

12 October 2021		ITEM: 8
Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Children’s Services Savings – Education and Skills		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education & Skills		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education & Skills		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children’s Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report outlines the proposed savings for the Education and Skills service within Children’s Services over the financial year’s 2021/22 and 2022/23. Like all local authorities, the Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the Council’s overall budget position. This report sets out the proposed efficiency savings and opportunities to present new operating models within children’s education and skills to ensure the LA continues to support children and young people as they engage in learning pathways.

Education & Skills has undertaken a full review of all services, the focus of the review was to consider the role of the local authority in ensuring that we meet our statutory duties related to education. Thurrock’s educational landscape means all bar one of our schools are either part of Multi Academy Trusts or standalone academies. Many of the Council’s educational statutory duties relate to maintained schools. Even with our educational landscape the Council has a number of key strategic drivers in education, these include providing support and challenge to schools, ensuring we have enough early years and school places, home to school transport and ensuring our most vulnerable children have access to high quality education. The review looked at all of these areas with an emphasis on ensuring we continue to support our most vulnerable children and young people with new operating models to enable us to continue to support our vulnerable children and young people.

The Council continues to have a strong commitment to skills and working with key stakeholders providing employment pathways to our young people, with a key emphasis on the vulnerable young people who are currently not in education employment or training.

Outlined in this report is an overview of changes to our operating models in a number of our service areas. The service has tried to mitigate putting staff at risk by holding vacancies across Education & Skills over the past year. The review has identified a reduction in some of the non-statutory services to schools, this includes

some funding to provide additional opportunities in schools as well as the universal offer within the integrated youth hub Inspire Your Future.

The report is broken down into two sections:-

1. Children's Services Asset Review
2. Children Services Education and Skills Review

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the proposals identified to contribute to savings to offset the funding gap.
- 1.2 This report to this committee seeks specific comment on the relevant items which fall within its remit and which requires further member scrutiny prior to final cabinet decisions being made on the relevant items.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report presents the savings for Children's Education and Skills for 2021/22 and 2022/23. All local authorities are having to review and consider how they deliver services going forward. Education & Skills have taken the opportunity to consider new operating models that will continue to support vulnerable children, young people and adults.
- 2.2 Thurrock Council is facing a significant budget shortfall with an estimated deficit of £34 million over the next two financial years. There is a statutory obligation to report a balanced budget and all available alternative options have been explored including Council tax increases and asset reviews. It has, however, been identified that efficiencies of an estimated £20 million will need to come from staffing in the next 2 years. Education & Skills which is part of Children's Services, having the second highest staffing headcount in the Council, will need to contribute to the savings figure whilst also maintaining high standards of services to children and their families.
- 2.3 The first section of this report will outline the review that has been undertaken regarding assets in Children's Services – we have looked to transform and co-locate services to reduce the buildings we operate in. The asset review related to individual buildings is described below:-
 - 2.3.1 **Thurrock Adult Community College (TACC)** the college had been considering a new operating model and, with the onset of Covid 19, this meant that they moved all delivery on line via an online platform. The introduction of digital platforms meant that they were able to quickly offer on-line learning opportunities for both current and new learners. The TACC building had a number of significant repairs that had been scheduled over the next two years. In considering our new operating model, where one of the key principles is 'less buildings better services', we took the opportunity of relocating the adult community college into South Essex College. To ensure we meet local community need we will also provide a number of satellite bases embedded in local communities with the aim of supporting residents to

gain skills that leads to employment opportunities, thus supporting our 'Backing Thurrock' strategic objective which is working to support the development of local employment opportunities. This has released back to the council a site which can be considered within the asset strategy review.

2.3.2 Riverside Youth Hub this is one of our youth buildings in Tilbury. A condition survey on the building identified significant investment was required to enable it to remain in operation. With the recent successful bid for Tilbury Towns Fund the development of the Onside Youth facility will provide the opportunity to develop youth provision in Tilbury. The realignment of youth provision will see a reduction in our universal youth work offer to enable a more targeted approach. As skills remains a key priority our new operating model has seen skills opportunities being offered in Tilbury via the successful Community Led Local Development funded programme to support more people back into work. We have relocated the remainder of our targeted youth offer into Inspire Youth Hub Stanford. This will release back to the council a site that can be placed on the asset strategy review.

2.3.3 Inspire Your Future Grays part of our new operating model has been the review of our skills youth offer and this has identified the potential to co-locate our Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Inspire Your Future. This will also provide a wider integrated youth offer for young people at one physical base. The teams have worked hard to bring all the services together thus offering those young people who are involved in the criminal justice system direct access to education and skills support. This will release the YOS building in Corringham to be placed on the asset strategy review.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Education & Skills Review

Over the past five years Thurrock has undergone a significant change with all but one of our schools becoming part of multi academy trusts or stand alone academies. As a result of this we have undertaken a full review of all the services we currently provide to schools in Thurrock.

This review brings an opportunity to consider how we move forward on the delivery of support to schools and the wider skills agenda over the next two years. This review has identified £1 million in savings over the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Given the financial challenges the council faces, the education and skills review has tried where possible to avoid putting staff at risk of redundancy. Careful consideration has been made to identify areas where work could cease or be combined without causing a significant impact on Thurrock's young people and their families. Over the last 12 months we have used natural wastage where possible to use arising vacancies to either delete or use for the required savings or to merge the duties into other existing posts through mutual agreement with the occupying post-holders.

The review has considered a number of key changes to our operating model the significant areas of change are outlined below:-

- 3.1.1 **Early Years and School Effectiveness** – Vacancies have been frozen and deleted where possible to provide the required savings. The duties from some vacant posts have been merged with other existing posts which had duties that were diminishing or would diminish further as we move towards the new operating model. This has been achieved through job analysis as the vacancies occur and through mutual agreement with relevant post holders who had capacity to take on the remaining work. School effectiveness has seen a significant reduction in income over the last three years and as such our new operating model has meant developing a strategic partnership with the Thurrock Teaching Hub to ensure that training that would historically have been delivered by the local authority is delivered by the new provider. Within our new operating models we no longer provide some historical support services an example would be training for school governors.
- 3.1.2 Inspire your Future – Integrated Youth Hub – we have undertaken a review of our current integrated youth offer. The review has focussed on the changes to our operating model, moving away from a universal offer to a more targeted approach that will focus on youth voice providing support to the Youth Cabinet and working with vulnerable young people including those at risk of serious youth violence.
- 3.1.3 Employability & Skills – the review identified areas of support that were provided to the schools that were not part of our overall statutory duty or funded via our traded offer. This will mean a reduction in the work we are undertaking with schools. Successful bids including On Track Thurrock will enable us to continue to support the most vulnerable including our looked after children and those with special educational needs which links to our strategic decision around a more targeted approach.
- 3.1.4 The council currently operates two nurseries in Tilbury, this is not a statutory duty on the LA and as such we are currently consulting with local residents, staff and other providers as to how we can look at different forms of delivery going forward. When the consultation is concluded, further updates will be brought to Children’s O&S. If, when the consultation exercise is completed we are unable to identify an alternative provider for the nurseries, then we would need to consider the closure of this service.
- 3.1.5 Home to school transport – this is undergoing a full service review. We have identified a number of potential savings and are working through the legal process to enable us to take these forward. Part of these savings are linked to the decision to review all current students who access post 16 SEND transport as set out in our home to school transport policy we are looking to implement this and a number of other savings in the academic year 2022/23. The Council recognises the importance of ensuring that all key stakeholders are aware of any changes that will be coming in the next academic year and will continue to ensure that we update with changes on a regular basis.

- 3.1.6 Other savings within Education & Skills have been identified through reducing the support to external providers of support to schools. We continue to work closely with organisations to identify alternative funding streams, an example of this is related to the work around Trailblazer we have identified funding for a transitional year and we are working with schools as to how this work can be funded in the future. We continue to look to maximise income and the successful phase two On Track programme has provided additional financial support within our skills offer which will remain a key priority as we begin to see the economy recover after Covid 19.
- 3.1.7 Risks – the Council has a range of statutory duties that we have to provide – the review has looked to mitigate any risk around the delivery of statutory duties. We will continue to seek alternative funding opportunities throughout the coming year. We will see a reduction in some areas as a result of not recruiting to the vacant posts. The service continues to seek external funding to support this and other areas of work across Children’s Services.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Thurrock Council is facing a significant budget shortfall. Education and Skills which is part of Children’s services need to contribute to the savings required by the Council to support returning a balanced budget.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The proposal will be subject to the Council’s overall consultation process as agreed with the recognised trade unions.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:

Create a great place for learning and opportunity.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

The medium term financial position was set out to Cabinet on 7 July 2021. This highlighted a cumulative £34.3m funding gap for 2022/23 and 2023/24. This also set out proposed mitigations grouped between income generation, operational efficiencies, providing services differently, staffing reductions and member decisions.

The committee is reminded there remains a significant funding gap to address in both years if all of these proposed mitigations set out in the report are delivered. Hence any savings proposals not taken forward will further increase the funding gap and hence will require further reassessments of core service delivery with associated impacts on levels of staffing. The delivery of the financial position remains a significant risk to the Council in the medium term.

This report to this committee seeks specific comment on the relevant items which fall within its remit and which require further member scrutiny prior to final cabinet decisions being made on the relevant items.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal

The local authority has a number of statutory duties and as such we need to ensure that the savings still enable us to deliver on our statutory duties going forward.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities

The council has a number of statutory duties around equality, education and skills and has aimed to minimize the impact for communities through the physical relocation of services outlined in Section 2 of this report. The wider review of education and skills has achieved savings from posts that are currently vacant preventing the need for any occupied posts being at risk of redundancy. Separate Community Equality Impact Assessments will be completed following consultations related to nursery provision in Tilbury and home to school post-16 SEND transport. We will continue to work closely with our community colleagues and identify ways in which we can support our communities. Our key focus remains our most vulnerable children and young people and the review has ensured we have continued to provide services for this group of children and young people.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

None.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Education & Skills Review

9. Appendices to the report

None.

Report Author:

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