

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A record of decisions made by the Executive Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Services including Looked After Children, Safeguarding relating to Children and Young People, Schools, Early Years strategies, Youth and Play services and the Youth Offending Service.

TUESDAY, 12TH SEPTEMBER, 2023

Following consideration of the matters detailed below in the presence of:-

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| Councillor Donaghy | - Executive Cabinet Member – Children's Services |
| Councillor Galloway | - Major Opposition Spokesperson |
| Councillor Hayes (as deputy for Councillor Priest) | - Minor Opposition Spokesperson |
| Councillor Grant | - Minor Opposition Spokesperson |
| Councillor Flitcroft | - Minor Opposition Spokesperson |
| Councillor Heslop | - Minor Opposition Spokesperson |
| Councillor Morrissey | - Observing |

Officers

- | | |
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| Mr P. Rankin | - Deputy Director of Children's Services |
| Ms T. Minshull | - Assistant Director – Strategic Commissioning |
| Ms G. Whitehead | - Assistant Director – Inclusive Education and Learning |
| Ms L. Butcher | - Head of Finance - People |
| Ms A. Hunt | - Senior Lawyer |
| Mrs S. Bailey | - Principal Democratic Services Officer |

11. MONITORING OF EXECUTIVE CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which provided an update on decisions taken at previous meetings of the Executive Cabinet Member.

The Executive Cabinet Member NOTED the report.

12. CHILDREN'S SERVICES – FINANCIAL MONITORING – QUARTER ONE 2023/24

The Borough Treasurer and the Director of Children's Services submitted a joint report which provided information relating to the projected financial position for the Children's Department for the 2023/24 Financial Year as at Quarter One.

The Revenue outturn position 2023/24 for the Local Authority Block was expected to be in line with Budget after a contribution from reserves of £8.456m.

Revenue expenditure for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was expected to be £3.522m less than the grant.

The original Capital Programme approved at Council in February, 2023 totalled £25.436m. Expenditure for Quarter One 2023/24 totalled £176k.

Reserves were expected to be £26.569m as at 31st March, 2024. Of the £26.569m Reserves, £28.699m related to Capital monies held for future work on schools and £4.441m related to schools' balances and other DSG Reserves.

Children's Services Reserves were projected to be in a deficit of £6.571m.

The Executive Cabinet Member NOTED –

- (i) The Revenue Budget changes in year;**
- (ii) The projected financial position of the portfolio as at 31st March, 2024; and**

- (iii) The changes within the Capital Programme, as now detailed; and APPROVED -**
- (iv) The delegation of authority to the Director of Children's Services to procure off contract agency for social services; and**
- (v) The delegation of authority to the Director of Children's Services to call off on the framework(s) for the Capital Programme, as detailed in section 3 of the report now submitted.**

13. VCSE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which sought approval to complete an open tender procurement exercise with the intention of identifying a partner agency or provider network to further enhance Bolton's internal residential sufficiency.

The report outlined the current challenges facing residential sufficiency in Bolton for Looked after Children and Young People who were aged under 16 which often led to children and young people being placed out of Borough.

Although it was considered that out of Borough placements were sometimes necessary when related to risk-focused decision making, most of the children and young people should be living and be cared for within the boundaries of their own locality.

In this regard, the report outlined proposals to generate a partnership with an independent provider or provider network for the purpose of developing the provision of children's residential care in the area over a ten-year period. The overall long-term aim would be to generate nine individual provisions within the following timescales:

- 1 EBD (Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties) Childrens Home by September 2024 in Bolton West;
- 1 further Childrens Home by 2026;
- 1 Short Breaks home for children with disabilities by 2026;

CC4

- 3 further Childrens Homes by 2029 in South Bolton; and
- 3 further Childrens Homes by 2033 in North Bolton.

This project would simultaneously flow alongside the ten-year Housing with Care and Support Prospectus.

The report advised that the identified provider or provider network would ideally be currently operating within Bolton's footprint and be familiar with the systems. This would ensure that the foundations for quality outcomes for children and young people were in place. It was also envisaged that they would have existing links to these networks of system opportunities to ensure that children and young people could thrive within their own Local Authority.

In order to maximise the opportunity within the VCSE sector, it was proposed to embark on a large scale and blended engagement approach which would utilise several methods and strategies. This would ensure that all VCSE providers would have the option to be involved and allow for a diverse pool of applicants whilst maximising the opportunity and ensuring fairness across the sector.

The report went on to put forward the following options:

- Option 1 – the commission and tender of a proposed partnership with an independent VCSE provider or a provider network who can deliver the short and long-term aspects of the specification and raise the in-Borough sufficiency across Bolton; or
- Option 2 – continue to manage the current sufficiency difficulties without the benefit of a dedicated in-Borough partnership, thus potentially relying on expensive, out of Borough placements.

The preferred course of action was Option 1 for the reasons now detailed.

The Executive Cabinet Member APPROVED -

- (i) Option 1, as detailed in the report now submitted, for an open procurement exercise which will allow for a proposed partnership with an independent provider who can deliver the short- and long-term aspects of the specification and raise the in-Borough sufficiency across Bolton; and**
- (ii) The authorisation of the Borough Solicitor to carry out any necessary legal formalities in this regard.**

14. GOVERNING BODY RECONSTITUTION

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which sought approval for a change of constitution and subsequent amendment of Instruments of Government for multiple Local Authority School Governing Bodies

The report advised that the undermentioned Governing Bodies had requested an amendment to their constitutions together with the reasons for the changes:

- Church Road Primary School;
- Egerton Primary School;
- Gaskell Primary School;
- Markland Hill Primary School;
- Oxford Grove Primary School; and
- St Mary's CE Primary School.

The Executive Cabinet Member APPROVED:

- (i) The revised Instruments of Government for the Governing Boards referred to in the report now submitted; and**
- (ii) The authorisation of the sealing of the revised Instrument by the Council's Legal Services Unit.**

15. PROPOSED EXPANSION OF SEND RESOURCE PROVISION AT QUEENSBRIDGE SCHOOL

Further to Minute 50 of the meeting of the Executive Cabinet Member for Children's Services held on 3rd April, 2023, the

CC6

Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided details on the proposed expansion of SEND Resource Provision at Queensbridge CP School and sought approval for the use of capital funding to undertake the necessary remodelling and physical extension of the school.

The report advised that in order to provide the additional accommodation at Queensbridge School, it would be necessary to remodel and physically extend the existing eight place resource setting. Over the past 6 months, consultants had been working closely with officers and key school personnel to design a suitable solution. A final design had now been agreed and would have an estimated cost of £700K to £800K.

In this regard, a commitment to provide capital funding of up to £800k was now required to support the scheme and enable the necessary design details and development of plans to progress to tender stage.

The £800k would include the anticipated capital cost of undertaking the necessary internal modifications and physical extension of the school, an allowance of up to £7K to support the school with necessary resources to equip the proposed new classroom and up to £15K to fit out a proposed sensory room.

The capital cost of the scheme would be supported from Safety Valve funding that has been allocated by the DfE to the Council to help deliver the range of projects described to increase SEND pupil place capacity within the Borough, including this proposal at Queensbridge CP.

The proposed procurement and delivery of the scheme would be managed through the existing partnership arrangement with Clear Futures and be delivered by one of their tier one appointed contractors.

The Executive Cabinet Member APPROVED -

- (i) Capital funding of up to £800K to meet the cost of expanding the existing SEND Resource Provision at**

- Queensbridge CP School, which will be supported from DfE allocated Safety Valve Grant; and**
- (ii) The authorisation of the Borough Solicitor to complete any necessary legal formalities in this regard.**

16. PROCUREMENT OF INDEPENDENT VISITING SERVICE FOR BOLTON CHILDREN

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which sought approval to undertake a full procurement exercise for the re-tender of the Independent Visiting Service for Bolton Children which was due to end in March, 2024.

The report advised that the current contract was initially valued at £15,000 per annum which equated to £500 per child. However, following an audit in 2022, the provider identified that this level of funding was not adequate to maintain the Service, and a fee uplift to £30,000 per annum had been agreed and approved. This uplift had allowed the Service to continue working with each young person in a meaningful, relationship-based way, with the long-term input required to be effective.

With regard to the new contract, the report advised that it would need to reflect the current financial commitment and individual approach to avoid the risk of not being viable to run and ensuring positive outcomes.

In this regard, the report put forward the following options for the tender process:

- Option 1 - a re-tender of the Contract - a new procurement exercise and contract would enable a robust review of the current specification to take place and a consultation process with service users and potential providers; or
- Option 2 – end the current contract and have no provision for this service in place for children and young people – this was not viable as there was a statutory duty to provide the Service which could not be provided internally.

The report advised that Option 1 was the preferred course of action.

If approved, it was intended to secure a three-year Contract from 1st April, 2024 until 31st March, 2027, with the option of extending the contract for up to two further twelve-month periods, potentially allowing the contract to be extended to 31st March 2029. The current value of the contract was £30,000 per annum.

The Executive Cabinet Member APPROVED -

- (i) Option One, as detailed in the report now submitted, for the re-tender the contract for Independent Visitor Services in Bolton on the basis now detailed; and**
- (ii) The authorisation of the Borough Solicitor to carry out any necessary legal formalities in this regard.**

17. PROPOSED EXPANSION OF LADYBRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL AND LITTLE LEVER ACADEMY – PROCUREMENT

The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report which outlined the secondary school place pressures currently being faced by the Authority and sought approval to provide Capital support to enable the physical expansion of Ladybridge High School and Little Lever Academy to create additional pupil places.

The report advised that Bolton had experienced a high demand for school places for many years and was currently seeing increasing pressures for secondary school places both in respect of Year 7 intakes and across all year groups.

The latest pupil projections based on the May 2023 census return continued to forecast increasing demand which would continue for the foreseeable future. Demand for Year 7 Intake places was expected to remain high and in excess of operational capacity until at least September, 2029.

CC9

Although the Authority had explored various options as to where such capacity could be created, there was still a need to look for opportunities to permanently expand existing secondary schools.

In this regard, various meetings had taken place with secondary school Headteachers via the Bolton Learning Alliance where schools had been invited to submit expressions of interest to expand their capacity. Both Ladybridge High School and Little Lever Academy had shown interest in being permanently extended.

With regard to Ladybridge High School, the report advised that a proposal had been submitted to increase its capacity from a Published Admission Number from 210 to 240 which would create an additional 30 Year 7 intake places and a 150 extra secondary school places overall across Years 7 to 11.

The Corporate Asset Management Team had engaged with Clear Futures to create a design which involved internal remodelling together with the construction of a new block at the front of the school and removal of the old former caretaker's dwelling. The scheme would cost an estimated £6m at current construction rates and include an allowance for temporary accommodation if required.

With regard to Little Lever Academy, the report advised that proposals had been formulated with its own design consultant and included an increased Published Admission Number from 210 to 240 which would create 30 additional Year 7 intake places and 150 additional places overall in Year 7 to 11.

The proposal would involve some internal remodelling and an enlargement of the dining area to accommodate the additional pupils together with a new two storey extension to the side, a new entrance and removal of the existing long, concrete ramp at the front.

The cost of the scheme was estimated at around £4.7m at current construction rates.

In this regard, the report outlined the financial implications of the proposals and sought approval to utilise Basic Need funding for the proposed expansion of Ladybridge High School and Little Lever Academy.

The Executive Cabinet Member APPROVED -

- (i) The allocation of up to £6m of Capital funding to support the proposed expansion of Ladybridge High School to create an additional 150 pupil places and the allocation of up to £4.7m of Capital funding to support the proposed expansion of Little Lever Academy to create an additional 150 pupil places; and**
- (ii) The authorisation of the Borough Solicitor to complete any necessary legal formalities in this regard.**