

Cabinet

Monday 9 December 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Evans OBE, in the Chair.

Councillor Laing, Vice Chair.

Councillors Aspinnall, Briars-Delve, Coker, Dann, Haydon, Lowry and Cresswell.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Penberthy.

Also Present: Liz Bryant (Head of Legal Services), Emma Crowther (Service Director-Integrated Commissioning), Jens Gemmel (Interim Chief Operating Officer (via Microsoft Teams)), David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Karime Hassan (Interim Strategic Director for Growth), Ruth Harrell (Director of Public Health (via Microsoft Teams)), Kamal Patel (Consultant in Public Health, Trading Standards and Health Improvement), Tracey Lee (Chief Executive), Jamie Sheldon (Democratic Advisor) and Gary Walbridge (Strategic Director Adults, Health and Communities).

The meeting started at 2.02 pm and finished at 3.40 pm.

Note: The full discussion can be viewed on the webcast of the City Council meeting at www.plymouth.gov.uk. At a future meeting, the Council will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

71. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

72. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting 11 November 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

73. **Questions from the Public**

There was one question from the public.

The following question was asked by Mike Sheaff:

Question: A High Court judgment described the council's conduct as "highly unsatisfactory", revealing a "lack of transparency" and "inadequate compliance with its duty of candour to the court." Did you request officers to adopt this approach, and if not when did you learn of it, and do you consider it acceptable?

Answer: Don't be ridiculous. That's my answer.

74. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

75. **Health Improvement Services**

Councillor Mary Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care) introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- a) The Health Improvement Service Contract Award was set to commence from 01 April 2025 and take place over five years, costing £5.5 million;
- b) The service had been delivered by Livewell for the previous 11 years;
- c) Re-awarding the contract to Livewell was a sensible decision as they were well-established and had been delivering health improvement services since the initial contract was directly awarded in 2013.

In response to questions, Kamal Patel (Consultant in Public Health, Trading Standards and Health Improvement) explained:

- d) Value for money would be attained through regular service meetings, frequent assessment of need, reaching people who needed to be reached, regular briefs with Cabinet members and meeting with the Health and Wellbeing Board;
- e) One of the benefits of continued work with Livewell was that the difficult conversations had already been had. Easy to achieve targets were not on the surface of the conversation but rather the more difficult targets were, for example areas needing improvement such as Women's Health and 'Healthspans';
- f) Whereas collective approaches, such as planning around the location of fast-food establishments, were important, the contract aimed to address individual health behaviours.
- g) Livewell had provided a great service to the community and continued to be integrated into the community, they had exceeded the scope of the contract in a positive manner and continued integration would see more positive effects reciprocated throughout the City.

Councillor Sue Dann (Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Sport, Leisure & HR, and OD) added:

- h) Livewell had been engrained heavily within the local community, the soon-to-be established community hubs were making use of this community integration and this would provide a strong 'bookmarking case' for the future implementation of partner organisations working within the community.

Cabinet agreed to:

1. Approve the decision to award a new contract for Health Improvement Services to Livewell Southwest.
2. Grant authority for the decision regarding the activation of the two-year contract extension to be delegated to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, where they would not already have authority to award within the scheme of delegation.

76. **Family Hubs Contract Award**

Councillor Mary Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care) introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- a) Family Hubs were a cross-council service working hand-in-hand with Children's Services and wellbeing hubs to support family and children up to 19 or 25 with SEND;
- b) The Council wanted to continue to develop this network to provide wider services for children and young people.

Emma Crowther (Service Director Integrated Commissioning) added:

- c) The paper proposed awarding new contracts to current family hub providers; Action for Children, Barnardos and Lark Children's Centre to enable them to continue to work with families into 2025 and beyond;
- d) The continued aim was to cooperate with these partners, as well as others, to design and embed practicalities of delivering early help and targeted support services;
- e) Support needed to extend beyond physical buildings into communities and of equal importance was the right person to work with the right family.

Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) added:

- f) Family Hubs were warm and welcoming spaces and communicating their message was a prime initiative for the Council. Vital early work with families facilitated by these networks prevented future acute concerns.
- g) Overcoming child poverty contract was additionally an important part of the service, which aimed to support those in need and would extend the reach of family hubs.

In response to questions, it was explained:

- h) To further encourage people to attend, the Council was extending networks and enhancing data related to needs. Community Connections were linking areas of the City. the Council was able to achieve this by extending warm and welcoming and spaces;

- i) Joint work had taken place with Midwives from Derriford Hospital and Livewell to early identify homes with speech and language concerns, a grant had been provided and there was a focus on this within the Family hubs. This was one of six priorities with Children's services and an action plan was being devised.

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) added:

- j) There were two substantial tranches of money dedicated to the award, one for 25/26 and one for 26/27.
- k) Family work was critical for building trust within Local Government Services.

Cabinet agreed:

- l. Three new Family Hub contracts were awarded to Action for Children, Barnardo's and Lark for a period of 2 years from 1st April 2025, with the option to extend by a further year, until 31st March 2028. These would replace the current Emerging Family Hub contracts. The total contract value for 2025/26 was confirmed as £2,443,693 and indicative contract value for 2026/27 was confirmed as £2,199,323.75.

77. **SEND Sufficiency Project Plan**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- a) The report provided information on the progress of the delivery of the SEND Sufficiency Plan which was approved by Cabinet in September 2024;
- b) The SEND sufficiency plan remained a very high priority for the Cabinet and the Council in general;
- c) Since approval, action had been taken to follow the councils funding approval process to release funds for the project management and feasibility stage of the plan – specifically the feasibility of the purchase of a historic building next to Mill Ford School. Senior Officers deemed the best option not pursuing this purchase any further;
- d) Officers had been in touch with the Department for Education (DfE) to discuss further use of schools and the replacement of various buildings;
- e) The planned developed resource provision within mainstream schools and Plymouth was now being echoed in national plans by the DfE, approximately £740 million was to be released in addition to the national budget for the provision of satellite specialist provisions capital work within mainstream schools.

Councillor Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) added:

- f) Whilst provision was still in early days, Finance was happy with the direction and spend of the project overall.

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) added:

- g) There was a high importance which needed to be placed on swift delivery and accelerated progress of the project in order to, in part, achieve value for money;
- h) The authority over local schools had diminished in the elapsed few years due to the proliferation of academy trusts at the expense of council lead schools. This necessitated a more persuasive tactic of approaching schools to achieve the ends of the project.

David Haley (Director of Children's Services) added:

- i) The department was in agreement with the Executive regarding the rate of project delivery and to those ends had requested a project plan be implemented by the end of the week and risk assessment put in place. A transition board meeting chaired by Tracey Lee was anticipated on 19 December. This would create a robust plan for 2025 to move at pace.

Cabinet agreed to note the report.

78. **Children's Services Update**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader of the Council, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- a) The number of children in care within Plymouth had stabilised at 520, in line with statistical neighbours. There were still significant challenges in regards to locating placement homes and, as a result, there was a larger number living in high cost residential settings and some in very high cost unregistered arrangements;
- b) Action had been taken by central government to address the issue but, in the meantime, these factors had led to an overspend at Month 7 of £6.991m against a total budget of £59.975m;
- c) Much of the overspend for the month was due to the cost of moving five children to more expensive accommodation;
- d) The service was working hard to recruit more foster carers and continually renewing strategies to achieve a higher recruitment number;

David Haley (Director Children's Services, Children, Young People and Families) added:

- e) A number of children had been identified in which needs could be better met in a family home. Work had been conducted over the previous months with independent and in-house fostering associations to match these children and build appropriate relationships so that, during January 2025, they may be moved out of residential care;

- f) The 'Mockingbird' programme had been operating effectively and conversations were ongoing with other local authorities regarding the process of implementing and expanding the programme more quickly.

Cabinet agreed to note the report.

79. **Leader's Announcements**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) made the following announcements:

- a) At the end of November, the Homes England senior executive team had been hosted within Plymouth. The Council had taken this opportunity to make the case for large scale long-term investment in Plymouth via presentation of the ambitious City plan. Topics of discussion included;
 - I. Plans to grow housing in the City Centre by 8 to 9,000, 1,000 within the next 5 years.
 - II. The delivery of 30,000 m² of new commercial space.
 - III. The operation and scale of the naval base.
 - IV. The nuclear project and the operation of the dockyards.
 - V. Employment in the Dockyards and employees' housing requirements.
 - VI. Construction workers required for the Dockyard as well as for Housing.
- b) A turf cutting ceremony at the £8 million Freeport direct development scheme had taken place on 06 December 2024, celebrating the construction of four units which could be utilised by companies participating in the scheme.;
- c) Thanks were extended for the assistance tendered from staff during the recent Storm Darragh.

80. **Cabinet Member Updates**

Councillor Coker (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport) made the following announcements:

- a) Extended thanks to staff for their fantastic efforts during difficult and dangerous circumstances stemming from Storm Darragh. The CCTV control team fielded 60 police requests for information, 29 trees fell onto highways, there were various road closures, four traffic lights were rendered non-operational, two streetlights had collapsed, road traffic furniture had spread across the highways and needed to be replaced, a wall collapsed and the team were left with over 80 pieces of further casework;
- b) Extended a thanks to the public for heeding weather and 'do not travel' warnings;
- c) The Council had been awarded £4.5 million for better bus services across England for the year 25/26. This was the largest bus service improvement plan funding the department had ever received. The funding would be used wholly within Plymouth;

- d) The Laira Bridge Walking and Cycling Route had been recently opened. The renovation work had seen 194 metres of decking laid upon galvanised channelling, which had presented difficulties and caused delays. New lighting designs were now being sort for the bridge.
- e) The Planning Team had won the project award for excellence in Planning at the Royal Town Planning Institute Awards for the Melville Place development and also came commended in Excellence in Planning for a Successful Economy. The judge commented “the project is an exceptional example of a genuinely plan-led scheme resulting in a high quality, sustainable mixed use project. It demonstrates strong leadership and highlights how excellent partnership-working is significant to excess. The sustainably-led approach to creating this state-of-the-art building has resulted in impressive space for all to enjoy, promoting heritage and culture in its highest form”

Councillor Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) made the following announcements:

- f) Enabling works were completed on the Community Diagnostic Centre at Colin Campbell Court. It was planned to be approximately 15 to 18 months before the completion of the project.
- g) The Armada Way project was progressing well, at forecasted cost. Works on Mayflower Street and the Subways to North Cross were significantly underway with releveling and pipe works being undertaken for the Sub-Urban Drainage Scheme (SUDS).
- h) Refurbishment works were in conversation for the Civic Centre building and interior ‘clean-up’ jobs had been completed. 22 architects across the country had expressed an interest in working with the Council. The tendering process would start soon.

Councillor Haydon (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Libraries, Events, Cemeteries and Crematoria) made the following announcements:

- i) Summer Session festival was to operate again over four days from 25 June 2025 and would include acts such as “The Cause”;
- j) The Santa Fun Run had taken place on 08 December with a record number of 804 participants, raising money for charity;

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) made the following announcements:

- k) A team from The Box had attended number 10 and 11 Downing Street to celebrate the 125th year of government art. They were joined by Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP and Sir Chris Bryant MP;
- l) Recent History Day was to be held on 11 January at The Box. The institute was looking for residents to attend and tell their own stories from Devonport;

- m) Following the Executive Decision on 29 November, Children's Services were now actively identifying suitable properties to purchase for the development of two children's homes in Plymouth;
- n) In terms of Foster Carer recruitment, the Plymouth HR team and managers from Children's Services attended a national social work job fair on 25 November. The stall drew a lot of interest and potential candidates are being followed up including holding an online event 10 December.

Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change) made the following announcements:

- o) The Council submitted an application to the national government's Warm Homes Local Grant and were anticipating receiving £9 million to improve the energy performance by retrofitting more than 700 low-income homes over the next three years.
- p) Tree planting season was underway, with over 2000 trees due to be planted over the Winter. Numerous types of trees were to be planted, with the 'right tree for the right location' a central concern of the programme.

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) made the following announcements:

- q) An early adopter scheme for primary school aged children undertaking free breakfast clubs would commence in April 2025. The DfE was looking for 750 early adopter schools. Participating schools would be funded to provide access to a Universal Breakfast Club lasting at least 30 minutes and was intended to target belonging and enjoyment in school.

81. **LGA Update**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) gave the following update:

- a) The LGA had provided a response to the recent financial settlement, thankful for multi-year settlements and a move to a focus on prevention;
- b) The additional funding allocated for issues such as SEND, Homelessness and children's social care was additionally welcomed, although concern was expressed that this funding was not entirely adequate to address the deficit in these areas;
- c) Louise Gittins, the LGA Chair had visited Plymouth and met with both Tudor Evans and Tracey Lee. She was reportedly the first LGA chair to have visited Plymouth. Conversations were had around devolution and local government reform whilst awaiting the English Devolution Bill which was to be published on 16 December 2024.

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