

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 4 March 2021 at 10.00 am

Virtual Meeting - Web ex meeting



AGENDA

3 Minutes of the previous meeting (Pages 1 - 16)

Andrea Clarke

The committee to receive the minutes of the meeting on 1 December 2020 and 14 January 2021 (To Follow).

Membership – *Cllr Phil Awford, Cllr Chris Coleman, Cllr Stephen Davies, Cllr Bernard Fisher, Cllr Colin Hay, Cllr Dr Andrew Miller (Chairman), Cllr Loraine Patrick, Cllr Alan Preest and Cllr Lesley Williams MBE (Vice-Chair)*

Added Members - *Charlotte Blanch (Clifton Diocese) and Dr Richard Castle (Primary Sector Parent Governor Representative)*

Co-Opted Member - *Ambassador for Vulnerable Children and Young People*

- (a) **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – Please declare any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests that you may have relating to specific matters which may be discussed at this meeting, by signing the form that will be available in the Cabinet Suite. Completing this list is acceptable as a declaration, but does not, of course, prevent members from declaring an interest orally in relation to individual agenda items. The list will be available for public inspection.

Members requiring advice or clarification about whether to make a declaration of interest are invited to contact the Monitoring Officer (Rob Ayliffe Tel: 01452 328506 e-mail: rob.ayliffe@gloucestershire.gov.uk) prior to the start of the meeting.

- (b) **INSPECTION OF PAPERS AND GENERAL QUERIES** - If you wish to inspect Minutes or Reports relating to any item on this agenda or have any other general queries about the meeting, please contact:

Andrea Clarke, Senior Democratic Services Adviser

☎:01452 324203/e-mail: andrea.clarke@gloucestershire.gov.uk

- (c) **GENERAL ARRANGEMENTS**



- 1 Will Members please sign the attendance list.
- 2 Please note that substitution arrangements are in place for Scrutiny (see p88 of the Constitution).

EVACUATION PROCEDURE - in the event of the fire alarms sounding during the meeting please leave as directed in a calm and orderly manner and go to the assembly point which is **outside the main entrance to Shire Hall in Westgate Street**. Please remain there and await further instructions.



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 14 January 2021.

MEMBERS:

Dr Richard Castle	Cllr Loraine Patrick
Cllr Chris Coleman	Cllr Alan Preest
Cllr Stephen Davies	Cllr Brian Robinson
Cllr Bernard Fisher	Cllr Lesley Williams MBE (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Dr Andrew Miller (Chairman)	Gloucestershire Ambassadors for Vulnerable Children & Young People

OTHERS :

Dame Janet Trotter DBE CBE CVO, (Chair of Child Friendly Gloucestershire)
Chris Spencer - Director of Children's Services
Andy Dempsey - Director of Partnerships and Strategy
Rob England - Head of Quality, (Children's Services),
Suzanne Hall - Finance Business Partner
Karon McCarthy - Head of Service, Youth Justice and Community
Cllr Richard Boyles: Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years
Cllr Patrick Molyneux: Cabinet Member for Economy, Education and Skills

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Colin Hay.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Chair, Dr Andrew Miller, advised the committee that only the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 would be considered at this meeting. The minutes of the meeting on 1 December 2020 would be published with the agenda and considered at the committee meeting on 4 March 2021.

For clarification, it was confirmed that actions relating to the minutes of the meeting in November 2020 included:

- a) The sharing of safeguarding experiences during lockdown – **Action (going forward) by Young Ambassadors;**

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- b) The request for safeguarding training, (as a mandatory training requirement for county councillors), to be referred to the Corporate Parent Group – **Action by Andrea Clarke**. It was later confirmed that an action to arrange an annual safeguarding training event for county councillors had been assigned to the **Interim Director of Safeguarding and Care: Gail Hancock**

4. GLOUCESTERSHIRE YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE (YOS) RECOVERY PLAN

At its meeting on 5 March 2020, the committee considered the Gloucestershire Youth Offending Partnership Improvement Plan, published in February 2020 in response to HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection of the Gloucestershire Youth Offending Service in October 2019.

HMIP is an independent inspectorate, reporting on the quality of services and effectiveness of work with adults and children and young people who are sentenced by the courts. The findings are reported to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

The findings of the inspection carried out in October 2019 rated the service as 'Requiring Improvement'. The HMIP report had highlighted many positive aspects of Gloucestershire's Youth Justice Service and had been one point short of being rated 'Good'. Ratings are based on 3 broad areas; (i) the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service; (ii) the quality of work done with children and young people that have been sentenced by the courts; and (iii) the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

To view the discussion at the committee meeting on 5 March 2020, (including the final HMIP inspection report), please refer to the link on published on the Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) website [here](#).

Andy Dempsey: Director of Partnerships and Strategy at GCC, gave an update on the progress of the recovery planning, (relaxed in the Autumn in response to the Covid-19 pandemic), and introduced the Gloucestershire YOS Recovery Plan published in September 2020, setting out the working arrangements for representatives on the Gloucestershire Youth Justice Partnership Board to respond to the challenges of Covid-19.

Commending the work of the newly appointed Head of Service: Youth Justice and Community, Karon McCarthy, it was explained that the recovery plan should be considered as a 'response' document rather than as a recovery plan at this current time.

Key comments made during the discussion, included:

- a) Prior to the national easing of duties, the response to the HMIP inspection in 2019 had been very positive in relation to overall delivery of the Gloucestershire Youth Offending Service;

- b) Given the impact of the pandemic and noting the reduction in offending during the first period of lockdown, it was still too early to report on the medium to long term improvements anticipated from the recovery proposals;
- c) Responding to concerns about the impact of the pandemic on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, it was agreed efforts to gain/maintain the trust of young (BAME) offenders would be a critical piece of work for the Partnership Board going forward. A member suggested this aspect of work form part of regular updates to the committee regarding the YOS recovery process – **Action by Andy Dempsey**
- d) The suggestion that staff receive supplementary training on working with young offenders from BAME communities was noted. Acknowledging concerns about increased levels of anxieties when experiencing trauma or change, members were reassured that every effort was being made to give young offenders, (from all backgrounds), the support they needed and made to feel safe. It was agreed to pursue feasible options for providing BAME related training. **Action by Karon McCarthy: Head of Service, Youth Justice and Community.**
- e) Questioning the impact of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of GCC staff, members were reassured that frontline staff benefitted from careful supervision and given the necessary support if experiencing stress or illness;
- f) Determined not to let the momentum slip on progressing the recovery process, it was reported that the multi-agency youth justice partnership board had continued to meet, (via remote access), throughout the pandemic and had received regular reports on performance;
- g) One positive impact highlighted during the pandemic had been the work of the Children First Diversionary Programme in successfully alleviating the backlog of court cases experienced in other localities and minimising the risk of young people re-offending.

The update was noted, supplemented by the suggestion that data gathered following publication of the recovery plan be included in regular updates to the committee. Monitoring the progress of the recovery plan, (including any actions taken in response to the pandemic), to be added to the committee work plan as an item for consideration at future meetings. **Action by – Andrea Clarke**

5. CHILD FRIENDLY GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Andy Dempsey, Director of Partnerships and Strategy, (Children and Young People), at Gloucestershire County Council and Dame Janet Trotter DBE CBE CVO, (Chair of Child Friendly Gloucestershire), gave a detailed update on the Child Friendly Gloucestershire (CFG) Initiative.

To visit the Child Friendly Gloucestershire website, please refer to the following link: www.childfriendlygloucestershire.com

The purpose of the presentation was to update members on the progress of the initiative, set up at the request of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) in 2018, in response to concerns about the wellbeing of the children and young people of Gloucestershire.

As reported at previous meetings, there is no longer a statutory duty for localities to have a Children and Young People's Plan. There is, however, a continuing duty under Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 for the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services to co-ordinate the work of local partner agencies to secure the wellbeing of children and young people in their locality.

Since its commencement in 2018, the CFG partnership has enlisted the support of a wide range of voluntary, faith and commercial sectors to work alongside senior statutory agency representatives and a diverse group of young people as a countywide coalition arrangement, reporting direct to the Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB).

Key functions include;

- a) To provide oversight and scrutiny of the impact of the wide range of existing plans and strategies that contribute to the health and wellbeing of the children and young people of Gloucestershire, (as set out by the CFG initiative).
- a) To develop specific actions and initiatives to deliver the priorities proposed by the group;
- b) To develop an infrastructure and arrangements from which to develop ongoing and authentic dialogue with children and young people from across the county;
- c) To develop a quality assurance and performance reporting framework from which to provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with evidence of the work of the group. This will form the basis for future service development and delivery activity.
- d) To act as a focal point for the development of capacity across sectors to improve outcomes for children and young people in the county.

At its meeting on 21 July 2020, the HWB received an update on the initiative, including the impact of Covid-19 on taking the project forward. At this meeting, board members were asked to include the work of CFG in the wider recovery plan for the county. The HWB re-affirmed its commitment to the project and proposed that work continue over the summer period to identify areas of work where intervention and support might have a lasting effect.

In a further update to the HWB, in September 2020, it was announced that CFG intended to focus on activities that would enable rapid progress in response to

Covid-19 related pressures. At this meeting, the HWB agreed to establish the Child Friendly Coalition/Strategic Group and agreed the 3 priority areas identified as the basis for the Year 1 Action Plan. The priority areas included: i) Children from pre-birth to 5 years old; ii) Transition to employment and Further Education, and iii) Mental health provision across all age ranges.

Presenting to the scrutiny committee at this meeting, members were advised that, under normal, (non-coronavirus), circumstances, progress had been expected to have been more advanced. Given the current demands on children's social care services, the work was notably delayed. This had not, however, impacted on the commitment of partner agencies, where the key focus was to maintain and promote the well-being of children and young people during this challenging time.

In response to the update, the following comments were made at the meeting:

- a) References to the role of the HWB as the formal means of seeking 'approval' of strategic decisions to be amended to the HWB providing a 'supporting' role;
- b) Greater emphasis to be placed on the role and participation of parents;
- c) Careful consideration of how best to engage with children, young people and parents was essential;
- d) Highlighted during the pandemic, it was important to address any inequalities evident across the county in terms of access to education/creating opportunities for children/young people in care;
- e) A revised Education Strategy for Gloucestershire will facilitate the work of CFG going forward, providing important links to schools and colleges.

One specific issue raised at the meeting related to the strategic priorities to be considered by the Children's Wellbeing Coalition Board in March 2021.

The priorities included:-

- a) All children and young people are supported to choose healthy lifestyles;
- b) All children and young people have access to safe affordable transport;
- c) All children and young people do well at all stages of learning and are equipped with the skills for life in the 21st Century;
- d) All children and young people are happy and able to have fun growing up;
- e) All children and young people enjoy the economic and social benefits of growth;
- f) All children and young people are able to contribute to making Gloucestershire a sustainable county.

Commending the initiative, Cllr Lesley Williams proposed that the committee consider arranging a half day or full day workshop to evaluate the relevance of the strategic priorities referred to in the Child Friendly Gloucestershire pledge document. Questioning the strength of the priorities, in terms of CFG being able to deliver the promises, Cllr Williams stressed the need for scrutiny of this commitment.

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Seeking the views of the committee on the value of undertaking this piece of the work at this time, Cllr Dr Andrew Miller, as Chair, agreed to liaise with officers and members after the meeting on the feasibility of Cllr Williams' proposal. **Action by Cllr Andrew Miller/Andrea Clarke**

Prevented from addressing the committee due to technical issues, Dame Janet Trotter has since advised Cllr Miller that, whilst welcoming input from the scrutiny committee going forward, the proposal to scrutinise the relevance of the strategic priorities, (prior to consideration by the Children's Wellbeing Coalition Board in March), might be premature.

Dame Janet clarified that the Coalition Board had yet to meet to consider proposed ambitions and to establish strategic work plans. A meeting is anticipated in March 2021.

Outlining the timeline for the next stage of work, the Director of Partnerships advised the committee that it was still early days and there was still a lot more work to be done. With the support of members and the young ambassadors at the meeting, the initiative was welcomed as a positive means of providing a voice to the young people of Gloucestershire. Noting the recent appointment of several new representatives, the committee welcomed the intention of building on existing resources and engaging with a wider spectrum of young people.

The update was noted with a request for regular updates at future meetings.

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK: PROGRESS UPDATE REPORT

Rob England, Head of Quality, (Children's Services), at Gloucestershire County Council presented the Children's Services Quality Assurance Report, (based on information reported up to November 2020).

The report confirmed that the high rate of inadequate practice reported 24 months ago had reduced significantly, albeit not at the expected pace or to the required target level. Examples of inadequate practice, where children were considered to have received a poor service, were still too common. In terms of audit, however, children were no longer identified to be at immediate risk of harm.

Overall, working practices were improving, progressing from an inadequate rating to requiring improvement. Members were advised of the need to target weaker work practices in order to offer more secure ratings, (based on consistently low levels of inadequate practice). Acknowledging concerns about weakening services for care leavers in the 3 month period prior to November 2020, it was agreed more focus was required in this area.

The report was described as encouraging. The proportion of good practice had improved during the past 12 months, but nevertheless, had been notably static during the 3 month period prior to November 2020, and had yet to reach the 40% short-term target within the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP). A quarter of the

teams within the department had consistently delivered good practice but more work was required with practitioners and other teams to elevate standards to good.

The areas of practice requiring particular attention included: -

- a) Management oversight
- b) Analysis: conceptualisation available information and understanding the impact of the child/young person's lived experiences and the service offered to them
- c) Drift and delay
- d) Risk assessment and review
- e) Care Planning and Permanence for Children in Care
- f) Meaningful and Purposeful relational practice (including contact with Care Leavers).

Building on the strengths of the teams, good working relationships and supplemented with additional training, it was hoped further improvements would continue.

For children and young people receiving a Child in Need Service, (including those with disabilities), the improvements reflected by the last report had not been sustained. Working practices rated as good for children and young people with disabilities had reduced from 38%-20% with practices rated as inadequate for Children in Need rising from 6%-18%.

There had also been a variance in the rates of good and inadequate practice for children subjected to child protection planning. Good practice had reduced from 22% to 17% and inadequate practice had increased from 14% to 20%. This group of children were suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

Children in Care continued to be the most likely to be in receipt of a better service, with the highest levels of good or better practice at 53%, (up from 50% in the last report), and with the lowest levels of inadequate practice (3%).

Referencing performance in the Leaving Care Service, (reported at this meeting and in the report presented at the previous meeting), members noted that this service remained an area of concern. Previously, an area identified as an area of best quality practice, ratings had declined markedly in recent months. In the last 3 months, practices rated as inadequate had increased from 27% to 44%. Feedback from Young Ambassadors and from senior managers at leadership meetings believe this may have been due to insufficient contact with the young people leaving care and from ineffective responses to poor outcomes, resulting in poor transitions to independent adulthood. The committee agreed this was an area that would need careful attention and regular monitoring.

Leadership in children's social care was evident at all levels. Leaders remained committed to providing good and outstanding services and to following a pragmatic step-by-step recovery plan and were commended at the meeting for the progress they were making in exceptionally challenging circumstances. The impact of Covid-

19 on staff, however, along with improvement and transformation activity, remained a concern. Efforts to promote resilience, wellbeing and care at all times were ongoing.

Updating members on recent targets, members were informed that, as of January 2020, the quality of working practices had, for the first time, met the short-term AIP targets of 40% (Good) and 12% (Inadequate). Along with the December rate for weak practice (35%), this was the first time the department had seen weaker practice ratings reduce from a persistent level of 45%.

Reassured by the pace of improvement, members supported the proposal that, in addition to the work and activities generated from the Accelerated Improvement Plan, attention should also be given to:

- a) Targeted intervention with the 18 teams identified as showing persistent weak practice;
- b) Renewed intervention around planning;
- c) Work to support consistent understanding and application of the department's expectations on supervision;
- d) Close attention to improvement planning for care leaving practices;
- e) Support to be given to leaders, (in terms of providing opportunities for recovery and developing resilience);
- f) A review of the practice whereby auditors review the practices for which they are responsible for;
- g) Specific work on helping practitioners and managers identify and articulate impact on children needed. It was explained that the longevity of this need indicated that a priority intervention was needed to support this practice improvement.

The report was noted.

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Chris Spencer, Director of Children's Services and Andy Dempsey, Director of Partnerships and Strategy, gave an update on performance against agreed targets for October and November 2020. The reports were taken as read at the meeting.

Responding to some of the key messages identified by the reports, the committee: -

- a) Expressed concerns relating to delays in the recording of information relating to children across the system and urged officers to consider ways of encouraging their teams to record data;

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- b) Questioned the reliability of the council's IT systems and equipment, (responding to concerns about the council's current system, members were assured that the system, although an older version, was fit for purpose);
- c) Members were advised that requests for early interventions during the pandemic had significantly increased;
- d) Responding to information relating to child protection issues on page 98 of the agenda pack, and questions about the involvement and participation of drugs/alcohol support groups in strategic wellbeing discussions, it was suggested that a briefing note on the issue be added to the work plan for consideration at a future meeting. **Action by Andrea Clarke**

The performance update reports were noted

8. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

Suzanne Hall, Finance Business Partner for Gloucestershire County Council, presented the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the commissioning of Children and Families Services in 2020/21, including net budget analysis and Year-End Forecast (October 2020).

Introducing the report circulated with the agenda, Suzanne confirmed that the budget update had been grouped by service area, with Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and non-DSG variances shown separately.

The forecast year end revenue position as at October 2020, (non-DSG funded services), represented an over-spend of £14.648 million, (11.24% of budget). Included within this figure was the forecasted additional cost of the impact of Covid-19 on budgets, totalling £6.979 million, (representing an underlying over-spend of £7.669 million, including estimated £2.585 million for additional external placements). Over-spends included external placements and home to school transport, both of which had been identified as ongoing pressures at the end of 2019/20.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funded services had been forecast with an over-spend of £14.432 million for 2020/21, including deficit carry forward of £8.442 million and deficit high needs budget of £5.449 million.

Additional forecast expenditure, brought in to address the impact of Covid-19, had been grouped into five key areas; i) external placement costs; ii) home to school transport; iii) transitions for care leavers; iv) staffing; and v) support to vulnerable pupils when schools reopen. A further £2 million had been forecast to offset costs relating to the anticipated impact on social care and education services after the easing of lockdown measures.

Activity levels within social care continued to place significant budgetary pressures on children's services, in particular against the external placement and safeguarding staff budgets. At the end of September 2020, children in care

numbers had been reported at 764, compared to 722 at the end of April 2019. This position was based on actual expenditure to the end of September 2020 and forecasts input in October 2020. In recent months the number of children in care had reached 800 plus.

Significant non-DSG variances referenced in the report included:-

- a) **Children in Care** – an over-spend against the external placement budget of £9.266 million (34.8% above budget). This included a contingency of £2.585 million for new cases in-year and £4.248 million for the current and future impact of COVID-19 on placement numbers.
- b) **Safeguarding** – this represented a forecast over-spend of £1.523 million, (7.8% above budget), including £0.4 million as contingency planning for additional staffing capacity to respond to a possible spike in activity.
- c) **Young People Support** – an over-spend of £0.546 million had been forecast to cover the cost of agency staff/vacancies in youth support teams. COVID-19 costs accounted for £0.196 million of the variance.
- d) **Commissioning for Learning** - home to school transport had been forecast with an over-spend of £2.594 million, (including an estimate of £1.34 million to cover the impact of COVID-19 from September onwards). This had been offset by a specific grant of £0.715m.
- e) **Services for CYP with Additional Needs** – this included a £0.5 million contingency sum to support vulnerable pupils as they returned to school
- f) **Regulated Services** – including an over-spend of £0.255 million against special guardianships due to a higher than expected number of orders.
- g) **Other variances** – other over-spends included the cost of additional management capacity to continue the safeguarding improvement journey during the COVID-19 period. This had resulted in a forecast over-spend of £0.753 million in social care and commissioning. (To offset these cost pressures, £1.52 million of funding from the MTFs would be held back to offset any over-spend in-year).

Make the Change (MTC) targets for 2020/21 totalled £0.57 million, (£0.55 million assigned to education and £0.02 million to child arrangement orders). The over-spend against the home to school transport budget was anticipated to have a negative impact on targeted savings (£0.15 million). It was also unlikely that part of the pensions savings forecast, (£0.07 million), would not be met.

Education and Additional Needs

Schools - The DSG deficit carry forward budget totalling £8.914 million was forecast to be offset by de-delegated balances of £0.472 million;

Services for CYP with Additional Needs – with an in-year demand for special school provision and special school places at capacity, a £0.75 million overspend had been identified in the independent special schools budget. The overspend had arisen from reduced trade income and a contingency of £0.5 million to be set aside to offer SEN support to schools in the Autumn in response to the impact of Covid - 19;

Education Outcomes and Intervention – a deficit budget had been set against the high needs block of £5.449 million

Commissioning for Learning - Home to school transport had been forecast with an over-spend of £2.594 million, including an estimated £1.34 million to address the impact of Covid-19 on service provision from September onwards, (to be offset by a specific grant of £715k). This underlying cost was due to the rise in demand and cost of SEN provision, number of solo journeys required and the increased cost of procuring new routes. An action plan was in place to address a range of issues impacting on this area and to reduce costs where possible.

Early Years - an underspend of £0.3 million had been forecast in nursery education funding. This was due to the lack of uptake of placements.

Budget Scrutiny Meeting Update – 7 January 2021

Updating members on recent forecasts, including the outcomes of the Corporate Scrutiny Budget meeting held the previous week, members noted the commissioning Intentions and budget changes proposed by the draft MTFS in relation to the Children and Young People Budget.

Key points from the meeting included:

- a) Significant investment to be made in the Vulnerable Children Budget, including £3m for external placements. This would need to be monitored carefully.
- b) A reduction in the number of agency workers was reported, reducing from 21.2% to around 50% of the workforce.
- c) There was a continuing rise in the number of children in care (800) and children on child protection plans
- d) Net of Covid-19 current overspend in the service was £7.669 million, (the latest report to Cabinet in late January to show a £1 million improvement on this).
- e) Some small savings within education would be made through a reduction in pension costs.
- f) The LGA had identified a £3bn gap in the children service budget nationally
- g) A Sufficiency Strategy was in place to manage the children's social care market and ensure the right mix of placements

At the previous weeks meeting, scrutiny members had expressed concern about year on year overspends in the Children's budget and had suggested increasing the budget from the outset to avoid a large overspend. In response, cabinet members stated that the proposed budget figures for the draft budget 2021/22 were at the right level. With a caveat that the placement budget was likely to require further resourcing during 2021-22, the budget was considered a realistic budget.

The budget included an additional £3million, plus £1million in contingency funds for additional placement costs. This was unlikely to be sufficient given a combination of rising unit costs, an increased number of children in care from the impact of Covid-19 and the time required to deliver the sufficient strategy. Of the £11.5 million additional funding relating to Covid-19, it was felt that an element of this would be needed to fund Children's Social Care Services.

A service improvement action plan was in place to recruit 40 new foster carers. The aim of this was to increase capacity and build on the support provided. In addition there was a new offer being developed for an Edge of Care Service to help families continue with their birth children. Supported by an external transformation consultant this would be an intensive family preservation service.

SEND funding was a complex issue, with a structural deficit of £8.4 million. This was a school owned deficit, not a County Council one with little opportunity for schools to absorb the overspend. The hope was that the current Government SEND review would provide a long term solution.

Emphasis had been placed on the importance of early intervention for children in care during the early stages of a child's life. Early years provision had seen a significant improvement in school readiness.

Members noted that a scrutiny task group would be making recommendations for the development of the Youth Strategy. The strategy was not looking to reduce services but would be looking to provide universal and specialist services. A report would be considered by Cabinet in April.

Some members had suggested outreach youth work within local communities was a viable option and should be explored. It was also suggested that in-house provision should be considered. In response, it had been explained that the priority would be to look at what was in the best interest of the child. There was a balanced view on whether this should be provided from in house services or outsourced, where the County did not have provision.

Members stressed the importance of being proactive and preempting strategies to identify potential problems in order to prevent children reaching a point where they needed to be in care.

Generally, there were concerns about the potential spike in numbers of referrals resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers responded by stating that the spike

had been anticipated and that analysis of the risks to the budget were carried out as part of the budget setting process.

Summary

In response to the update at this meeting, the committee noted the comments from the budget scrutiny meeting and acknowledged that DSG budget pressures in Gloucestershire reflected the national position, with significant deficits in the DSG high needs budget impacting on many local authorities nationally.

It was agreed that a High Needs Strategy would be essential to ensure the budget balanced in future years. It was confirmed that a spending review of services was in progress.

Responding to questions, the Finance Business Partner explained that, given the unknown impact of Covid-19, the forecast was subject to several assumptions, relating to; growth inactivity; delays in transitions; capacity in the fostering market; and the impact of opening of Trevone House to provide additional capacity for young people.

The assumptions would need to be reviewed on a monthly basis and adjusted accordingly. It was hoped that, from improving social care practice, diverting children from care at an earlier point and achieving permanence at the earliest opportunity, would help reduce the numbers of children in care and associated costs in the longer term.

The update was noted, with assurances that the estimates presented at the meeting were the best estimates, given the response to Covid-19. It was hoped effective lobbying of government would secure further funding from the DoF to help with the recovery process from the pandemic.

A member suggested that, to allow more time to consider financial updates, the revenue budget monitoring report be considered at an earlier stage of the meeting.

Dr Richard Castle, (Primary School Governor Representative), submitted the following supplementary questions after the meeting.

The questions, including responses from Finance Business Partner, Suzanne Hall, are detailed below: -

Supplementary Questions

Reference the refund of Covid19-related expenditure to schools; if I understood correctly, it was suggested GCC had received full funding centrally from DfE, (my assumption was that this would now be passed on to schools). However, it was suggested at the meeting that if schools had not received a refund, they should submit a case to the Government.

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Please confirm:

- a) *If all Covid-19 related expenditure (for maintained schools in Gloucestershire) will be refunded through GCC and/or*
- b) *If this is not the case, how schools should appeal to Central Government?*

Response: GCC has continued to fund schools at the budgeted level agreed at the beginning of the year.

The additional costs that schools have incurred for Covid-19 related pressures, (premises, free schools meals and cleaning), have been funded through a separate exceptional grant from the DFE to the end of the Summer term but there continues to be pressures on schools which have not been able to be claimed.

Detailed information can be found in the papers that went to Schools Forum meetings in September and November 2020, plus a letter that F40 (a group of the lowest funded Local Authorities that lobbies the DofFE for better funding) has sent.

To view the **September School Forum Papers**, please refer to the link [here](#)

To view the **November School Forum Papers**, please refer to the link [here](#)

Schools to receive the catch-up premium: -

- Mainstream school will get £80 for each pupil in from reception to year 11 inclusive.
- Special, AP and hospital schools will get £240 for each place for the 2020 to 2021 academic year.

There was also support during the Autumn for supply staff costs if they had exceptionally high staff absence rates. Please refer to the following link: - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-workforce-fund-for-schools>

There was no cover for exceptional costs since the end of the summer term. Locally, we put in place the team around the locality model to provide early intervention support where there are vulnerable children that were struggling to access education. The primary aim of this was to ensure multi-agency support, but funding is provided where necessary.

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CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 13.00

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