

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

8 September 2009

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Cath Hill (Children's Services Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Sue Johnson, Assistant Director - Planning & Service Integration
Sally Robinson, Assistant Director of Children's Services -
Safeguarding & Specialist Services
Mark Smith, Connexions Service Manager
Chris Wenlock, Parks and Countryside Manager
Sarah Bird, Democratic Services Officer

20. Playbuilder Project – Consultation, Site Selection and The Way Forward *(Assistant Director – Planning and Service Integration)*

Type of Decision

Key (test ii applies)

Purpose of Report

The report was presented following the report given to the Culture, Leisure and Tourism Portfolio Holder on 17 March 2009. The report sought to update the Portfolio Holder on progress in delivering the project and to request approval of the sites for implementation and delivery which had resulted from the public (site consultation) exercise.

Issues for Consideration

The report outlined the intended purpose of Hartlepool's Playbuilder Project which was being delivered by the Parks and Countryside Section supported by the Children's Services Young People and Play Co-ordinator, to refurbish or develop 22 play areas over the next 2 years. It also outlined the public consultation process which had been undertaken to identify suitable Playbuilder sites within the Borough, the ongoing consultation and visioning exercises with able and non-able bodied children from across the Borough and exploring what concepts work well in existing Play Building play areas in the North East region and how children use these play spaces. It also outlined the challenges and

compromises faces in bringing the vision for Playbuilder play areas into reality. The report explained the need to embed the 'Risk-Benefit Assessment' process within Hartlepool's approach to play provision. Finally, the report identified the sites that were recommended to be taken forward for delivery through the Hartlepool Playbuilder scheme.

The Portfolio Holder said that she would be interested in seeing the feedback from children and young people on their opinions on ideas for a good play space. The Portfolio Holder agreed with the quote in the report from the HM Principal Inspector, Health and Safety Entertainment and Leisure Sector i.e. *The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recognises the importance of play in children's lives and for their opportunities to learn about risk. HSE is pleased to commend the Managing risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide. Its application of risk-benefit assessments is a sensible approach to the health and safety management of play provision.* The Portfolio Holder said that she hoped that local young people and the communities would take ownership of the playspaces and respect them.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder:-

- Noted the community orientated public consultation process that had focused upon identifying suitable sites
- Noted the ongoing children's consultation
- Noted the challenges and compromises faced in bringing the visions for Playbuilder play areas into reality
- Noted the need to embed the Risk-Benefit Assessment process within Hartlepool's approach to play provision
- Approved the year 1 and year 2 Playbuilder sites in the Table 1 of the report for implementation and delivery; retaining the option to research alternative sites if a supplementary site became necessary and discontinue work on sites identified to 'drop' which were unsuitable for inclusion in the programme of work at that time.

21. Connexions Operational Plan 2009/10 *(Connexions Service Manager)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented in order to inform the Children's Services Portfolio Holder of the main activities which would be undertaken during the year 2009/10 by the Connexions Service as it strived to build upon its successful track record of raising aspirations and reducing the percentage

of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), established following transfer to the Local Authority in 2007.

Issues for Consideration

National policy drivers had resulted in some significant changes to the strategic environment for Connexions delivery. From April 2009, Connexions Business Planning had taken place in the context of national drivers relating to the development of local integrated Youth Support and targeted Youth Support Services alongside significant changes to the 14 - 19 curriculum. The changes were to be supported by the Local Authority's Business Transformation Programme.

The plan identified the key policy drivers and placed them alongside the findings of the service's annual self assessment. It outlined the key responsibilities of the service and the necessary actions for securing improvements in performance and directing the service's development as it moved towards an integrated model of delivery with the local Youth Service. The plan had been formed by self evaluation and in conjunction with participation with Partners and parents/carers. Key areas for improvement were to work with parents and carers as many were baffled by the choices and opportunities for young people. Further links were necessary with employers in order to promote the young people in Hartlepool as prospective employees as well as promoting links with JobCentrePlus for the transition when young people reached the age of 18.

The Portfolio Holder asked that jobs on offer to young people were scrutinised so that these offered training and development opportunities for the young people. The Connexions Service Manager confirmed that prospective employers would be vetted to ensure that any health and safety, criminal records bureau and training opportunities were complied with.

It was clarified that should any young people have disabilities and found employment through the Connexions service, then the service would follow up that the post was suitable for their needs.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder noted the report.

22. Information Advice and Guidance Action Plan 2009/10 *(Connexions Service Manager)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented in order to note the key areas for improvement locally in relation to the provision of young people's information, advice and guidance and the development of an annual Action Plan to drive up standards across young people's services and local learning establishments.

Issues for Consideration

From April 2008 responsibility for commissioning information, advice and guidance services for young people and the funding that goes with that responsibility was devolved from the 47 Connexions partnerships to the 150 Local Authorities in England. To support this transition, National Standards for the provision of young people's Information Advice and Guidance were cascaded to support the ongoing development of consistently high quality and impartial information, advice and guidance services across the country.

The report summarised the key areas for improvement locally in relation to the provision of young people's information, advice and guidance as derived through evaluation against the National Standards. It provided an overview of the key actions necessary to drive up standards across young people's services and local learning establishments to secure compliance with the standards.

The Connexions Service Manager stated that there was a town-wide action plan to improve communication with parents and carers. The Connexions service would be advertised in various mediums including doctors' surgeries, buses. The service should have up to date labour market information to impart to the young people involved.

The Portfolio Holder said that the teenage pregnancy figures were of concern and the Connexions Service Manager confirmed that this was a key problem but the Connexions service worked with partners including the Team Around the Secondary School to assist with reduction in the number of teenage pregnancies.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder noted the report.

23. Safeguarding Children in Hartlepool *(Assistant Director – Safeguarding and Specialist Services)*

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was given to update the Portfolio Holder in relation to the arrangements for safeguarding children in Hartlepool and to provide an analysis of statistical information in relation to safeguarding activity between April and June 2009.

Issues for Consideration

The report provided the Portfolio Holder with information on the arrangements for safeguarding children in Hartlepool. The report provided statistics of children receiving services from Safeguarding and Specialist Services including children in need (567), children subject to protection plans (101) and looked after children (162).

The report detailed the current staffing structure of the service and information in relation to staff vacancies, cover arrangements and staff absence.

Team Managers and Heads of Business Units closely monitored social work caseloads to ensure that these are manageable and that only children receiving a service were active on social work caseloads. The report also included details of complaints and compliments received about the service during the period under review. Hartlepool Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is the co-ordinating body that manages safeguarding arrangements in the town. The work of the LSCB is monitored through an annual work plan. The draft priorities and work plan of the Board have been developed and an Annual Report prepared.

The Portfolio Holder was pleased with the department's achievements for the children of Hartlepool. She did however, express concern at the sickness levels in the department although she was aware that the authority was doing what it could to manage this. She was pleased that the department was recruiting experienced staff especially qualified social workers as the Authority had a good reputation amongst the social work community.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder noted the contents of the report.

The meeting concluded at 10.45 am.

P J DEVLIN
CHIEF SOLICITOR

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