MINUTES OF THE Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Tuesday, 18th November, 2025, 19:00

PRESENT:

Councillors: Anna Lawton (Chair), Anna Abela, Marsha Isilar-Gosling, Mark Grosskopf, Kaushika Amin.

ALSO ATTENDING: Christine Cordon (Co-Optee)

29. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Dunstall.

31. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

33. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

34. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting on 9th September 2025 were agreed as a coirrect record.

35. SCRUTINY OF THE 2026/27 DRAFT BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026/2031

The Panel received a report for their consideration and comment, on the Council's draft 2026-27 Budget and 2026-31 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

proposals that related to the Panel's remit. The report included the Budget/MTFS report that went to Cabinet on 11th November, along with appendices that set out the General Fund revenue and capital budget proposals relevant to the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel. The report was introduced by Neil Sinclair, Head of Finance and Ann Graham, Corporate Director of Children's Services as set out in the agenda pack at pages 9-78. Also present for this item were the Director of Early Help, Prevention and SEND and the Director of Safeguarding & Social Care. Cllr Brabazon, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families was also present for this item.

Mr Sinclair identified that the financial position of the Council overall continued to be very challenging, driven by increasing demand and the rising cost of services. The Council was seeing trends from the current year continue into next year, with significant overspends in Social Care, TA and inflation costs. Other areas of overspend for next year included housing benefit overpayments and the Council's property estate. The Panel was advised that the current forecasts showed that an additional circa £30m was required to cover the projected overspend for 2026/27. There were £7m worth of new savings/ costs reductions in the budget and £14.9m of previously agreed savings due to be delivered next year (£21.9m in total). The current projection for Exceptional Financial Support was £57m for 2026/27. This was in additional to £10m of EFS for 2024/25 and £37m of EFS in 2025/26. The Panel was advised that the final figures would be known at the end of the financial year, once the existing budget was subject to closure. The Cabinet Member advised the Panel that Children's services had managed their budget well, including their contributions to overall savings for the Council. The Cabinet Member commented that the numbers of agency staff had gone down, the number of placements had gone down and the Safety Valve programme had been managed. There continued to be an overspend in the Dedicated Schools Grant, which was related to SEND, and was deemed to be manageable. Cllr Brabazon set out that in the context of a budget that where costs had risen significantly, the service had done a commendable job in containing the budget.

The following arose as part of the discussion of the report:

a. The Panel sought clarification around the budget pressure relating to Rising Green youth centre and queried where the funding would come from to replace the grant funding that had come to an end. In response, officers advised that a dedicated report had been submitted to Cabinet that set out all of the issues in relation to funding. The Panel were advised that the youth centre would be funded corporately as a growth budget in order to maintain that service provision for the next two years. The service was committed to finding an alternative venue to provide a youth centre following those two years.
b. The Panel queried whether the Rising Green youth centre would continue to be funded to the same level over the next two years. In response, officers advised that there were some cuts to the overall youth provision, with the targeted youth service being brought under Early Help and reductions being made as a result. However, Rising Green would remain operating for the next two years and it was envisaged that a new site would be found following that two-year period.
c. The Panel queried the additional funding proposed around employing additional staff to manage the steep rise in Subject Access Requests and whether those additional staff were required, given that it was possible to extend the deadlines for responding for complex requests. In response, officers advised that the

overall volume of cases in that service exceeded what they could manage, and so even though they could extend the deadlines for complex cases, demand far outstripped capacity.

d. The Panel queried whether, following the replacement of the 2025/26 grant for the Families First Partnership Programme, there were any alternative sources of funding that were being explored. In response, officers advised that when the grant was initially released it was given to the Children's services base budget but the government subsequently issued amended guidance. Following discussions with the Corporate Director of Finance, it had been agreed that it would not be a pressure within the Children's Services base budget for next year. It was commented that Haringey was not alone in finding itself in this position.
e. In relation to previously agreed savings and whether these would be delivered in full, officers acknowledged that they would not be able to deliver the savings for the current year, due to the £1.4m grant issue and not having any time to plan for how to mitigate this. The current assumption was that all of the previously agreed savings included in the March 2025 Council report across 2026/27 to 2030/31 would be delivered in full.
f. In relation to the cost pressure arising from tribunals, the Panel sought clarification as to whether there was scope to reduce the number of cases ending up at tribunal, given the costs involved. In response, officers advised that costs varied widely according to what package of care the tribunal related to. Officers advised that they had undertaken some modelling to see the level of workforce they would need to meet the current level of complaints. The service was developing a team of four staff to manage a dispute resolution process with the aim of preventing cases escalating to the point of going through the courts. Currently there were around 75 cases going to tribunal and only one person working on them. Consequently, it was very hard to keep on top of demand.
g. In response to a follow-up question about the additional team of four staff, officers advised that savings deriving from this team would be savings to the High Needs Block rather than the General Fund. The Safety Valve programme was due to end the overspend in the HNB by March 2028.
h. The Panel commented on the importance of managing relationships with parents when it came to reducing the number of cases going to tribunal, for example, and questioned if there was another way to manage relationships within the service. In response, the Corporate Director set out that Subject Access Request could involve someone who was in care 20 plus years ago needing to know something about their birth parents. The Council could have no current relationship with that person and, in that context, managing relationships in a different way would not affect that person's need to find out a specific piece of information. In relation to tribunals, officers advised that these were often about a parent trying to ensure that their child's needs were met and the Council could have a good relationship with that family. Within the SEND process there was a statutory requirement for a formal route of redress if parents were not happy with a decision taken by the local authority or a health authority. Officers set out that there was a lot of work going on within the service to ensure that it had good relationships with service users. The Panel noted that there was a very well established parent carer forum in Haringey, that had 500 members and thousands of people who received its newsletters.

The Cabinet Member emphasised the fact that the SEND system was fundamentally adversarial in its set up and that there wasn't enough money in the system. People had a right to go to a tribunal if they were not happy.

i. In relation to a question around the saving proposal around introducing specialist foster carer allowances to attract more foster carers, officers confirmed that training would be part of a wider package of support offered to foster carers, including looking at how children were matched with foster carers. Officers set out that there was a clear expectation that people who undertook these placements also undertook enhanced training.
j. The Panel queried whether there were any concerns around incentivising foster with pay bands based on tiers of complexity/need. In response, officers acknowledged that it was an issue that they had deliberated on, and assurances were provided that there would be processes in place to ensure that foster carers had the requisite skill set in order to undertake these placements. Officers emphasised the importance of placing children locally, where the organisation could provide support in order to achieve the best outcomes for those children. In contrast to the huge costs charged by some independent care agencies, the service was seeking to put in place packages of support to children and foster families in order to keep placements in-house, rather than going through agencies. The Corporate Director of Children's Service emphasised the importance of children having a family experience for as long as they could.
k. In reference to the proposed saving around care leavers accommodation, the Panel questioned whether, if successful, there was scope to deliver more units for care leavers. In response, officers acknowledged that that it was an exciting proposal and that the service was incredibly proud to have young adults moving into their own accommodation. It was estimated that there were either 104 or 109 care leavers moving into supported accommodation. In terms of getting them ready to move into permanent accommodation, it was suggested that it was important to provide them with the opportunity to input into what they needed to make it work.
l. In response to a question about the level of overspend, officers advised that overall, the Council was projecting an in-year overspend of about £34m. Some of these pressures were recurring and some were one-offs, and they would need to be built into the 2026/27 budget forecast.

RESOLVED
That the Panels scrutinised the proposals presented in the report and appendices.

36. HARINGEY SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

The Panel received a copy of the Haringey Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Annual Report 2024-25, for noting, as set out in the published agenda pack at pages 79-121. Accompanying the Annual Report was a set of presentation slides that were tabled at the meeting and have been published as part of the agenda papers for this meeting. The presentation and the Annual Report were introduced by David Archibald, Independent Scrutineer HSCPB. Also present for this item were the Corporate Director, Children's Services and the Director of Safeguarding and Social

Care, along with the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families. The following arose as part of this discussion of this report:

a. In response to a query about the extent to which the HSCP was a new set up, the Panel were advised that up until 2019, each authority had to have a safeguarding children's board. From September 2019, there was a change which required councils, police and health to have joint accountability. Subsequent changes meant that there was no longer an independent chair, instead the chair rotated between the three lead partners. The role of independent scrutineer was also brought in.
b. The Panel noted that the report contained a lot of qualitative data and queried whether there was any quantitative data that showed how the partnership was performing. In response, Mr Archibald advised that the partnership had been developing a dataset to evaluate progress on a range of areas of children's safeguarding and that there was also work underway to encourage HSCPs to do this nationally. Mr Archibald advised that he chaired a recent HSCP leadership group meeting which included a progress report on performance data. In general, the data showed that the partnership was performing well. It was commented that there was a huge and complex set of potential data, and the challenge was to use this data to show where improvements could be made. The Corporate Director of Children's Services advised that her team followed the movement and flow of the data closely, and that when the dataset moved up or down they would interrogate it, in order to understand possible areas of concern.
c. The Panel sought clarification about how the partnership worked with housing to tackle issues such as damp and mould, which had a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of children. In response, officers advised that within the responsibilities of the HSCP, there wasn't anything the partnership could do to allocate housing. Officers would contact housing if they came across any housing issues. The introduction of Awaab's Law brought in specific timescales for landlords and housing providers to deal with serious issues such as damp and mould. Officers also commented that Haringey's Children Safeguarding Board had a housing sub-group and that this provided an opportunity for different sections of the Council to work together to deal with housing challenges.

Clerk's note at 20:20 – Cllr Abela left the meeting at this point.

d. The Panel queried access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and whether waiting times had improved. In response, Mr Archibald advised that the report set out some good progress in relation to Mental Health, including the introduction of a single point of access. It was acknowledged that there was a backdrop of increasing demand for CAMHS and increasing concerns about the mental health of young people. Officers advised the Panel that the Children and Young People's Mental Health Strategy had recently been published. The Strategy was the product of having listened to families over a number of years and that people needed access to services in a timely manner, needed services that met need, and they needed support in navigating a complex system. In relation to children with more complex needs, it was commented that the single point of access and 'no wrong front door' approach would allow anyone who approached the service to be directed to the most appropriate service based on their needs. The Panel was also advised that

CAMHS were also going into schools, and that there was a community offer available through family hubs.

e. The Panel sought clarification about the role of independent scrutineer and the extent to which it was independent. In response, the Panel was advised that the role was relatively new and that partnerships across the country were trying to work out how best to incorporate the role. There was national guidance that set out the key elements of scrutiny. Mr Archibald commented that it was more helpful for him to sit with the executive and to contribute and challenge them directly as decisions were being taken, rather than retrospectively scrutinising decisions that had already been taken. It was emphasised that whilst Mr Archibald sat on the HSCP, he did not manage anything operationally. The Corporate Director commented that Mr Archibald knew Haringey well and that he was very experienced, this experience was helpful to the partnership. The Panel acknowledged the role played by the Independent Scrutineer, but suggested that use of the word 'independent' initially seeming misleading, given that he sat on the Partnership Board.
f. In relation to slide 11 titled 'Children's Social Care Dataset 2024/25', the Panel queried the fact that it stated that there had been a near 20% decrease in the volume of EHCPs but that the completion within a 20 week timescale had dropped from 98% to 82%. In response, officers advised that they would check the figures and come back to the Panel. It was commented that the timeframe aligned with the introduction of the Safety Valve programme, and that as that embedded and early intervention processes were implemented, less children required an EHCP. In relation to performance, officers acknowledged that this was a decrease, but noted that the organisation was still performing above the national average.
g. The Panel also queried the number of Asset Plus Plans within the Youth Offending Service, as the information box on slide 11 stated that performance was 'up' 65% from 74% the year before. The Panel sought clarification on whether this was a typographical error.

Clerk's Note – following the meeting officers found that there was an error with the data provided. In relation to Children supported with Asset Plus Plans, the data set should have stated: 'Between April 24-March 2025, the number of children supported by the Youth Justice Service with their Asset Plus Plans up to date was 72% which was the same in 23-24. The number of children supported between April 24- March 25 by the service was 303 compared with 243 in 23-24.' In relation to EHCPs, the data set should have stated: 'In 2024 there were 533 requests for Education Health and Care Needs assessment (EHCNA), compared with 600 in 2023 which is a decrease of 7.83%. In 2024, 83% of EHCPs were finalised in 20 weeks, compared with 86.5% in 2023, which is a decrease of 3.5%. N.B. Following this error, the published HCSB Annual report was updated and the DfE were notified.

h. The Panel queried whether the Haringey Healthy Weights Strategy 2022-25 was being updated. In response, officers advised that Public Health would have to come back on this. The Panel agreed for a report on the implementation of the Haringey Healthy Weight Strategy to come to its February meeting. **(Action: Clerk).**
i. The Panel commented that there had been a number of recent news articles about grooming gangs in London, and queried the extent to which this was something that was happening in Haringey. In response, the Corporate Director of Children's Services stated that it was difficult to say definitively either yes or

no. However, the service was not seeing any of the patterns or indicators it would expect to see for children being at risk in this way. It was commented that it was a police activity to find young people and spot those who may be at risk of being exploited through grooming gangs. Officers advised that there was a partnership level missing panel that was convened weekly, to share information and develop a partnership response to any instances of missing children.

j. The Panel questioned what was being done to reduce waiting times for children to receive an assessment for ADHD or autism. In response, officers advised that work was underway locally to reduce the large number of pathways and to bring providers together. A provider's collaborative had been established to bring providers together to look at how services could be delivered in a more streamlined way and how assessments wait times could be reduced. Officers commented that one of the key outputs was assuring that when a child had waited for an assessment, that assessment was the correct one and that the family weren't made to start that process from the beginning. Officers advised that there was also a robust waiting well offer for families that had been produced in conjunction with SEND Power. The service's management also scrutinised the data with health providers on a monthly basis.

RESOLVED
That the HSCB Annual Report was noted.

37. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

RESOLVED

That the work programme was noted and any amendments were agreed.

38. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

39. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

15th January
26th February

CHAIR: Councillor Anna Lawton

Signed by Chair ……..

Date ……