



Cabinet agenda supplement

Date: Tuesday 15 November 2022

Time: 10.00 am

Venue: The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF

Membership:

M Tett (Leader), Cllr A Macpherson (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing), G Williams (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment), S Bowles (Cabinet Member for Communities), S Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Transport), J Chilver (Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources), A Cranmer (Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services), C Harriss (Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure), P Strachan (Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration) and M Winn (Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services)

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5 Question Time
Question from Councillor Sophie Kayani to Councillor Anita Cranmer,
Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services

The Q2 Budget Monitoring and KPI Reports on Education & Children's Service demonstrates a service in crisis and a portfolio without a firm grip, namely:

- £9.2m adverse on its operating budget (worsening by £5.3m in Q1) due to placement budgets (£3.2m), agency staff (£1.9m), client costs (£2.9m), adoption and special guardianship allowances (£0.5m), and care leavers' accommodation and allowances (£0.9m).
- The portfolio is failing to deliver its planned savings with a shortfall of 35% (£0.3m) due to these agency staff commitments, even with the Social Worker Academy.
- The contingency for Children's Services' demography (£1.4m) will be fully used up, but High-Cost Children's Placements contingency (£0.5m) is seemingly not being deployed in spite of the shortfall noted above.

- This contingency has been proven to be wholly inadequate although categorical reassurances were given by the Cabinet Member during Budget Scrutiny.
- It is failing to deliver its capital projects, such as school places (£3.4m), SEND projects (£1.5m), and Children's Homes (£0.5m)
- There is "*£0.6m pressure in Legal & Democratic Services from increased demand linked to Children's and Adult cases*".
- KPIs show worsening Red ratings on Re-referrals within 12 months, EHCPs issued within 20 weeks, Family Support Plans issued within 31 days, repeat Child Protection Plans, Children In Need seen within 4 weeks

The Report provides no confidence, stating that "*a detailed review of the budget and forecast expenditure is taking place in order to identify actions that can be taken to reduce spend. An action plan is being drawn up as a result of this review identifying priority actions, timelines, and estimated savings. This plan will be monitored by Children's SLT and Children's Budget Board and the potential financial impact included in the forecast in future months as actions are agreed and implemented.*" This 2022-23 revised forecast and 2023-24 Budget will clearly need to be the subject of detailed scrutiny through the Budget process.

Can the Cabinet Member provide a categorical reassurance that this is the worst-case financial position for 2022-23; how spend can be possibly reduced in a so-called "*dysfunctional*" Children's services market where demand is increasing, even with all the substantial demography assumptions made in the 2022-23 budget; confirm when this detailed review will be completed and subject to scrutiny by the appropriate Select Committees; and that this portfolio is not creating a further reputational and financial risk to Buckinghamshire Council through inferior or inappropriate placements for children ending up in unnecessarily traumatic and costly legal disputes?

If you would like to attend a meeting, but need extra help to do so, for example because of a disability, please contact us as early as possible, so that we can try to put the right support in place.

For further information please contact: Ian Hunt on 01296 382343, email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.