

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD AT 7.00PM ON  
THURSDAY, 21 JANUARY 2021  
VIRTUAL MEETING: PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL'S YOUTUBE PAGE**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors D Over (Chair), K Aitken, G Casey, A Coles, (Vice Chair), N Day, A Dowson, T Haynes, S Lane, L Robinson, B Rush, H Skibsted

Co-opted Members: Peter Cantley, Flavio Vettese, Clare Watchorn, Al Kingsley, and Parish Councillors Susie Lucas and Dr Sridhar

Officers Present: Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Executive Director, People and Communities  
Lou Williams, Service Director, Children and Safeguarding  
Nicola Curley, Assistant Director Children's Services

Also Present: Councillor L Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education, Skills and University  
Councillor J Holdich, Leader of the Council, and Deputy Mayor of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority  
John Hill - Chief Officer, Business Board and Director of Business and Skills at the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority  
Councillor Ray Bisby, Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Committee

The Chair informed the Committee that Councillor Janet Goodwin, Chair of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee had recently passed away on 23 December after a period of illness. Councillor Goodwin had been Chair of the committee for some time and would be greatly missed. As a mark of respect and in memory of Councillor Goodwin the Committee held a minute's silence.

**21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Co-opted Member Rizwan Rahemtulla.

**22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of interest were received.

Agenda item 5 New University of Peterborough Update

- Councillor Over declared that he was a member of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
- Al Kingsley declared that he was a member of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Business Board

- Councillor Coles declared that he was the Lead member for skills on the Scrutiny Committee at the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

### 23. **MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2021**

The minutes of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9 November were agreed as a true and accurate record.

### 24. **CALL IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISION**

There were no call-ins for this meeting.

### 25. **NEW UNIVERSITY OF PETERBOROUGH UPDATE REPORT**

The Chief Officer, Business Board and Director of Business and Skills at the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) introduced the report accompanied by Cllr John Holdich, Leader of the Council and Deputy Mayor of the CPCA and Cllr Lynne Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education, Skills and University.

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with an overview of the skills and economic development strategies, developed by the CPCA, that had given rise to the comprehensive programme of bids for local and national funding, engagement with businesses and construction, taking place between 2018 and 2028. Also provided was the implementation approach for the strategy, including:

1. **The rationale for the campus design** that would balance increased opportunity for local people to gain a HE qualification with the opportunity for them to gain a HE level job locally
2. **The processes to secure funding** from HMG and locally, along with private sector co-investment to finance the first five potential buildings.
3. **The delivery approach**, building design and master planning processes for the current two, and proposed further three buildings for the campus.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members noted that a further thematic area of Sports would be added in phase 5 and sought clarification on whether this was dependent on all of the local sports facilities supporting the bid, an example would be if it were dependent on the POSH football club relocating to the embankment. Members were advised that in terms of volume Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) who were awarded Academic Delivery Partner were already the most successful sports science provider in the UK. Peterborough was seen as an interesting geographic catchment area for sports science. Early indications had shown that if POSH were to relocate to the embankment that they would be keen to integrate with the sports science faculty at the university, including the development of sports academies.
- There was a Green Travel Plan in place for the first building. Due to the anticipated number of people in the research building the Peterborough City Council (PCC) planners advised that a car park for 190 spaces would be required and this would be in the form of a multi deck car park adjacent to the site.
- Members were pleased to note that there would be a Faculty of Agriculture, Environment and Sustainability and were interested to hear how this would assist with the climate work being done at PCC. Members were advised that the University Faculty was being developed around three drivers: student demand on what they want to be taught, employers and what skills they needed, and the buildings niche and what it would become known for. The niche for this University would be climate change and zero carbon technologies. ARU were keen on developing environmental management, zero technologies including innovation management.

The research component was focused on attracting into Peterborough companies that were developing net zero technologies so that Peterborough, the University and the campus could become highly competitive in net zero technologies and climate change action.

- The ambition was to partner with big technology companies that are the member companies of organisations like TWI based in South Cambridgeshire and to get Peterborough local manufacturing companies into their supply chain providing net zero technology, systems and products.
- Members sought clarification on how the university would reflect the considerable religious, cultural and historic diversity of Peterborough. Members were advised that it was fundamentally a local university and 90% of the students would come from Peterborough which would reflect the culture, ethnicity and social economic structures of the city. It was important to educate people who lived in the city so that they could get employment in the city. ARU were keen to embed in the vernacular of Peterborough.
- Members noted that the ambition to build the number of students up to a capacity of 12,500 students by 2030/31 and wanted to know how close to this figure the intake would need to be to remain viable and provide long term viability. Members were informed that it would become commercially viable from approximately 3,000 to 4,000 students and up to 6,000 students. The initial phase over the first three years was a lean delivery model. ARU had put aside £6m to cover the anticipated initial loss and ARU would get the building rent free for the first 10 years. There was a high level of confidence in achieving the initial student numbers and ARU already had 800 students who would transfer in, additionally the university was already being marketed. There was medium level confidence of getting to 6,500 level of students that would be needed to fill the two extra buildings. 12,500 students was an aspirational target and was too early to predict how this would be achieved.
- Concern was raised with regard to the possibility of students parking in the local streets rather than in the designated car park due to the cost of parking and clarification was sought as to how this might be resolved. Members were informed that discussions would be held with ARU to look at their policies and rules and regulations and ability to influence students in terms of what they can and cannot do. The business model for the car park was being discussed with PCC officers and the car parking pricing level could be considered to try and set the price at a level that does not discourage the students from parking in the car park. Equally consideration would also need to be given to not encouraging students to bring their cars to the university.
- The university will be working with local employers so that approximately 43% of the students would be working in actual companies and out in the field as part of their course. It would be a bended learning model and not only traditional higher level degree course delivery but flexible apprenticeship degrees. ARU were the largest provider of apprenticeship degrees in the country. Approximately 30% of students would graduate with an apprenticeship degree enabling them to graduate already in employment.
- Members noted that part of the strategy was a “*clear focus on under-represented groups and those “left behind” i.e. those who cannot or will not travel to existing providers*”, and wanted to know how this would be achieved. Members were informed that part of the strategy was to get local people in the area to come to the university who had previously not considered doing a degree or who had not thought about going to university. It might be people that were older and had been made redundant and were wanting to retrain or people already in employment but could not move to go away to university.

The Chair thanked the Chief Officer for the detailed and informative report and attending to answer questions.

## **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED to:**

1. Note and comment on the process and progress on the establishment of a University Phase 1 Teaching Building
2. Note and comment on the process and progress on the establishment of a University Phase 2 Research Building

3. Note and comment on the outline plans for further expansion of the teaching and research campus on the embankment

## 26. **REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE FOR 2019-2020**

The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Committee introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on the activity carried out by the Corporate Parenting Committee in the municipal year 2019-2020.

The report also addressed all areas of the Children in Care pledge and the Care Leavers' Charter. It specifically shows Scrutiny how the Corporate Parenting Committee have been addressing the increase in the Children in Care population; the changes to the partnership with TACT; and Children in Care and Care Leavers' education and training needs.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members noted the work being undertaken on a Passport to Independence for young people in care and asked if the last nine months had provided challenges and halted the work. Members were informed that it had been incredibly challenging for the care leavers over the past year. The service had worked extremely hard to stay in touch with the care leavers' as much as possible and increased virtual contact. Some of the young people had found it very difficult living on their own and being in lockdown but they had felt in general very well supported.
- Members had noted that the Corporate Parenting Committee had identified a growing trend where Children in Care's educational progress was being negatively impacted by their placement outside of the local area, and asked how as Corporate Parents, they could ensure that the educational needs of the children placed out of area was being looked after. Members were informed that Children's Services had worked very closely with the Virtual School that looked after all of the children in care and there was a vulnerable children's tracker in place which included all children in care. All children and young people in care on the tracker had been evaluated to see if they needed face to face visits regardless of how far away they lived or if they needed virtual visits to support them. Where there had been serious concerns a face to face visit had taken place, where there had been less concerns a virtual visit had taken place. A lot of work had been done with the carers and the schools that they attended to ensure that children and young people in care had the technology required to ensure that they were not disadvantaged in school lessons.
- Members sought detail on the project to enhance the function and meaningfulness of Personal Education Plans and how this was progressing. Members were informed that one way of making the Personal Education Plans more purposeful was to ensure that the young person was as involved in the plan as possible and work was being done to look at how the PEP could be a more meaningful document for each individual. Additionally work was being done to see how the health element could be strengthened within the PEP. A strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) was undertaken with the children in care to look at their emotional health and wellbeing. This would be scored with an action plan being put in place from the findings, this would then link into the PEP providing a cohesive plan to support the child going forward.
- Children in Care were either with foster carers, in agency placements, or residential homes and some 16 to 17 year olds lived in semi-independent placements. The impact of Covid had depended on what type of placement the children were placed in. The in house foster carers had worked extremely hard to maintain children in their placements. Finding placements was becoming more challenging which also had a cost implication.

The Chair thanked the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Assistant Director Children's Services for attending the meeting and the detailed and comprehensive report.

## **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to note the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee over the last 12 months.

### **27. SERVICE DIRECTOR REPORT: CHILDREN & SAFEGUARDING INCLUDING UPDATE ON IMPACT OF COVID-19**

The Service Director, Children and Safeguarding introduced the report which provided the Committee with a brief overview of the current position in Children's Services and the impact from the Covid-19 pandemic. The report also provided a summary of the very positive evaluation of the Family Safeguarding model in Peterborough that was published by the Department for Education in November 2020.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members sought clarification on the level of confidence the Service Director had with regard to safeguarding especially in schools during the current pandemic and possible difficulties with school referrals. The Service Director advised that children were less visible when not in school but referrals whilst reduced were still happening from a number of other sources. A lot of information had been circulated via various sources highlighting what people could do if they had concerns about a child. Schools had been vigilant in remaining in contact with children that they are concerned about. The impact of Covid would be long term and there were already signs of more complex needs arising as a result of the first lockdown and the second lockdown would only compound these issues. Schools were very aware of the referral report processes, and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) were still operating which included education staff. Children's Services, Children's Social Care and the Education Service were working very closely together to identify any vulnerable children.
- Members referred to the Evaluation of Family Safeguarding in Peterborough report and noted the recommendation for LA's to look at long term cohort tracking so that the long term outcomes of those who first participated in the pilot could be seen and the information that could be learnt for this.
- Members also noted within the report that all the LA's that took part in the pilot had difficulties in recruiting adult facing workers but Peterborough had a challenge that had persisted longer in particular with finding mental health specialists. Members were informed that it had been very difficult initially to recruit specialist roles such as mental health practitioners. It had taken time to work with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust (CPFT) to articulate the role and whilst there were still some difficulty in recruitment and retention the position had improved considerably.
- Members sought further explanation regarding the Think Communities agenda and investment in community capacity building. Members were informed that this work had been driven by the experience of what had been happening in the Community Hubs and the challenges that had emerged through the pandemic. The work was about thinking about different ways of supporting communities in helping them deal with the challenges they were facing rather than the traditional ways of working with individual families. For example work had been done with schools and voluntary organisations to identify vulnerable families and provide meals over the holidays and access to debt counselling and support.
- Members noted that while demand had not increased significantly in terms of volumes, the needs of families and their children had increased in complexity and sought clarification as to why this had happened. Members were advised the reason for the increase in complexity of need was multifaceted and had included the cumulative effect of lockdown and social isolation of not being in school. Both of these factors had affected those young people with less resilience which had increased emotional and mental issues and had in turn fed into parent's emotions and therefore more requests for help and support from services. Additional support had been put in place to support Early Help and were currently looking at whether additional

resources would be needed for specialist social care and a bid had been prepared to add another 6 or 7 social workers to support 90 to 100 more children. The case load was manageable at the moment but if the current situation continued then more social workers would need to be put in place to cope with increased demand.

- Members sought clarification on the timeliness of single assessments and case worker load and what plans were in place to mitigate the possible future increase in demand. Members were informed that the timeliness of initial assessments had continued to do well. Historically Peterborough had a tendency to conduct more assessments that was necessary with some resulting in no further action. The number of assessments had therefore been reviewed and this had assisted with managing the required initial assessments in a timely manner. One of the unforeseen impacts of lockdown was that pregnant women in their third trimester have been required to work from home. There were a few pregnant women in the already small assessment team which meant that they had to work from home, so additional resources have been required to manage this impact on the team.
- Members asked if there were any obstacles in meeting families face to face during lockdown. Members were informed that every single child that comes under the service had been assessed and RAG rated. The children that were of most concern continued to have face to face visits, those that were of less concern had a mixture of virtual meetings and face to face visiting.
- The additional funding of £220K from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in order to fund an increase in directly provided support to families in need was being used.
- The Cabinet Member in attendance commented on how important the Family Safeguarding model was and how much it had saved the Local Authority due to less children having to come into care. It had been a very successful model in Peterborough for families, children and the Local Authority. The Cabinet Member also commented that there had been a great emphasis on seeing children face to face and the team of officers working behind the scenes should be congratulated on the service that was being provided during these challenging times.
- Members noted that there had been an increase in numbers of children on child protection plans and that this was partly about it being more difficult to progress the child protection plans which was leading to children tending to remain on a child protection plan for longer. Members wanted to know if this was likely to reduce when lockdown ended. Members were informed that in general the new approach of contact via virtual meetings had worked very well for some people and would continue post lockdown. The Family Safeguarding approach was about dealing with parents who had serious issues with drug, substance and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse. Virtual meetings had less of an impact in these circumstances and programmes for issues like substance misuse were difficult to hold during lockdown. There would therefore be a continuing impact until things returned to normal.
- The Service Director advised that there would be a continuing impact of school not being available for some families and more families would struggle to maintain housing due to the economic impact which would increase pressures on families.
- Another group of concern was the 13/14/15 year olds who were disengaging and struggling to remain in school even before the first lockdown. The lockdown would have meant that they were completely disengaged with school and their needs had therefore become more challenging and made them more vulnerable to criminal exploitation. This was a relatively small group of young people but their support needs were extensive and care placements expensive. For children in general the achievement gap would broaden again due to the impact of the lockdown and especially for those children who lived in less privileged homes.

Members thanked the Service Director, Children and Safeguarding and the Assistant Director Children's Services and their teams for their hard work and dedication during these challenging times.

## **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED to**

1. Note the evidence of emerging impact arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated economic and other implications;
2. Note the preparedness of children's services to continue to meet need;
3. Notes the potential resource implications of continued increased demand and complexity of need;
4. Welcome the findings of the independent evaluation of Family Safeguarding as practiced in Peterborough, including evidence of improved outcomes for vulnerable children and lower costs

## **28. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

The Committee received the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of Executive Decisions, containing decisions which the Leader of the Council anticipated Cabinet or Cabinet Members would take over following four months. Members were invited to comment on the Forward Plan and where appropriate identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme.

### **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to note the current Forward Plan of Executive Decisions which identified any relevant items for inclusion within their work programme.

## **29. Work Programme 2020/2021**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer presented the report which considered the work programme for the municipal year 2020/21.

The Chair requested that a progress report on the University should be brought back to the Committee on a regular basis.

### **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to note the work programme for 2020/2021 and that consideration would be given at the next agenda setting meeting as to how often the University update report should be presented to the Committee going forward.

## **30. Date of Next Meeting**

- 22 February 2021 – Joint Scrutiny of the Budget
- 4 March 2021 – Children and Education Scrutiny Committee

Chairman

7.00pm to 8.33pm

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