specific needs who would need to be looked after in the external market and potentially out-of-county, but the Council should look to increase the numbers of internal placements where possible.
- Members were reminded that at the last full Council meeting further capital investment had been approved to create more in-house placements. The purchase of properties was now being taken forward and, as an example, for a 4

bed unit for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, compared with external placements savings could be in the region of £150k per year.

- In response to the suggestion that the uncertainty caused by the setting up of the Alternative Delivery Model would have an impact on recruitment, Members were reminded that, although this might be an issue which may cause uncertainty, in the current climate no Local Authority could guarantee to its staff that there would be no changes. Furthermore, the Cabinet Member reminded Members that the service was an improving service which had recently recruited fantastic staff at Assistant Director level. Also, the Council's improvement partner had commented positively on the quality of the Council's Newly Qualified Social Workers.
- It was confirmed that the small underspend on the Youth Offending Service budget was as a result of a lower than anticipated level of spend on youth offending.
- In relation to Early Help, the Panel was reminded that lots of early help activity was undertaken by other partners, such as schools and the voluntary sector, and was not all funded by the Local Authority.
- The Chairman suggested that, when the Panel discussed the 2018/19 budget at its January meeting, it would also wish to look at progress against 2017/18 savings. It would be important to ensure that savings were deliverable and this might be something that Panel Members could review on a quarterly basis.

After the debate the following actions were agreed:

- The Head of Strategic Infrastructure Finance and Financial Recovery agreed to confirm the details relevant to whether a child would be entitled to assistance with transport even if their parent had access to their own car and they did not need to be accompanied. Subsequent to the meeting, it was confirmed that a child would still be entitled to assistance with transport if they met the transport policy criteria, if their parent had their own car and/or they received motability allowance on behalf of their child, and support would still be given if the child did not need to be accompanied.
- Members should be aware that a report on the CAMHS Transition Plan would be considered by

the Health and Well-being Board on 5 December 2017.

- Details of comparable salaries offered by local competitor authorities would be made available to the Panel.

In addition, the Chairman reminded Panel Members that:

- A member briefing on the outcomes of the options appraisal for the Alternative Delivery Model would be held in early December. [This was subsequently arranged for 6 December at 1.30pm.]
- Members should contact schools in their area to ask about their experiences of the Family Front Door and whether the service provided was improving.
- Events for Looked After Children were being held in each district and Members should aim to attend if possible. A very successful event had recently been held in Wyre Forest.