

CHILDREN'S SERVICES BUDGET REVIEW WORKING GROUP

TUESDAY, 5TH JANUARY, 2021

Present: Councillors Burton and Moore

Officers in attendance: Elaine Redding, Corporate Director, Children's Services
Jo Collis-Heavens, Finance Manager – Children's
Strategic Finance (Accountancy)

1 Election of Chairman

Councillor Burton was elected as Chairman.

2 Apologies for absence

Councillor Coope sent his apologies.

3 Budget Review Discussion

The Children's Services Corporate Director introduced the item together with the Finance Manager – Children's Strategic Finance and referred to the budget café slides, which had been previously circulated and suggested the Members consider specific areas of interest.

The Chairman requested some background information into how the Service dealt with unknowns and how they were managed in the budget setting process. The Corporate Director set out some background on predictive analysis and what care needs and costs could be planned for and anticipated. There had been some additional pressures which had occurred this year, which were discussed, but it was noted that some cases can't be predicted which can cause the demand to exceed the planned budget.

The cost of the placements was discussed and it was noted that although the costs could seem very high in some circumstances, the Finance Manager reassured Members that the Service challenged every placement to ensure children were placed in the best possible placement to ensure positive outcomes for them, whilst always striving for the most competitive price. The Corporate Director advised that the Service needed to undertake a piece of work regarding managing the market and sufficiency strategy for placements, which fitted with the corporate Transformation Programme.

Staffing was then discussed, and it was noted that staffing and placements were the biggest spends. Overall, across Children's services, 64% of the budget was allocated to staffing. The Corporate Director advised that the workforce was set to allow for a reasonable caseload and that, following a piece of work, they were confident that they had the right number of staff to achieve this. The budget issues in this area were discussed which included the cost of agency staff, the positive initiative of the recruitment and retention, the difference between workloads of a newly qualified and experienced social worker, previous issues with the leadership and management. Travel costs and the office location of staff were also discussed.

In response to a query regarding the young people currently in residential settings, the Corporate Director advised that a review was ongoing to see if their needs were being met in their placements and also if there was opportunities to move them closer to their communities.

In response to a query regarding the Dedicated Schools Grant, it was noted that the Schools Forum would be considering it next week. It was noted that High needs pressure would not be going away however it was believed that BCP was in a better position than some over Local

Tuesday, 5th January, 2021

Authorities. The Members were advised that a sufficiency, recovery and inclusion plan were all currently being considered to enable discussions with Schools Forum.

In response to any possible budget pressures due to the current lockdown, the Members were advised that Mental health and domestic abuse services would need to be closely monitored, however it was noted that following last year, the Service was responding in a different way through the front door service to enable quicker responses. The need to ensure the Looked After Children were closely supported and monitored during this lockdown was discussed.

In response to a query regarding whether the budget was sufficient, the Corporate Director advised that it was believed that the in-year funding of £310k would serve the rest of this year and that, in addition, was being sourced through a DfE Business Case. It was felt the MTFP 21/22 budget commitment to Children's Services was the needed level of investment

In conclusion, the Chairman summarised that they welcomed the additional funding to help drive improvement as per Ofsted report and through a bid for DfE funding. The need for an update on the review of young people in high cost residential settings and being kept informed on the recruitment campaign for social workers was also discussed.

Chairman at the meeting on
Tuesday, 5 January 2021