

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD**

3<sup>rd</sup> August 2010

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

## **Present:**

Councillor Cath Hill (Children's Services Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Caroline O'Neill, Assistant Director of Children's Services  
(Performance and Achievement)  
Ian Merritt, Head of Commissioning and Children's Trust  
Danielle Swainston, Sure Start, Extended Services and Early  
Years Manager  
John Robinson, Parent Commissioner  
Jo Wilson, Democratic Services Officer

## **1. Change of Use and Refurbishment of Exmoor Grove** (*Director of Child and Adult Services*)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To seek approval for a change of use for Exmoor Grove short break centre, including a reduction in the number of beds available.

To approve the establishment of a Capital Works Programme to refurbish Exmoor Grove short break care centre subject to funding being available.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

The changing needs of children and young people requiring residential short break care had necessitated a review of the service provided by Exmoor Grove. The demand had reduced as parents and carers opted to purchase short break care utilising Direct Payments and also due to other provision being available in the community. As there were a small number of disabled children and young people for whom alternative provision would not be appropriate it was proposed that Exmoor Grove be reconfigured to match current demand. This would be done by reducing the bed capacity from 8 to 6 and offering the service 4 days/nights per week during term time (although the service would remain at 7 days per week during school holidays).

Concerns had also been expressed about the fabric of the accommodation

and the interior fabric of the building. Building consultancy had estimated the cost to make the necessary repairs and improvements at £99,486. An additional £6,755 would also be needed to replace the exterior fencing. The intent was to close the centre during the Autumn for these refurbishments during which time placements would be commissioned from the independent sector, jointly funded by the Council and PCT. Commissioning costs would be met from within existing budgets. Work was scheduled to commence from the end of October with a suggested completion date of April 2011.

The Portfolio Holder expressed concerns that the building might be closed for such a long period of time. The Strategic Commissioner for Children's Services advised that these dates were only estimates and it was doubtful that it would take that long. However it was felt preferable to overestimate and finish early rather than underestimate and raise parents' expectations. However the Portfolio Holder felt this work could be started now and asked that her concerns be fed back to Dunelm as the builders in charge of the project. She further queried what would be in place for those parents affected and was advised that they would receive care through Granville Lodge, with the support of the Child and Adult Services Department.

#### **Decision**

That a change of use for Exmoor Grove reducing the number of beds from 8 to 6 and making provision for children and young people with mild to moderate challenging behaviour be agreed

That the establishment of a Capital Works Programme to refurbish Exmoor Grove short break care centre be approved subject to funding being available.

## **2. OSCARs Out of School Childcare Service – Change in Charges** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

#### **Type of decision**

Non-Key

#### **Purpose of report**

To seek approval for a change in charges for OSCARs out of school service

#### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

OSCARs After School Club service provides year-round after school club provision and holiday club provision. It currently offers a flexible fee policy, dependent upon the number of siblings accessing the service and the family's employment circumstances. However the current financial structure, approved by the Portfolio Holder in September 2008, had led to a deficit position of more than £80 thousand in 2009/10. Two alternative fee structures were outlined within the report.

The Portfolio Holder indicated her support for the fee structure which would

allow the service to break even immediately, saying she saw no point in taking a staged approach if this left the service at risk. She queried the proposed removal of the subsidy for unwaged users however the Sure Start, Extended Services and Early Years Manager highlighted that this service was primarily aimed at waged families and there were a plethora of other free play services for unwaged families to access. Waged or unwaged staff costs were the same and if the service were lost it would be the waged families that would lose out. She acknowledged that the increases were high but 80% of the cost would be covered by Working Tax Credits.

### **Decision**

That Option 1 – break even – as set out in paragraph 7 of the report – be approved in relation to changes to charges for OSCARS out of school childcare services

## **3. Hindpool Close Children's Centre OFSTED Inspection** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To note the inspection report and outcome for Hindpool Close Children's Centre OFSTED Inspection.

### **Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

OFSTED inspectors spent 3 days inspecting Hindpool Close in May 2010. The overall outcome was satisfactory although safeguarding and enjoy & achieve were noted as being good. Recommendations for further improvement were made, the main issue being the lack of local children's centre data. The final report was appended to the report, as was an action plan addressing areas for further improvement.

The Sure Start, Extended Services and Early Years Manager went on to highlight that work needed to be carried out with the PCT to improve the links between teenage mums and children's centres. The current Teenage Pregnancy Service operates as a specialist service but as highlighted in the inspection there is a need to ensure teenage mums can access the full range of children's centre activities. There seemed to be a belief by the PCT that teenage mothers preferred to deal with them rather than the Council. They also tended to concentrate more on supporting existing teenage mothers where Council officers felt the service should be concentrating on prevention in the first instance. The Assistant Director highlighted the preventative work undertaken at Manor College of Technology and the improvements at the school and in the area as a whole. The Chair noted that the Council were following the national strategy.

The Chair also queried why the inspector's had been so insistent on

provable data being available but would not accept case studies as evidence. The Assistant Director referred to their background in education and schools saying their approach was more quantitative than qualitative. The difficulty was that certain data had not yet been captured specifically that relating to breast feeding.

**Decision**

That the inspection report and outcome for Hindpool Close Children's Centre OFSTED Inspection.

4. **Update on the Provision of Parenting Support** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

**Type of decision**

Non-Key

**Purpose of report**

To note the report and current progress

**Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

In December 2007 the Government's Children's Plan had announced funding for Parenting Experts to reduce anti-social behaviour. Hartlepool subsequently received funding for 2 experts and had also gained funding to increase the availability of evidence based parenting programmes for parents experiencing problems with their children's behaviour. Details were given within the report of the current progress including the number of parents that had accessed programmes and the strategies used.

**Decision**

That the report and current practice be noted.

5. **Sue Johnson**

The Portfolio Holder referred to the recent retirement of the Assistant Director for Planning and Service Integration, thanking her and wishing her well for the future.

The meeting concluded at 10:50 am

**P J DEVLIN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

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