

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

23 October 2012

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

**Present:**

Councillor Cath Hill (Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder)

Also Present: Councillor Chris Simmons

Officers: Sally Robinson, Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services  
Dean Jackson, Assistant Director, Performance and Achievement  
Robin Daniels, Archaeology Officer  
Sue Beevers, Admissions, School Place Planning and Support Services Manager  
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

## **28. Admissions to Community Primary and Voluntary Controlled Schools** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

**Type of decision**

Non-key (for information)

**Purpose of report**

To advise the Portfolio Holder that the determined School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools, for the year 2014/15 are to remain the same as those set in 2013/14. As there is no change proposed, there is no requirement for the Authority to carry out public consultation.

The criteria to be used for admission to community and voluntary controlled schools will remain as set out previously (see below):

- 1) those children who are in the care of the local authority;
- 2) those children who have older brothers or sisters who will be attending the school in September 2014;
- 3) those children who live in school's admission zone;

- 4) those children who are distinguished from the great majority of other applicants whether on medical grounds or by other exceptional circumstances and who would suffer significant hardship if they were unable to attend the school'
- 5) those children who live closest to the school as determined by the shortest suitable walking distance.

Admissions criteria for voluntary aided and foundation schools will be set by the school who are their own admissions authority.

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

It was reported that prior to the introduction of the new School Admission's Code which came into force in February 2012, the Authority was required to carry out public consultation on the determined school admission arrangements.

The School Admission's Code now stated that where no changes were proposed, they must be consulted on at least every 7 years. Therefore, as the Admission Arrangements for Hartlepool Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools were to remain the same as those set the previous year, there was no requirement for the Council to carry out public consultation this year.

The Portfolio Holder referred to feedback at a recent governor's function where extensive support had been expressed for the new admission arrangements in relation to sibling links being given greater weighting in the criteria and looked forward to implementation of the decision.

### **Decision**

That the contents of the report, be noted,.

## **29. Adoption Agency Interim Report 2012** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

### **Type of decision**

Non-key

### **Purpose of report**

To enable the executive side of the local authority to monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users.

To enable the executive side of the local authority to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

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

The report provided background information in relation to the requirement of the Council to provide written activity and progress reports every six months to the Executive.

The aim of the Adoption Service was to recruit, train and support adopters to provide high quality adoptive placements for children of Hartlepool. This was achieved through a number of objectives, as set out in the report.

The Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Specialist Services outlined Adoption Panel and Adoption Service activities for the period April 2012 to August 2012 as detailed in the report. It was noted that as of 1 September 2012, fourteen adopters had been approved.

With regard to the process for approving children's plans for adoption, the regulations had recently been changed and the plans were no longer presented to Panel for approval. Approval was now granted by the Agency Decision Maker, the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Specialist Services. A process for achieving approval of adoption plans had been implemented and provided a thorough and robust mechanism, similar to the panel process, to ensure proper scrutiny and thus achieve the best outcomes for children.

During the reporting period there had been no adoption breakdowns. However, one prospective placement had broken down during the course of introductions.

Details of recruitment activity as well as achievements to date was provided as detailed in the report. The Adoption Performance table published earlier in 2012 indicated that Hartlepool had managed to sustain a high level of performance and was placed fifth in the country in relation to the average length of time between a child becoming looked after and moving into an adoptive placement.

The report included details of progress made to date in relation to service development priorities for 2012/13

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the continued achievements and expressed her thanks to the staff involved for their hard work and contribution to the success of the service.

### **Decision**

That progress made by the adoption service within the period reviewed be noted and the commitment to deliver continuous improvement be supported.

### **30. Vulnerable Schools and Schools Causing Concern** (Director of Child and Adult Services)

#### **Type of decision**

Non-key

#### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of this report is to outline the strategy and procedures that the Local Authority will follow for:

- (a) identifying a school judged to be temporarily vulnerable or, over time, causing concern;
- (b) supporting and challenging the school to bring about improvement;
- (c) monitoring the school's self-evaluation of its improvement.

Furthermore, it will outline the classification system, linked to RAG ratings, which will be used in order to identify the level of support needed for any school that is judged to be vulnerable or causing concern.

The report will also provide a summary of the statutory powers that the local authority has for intervening in schools causing concern, where sustainable improvement is not taking place.

#### **Issue(s) for consideration by Cabinet**

The report provided background information relating to the provisions in Part 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, as updated by 2012 Advice to Local Authorities, as set out at Appendix 1 relating to schools causing concern. The local authority, under Section 60 of the 2006 Act could issue a statutory warning notice to a school causing concern that related to the school's performance or standards of safety.

To develop an improved understanding of the overall performance of all of its schools and identify any specific schools causing concern, a revised school performance categorisation protocol, had been developed, attached as an appendix to the report. This would ensure that schools and the local authority worked together to address identified areas of concern promptly and effectively. The Council would introduce a revised school performance categorisation process based upon a comprehensive set of quantitative and qualitative indicators that were individually and collectively RAG (red, amber, green) rated. Further details of the categorisation process were included in the report. A school rated as amber or red, would be identified as either a vulnerable school or a school causing concern. There would be a formal annual process for notifying a school if the local authority had identified a concern, as set out in the report.

The Hartlepool Local Authority Support and Challenge Strategy protocol

had a clear specified, formal statement of interventions that were differentiated according to the degree of concern . The four levels of the “Support and Challenge” continuum were provided, as detailed in the report.

The Portfolio Holder was referred to the risk, financial and legal considerations of the proposals, as set out in the report.

A lengthy discussion ensued in relation to the powers of the local authority to intervene in schools causing concern, the potential risks of schools becoming academies as a result of the Government’s proposals and the impact on the Council as a result. The importance of maintaining standards in schools and challenging head teachers to ensure every pupil was provided with the education and opportunities they deserved was emphasised. The Portfolio Holder was keen to ensure that any schools causing concern were challenged as well as supported to bring about improvement at an early stage to avoid situations of this type and to enable schools to remain within the Council’s control. Some concern was expressed regarding the timing of the annual process for notifying a school if the local authority had identified a concern and it was suggested that any such concerns should be reported immediately.

#### **Decision**

- (i) That the contents of the report and comments of the Portfolio Holder, be noted.
- (ii) The Portfolio Holder noted the proposed implementation of the Hartlepool Local Authority Support and Challenge Protocol before 31 October 2012.

### **31. River Tees Rediscovered: Successful HLF Landscape Partnership Bid** *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

#### **Type of decision**

Non-key

#### **Purpose of report**

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the success of the River Tees Rediscovered Landscape Partnership Bid.

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

The Portfolio Holder was referred to the background to the Heritage Lottery Fund ‘Landscape Partnerships Programme and the announcement in July 2012 that the River Tees Rediscovered Landscape Partnership Bid had been successful against national competition in acquiring a stage 1 pass. This would provide initial funds to allow the partnership to assemble a project team, develop information about the project area and begin to work

up specific projects for the area. The stage 1 pass provided for funding of £82,800 and in Stage 2, £1.9m would be bid for. Tees Archaeology and the Council's Parks and Countryside officers would work alongside partner organisations and local authorities to ensure the successful implementation of the partnership project.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the successful funding bid and commented on the economic benefits for the town from projects of this type.

**Decision**

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the success of the River Tees Rediscovered Partnership in acquiring Stage 1 funding from the Heritage Lottery.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 am.

**P J DEVLIN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

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