

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

3 September 2013

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Chris Simmons (In the Chair)

Councillors: Marjorie James and John Lauderdale

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2 (ii), Councillor Allan Barclay was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Sheila Griffin, Councillor Sylvia Tempest was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Mary Fleet and Councillor Paul Thompson was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Cath Hill.

Co-opted members:

Sacha Paul Bedding and Michael Lee

Young people representatives:

Matthew Streeting, Shay Miah, Aimee Wilson, Adam Davison,

Also in attendance:

Dave Wise, West View Project
Alex Sedgewick, Belle Vue Community and Sports Centre
Michael Todd, Headland Future

Officers:

Dave Stubbs, Chief Executive
Sally Robinson, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Dean Jackson, Assistant Director, Education
Jane Young, Business Unit Manager
Wendy Rudd, Head of Business Unit
Noel Adamson, Head of Audit and Governance
Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager
Kimberley Bell, Participation Worker
Katy Larkin, Participation Worker
Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services Officer

45. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kelly Atkinson, Mary Fleet, Sheila Griffin and Cath Hill.

46. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Chris Simmons declared a prejudicial interest in minute 47 and indicated he would leave the meeting during the consideration of that item.

It was suggested that the young people's representatives should leave the meeting also for the consideration of that item due to their potential involvement with the organisations involved.

Councillor Sylvia Tempest indicated she had taken advice from the Monitoring Officer and declared a personal interest in minute 47.

Councillor Paul Thompson declared a personal interest in minute 48.

Sacha Paul Bedding declared a prejudicial interest in minute 47.

Councillor Marjorie James provided a point of clarification for the Committee and indicated that she was not and had never been employed by Manor Residents' Association and had no connection with the Board of Management of that organisation. In addition, Councillor James declared a personal interest in minute 47 as a Ward Councillor.

Councillor Chris Simmons left the meeting at this point due to his earlier declaration of interest, Councillor Marjorie James (Vice Chair) in the Chair.

The young people's representatives left the meeting at this point due to the advice provided in minute 46.

Sacha Paul Bedding left the meeting at this point due to his earlier declaration of interest.

47. Commissioning of Early Intervention Services

(Assistant Director, Children's Services)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To seek agreement from Children's Services Committee to extend the contracts for services commissioned under the Early Intervention Strategy for a 6 month period.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the provision of services under the Early Intervention Strategy and outlined the proposals for the continuation of this service provision. The Chair introduced representatives from the provider consortium that represented West View Project as Lead Provider, Belle Vue Community and Sports Centre and Headland Future.

In relation to option 1 identified in the report, clarification was sought on the service delivery and staffing arrangements for that service provision. The representative from West View Project confirmed that the current service provision within the Manor Residents buildings was a good service that would be built upon through the involvement of representatives from the provider consortium. As part of the future management of the programme, it was confirmed that all staff will be co-opted to West View Project with this organisation providing line management and payroll arrangements for these staff. The Chief Executive reiterated that the contract would be with the provider consortium and not Manor Residents' Association.

The representative from West View Project indicated that the consortium provider would build on the current service provision to ensure an effective and efficient service delivery that would meet the needs of residents.

Decision

- (i) That Option 1, as outlined in the report be approved and that the Lead Provider for the Targeted Activities for Children and Young People contract seek alternative arrangements/providers for the element of the project currently delivered by Manor Residents' Association.
- (ii) That the extension of the contracts for services commissioned under the Early Intervention Strategy for a period of 6 months to 31 March 2014 be approved.

Councillor Chris Simmons, Sacha Paul Bedding and the young people's representatives rejoin the meeting.

Councillor Chris Simmons in the Chair.

47. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2013

Received.

48. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2014/15 Savings Proposal *(Assistant Director, Children's Services)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework.

Purpose of report

To enable Members to consider the initial 2014/15 savings proposals relating to the Committee remit and to feedback comments to the Finance and Policy Committee.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Children's Services referred to previous reports to the Finance and Policy Committee which provided the background and an overview of the Council's financial position including details of the significant financial challenges and risks facing the Council arising from continued reductions in Government funding.

In relation to the 2014/15 budget, it was reported that that the Council faced a gross budget deficit of £8.524m. The gross budget deficit could be reduced to £4.594m without impacting on services through a combination of permanent budget savings and one-off factors as summarised in the report. The report also detailed departmental savings proposals with a total value of £4.376m. Assuming the proposed departmental savings were implemented there was a net unfunded deficit for 2014/15 of £0.218m. It was anticipated at this stage, that this amount could be bridged from the 2014/15 New Homes Bonus. However, this income was not yet guaranteed.

Members were advised that if the proposals, as set out in the report, were approved for addressing the 2014/15 budget deficit, the Council would still face significant budget deficits in 2014/16 and 2016/17. Over the period of the current MTFS it was forecast that the Council would have to make permanent budget cuts of around £16.2m, details of which were included in the report.

Members were referred to the proposed departmental budget savings and budget pressures for consideration by the Committee, attached as appendices to the report that would be incorporated with those received from each of the Policy Committees in relation to their remits for consideration by the Finance and Policy Committee on 19 September 2013.

A discussion ensued on the proposed saving of £125k from the proposed

review of school transport including denominational transport provision and consideration of alternative service delivery arrangements. A Member questioned whether further consultation on the delivery of school transport and denominational transport provision would be undertaken and whether it would involve young people. It was noted that the school transport service provision had been highlighted previously as a proposed budget savings although this did not secure Council approval. It was recognised that whilst the issue of free or subsidised school transport was an important issue, the Council had some difficult decisions to make in view of the current budget constraints.

It was highlighted that consultation had previously been undertaken but had not included all schools that accessed denominational transport. However, the consultation that had been carried out had indicated that parents were willing to pay a reasonable amount for the provision of a school transport service. A Member suggested that should the option of charging for school transport be introduced, any surplus places could be offered to any other children who would be interested in using that route. For clarification, the Assistant Director, Education confirmed that any children who were entitled to free transport as they lived outside the distance zone for their allocated school or were in receipt of free school meals would continue to receive free school transport. It was suggested that any future consultation exercises should include young people through schools' councils.

A young people's representative raised a concern with the implementation of free school transport and the Chief Executive indicated this issue could be examined further outside of the meeting.

Whilst Members acknowledged the need for budgetary savings, there were concerns expressed at the proposal to review the provision of school transport. It was suggested that a further report to outline all options available to Members be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to enable a full debate to take place on this issue. The Chair requested that officers meet with the Chair and Vice Chair once the report was complete before it was submitted as part of the agenda documentation for the meeting of the Committee.

Decision

- (i) The Committee supported the proposed savings and budget pressures for consideration by the Finance and Policy Committee on 19 September 2013.
- (ii) In view of Members concerns with the review of school transport including denominational transport provision and consideration of alternative service delivery arrangements, a further report detailing the options available to Members be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

49. Six Monthly Monitoring of Agreed Scrutiny Recommendations (*Scrutiny Manager*)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To provide Members with the six monthly progress made on the delivery of scrutiny recommendations that fall within the remit of this Committee.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided details of progress made against the investigations undertaken by the previous Children's Services Scrutiny Forum. The report included a chart which provided the overall progress made against each scrutiny recommendation since the last six monthly monitoring report was presented to the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum in February 2013.

It was noted that 87% of the Scrutiny Forum's recommendations had been completed with 7% in progress, 4% cancelled and 1% overdue.

Clarification was sought on recommendation SCR-CS/16f and how this was to be implemented. The Assistant Director, Education indicated that the Home to Hospital service would be relocated to the Brierton site and would be an enhanced service. In relation to the Learning Platform, it was acknowledged that the Learning Platform was in place, although it was not utilised fully. However, work was underway to progress a pilot to use this platform for primary schools which would then be rolled out to secondary schools. The Assistant Director, Education recognised the importance of young people accessing learning resources and materials from outside of the school premises. A co-opted member commented that an effective Learning Platform would be a really useful tool to provide education in a different way and would be a major step forward. The Assistant Director, Education indicated that there may be the potential to include interested secondary schools in the pilot and this could be examined further.

One of the young people's representatives referred to the Learning Platform that was utilised by the secondary school he attended and how this was used and the Assistant Director, Education commented that this was useful information to share with other schools.

Decision

That progress against the agreed recommendations be noted.

50. Hartlepool School Admission Arrangements for 2015/16 (*Assistant Director, Education*)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To propose a change to the definition of the distance criteria used for oversubscription in Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools. It was proposed that this change would be effective from 2015/16 admissions round.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the oversubscription criteria currently used and outlined the consultation exercise that would be undertaken on the proposed change. The Assistant Director, Education highlighted that the current oversubscription criteria no. 5 was subject to much discussion and debate with parents throughout the school admission arrangements. It was recognised that the safest walking route was endlessly debatable, the proposed measurement from centre of house to centre of school would be consistent across all the admission arrangements.

However, one Member did have some concerns at the proposed 'straight line' measurement and whether this would be linked to the current arrangements for free school transport. The Assistant Director, Education reassured Members that this proposal was for school admission arrangements only and would be determined by an external GPS measurement and only in instances where the 5th tie breaker was required. For clarity, a Member suggested that the proposal be approved with the caveat that this proposal was for school admission arrangements only and not to determine free school transport applications.

The Chair confirmed that the consultation exercise that would be undertaken would be the usual consultation process for changes to admission arrangements.

Decision

That a consultation exercise on the 2015/16 admission arrangements (with an end date of December 2013) be undertaken on the basis of seeking views on:

- The oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary controlled primary schools in regard to the proposed change in the method of measuring the distances involved in the 'closest to school' criteria.

51. Scoping Exercise – Changes to Catchment Area (Admission Zones) *(Assistant Director, Education)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To inform members of the scoping exercise which had been undertaken in respect of the proposed school admission arrangements for 2014/15 as requested by the Children's Services Portfolio Holder on 2016 June 2012.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the request and detailed the proposed scoping exercise to be undertaken which included a preparation phase (September to November), consultation phase (November to February) and a reporting phase (February to June). The Assistant Director, Education highlighted that the school admission numbers based around school capacity demonstrated that there was currently a surplus of primary school places in Hartlepool. However, the data also indicated that pupil numbers were expected to increase by approximately 400 pupils in the next 10 years which would take up some of the spare capacity. The financial implications of undertaking a full consultation process were included in the report.

A discussion ensued during which Members noted that it may not be the most effective time to undertake consultation on this issue due to the potential changes to schools' arrangements in view of the option for schools to convert to academies. However, Members were keen to review this position on an annual basis.

Decision

- (i) That a full review of admission procedures and catchment areas in Hartlepool not be undertaken at the current time.
- (ii) That this issue be subject to a further review on an annual basis.

52. Safeguarding Children in Hartlepool (*Assistant Director, Children's Services*)

Type of decision

For information.

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

The report provided the background to the monitoring of the workload of children's social care services to ensure the Council was fulfilling its statutory responsibilities. The information provided related to the first quarter of 2013/14. The Head of Business Unit informed Members that whilst there was a steady increase in requests for children's social care services, the rate of re-referrals had decreased. It was noted that abuse and neglect continued to account for the highest number of referrals received into the Department closely followed by family dysfunction.

Details of the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan, the number of Looked After Children and the number of children in need in Hartlepool were provided in the report.

A discussion ensued during which a Member questioned whether the welfare reform changes implemented in April 2013 had affected the re-referral rates. The Business Unit Manager confirmed that whilst it was recognised that a number of referrals may have resulted from the impact of the welfare reform changes, it was difficult to provide details of the impact on re-referrals at this current time. It was noted that a better reflection of that impact would be available in 12 months time.

A co-opted member sought clarification on the number of core assessments being completed outside the prescribed timescales. The Business Unit

Manager confirmed that initial assessments had to be undertaken within 10 days and core assessments within 35 days. However, it was noted that the Government had proposed some changes to the prescribed timescales with a single assessment to be completed within 45 working days. The Business Unit Manager reassured Members that throughout the assessment period, families would receive a service. The Assistant Director, Children's Services commented that quality was the priority in the completion of assessments and that all assessments were thorough to ensure the services met all the needs of the family.

A Member questioned the reference in the graph at 5.1 that referred to an unborn child being subject to a child protection plan. The Business Unit Manager confirmed that assessments can be undertaken from the 28th week of pregnancy in situations where there was the potential for a child to be considered at risk. This would enable a child protection plan to be in place at the time of birth should this be required.

Decision

The contents of the report of activity within children's social care were noted.

52. Quarter 1 – Financial Management Report (*Assistant Director, Children's Services and Chief Finance Officer*)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To inform Members of the 2013/14 forecast General Fund budget outturn for the Child and Adult Services department and specific details for the services the Committee was responsible for.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Children's Services presented the report which provided the background and financial reporting arrangements for 2013/14 as well as the General Fund budget outturn information in relation to the Child and Adult Services Department.

As previously reported to the Finance and Policy Committee, Members were advised that there would be an overall underspend in the current year. In relation to the management of departmental budgets, the Corporate Management Team was again seeking to achieve underspends to help

address the significant financial challenges through a combination of robust management actions, as detailed in the report. After reflecting these actions, it was currently anticipated that there would be a gross managed year end underspend of between £2.090m to £2.764m. A range of additional one off commitments had also been identified since the initial 2013/14 outturn forecast. When account was taken of these commitments and the earmarking of the initial forecast outturn, it was anticipated there would be a net uncommitted underspend of between £19,000 and £693,000.

Detail of the overall budget position for the Child and Adult Services Department was summarised in a table included in the report which included the reasons for the forecast outturn. Further details of specific budget areas were set out at Appendix A.

The Assistant Director, Children's Services informed Members that there had been an error in the report and that the brackets on the table in paragraph 4.1 should be around 'Favourable' and not 'Adverse'. A Member suggested that it might be useful to recirculate the report once corrected.

Decision

- (i) The update on the Children's Services Committee's forecast 2013/14 General Fund revenue budget outturn was noted.
- (ii) That an updated version of the 2013/14 Forecast General Fund Outturn for the Children's Services Committee be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

53. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 5.40 pm

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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