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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

Special Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee

Date: Wednesday, 20th April, 2022

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Suite

Present: Councillor L Salter (Chair)
Councillors H Boyd (Vice-Chair), M Berry, J Courtenay, T Cowdrey, T Cox*, A Dear, K Evans, D Garne, B Hooper, A Line, K Mitchell, A Moring*, I Shead, M Stafford and A Thompson

*Substitute in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 31.

In Attendance: Councillors L Burton, P Collins, S Wakefield (Cabinet Members), Councillors K Buck, S Buckley, M Dent, S George and P Wexham, R Savage (Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS) (Co-opted Member), A Barnes, J Burr, G Gilbert, M Marks, B Martin and S Tautz

Start/End Time: 6.30 pm - 9.25 pm

904 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor B Beggs (Substitute: Councillor T Cox), Councillor J Lamb (Substitute: Councillor A Moring), Councillor D Garston (Chair of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee) and T Watts (Southend Carers Forum (Co-opted Member)).

905 Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared at the meeting:

(a) Councillors L Burton, P Collins and S Wakefield (Cabinet Members) - Interest in the referred item; attended pursuant to the dispensation agreed at Council on 19 July 2012, under S.33 of the Localism Act 2011.

(b) Councillor M Berry - Minute 907 (Vecteo Update) - Ongoing association with member of Southend SEND Independent Forum (SSIF) around the current provision of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) home to school transport services by Vecteo, Education Health and Care Plans and other related matters - Non-pecuniary interest.

(c) Councillor T Cowdrey - Minute 907 (Vecteo Update) - Ongoing association with a number of service users around the current provision of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) home to school transport services by Vecteo - Non-pecuniary interest.

(d) Councillor B Hooper - Minute 907 (Vecteo Update) - Director of Blade Education, a not-for-profit company that works with local SEND children - Non-pecuniary interest.

(e) Councillor A Moring - Minute 907 (Vecteo Update) - Family member was previously in receipt of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) home to school transport services - Non-pecuniary interest.

906 Questions from Members of the Public

The Committee noted the response of the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning to questions submitted by Philomena Johnson, Liam Slattery, Jo Richardson, Kim Drake, Becky Verrall and Louise Robinson, which had been sent to each questioner as the questions were not to be presented at the meeting.

907 Vecteo Update

The Committee received a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director (Finance and Resources), arising from a request of the Audit Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2022 that the People Scrutiny Committee undertake an in-depth examination and scrutiny of the current provision of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) home to school transport services by Vecteo and where service failures had occurred since the commencement of the contract with Vecteo. The Chair reported that, given the cross-cutting elements of the review requested by the Audit Committee, an invitation to attend the meeting had been extended to all members of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

The report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director (Finance and Resources) provided an overview of the progress of elements of the in-house and external audit work to review service provision and failure that had been agreed by the Council on 25 November 2021. In response to questions raised by members of the Committee, the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning undertook to ensure that each of the final reports and recommendations arising from such audit work, be referred to a future meeting of the Committee following consideration by the Audit Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning undertook to provide a written response to questions raised by members of the Committee, with regard to:

- the number of risk assessments so far completed as part of the provision of SEND home to school transport services by Vecteo.
- the support provided by the Council to enable all families in receipt of SEND home to school transport services to fully participate in the customer satisfaction survey undertaken in December 2021.
- the comparison of the results arising from the customer satisfaction survey undertaken in December 2021, with the findings of any previous similar surveys carried out by the Council.
- current arrangements for the provision of transport services for families of adults and children with learning disabilities.
- current arrangements for the designation of a safeguarding 'lead' as part of the provision of SEND home to school transport services by Vecteo.

Resolved:

- (1) That the following matters as set out in the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director (Finance and Resources), be noted:
 - (a) the findings arising in respect of service provision and where failures have occurred.
 - (b) the overview of the findings of the work that has been undertaken.
 - (c) the progress that has been made with the Council's arrangements for working with Vecteo.
- (2) That a report be made to the Cabinet at the first available opportunity, to:
 - (a) note the serious safety and safeguarding failures that occurred at the start of the Vecteo contract.

- (b) consider whether Vecteo is now able to provide robust performance data that the Council can rely on.
 - (c) consider what alternative options (other than continuing with the Vecteo contract) are available to the Council for the delivery of SEND home to school transport services (and other contractual services).
 - (d) consider, with reference to Resolution 2(a)-(c) above, whether the Council should take action to withdraw from the contract/joint venture arrangement with Vecteo as soon as practicable.
- (3) That the Shareholder Board be asked to consider and report back to the Cabinet on the financial performance of Vecteo.

Note: This is a Scrutiny function

Chair: _____

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