

Report of meeting regarding Budget Savings Proposals for Children and Young People Directorate

11 am on 5 January 2024

Microsoft Teams

In attendance

Cllr Barnham, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Cllr Sorba, Chair of the Children and Young People Select Committee

Cllr Warner, Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Select Committee

Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Children and Young People

Benjamin Awkal, Scrutiny Manager

The Chair and Vice Chair of CYPSC looked at all the savings proposals and paid particularly close attention Home to School Transport, Short Breaks, and the methodology for assessing the probability of delivering proposed savings.

The key details of the whole discussion are described below.

Key decisions for Members

Sale of capital asset

One-off saving. Building valued at £850k by Regeneration.

At some point, the building ceased to be used as children's centre. Its location in the middle of the estate made it opportune for use as Housing Revenue Account or Temporary Accommodation housing. There was no logic to CYP having the building when the Honor Oak Youth Centre was across the road. The Chair noted he and other ward councillors were content for the building to be sold and repurposed, as it was currently providing limited social value locally, and hoped that would result in greater social value.

Delivery confidence was a professional judgement of the probability of a successful sale and not arrived at using a specific methodology.

Children's Centre revenue savings

£50k is a conservative estimate reduction in revenue costs achieved by the sale of Honor Oak Depot and expected contributions from our Health Partners resulting from the move to Family Hub model.

There was a question around where a Family Hub would be located in Area 2 of the Borough. When hubs and spokes are implemented, some existing sites may become surplus to requirements. The aspiration is to increase service quality and reach, and communicate this to the public so they recognize the merit in potentially closing former delivery sites.

A Children's Centres delivery contract with the Early Years Alliance had been extended recently. A key decision will be required, likely before summer as to whether in the long term, Children's Centres will be recommissioned from outsourced providers or run in-house.

Officer decisions

Placements: Housing benefit claims for all Staying Put

To ensure claiming Housing Benefit for Care Leavers remaining with foster families (Staying Put), offsetting costs to the authority. The confidence figure around what sum will be saved as a result is due to the fluctuating number of Care Leavers in Staying Put arrangements.

Placements: payments efficiency for placement providers

Council is now better at tracking payment commitments for placements, which would avoid costs associated with some missed/late payments in the past.

Placements: building Council owned Children's Residential Homes

£390k saving for Financial Year 24/25 a part-year saving to be followed by significantly larger savings in subsequent Financial Year.

Developing a business case to open in-house residential placements for Children Looked After with particularly complex and high needs. The current market conditions allow private providers to charge significantly more than equivalent Council-owned and managed provision.

At any one time, around 40-45 CLA are in residential placements. The proposal is likely to create around 10 places in and around Lewisham over a number of years to accommodate the highest-cost CLA. The Council needed to be cautious not to create too many placements and end up with expensive over-capacity. In-house placements would also reduce consequent costs of out-of-area private placements (e.g. visiting Social Worker travel time and costs).

S17 & Placements: reduced spot purchasing of youth support

Current spend approx. £3-5m.

Observed significant increases in placements and the complexity of CLA and children at risk of entering care had resulted in spot purchasing of support for young people.

Proposed to create in-house support offer at lower cost but equal or better quality.

EDCYP is confident the skills are available in the labour market as Council currently procuring the same services. An improved Ofsted rating of Lewisham Children's Social Care would help the Council market itself as an employer of choice. The Council was somewhat ahead of other London councils in this regard so unlikely to be competing with them to hire the requisite staff.

A similar approach had been followed at The Meliot Centre.

Contribution from the Participation Team – Ongoing saving

The Lewisham Challenge which helps high achieving school students prepare to apply and gain entry to the very top Universities is in the interests of Further Education and Higher Education and the Council believed it no longer needed to fund it. This had been discussed with FE and HE institutions, hence 100% confidence in delivering the saving.

3 x Outreach Inclusion Service - Management actions

Already delivered.

Primary phase Alternative Provision Commissioning costs – Management Action

Primary Phase Alternative Provision is currently being delivered by a commissioned provider at Lucas Vale. The school is now expected to deliver the service moving forward and fewer spots are expected to be required as Exclusions come down.

Contribution from the Participation Team – Ongoing saving

Alternative funding is being used.

Savings DBV Programme Implementation Grant and SEN Transport Mitigation work – direct payments and Personal Travel Assistance Budgets

Personal Home to School Transport budgets are currently calculated as a mileage allowance paid to parents or carers, which mostly has not been financially attractive. The proposal is to provide more financially attractive travel allowances to parents and carers. These however will nevertheless remain considerably cheaper (apx. 50%) than the Council providing or arranging travel.

Uptake of such an offer by parents/carers is estimated to be between 5% and 8% of the children and young people who receive Home to School Transport. The lower figure of 5% has been used to estimate saving's value.

The proportion of SEND learners receiving Home to School Transport has decreased, although the absolute number has gone up because the total number of children with SEND has gone up.

Savings DBV Programme Implementation Grant and SEN Transport Mitigation work – grant top-slice

High level of confidence in delivery due to an expected positive Department for Education response to the Council's grant application.

Use of grant funding to provide administrative support within Lewisham Learning

Violence Reduction Unit grant is being applied, therefore one-off saving.

Virtual school

Total non-pupil spend was apx. £1m, therefore a relatively small saving and potential for further future savings.

Early Years

Capacity to increase saves through greater use of grant funding.

DBS

EDCYP was unsure of detail of saving, which he believed to already have been delivered. Perhaps the schools are providing funding to offset facilities costs of trade union activities.

Savings from Short Breaks Review- Targeted & Specialist Short Breaks including CHC cases.

An expansion of Short Breaks had been observed. Some service users supported by Disabilities Team.

The Council was seeking to attract more funding from our Health Partners.

The spot-purchasing/in-house provision saving relates to how bespoke support for specific individuals was being procured/provided and not to our formally commissioned arrangements, such as the Ravensbourne facilities. This operational change will not require consultation with parents and carers.

The criteria for Short Breaks were to be reviewed to better match the level of support to the level of need as there have been cases of families experiencing a mismatch. Parents and carers would be consulted in this review.

The changes were aimed at new service users rather than existing ones.

Reduction in business support

Business support arrangements are being reviewed following structural changes in the Directorate.

Also there is an intent to look to charge against grants for business support costs.

Grant maximisation

Charging against a plethora of small grants for operational costs.

Also, a £4m grant application has been submitted to the DfE "Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme (the stream ringfenced for Authorities classed as Requires Improvement at the time of the application being decided). The outcome is expected in January 2024, which, if positive, would increase the £150k saving.

Reduction in staffing costs

The Family, Quality and Commissioning Division had been established on the basis of figures provided at the time and has been returning a salary budget surplus.

Luke Sorba, January 10th 2024