

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Tuesday 9 February 2021 at 5.45pm

Present: Councillor L Giles (Chair);
Councillors E M Giles, Moore and Rollins.

In Attendance: Councillors Piper and Preece.

Rt Hon Jacqui Smith (Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust Board);
Frances Craven (Chief Executive, Sandwell Children's Trust);
Tara Malik (Director of Resources, Sandwell Children's Trust).

Officers: David Stevens (Chief Executive), Lesley Hagger (Executive Director of Children's Services), Surjit Tour (Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Chris Ward (Director – Education, Employment and Skills), Rebecca Maher (Inteirm S151 Officer and Head of Finance), Melanie Barnett (Group Head – Inclusive Learning Services), Sue Moore (Group Head – Education Support Services), Steve Lilley (Finance Business Partner), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager - Democracy) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager).

9/21 **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence were received.



10/21 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

11/21 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared at the meeting.

12/21 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

13/21 **Exclusion of Public**

Agreed: That the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting. This is to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

14/21 **Sandwell Children's Trust Contract Sum 2021/22**

The Board welcomed the Chair, Chief Executive and Director of Resources of Sandwell Children's Trust to the meeting.

The Scrutiny Management Board was informed that the Sandwell Children's Trust was established on 1 April 2018 as a new and distinct legal entity to provide children's social care services in Sandwell on behalf of the Council. The Trust had day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services and was managed by a board of non-executive and executive directors.



The Council had commissioned Sandwell Children's Trust to deliver statutory children's social care and targeted services and awarded a 10-year contract which commenced in 2018.

The contract specified the process and timelines for agreeing the contract sum. Members were informed that this had been complied with, with open discussions between senior officers of both the Council and the Trust.

The Board was informed that the Department for Education had provided an independent advisor, who had worked with the Trust and the Council, including looking at the impact of COVID-19.

Members sought assurances around the Trust's ongoing plans and activities to reduce the budget deficit. Representatives of the Trust gave further information on aspects of its Medium Term Financial Strategy, which would continue to reduce its budget deficit going forward until a break-even position was reached.

The Board also received an overview of performance of the Trust in relation to several performance indicators.

The Chair thanked the representatives of the Trust for attending the meeting and answering questions from the Board in detail.

15/21

Medium Term Financial Strategy – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport

The Board received further details in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transport.

An overview of the Council's responsibilities under the Children and Families Act 2014 was presented to the Board. Reasons for increasing pressure on the service were also discussed, these included:-

- A doubling in the number of SEND pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (known as EHCP);
- An increase in the number of children requiring transport;



- A higher proportion of pupils with more complex needs requiring more specialised transport;
- A high number of pupils transported out of borough to specialist provision;
- No in-house transport provision;
- Increasing costs for transport providers;
- No increase to core budget allocation for this service.

The Board considered a breakdown of the current expenditure and an overview of how this compared to other local authorities in the region. Members noted that work was being done on a regional and sub-regional level to investigate and implement ways of reducing costs to local authorities whilst ensuring the responsibilities of those authorities were dispensed appropriately.

Agreed:-

- (1) that the Director – Education, Employment and Skills bring a further update on the work around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport to a future meeting of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board;
- (2) that relevant Cabinet Members be invited to attend future meetings where elements of the Medium Term Financial Strategy are being considered.

Meeting ended at 7.18pm

The public part of the [meeting can be viewed on YouTube](#)

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

