

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

30 January 2012

The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

**Present:**

Councillor Chris Simmons (Children's Services Portfolio Holder)

Also Present: Councillor Ann Marshall, Rossmere Ward Councillor

Officers: Caroline O'Neill, Assistant Director, Performance and Achievement  
Sally Robinson, Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services  
Ian Merritt, Strategic Commissioner – Children's Services  
Beth Storey, Youth Work Manager  
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

## **19. The Revision of Fees for Rossmere Skate Park by the Local Authority for 2012** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

**Type of decision**

Non-key.

**Purpose of report**

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for Hartlepool Borough Council Integrated Youth Support Service to raise fees for Rossmere Skate Park (Rozzy Plaza) to enable the continued support of young people and the wider community to access the site safely.

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

The Youth Work Manager reported that the skate park at Rossmere Way was funded through the Co location Fund which was capital spend only. The multi use games area has a charging policy for groups outside of the partnership.

The management of the site was the responsibility of the Integrated Youth Support Service Youth Work Team. Management arrangements included CCTV, swipe card access, health and safety information, code of conduct and access to helmets – to enable a managed not supervised site. A member of staff had been employed on a part time basis to enable swipe cards and membership to be accessed, hiring of helmets and engaging with

the young peoples representative group to enable development work to be carried out.

At present staffing was secured until March 2012 via the Early Intervention Grant and the plan is to extend the position for a further year whilst pushing on with the plans to make the park more self sustaining from 2013 onwards.

A range of options had been considered by the Skate Park Steering Group which included elected members (Rossmere Ward), young people and council officers and through broader consultation with skate park users. Careful consideration by the Skate Park steering group had led to a proposal to increase fees as well as income generation next financial year.

Seventy five young people who regularly used the park had been consulted about what they consider to be a reasonable fee for the year. Fifty six stated £10.00 or more. General discussion with those who stated less didn't indicate inability to pay, but rather a reluctance to pay given the current charge of £1.00 per annum. That being said, provision for inability to pay would need to be made as in other Local Authority pricing schemes.

The report considered in detail the proposals to –

- Open site to all with minimal supervision;
- Explore income generation other than membership fees;
- Increase membership fees and use other methods of income generation.

The proposals agreed by the management committee included raising the annual fee to £10.00, introducing a day rate of £3.00 for young people who do not access frequently and do not wish to take up full membership, and that a concessionary rates of £1.00 be introduced for those with evidence of inability to pay (comparable to forms acceptable in other local authority facilities). The new pricing structure was proposed to be introduced after the current year's membership expired. It was also suggested that further opportunities for income generation be developed to ensure the sustainability of the site.

The Portfolio Holder questioned how much income was hoped to be generated. The Youth Work Manager commented that while membership stood at around 400, many of those were young people who may have only been once or twice, some from outside of Hartlepool, who had taken the annual membership option as the cheapest way to use the skate park. There were around 75 regular users though some of these would probably qualify for reduced membership.

The Portfolio Holder considered that while being located in Rossmere this was a facility for the whole town and as such, any charging regime needed to be considered carefully. There was concern that the proposed membership rate may be too high particularly when there may be several members of one family wanting to join. For families on low incomes this

could become prohibitive.

Councillor Ann Marshall, Rossmere ward, was present at the meeting and spoke against the proposed price rises. Councillor Marshall believed that there may be a case for charging those from outside of Hartlepool more but at this time couldn't support a price increase for Hartlepool children.

The Portfolio Holder considered the issues relating to the proposed price increase. The Early Intervention Grant monies were to be continued for a further year; this was confirmed by the Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services. The Portfolio Holder believed that when young people were given the opportunity, and a reason for raising funds, their entrepreneurial skills were regularly as good as anyone's. The potential of implementing additional charges for those from outside the borough was questioned though the Assistant Director did feel that children from Billingham, for example, who may travel to this site were just as likely to be from deprived backgrounds.

On balance the Portfolio Holder decided not to support the proposed price increase but to maintain the current £1.00 registration fee. The Portfolio Holder did encourage the management committee to come forward with ways of increasing the income base for the skate park over the next year.

#### **Decision**

That the fees for the Rossmere Skate Park remain at the current level and that a further report on the fees and income generation be submitted in a year's time.

## **20. Exmoor Grove Children's Short Break Care Unit** (Director of Child and Adult Services)

#### **Type of decision**

Non-key.

#### **Purpose of report**

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the outcome of the recent OFSTED inspection of Exmoor Grove Children's Short Break Care Unit.

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

The Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services reported that in October 2009 the OFSTED Inspection report stated "The home is not furnished and equipped to meet the needs of the young people who now use the service. A decision has still not been made as to the future direction of the home and this is reflected in the basic nature of a lot of the furnishings and fabric of the home". As a result of this Exmoor's OFSTED rating dropped from 'Good' to 'Satisfactory'

While the Ofsted Report highlighted the outstanding issues in relation to the fabric of the building, this had already been recognised and work

commenced, on a reconfiguration programme for Exmoor Grove. The outcome of the reconfiguration programme was that Exmoor Grove should specialise its services for children with challenging behaviour and associated learning disabilities. Exmoor Grove subsequently closed on 31st October 2010 for a period of three months to allow extensive refurbishment work to be undertaken, re opening in February 2011.

Exmoor Grove underwent its most recent Ofsted inspection on 7 November 2011 and the Inspector had rated as 'Good', the Overall Effectiveness of the unit, the Outcomes for children and young people, the Quality of Care, Safeguarding Children and Young People, and the inspector stated that the home has a thorough and systematic approach to risk management with up to date risk assessments available with regard to building, gardens and each individual young person.

However, Leadership and Management had only been judged as SATISFACTORY. The inspector found that the home met the aims and objectives set out in the Statement of Purpose, however, it did not include an up to date address for the current regulatory authority. The inspector noted that a small independent team of staff were employed to provide one to one support for a young person separate to the majority of children in the unit; he found these staff was not provided with regular formal supervision by the management team and as a result the supervision of staff is inconsistent.

The refurbishment work undertaken earlier in the year together with the hard work of the Exmoor Team following the re opening have resulted in an extremely positive OFSTED inspection with the unit being re classified as GOOD from its previous SATISFACTORY grading. An action plan had been developed to address any areas highlighted during the inspection and this was submitted for the Portfolio Holders information. The Assistant Director particularly highlighted that the issue that had only been ranked as satisfactory had been addressed immediately and appropriate revised arrangements for supervision were now in place.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the very positive Ofsted report and noted that the majority of the actions in the action plan had been completed or were on track. The Portfolio Holder considered that the report showed the investment in the property and staff had been justified and he congratulated the staff at the home for their hard work in achieving this positive report.

### **Decision**

That the report and action plan be noted and welcomed.

## **21. Adoption Inspection – May 2011** (*Director of Child and Adult Services*)

### **Type of decision**

Non-key.

### **Purpose of report**

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the outcome of an OFSTED Inspection into the services provided by Hartlepool Adoption Service and the Action Plan addressing the recommendations made within this report.

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

The Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services reported that the Adoption Service is a regulated service and as such is inspected on a three yearly basis by OFSTED, the purpose of the inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and the government of the quality and standard of services provided. The inspections are carried out to assess the effectiveness of the agency and that it is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users. The inspection considers how well the service complies with relevant legislation and meets the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011.

Following the inspection a report is produced by Ofsted which commented upon the strengths and areas for improvement for the service, including any breaches of regulations and any failure to meet the minimum standards. A judgment is included in the report.

The inspection judgments were

- Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
- Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements
- Satisfactory: a service that only meets the minimum requirements.
- Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements.

The Adoption service's most recent inspection took place in May 2011, the service was judged as satisfactory with some areas identified for improvement. The inspection report was received in October 2011 the delay being due to the sickness absence of the lead inspector. It was felt that some positive aspects of the service which had been shared in the verbal feedback had not been noted within the written report and a letter was sent to the Inspector concerned to this effect. The inspection report had been published on the Ofsted website but was removed whilst consideration was given to the letter challenging the report, Ofsted had given an indication they will send an amended report but this has not yet been received. The original report was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

As the report had not been received until October 2011 it was difficult to fully address the recommendations that were highlighted prior to this. However through the verbal feedback, the service had information on the issues highlighted and started to address these and implement the required improvements to the service. Following receipt of the Inspection Report, an Action Plan was drawn up to ensure that all the recommendations made

are fully and comprehensively addressed. This Action Plan was also submitted as Appendix 2 to the report.

The Portfolio Holder considered that there was some irony in the authority being rated as one of the top three authorities in the country for placing young children in adoptive placements, yet the inspection only rated the same service as satisfactory. The Assistant Director commented that the size of the borough worked for it in some cases, such as its ability to place young children in family situations through adoption or fostering, but also worked against it in cases such as this inspection. Significant improvements had been made in the adoption service over the last two years. However, being a small borough, the number of example cases that the inspectors required meant that they had to go back further than this time to get the number of example cases they required. Larger authorities could provide the number through a few months work.

The Portfolio Holder noted that many of the actions in the action plan had already been completed and looked forward to future inspection reports reflecting the excellent work undertaken in this area.

#### **Decision**

That the Adoption Inspection report and its recommendations and also the arrangements in place to implement the recommendations be noted.

## **22. Safeguarding Children In Hartlepool** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

#### **Type of decision**

Non-key.

#### **Purpose of report**

To present information on the workload of children's social work teams in providing service to children in need in Hartlepool including those in need of protection and children looked after.

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

The Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services reported on the workload of children's social work teams and the current demands on the service. The information provided was an analysis of the activity during the second quarter of 2011/12. The report set out details of the numbers of children referred for and receiving services, workload and workforce information and details of complaints, comments and compliments received by the service during the quarter.

The Portfolio Holder commented that the report showed how well served Hartlepool was by local foster carers. However, more foster families were always needed and the Portfolio Holder questioned what work was being done in this respect and whether the local press could assist in recruiting families to this very rewarding work. The Assistant Director commented

that there was to be an event in February at the council's Art Shop in the Middleton Grange Shopping Centre on recruiting new families into foster caring. The department always worked with the local press in publicising such events.

**Decision**

That the report be noted.

**23. Children's Homes: Regulation 33 Reports** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

**Type of decision**

Non-key.

**Purpose of report**

To present the Regulation 33 reports of visits to Exmoor Grove Short Break Care Unit.

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

The Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services submitted Regulation 33 reports covering the months of April, May, June, July, August, September, October and November 2011 for Exmoor Grove. Further details are set out in the exempt section of the minutes.

**Decision**

That the reports be noted.

**24. Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006**

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

Minute Title (Author) - This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely

**25. Children's Homes: Regulation 33 Reports** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)* This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely paragraphs 1 and 2

**Type of decision**

Non-key.

**Purpose of report**

To present the Regulation 33 reports of visits to Exmoor Grove Short Break Care Unit.

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

The Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services submitted Regulation 33 reports covering the months of April, May, June, July, August, September, October and November 2011 for Exmoor Grove. Further details are set out in the exempt section of the minutes.

**Decision**

That the reports be noted.

- 26. Children's Services Contracts: Exceptions to the Contract Procedure Rules** (*Director of Child and Adult Services*)  
This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972, namely paragraph 3

**Type of decision**

Non-key.

**Purpose of report**

To seek the Portfolio Holder's approval to make exceptions to the Contract Procedure Rules in respect of several Children's Services contracts.

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

The Strategic Commissioner – Children's Services reported information about the contracts, the financial impact of the provision of the services and the justification for making an exception to the Rules. Further details are set out in the exempt section of the minutes.

**Decision**

That an exception to the Contract Procedure Rules for the reasons reported be approved and that permission be granted to enter into short term agreements with the existing providers.

The meeting concluded at 3.15 p.m.

**P J DEVLIN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

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