

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

19 OCTOBER 2022

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Cresswell to ask the Chair of the Committee:

#### Children's Services Finances

Children's services in neighbouring boroughs are reportedly experiencing financial difficulties. Can the lead councillor update me on the financial status of Reading's children's services (Brighter Futures) and any relevant implications for our services?

**REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:**

I invite Councillor Hoskin, the Lead Councillor for Children to make the response on my behalf.

**REPLY by Councillor Hoskin, Lead Councillor for Children:**

Children's Services is supplied by Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) within a pre-agreed contract sum. Most of our Children services relates to Children looked after and social work and is an area under financial pressure due to our demographics, demand on services and difficulties in recruiting permanent social workers. In addition, high fuel costs and increasing demand for Home to School Transport is also an area of ongoing pressure. The Company is working tirelessly to manage these pressures.

What this means is that Reading's Children's services are not insulated by the huge difficulties facing upper tier councils in England to fund services in the face of underfunding from 12 years of Conservative governments. This situation is becoming more urgent as a result of the inflationary and demographic pressures mentioned above.

The Local Government Association has calculated that the combined impact of rising inflation has landed councils with an extra £2.4 in additional costs this year alone. It is therefore extremely concerning to hear Jeremy Hunt, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (at the time of writing this answer), float the idea that further cuts to public services across the board. The president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services has said "The idea that further efficiency savings can be made is both fanciful and deeply worrying."

There are wholly inadequate levels of funding available for Children's Services in England and in Reading. We will work tirelessly to deliver the best possible services with the funding we have and work to deliver the best possible budget for the council in February. What is really required is the removal of our failing government (this feels like an understatement) through a general election now.

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### ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

19 OCTOBER 2022

QUESTION 2 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor Cresswell to ask the Chair of the Committee:

#### Ring Fencing Apprenticeships for Care Leavers

As councillors we should do our best for our children in care and leaving care. It is good that the council has a guaranteed interview scheme for care leavers. Green Party councillors think that in line with the Care Leavers Covenant some council apprenticeships should be ring fenced for care leavers. Please can the lead councillor update me on work looking into this?

**REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:**

I invite Councillor Hoskin, the Lead Councillor for Children to make the response on my behalf.

**REPLY by Councillor Hoskin, Lead Councillor for Children:**

I'd like to thank Councillor Cresswell for his question which covers a really important area of our work. As the relatively new lead councillor I am making our Corporate Parenting responsibilities a key priority for me and, as part of this, reviewing and enhancing what we do to support our Looked After Children and Care Leavers. Council apprenticeships and other roles in the 'family business' should absolutely be a part of that review.

Feedback from our Looked After Children and Care Leavers, on a one to one basis and through Care 2 Listen, our Children in Care Council, consistently confirms how important it is for our young people that we support them to succeed in life, to help them develop their skills and to fulfil their potential. Apprenticeships are an important and positive route that we would like to see more of our Care Leavers accessing. As part of our work with Care 2 Listen over the next six months we are going to review our approach to apprenticeships, including maximising the access of Care Leavers to Council apprenticeship opportunities. This review will include consideration of all possible ways we can maximise our young people to successfully access apprenticeships, including through ring fencing.