

Children's Services 06/01/23

An overview of the service area was provided. The service area employed 291 FTE and had a General Fund budget of £69.530m.

The directorate is split into three areas –

- Education Services
- Commissioning & Partnerships
- Intelligent Client Function/Children's Trust

Pressures identified over the previous 12 months (2022/23) included: -

- Children in Care population increase by 52.
- In year school applications increase of 600+ in year
- EHCP caseloads increase average 360-380/worker (recommendation 150-180)
- Elective home education; Children Missing Education increase.
- Removal of non-statutory Psychology function
- Increase in School Population 3%
- Increase in SEND Population 7.2%
- Increase in SEND Support 3%
- Increase in EHCP 28.9%

Pressures Identified for 2023/24

- Continued increase children in care (virtual school)
- Increase school age population (admissions)
- Increase SEND at all stages and ages (Education Inclusion/Ed Psychology/Educational Health and Care)
- Reduction in SENDIASS
- Reduction in Admissions Service
- No strategic Leader Early Years; SEND.
- No brokerage or contract management functions for SEN; Ed Psych and alternative provision
- No participation/engagement function for SEN

Members queried why demand for post-16 SEND places had increased.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students with special educational needs had not been identified, as they were not attending school. As a result, since students had returned to schools, an increased need for post-16 SEND provision had arisen. In addition to this, there also existed long waiting lists for children to receive assessments and diagnoses for neurodivergent conditions.

General Fund Budget Summary

Draft Budget Summary for Children and Education –

2023/24 - £69.530m

2024/25 - £70.157m

205/26 - £71.897m

Education

The service area includes –

- Standards and Achievement
 - School Effectiveness
 - Safeguarding in Education
 - Governance
- SEND and Vulnerable Groups
 - Education, Health and Care Plans
 - Education Psychology
 - Attendance and Early Help
- Access and Sufficiency
 - School Admissions
 - Pupil Place Planning
 - Capital Investment
- Virtual School

One member acknowledged that the local authority had inherited some costs of new academies, such as students' travel to remote areas. They queried whether anything could be done to ensure that new academies were established in more convenient locations, to better serve the local population.

The DfE and ESFA would assess appropriate sites for schools. Pressures against schools' transport budgets existed when academies were established in isolated areas however, it was not simple for the local authority to make location demands of academies.

Members queried whether pension rates were likely to change.

Pensions rates did not fluctuate much, except for adjustments for cost of living and cohort of pensioners. If schools were to make redundancies for efficiency, they would pick up the cost.

Commissioning and Partnerships

The service area includes -

- Partnerships
 - Integrated Care Northamptonshire
 - Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership
 - SEND Independent Advisory Service
 - Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Commissioning
 - Education Commissioning
 - SEND and Alternative Provision Commissioning
 - Joint Commissioning
- Service Development
 - SEND Improvement
 - Family Hubs
 - Early Years
- Intelligent Client Function
 - Contract Performance
 - Contractual Governance
 - Financial Management

Capital

Details regarding the proposed Capital Programme for 2023/24 were provided.

Rowan Gate Special School – Mobile Unit Replacement £1,661,000

Schools Minor Works Programme £1,947,000

Children’s Trust £600,000

Total - £4,208,000

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

Information was provided regarding the DSG.

2023/24 Dedicated Schools Grant Settlement

Schools Block

The DFE have rolled in the School Supplementary Funding in 2022-23 into the National Funding Formula which is why Schools Block needs to be rebased to make an accurate comparison.

Following the 2022 Autumn Statement the DFE will also be paying a new one-off grant in 2023-24 called Mainstream Schools Additional Grant to mainstream schools only. This grant will be rolled into Schools Block from 2024-25.

Central School Services Block

The DFE continues to reduce Historic Commitments by 20% year on year.

High Needs Block

The DFE have rolled in the additional high needs funding into High Needs Block. They have also included the mandatory requirements of ensuring 3% MFG above 2021-22 funding is paid to Special Schools, PRUS and APs as well as 3.4% additional high needs funding in 2023-24 in the terms and conditions of DSG Grant Funding.

Early Years Block

The DFE have rolled in the Teacher Pay and Pension Grant (which previously was only paid to schools and academies) into the 3 and 4 year old funding rate as well as the Maintained Nursery School Supplement rate.

One member queried whether other local authorities had misallocated Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), leading to deficit positions.

Some local authorities held deficits on the DSG, which sat against Council reserves. This strategy was not ideal due to the fact that Council reserves then could not fall below this position, as they would need to be aligned with the deficit position.

Members queried whether North Northamptonshire Council had inherited a DSG deficit from the legacy County Council authority.

Much of the DSG deficit inherited from Northamptonshire County Council had been 'clawed back' from alternative service provision. This spend continued to be closely monitored.

Conclusion

Members thanked officers for their presentation. Members recognised the continued challenges faced by the service regarding financial constraints and increasing demand for services. Members congratulated officers for being able

to address many of these challenges and for the dedication of the directorate's staff.