

## Minutes

of the Meeting of the

## Children & Young People Services Policy & Scrutiny Panel

### Tuesday, 23rd January 2018

held at the Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset.

Meeting Commenced: 12.05 p.m.

Meeting Concluded: 1.20 p.m.

#### Councillors:

P Ann Harley (Chairman)

P David Oyns(Vice-Chairman)

P Karen Barclay

P Ericka Blades

P Charles Cave (Substitute for Cllr Blatchford)

P Bob Garner

A David Hitchins

Kate Stowey

P Martin Williams

P Deborah Yamanaka

P Michael Bell

A Mary Blatchford

P Donald Davies

Judith Hadley

P Denise Hunt

A Liz Wells

A Roz Willis

P: Present

A: Apologies for absence submitted

**Also in attendance:** Councillors Ruth Jacobs, Reyna Knight, David Pasley, Dawn Payne

**Officers in attendance:** Jo Buchan, Nick Brain, Malcolm Coe, Leo Taylor (Corporate Services)

#### **CAY**    **Declarations of Interest by Members**

**19**

None

#### **CAY**    **Call in of Executive Member Decision (number CSD 109): Welfare Provision Scheme 2018/19 amendments**

**20**

The Chairman explained that the decision had been called in by Councillor Donald Davies and seconded by Councillor Mike Bell. She said the matter was being considered by this Panel in so far as the reasons for the call in related to children and their families. Before asking Councillors Davies and Bell to outline their reasons for the call in, she invited officers to give a presentation to highlight the scheme amendments as set out in the decision

of the Executive Member for Human Resources and Asset Management, Capital Programme and Transformation Programme.

The Client Specialist, Revenue and Benefits, outlined the Welfare Provision Scheme (WPS) setting out:-

- the total number of claims made to WPS involving children;
- the percentages of that number involving multiple claims;
- a breakdown of the total by the numbers of children involved in each claim;
- the percentage breakdown of claims by single parent families as opposed to couples; and
- an overview of the current system including its legislative origin, how it had evolved and how it currently operated in practice.

Discussion ensued and Members sought and received clarification on the following issues:-

- 1) the amount allocated by the Government for the scheme, how that figure was allocated by the Council to the scheme year on year, and the implications for funding going forward (noting that there appeared to be an inconsistency between expenditure figures presented and subsequently reported);
- 2) the year on year demand trend and the extent to which the annual allocations to the WPS matched demand;
- 3) the eligibility criteria for access to the scheme;
- 4) the numbers of people turned away from the scheme, and, where this may have occurred due to lack of budgeted funds (as opposed to simply not-qualifying), how this was managed; and
- 5) the legal requirements in respect of the information contained within an Executive Member Decision Notice. Members noted that there was no explicit reference in the notice to the proposed reduction in financial cap from £500 to £350.

In response to clarification given by the Head of Legal Services regarding point 5 above, the Head of Finance and Property acknowledged that there was insufficient information contained within the Decision Notice and indicated that it would need to be reissued.

The Executive Member for Human Resources and Asset Management, Capital Programme and Transformation Programme thanked Members for bringing these issues to his attention and said that he agreed with the Head of Finance and Property's conclusion.

The Chairman then invited Councillors Donald Davies and Mike Bell to outline their reasons for calling in the Executive Member decision.

Councillor Davies gave the following reasons for calling in the Executive Member decision:-

- a) inconsistencies in the financial data;
- b) concerns about the impact on children of a reduction in the permitted number of claims;

- c) there was no direct reference in the policy to children (eg in an impact assessment); and
- d) there was insufficient supporting information within the decision notice.

Councillor Bell added the following:-

- e) the sustainability of the WPS budget was questionable and consideration should be given to whether it was set at an appropriate level;
- f) there was a need to refresh the WPS policy document including the following:-
  - a need to be more specific about how people were prioritised (weighting criteria);
  - an impact assessment needed to be included;
  - discretionary applications of the policy (eg due to exceptional claimant circumstances) needed to be specified.

Following discussion around the issues raised, the Panel concluded that not all of the relevant information had been provided in the decision notice and some information had been inconsistent and it was therefore:-

**Resolved:**

- (1) that decision CSD109 be reconsidered by the Executive Member; and
- (2) that in doing so, consideration be given to the specific issues raised in discussion by the Panel (see points a-f above).

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Chairman

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