

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held at Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 20th January, 2026.

PRESENT: Mr B Fryer (Chairman), Mr D Burns (Vice-Chair), Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr A Kibble, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Mr M Reidy, Ms C Russell, Mr T L Shonk, Mr P Stepto, Mr P Thomas and Mrs S Roots

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs B Fordham (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Mrs C Palmer (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) and Mr B Collins (Deputy Leader)

OFFICERS: Christine McInnes (Interim Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education), Dan Bride (Assistant Director, Adolescents and Open Access), Katherine Atkinson (Assistant Director, Management Information and Intelligence, Integrated Children's Services), David Adams (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Sufficiency, Effectiveness and Skills), Ian Watts (Area Education Officer), Craig Chapman (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Access and Inclusion), Dave Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy) and Dr Anjan Ghosh (Director of Public Health), Ingrid Crisan (Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services), Kevin Kasaven (Director for Children's Countywide Services), Ian Watts (Assistant Director for Education North Kent) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

41. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 2)

Apologies had been received from Ms R Ainslie-Malik and Dr Sturley for whom Mrs Roots was present as substitute.

42. Declarations of Interest
(Item 3)

Mr Stepto declared that he was a Governor at a special school.

43. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2025
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2025 were a correct record.

44. Verbal Update by Cabinet Members
(Item 5)

1. Mrs Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, gave a verbal update on the following:

- a. Mrs Fordham had undertaken visits to a range of primary, mainstream and special schools to understand how they were managing pupil transitions in the context of recent Government announcements and the anticipated Schools White Paper on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reform. Some mainstream schools were making good progress with inclusive practice, while others were experiencing capacity and staffing pressures and required additional resources. It was explained that special schools needed to focus on meeting the needs of higher needs cohorts and that a clear understanding of individual school populations and requirements was essential.
 - b. Mrs Fordham had visited Oakfield School in Tonbridge and the East Kent Colleges Group (EKC) on the Isle of Sheppey. The EKC model was highlighted as an example of wrap around provision, spanning from nursery to post 16. This included early intervention, structured transition support in reception, pathways into mainstream education at year 7 and a small junior college focused on vocational skills. It was acknowledged that this model would not be suitable for all children.
 - c. The School Funding Forum, which brought together sector representatives to consider funding and delivery through community of schools groupings, was still evolving and would be influenced by the forthcoming Government White Paper. Mrs Fordham welcomed Member feedback, which would be used to inform discussion at the Schools Funding Forum.
 - d. Mrs Fordham explained that the Government had published a new Ofsted inspection framework with an increased emphasis on inclusion.
 - e. Mrs Fordham highlighted that despite indications of potential budgetary changes, the delay to the White Paper had created uncertainty.
 - f. No uplift had been received for high needs funding and funding levels remained at 2025/26 baselines. As a result some proposals have been paused and would need to be revisited to assess the implications.
 - g. Mrs Fordham drew the Committee's attention to reports of a £30 billion capital allocation for special resource provision. It was clarified that this funding related to capital investments only, not staffing or revenue costs and that eligibility criteria had not yet been published. Also, the details of the announcement of £200 million of funding related to teacher training had not been announced. Mrs Fordham explained that these individual announcements made it difficult to develop a coherent strategic response in advance of the publication of the White Paper. The Committee would be provided with a update once further clarity was available.
 - h. Mrs Fordham shared that MPs had been invited to visit KCC and Kent schools, to have productive discussions about the issues that were being faced.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
- a. A Member raised concerns about capacity pressures at Five Acre Woods Special School, particularly relating to the number of pupils placed from outside Kent. The Member requested that this issue be raised at Mrs Fordham's previously mentioned meeting with MP's, given its significant impact on local residents and service users.
 - b. Mrs Fordham agreed to raise this issue and would provide the Member with feedback.

- c. A Member asked that Mrs Fordham's invitation to meet and discuss issues be extended to Members. Mrs Fordham encouraged Members to come to her office to discuss any issues related to her portfolio.
 - d. A Member raised an example of a recent security issue at a school in Kent. Also, highlighting the danger of unregistered and uninspected schools. Mr Adams, Interim Deputy Director for Education: Sufficiency, Effectiveness and Skills, explained that a school in Kent received a terror related threat over the weekend which was reported to Kent Police. Although initially assessed as not credible, further information prompted precautionary action to close the school while investigations were completed. Kent Police subsequently confirmed there was no credible threat and that the message formed part of a wider national issue. The Local Member shared that he had visited the school and spoke with staff and offered his support.
3. Mrs Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the following:
- a. Mrs Palmer shared that she had attended the first KCC Youth Voice meeting following the county wide elections, which was attended by around 140 young people. The next meeting was set to take place in February and would elect a Leader and a Chair.
 - b. Mrs Palmer attended the Risk Outside of Home Conference in Maidstone, which was presented by Michelle McManus from Manchester Metropolitan University. The conference brought together experts in child exploitation and safeguarding beyond the home, Mrs Palmer shared that she found the event extremely informative.
 - c. Mrs Palmer provided an update on the forthcoming Best Start in Life Programme. She explained that it was expected to support earlier identification of developmental delays, enable earlier support for families and help reduce school waiting lists.
 - d. Alongside her Deputy Cabinet Member, Mrs Palmer visited the Imago young carers support service. They met with eleven children aged from eight to twelve. The visit was particularly emotional, hearing about the low levels of self esteem some of the children experienced. This reinforced the importance of the work and the strength of the frontline teams.
 - e. Mrs Palmer shared that two children's home properties had returned in-house following planning approval.
 - f. An additional £1 million had been received from Public Health for family hubs, with details of the allocation still to be agreed.
 - g. There were to be contractual changes to the current contract with The Education People regarding care leavers.
 - h. Mrs Palmer had invited Fatima Whitbread to visit KCC to see the support provided to care leavers following her comments during her 2026 'Fatima's UK Campaign'. Mr Kasaven, Director for Children's Countywide Services, had also been asked to invite Josh MacAlister, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Children and Families), to visit foster carers and discuss potential capping of independent foster placements in Kent. In Kent independent carers accounted for around 50% of all foster carers, compared with approximately 10% elsewhere.

4. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Mrs Palmer clarified that Kent had its own foster care service, working with Kent foster carers and foster families. Independent fostering agencies operated privately and often placed children from a range of other areas in Kent. Therefore, it was important to promote Kent foster families in order to increase local capacity and enable more children to be supported within the county.
 - b. A Member queried the long term security of family hubs, welcoming the funding secured to maintain sites in Ramsgate, Margate and the Isle of Sheppey. They also raised concerns about the closure of a special education needs school in Broadstairs, Bradstow school, outside Local Authority control, and the impact on current pupils and their future arrangements.
 - i. In response to the question regarding family hubs, Mrs Palmer explained that funding for the hubs and the Best Start in Life Programme had been secured for the next three years. Ms Crisan, Director for Operational Integrated Children's Services, added that KCC operated 53 family hubs and that funding from Central Government for the Best Start in Life Programme along with the Public Health Grant had secured their operation for the next three years. Confidence was expressed in the council's ability to deliver these services throughout that period.
 - ii. In response to the question regarding the Broadstairs special educational needs school, Ms McInnes, Interim Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education, clarified that Bradstow School was maintained by Wandsworth Council. She explained that KCC had engaged in discussions with Wandsworth over several years in an effort to secure a safe and supportive environment for the Kent pupils attending the school, at an acceptable cost. The two councils were unable to reach an agreement for a range of reasons. Mrs McInnes confirmed that Kent had since secured suitable alternative placements for all pupils previously attending Bradstow School.
 - c. When asked about the services family hubs provided, Mrs Palmer explained that family hubs provided accessible services from birth, including maternity services such as midwifery support for pregnant women. A number of hubs also offered speech and language therapy and portage support for children. Mrs Palmer explained that these services were expected to continue to improve through the Best Start in Life Programme. Ms Crisan added that all family hubs provided the core offer focused on pregnant women, perinatal mental health and early support for children, including school readiness and early identification of special educational needs and speech development. In addition, a wider offer was available for the community, including support for adolescents, children with special educational needs and families who had experienced separation or conflict. A wide range of support was available both online and through family hubs.
 - d. When asked about the response from the 'Run' fostering promotional video, Mrs Palmer shared that positive feedback had been received. It had been shared many times, views of the video and fostering inquiries had increased.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates were noted.

45. Draft Capital Programme 2026-36, Revenue Budget 2026-27 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2026-29
(Item 6)

1. Mr Collins, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Traded Services, introduced the report.
2. Mr Shipton, Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy and Acting Section 151 Officer, advised the Committee that the budget proposals provided a balanced position for the 2026/27 budget. Across the Council, the proposals included £179.5 million of spending growth and the reversal of £28 million of previously planned savings that were one-off or irrecoverable, representing a total challenge of over £200 million. This was offset by £14.7 million from reserves, £61.7 million of savings and £14.6 million of new income generation, resulting in net growth of £116.5 million. This net growth was significantly lower than underlying service cost pressures, reflecting ongoing demand pressures that exceeded funding from central government and local taxation. Mr Shipton reminded Members that they could access the interactive Member Dashboard to further analyse the budget figures.
3. Ms Stone, CYPE Finance Business Partner, explained that the Directorate's budget included approximately £40 million of new growth proposals, alongside the continuation of around £11 million of funding previously supported by grants and savings proposals of approximately £20 million. This resulted in a net increase of around £20 million for the director equating to approximately 5%, rising to around £30 million when the continuation of grant funding was included.
4. Mrs Fordham added that savings had been carried out but the Service was still providing its statutory duties. Many savings, including those within transport, had been achieved through process improvements and the implementation of more efficient systems. Further work was underway to tighten transport policy so aligned more closely with legislation. This was expected to link with future proposals arising from the forthcoming White Paper to address transport overspends that were largely outside of the Council's control.
5. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. The future cost of the Kent 16+ Travel Saver and the standard Travel Saver had not yet been confirmed because final savings depended on actual usage. Officers advised that the annual price typically rose by £20–£40, and that confirmed costs would be shared with residents shortly.
 - b. Regarding the £4.2 million in savings supported by grants, it was stated that the Government had secured this funding for the next three years. Although the funding was guaranteed, the Service was still awaiting some of the detailed terms and conditions.
 - c. The proposed £1.9 million saving from recharging health services for looked after children was expected to come from claims submitted to the Integrated Care Board (ICB) for shared costs relating to children with complex needs. Previous rebates had been achieved, but income was

lower this year due in part to ICB staffing instability. Nevertheless, the saving was considered achievable based on previous year performance.

- d. In discussion about school finances, SEND funding sustainability, and strategic actions to manage SEND pressures, as well as the decision to repay a £50 million loan early and not apply the maximum Council Tax increase, the Committee heard that early repayment would save £670,000 annually for 40 years. Members were reminded that Council Tax increases should not be automatic and must balance financial pressures with responsible spending. The SEND deficit remained a major risk, currently mitigated by a statutory override that expires in March 2028, making deficit reduction essential and a key feature of the Chief Financial Officer's statutory assurance statement.
- e. Additional recharge to schools for next year was to amount to £2.5 million annually. Previously the Council had absorbed the associated costs through its General Fund
- f. On the question of cash flow assurance and the timeline for efficiency savings, it was explained that the Council was investing in "invest to save" initiatives, including bringing children's homes back inhouse, which was expected to generate at least £1.5 million in recurring annual savings. It was also confirmed that the Council continued to report regularly to the Department for Education under the Safety Valve Agreement. Although increased costs and delays to new special schools had pushed the SEND deficit higher than expected, the DfE had agreed to continue payments provided the Council sustained efforts to reduce overspending.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the draft capital and revenue budget proposals.

46. Performance Monitoring *(Item 7)*

1. Ms Atkinson, Assistant Director Management Information and Intelligence, introduced the report, providing the Committee with an overview of the performance data of the individual indicators.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. When asked about the high levels of red indications in Thanet district scorecard for Integrated Children's Services, Ms Atkinson explained that there was regional variation in performance, which was expected and regularly reviewed by local teams. In addition to the score card, operational dashboards were used by teams and service managers to review performance at both team and individual worker level. It was highlighted that recruitment challenges or staff absence could significantly impact performance and this was therefore closely monitored. Within the overall Kent performance, underlying regional variation was always present and managers were engaged to understand the reasons and context. Where issues were identified, these were often supported by audit findings, which led to action plans including staff retention and recruitment measures, with a range of mitigations put in place to address concerns.
 - b. Mr Chapman, Interim Deputy Director for Education: Access and Inclusion, explained that there was a strict

criteria for determining whether a 20 week assessment was considered to have been completed on time. A draft plan was issued to parents approximately three to four weeks prior to consultation and discussions. A legally compliant plan was then returned to parents and made available to the school within the 20 week time frame

- c. It was clarified that the six week timescale for the return of educational psychology assessment requests was an internal performance metric. This was set because this information was critical to progressing the remainder of the process. The educational psychology report was a key professional assessment outlining the child's needs and without it officers would have been unable to complete the statutory 20 week process. It was confirmed that a return within six weeks meant a completed professional report had been provided and made available to officers. Mr Chapman explained that there had recently been constraints negatively impacting 20 week completion rates, largely due to the national shortage of educational psychologists. Significant work had been undertaken within the service to prioritise the most complex cases allocate additional time to them, enabling subsequent stages of the process to continue. Members were advised that performance had since improved, with backlogs largely cleared and that both educational psychologists and assessment officers were now in a stronger position to continue improving performance against both key performance indicators.
- d. A Member highlighted the significant improvement in the number of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) cases open past the 20 week time frame. Whilst acknowledging the positive aspects of this, the Member highlighted the number of outstanding cases across districts were slowly increasing and asked whether this reflected new demand rather than historic cases. Ms Atkinson explained that demand remained high, with a significant number of referrals received each month and a consistent seasonal pattern observed annually. Members were advised that while the data presented in the report covered the period up to the end of November 2025, there had been a notable shift in performance since that time, with more recent live system data showing improvement compared to the figures shown. The cases exceeding the 20 week timescale were not historic cases but had gone over due to ongoing issues such as securing appropriate school placements. Although these cases were beyond 20 weeks, they were not considered old and these figures were being closely monitored.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

47. 25/00111 Proposal To Remove Specialist Resourced Provision From River Primary School
(Item 8)

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision.
2. Mr Adams explained that KCC was approached by the governing body and leadership team at River Primary School regarding the potential decommissioning of their specialist resource provision for children with speech and language disorders. The request was prompted by a reduction in referrals, partly due to changes in support systems and post COVID shifts

in medical diagnoses. The provision had capacity for twelve pupils but currently supported four with two leaving at the end of the current academic year and the remaining two moving to secondary school next year. An informal consultation was conducted, with the majority of responses received late and mostly opposing the proposal. The school maintained its intention to decommission the provision, while continuing to support the current pupils and providing enriched support to other children as needed. The Council, as commissioner, agreed that only two places needed to be formally commissioned noting that maintaining funding for unfilled places would be an unsustainable cost or approximately £100,000. The proposal aimed to reallocate resources to meet needs elsewhere.

3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. When asked when the provision would be closed and whether the pupils had their annual review conducted yet, Mr Adams explained that annual reviews for affected pupils had not yet taken place. Officers were working with the school to review plans and consider how provision would be adapted if the specialist resource provision was decommissioned, ensuring families were involved in the process. It was explained that the specialist resource provision was intended to close at the end of the academic year and bespoke support would be provided for remaining pupils. Consultations with staff and consideration of redeployment opportunities were also planned to retain relevant skills within the school.
 - b. Mr Adams explained that within the same planning group Whitfield Aspen Primary School provided specialist resource provision for students with profound, severe and complex needs, supporting 185 children with Education Health and Care Plans. This contrasted with the smaller provision at River Primary. The majority of current demand was for pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or speech, language and communication needs. It was confirmed that a new specialist resource provision would open in Deal to support the community, aligning primary provision with the secondary pathway in the area. Ongoing monitoring would ensure that further capacity was provided where needed, with Whitfield Aspen continuing to serve the majority of pupils with more complex needs.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

48. 25/00112 Proposal to increase the capacity at Ebbsfleet Green Primary School
(Item 9)

1. Mrs Fordham introduced the decision.
2. Mr Watts, Assistant Director for Education North Kent, explained that the proposal was to support Ebbsfleet Green Primary School in accommodating two bulge classes admitted in 2024/25 and 2025/26, including the provision of suitable accommodation. It recommended permanent classrooms as a more cost effective, long term solution with additional benefits for early years and the SEND provision once the bulge classes had moved through the school.

3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. A Member expressed his thanks to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills for her work during the year and welcomed the decision to select Ebbsfleet Green Primary School for expansion. It was highlighted that the Ebbsfleet Garden City area faced a significant shortage of primary school places due to extensive new housing development without sufficient education provision at the planning stage. The Member added that the proposal was strongly welcomed by local residents as the lack of education provision had an impact on families, school access and local traffic pressures.
 - b. Mr Watts explained that additional education provision was planned within Ebbsfleet Garden City to address pressures on primary school places. It was highlighted that demand had eased compared with two to three years ago as reflected in parental preferences. Alkerden Primary School was confirmed to open in September 2026, with further primary school places planned for the former eastern quarry site in the future years. Ongoing discussions with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation were also highlighted regarding the potential development of Ebbsfleet Central. This included a proposal for an additional two-form entry primary school. It was confirmed that progress was being made in addressing the need for school places in the area.
 - c. When asked about the timeline for Alkerden Church of England Primary School, Mr Watts explained that it was an all through school, an eight form entry secondary school and a two form entry primary school. The secondary school had already opened with five forms of entry in Year 7 for the current academic year. This was in a temporary provision come up the building was due to be completed in summer 2026.
 - d. In terms of the timeline for Ebbsfleet Garden Primary School, it was explained that the proposal addressed the existing bulge cohorts and ensured they would be properly accommodated as they progress through the school. The works were required to be completed before summer 2026 to support the new cohorts when the school reverts to two form entry. The scheme was a relatively small capital project comprising of three classrooms and auxiliary space. Mr Watts explained that the endorsement of the decision at the meeting would allow sufficient time for delivery.
 - e. A Member requested clarity on unreceived and unspent developer contributions for education and thanked officers and the Cabinet Member for future proofing provision to manage current and future costs. Mr Watts explained that developer contributions were complex due to differing arrangements across authorities. Much of the provision in Ebbsfleet Garden City had been delivered directly by developers, while contributions for the project were supplemented by the Council's basic needs funding. Future financial reports would clarify how developer contributions have been applied.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

49. 25/00109 Best Start Family Hubs Programme Grant Award
(Item 10)

Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Palmer introduced the decision, explaining that the strategy was brought forward by the Government in July 2025 alongside the commitment for £500 million of funding across the Country.
2. Ms Crisan added that the 'Start for Life' funding represented a significant Government investment recognising the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life. Members were reminded that the grant had strict conditions, requiring the funding to be allocated across five specific workstreams. Detailed spending plans were developed for each work stream with regular reports submitted to the DfE and the Department of Health and Social Care. These plans were produced in collaboration with Public Health colleagues where relevant.
3. Dr Ghosh explained that the family hubs programme had been in place for some time and that this funding represented the next stage of its development. The funding was confirmed as a three-year allocation, providing greater certainty and representing a significant investment in early prevention and improving outcomes for children. Members were informed that the programme had a strong public health focus, particularly in supporting school readiness and children's development aligned with the councils agreed objectives.
4. Mrs Palmer expressed her gratitude to the many officers working behind the scenes.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.

50. 25/00108 Special Educational Needs (SEN) Funding - 2026-27 Payment Uplifts
(Item 11)

1. Ms Fordham introduced the decision.
2. Ms Stone explained that this paper was brought to the Committee to highlight the need for a decision to be taken before 28 February 2026, which was the statutory deadline for publishing school budgets. The current high needs funding for 2026/27 had been frozen and whilst there had been indications of possible additional funding from the Government, there was no certainty.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Members explored the potential of allocating additional funding from base budget, including via increased Council Tax levy. It was clarified that this would be a political decision, however specific approval from the Secretary of State would be required to permit any additional allocations from KCC's budget to the High Needs block, therefore there were technical challenges.
 - b. A Member highlighted that the table detailing SEND expenditure and the cost of the 2% uplift had been referenced but not included in the papers. They also expressed concern about passing unexpected financial pressures on to schools at short notice. The Member suggested maintaining the 2% uplift for this year and using the time to

engage with schools and consider the forthcoming White Paper before making changes next year.

- i. Mrs Fordham agreed to take this into account within the options analysis. She cautioned, that granting an immediate uplift without clarity on future funding could make it difficult to withdraw later, ultimately impacting taxpayers. She confirmed the team would seek further information on upcoming funding and ensure any support for schools was fair, equitable and aligned with potential changes to the funding formula.
- ii. Ms Stone apologised for the omission of the table and confirmed it would be added to the Decision Report.
- c. Concerns were raised around unequal funding between special and mainstream schools. The Member highlighted that in some cases teaching assistants and support staff in special schools had specialised skills and due to this had higher salaries, expecting schools to cover these costs without additional funding would be challenging. Mrs Fordham acknowledged the issue, emphasising the importance of proper resourcing despite the wider financial deficit.
- d. A Member criticised the timing of Government announcements and requested a briefing on the impact of delaying an uplift. They also asked for clarity on the Schools Funding Forum's position. Ms Stone explained that a delay would increase financial risk for schools, which must set multiyear budgets and may need to implement difficult savings before any funding announcement. Mr Chapman confirmed early engagement with the Schools Funding Forum but no formal recommendation had yet been made.
- e. A Member raised concerns about staffing pressures in SEND settings and queried whether temporary funding could later be reclaimed if Government funding followed. Ms Stone confirmed budget rules prevented in-year adjustments, making such repayment mechanisms impossible.
- f. On clarification, the Member explained the intention was only to reclaim funding if Government later paid schools directly. Ms Stone reiterated that Government rules currently do not allow such arrangements, particularly across both maintained schools and academies. Also, it was highlighted that any funding applied would affect both maintained schools and academy trusts and that similar agreements could not be made unilaterally with academy trusts. It was confirmed that the matter would be reviewed further when all proposals were considered. Mrs Fordham explained that additional funding did not guarantee effective allocation and the primary concern was a delay and approach to the process rather than the amount. Mr Chapman clarified that while further announcements remained possible, there was no guarantee of them. Therefore, the Council faced a choice between covering the funding shortfall, with the previously discussed financial risks and consequences within an already overspent and high risk budget area. Otherwise, delay in the hope of future funding, thereby passing pressure onto schools. Any potential future offer was described as desirable but not guaranteed and the Council was required to proceed on the basis that the current offer could represent the Government's final position for Kent this year.
- g. A Member asked that the Council and others nationally, write to Government about the unsustainability of annual funding uncertainty. Mrs Fordham agreed to raise this through the appropriate channels.

- h. A Member suggested applying a 1% uplift, costing around £3 million to the High Needs Block, to give schools certainty. Ms McInnes stressed this would increase already significant High Needs Block deficit, without assurance of future Government funding and could have long term implications for Council Taxpayers. Mrs Fordham suggested that all Members received information about the safety valve and its implications in simpler terms as it was a complex subject matter. To ensure that Members understood both the short term financial implications and the longer term risks, particularly if the deficit was not reduced by March 2028.
- i. Concerns were expressed about repeated delays in national funding decisions, which continue to create instability for schools.
- j. A Member commented that a £3m uplift could be met through a Council Tax rise of around 4.2%. Ms McInnes advised this would add to the existing deficit, projected to reach £136m by yearend. It was emphasised that the cumulative deficit would ultimately fall on the taxpayers and that costs were continuing to rise. Mr Chapman added that some councils had not met their safety valve savings or efficiency requirements, resulting in the cessation of additional payments.
- k. A Member asked whether a 0.3% Council Tax increase could generate £3 million without increasing the Safety Valve deficit. Mr Chapman explained that the Council was already over spent and an additional £3 million would add to the existing in-year deficit rather than balancing the budget.
- l. Further questions were raised about whether Council Tax income could offset the uplift. Ms Stone clarified that the Council could not just make further contributions to the high needs funding at this time using Council Tax. Any additional funding would require approval from the Secretary of State.
- m. A Member emphasised the seriousness of Government scrutiny and highlighted the need for Members to review the Council's Budget Report.
- n. A Member queried delays around the Government White Paper, additionally, asking why planning for schools had not started earlier and whether the delay was due to a lack of information or other constraints. Ms Stone explained that recent high needs funding announcements had been unpredictable, with the flat cash settlement arriving unexpectedly and with little notice, officers had limited preparation time.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the update and that the Cabinet Member for Education & Skills will make a decision on the future payment rates for SEN services and agreed that this update report concludes the Cabinet Committee consideration process for the decision.

51. Work Programme
(Item 12)

RESOLVED that the work programme was noted.

52. 25/00115 Contractual Changes - The Education People
(Item 13)

- 1. Mr Adams introduced the decision.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision.