

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

3 December 2013

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

Present:

Councillor: Chris Simmons (In the Chair)

Councillors: Sheila Griffin, Marjorie James and John Lauderdale

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2 (ii), Councillor Rob Cook was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Mary Fleet.

Co-opted Members:

Michael Lee

Young People's Representatives:

Aimee Wilson, Adam Davison, Matt Streeting and Shay Miah.

Officers:

Gill Alexander, Director of Child and Adult Services

Sally Robinson, Assistant Director, Children's Services

Dean Jackson, Assistant Director, Education

Alyson Carman, Legal Services Manager

Mark Smith, Head of Youth Support Services

Jane Young, Business Unit Manager

Kimberley Bell, Participation Officer

Steve Hilton, Public Relations Officer

Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services Officer

82. Apologies for Absence

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

83. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Chris Simmons, Rob Cook, Marjorie James, John Lauderdale, Sheila Griffin all declared personal interests in minute 85 as school governors.

Michael Lee declared a personal interest in minute 85 as a Head Teacher of English Martyrs School and Sixth Form College.

The Chair highlighted that the young people representatives were all pupils at Hartlepool schools and there would have a personal interest in minute 85.

84. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2013

Received.

85. School Funding Formula 2014-15 (*Director of Child and Adult Services*)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (ii) applies – Forward Plan Reference CAS 021/13.

Purpose of report

To consider and approve the 2014/15 Schools Funding Formula.

Issue(s) for consideration

Prior to the consideration of this item, the Chair provided an explanation on the declarations of interest given by Members at the beginning of the meeting.

The report outlined the consultation that had been undertaken on the schools funding formula. It was noted that the majority of the consultation questions had been agreed by the Schools Forum however, views were split with regard to the model to be used for deprivation factor with 16 schools voting for 12%, 17 schools voting for 15% and 2 schools voting for 13%. The subject of the deprivation factor had been discussed at great length by the Schools Forum and referred to the Local Authority for determination. The Director of Child and Adult Services advised that in her professional opinion, Members should consider reducing the deprivation element from 17.9% to 15% for 2014/15. This would rebalance the formula so that the basic entitlement for all Hartlepool children was appropriate, whilst managing the change incrementally to avoid destabilising those schools reliant on the deprivation factor. It was suggested that the impact of this change would be reviewed as part of the School Forum's annual review of the Funding Formula for 2015/16.

A co-opted Member expressed a number of concerns at the level of deprivation element recommended and highlighted that several Head Teachers had expressed similar concerns. It was noted that during the discussions at the School Forum meetings, there were many issues considered, although destabilisation had not been one of them. In addition, the co-opted Member highlighted that whilst concerns had been expressed

at the level of balances retained by schools, however, these balances do not support the idea that a lower deprivation level would destabilise schools. It was noted that the discussions that had taken place at the School Forum meetings had been very difficult with a number of very strong opinions being voiced. It was suggested as a compromise and way forward, the level of deprivation should be set at 13.5%.

The Chair highlighted that any balances held within schools should not exceed 8% of their total budget and should be committed for specific projects to improve the school. It was noted that over the years, the Schools Forum had been extremely careful to ensure schools in deprived areas were able to cope with the additional responsibility they have to make sure students reach the national minimum standards in education. However, some schools still struggle to do that despite the level of deprivation funding and pupil premium available to them.

The Director of Child and Adult Services acknowledged that there had been a significant debate at the Schools Forum meetings on the issue of the deprivation level within the funding formula with some schools expressing concerns that a significant shift in the deprivation level would result in destabilisation. It was therefore recommended that in the first instance, a deprivation level of 15% should be implemented as this should ensure a direct resource would close the gap in relation to disadvantage in a planned way.

Decision

- (1) The recommendations of the Schools Forum in relation to the five areas outlined below were approved:
 - (i) The lump sum be maintained at the maximum possible value - £175k.
 - (ii) The overall quantum of funding allocated for this factor (£1.13m – 2.2%) be maintained and adjusted per pupil value accordingly to ensure that this total was not exceeded.
 - (iii) A Pupil Mobility Factor should be re-introduced into Hartlepool's formula.
 - (iv) That the funding rate for Pupil Mobility should be £642 per pupil with the additional funding coming from the AWPU.
 - (v) That the Primary:Secondary ratio be maintained at 1:1.26.
 - (vi) That Capping as the method of funding the MFG continued.
- (2) That the deprivation factor be reduced from 17.9% to 15% for 2014/15.
- (3) That the Director of Child and Adult Services be authorised to work with the Schools Forum to review the impact of the proposed changes as part of the 2015/16 consultation on the Schools Funding Formula.

- (4) It was noted that a report on the outcome of the review of the impact of the changes to the Schools Funding Formula will be reported to a future meeting of the Children's Services Committee.

86. Nursery Provision in Seaton Carew – Response to Consultation *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (i) and (ii) applies – Forward Plan Reference CAS 012/13.

Purpose of report

To provide details of the response to the consultation on the proposed closure of Seaton Carew Nursery School and the extension of the age range of Holy Trinity CE Voluntary Aided Primary School from 4-11 year olds to 3-11 year olds.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the proposals and the consultation that had taken place from 23 September 2013 to 1 November 2013. A summarised analysis of the consultation responses was provided in the report. The decision making route and proposed timeline for the implementation of the proposals was outlined in the report.

The Chair indicated that he had attended one of the public consultation meetings and had noted that in general there was around 90% support for the project and whilst there may have been some concerns, everyone was of the view that it would be beneficial to have the nursery attached to the primary school, in a similar way to all other primary schools in the town.

A Member referred to one of the responses to the consultation in relation to a previous decision by the Local Authority not to close the nursery. It was noted that the previous decision had been taken as part of the Primary Capital Programme and was based on the consultation undertaken at the time.

One of the young people's representative sought clarification on whether a place at the nursery would guarantee a place at the school. The Chair indicated that having a place at a school based nursery did not guarantee that child a place within the school and this principle applied across all schools in the town. The admission criteria for schools was different to that for school nurseries.

Decision

- (i) The proposal to close Seaton Carew Nursery School was approved.
- (ii) The proposal to extend the age range of Holy Trinity Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School from 4-11 year olds to 3-11 year olds was supported.
- (iii) The Director of Child and Adult Services was authorised to publish the necessary statutory notices to carry out this decision.

87. Adoption Service – 6 Month Interim Report 2013-14 (*Director of Child and Adult Services*)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To provide information relating to the work of the Adoption Service during the first six months of 2013/14. The adoption service is a regulated service and as such was required to provide the executive side of the Council with regular performance information.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the management and reporting of progress of the Adoption Service. It was highlighted that over the last six months, the Adoption Service had benefitted from the receipt of an award from the Adoption Reform Grant and had invested the grant in a number of initiatives designed to strengthen local performance and practice and these were listed in the report. The report highlighted that there had been significant staffing changes to the staffing complement of the adoption service, including long term sickness. However, the additional social work posts created have mitigated this pressure. The report provided further detail on the service including:

- Marketing and publicity activity
- Recruitment of prospective adopters
- Preparation training
- Post approval support groups
- Panel activity
- Family finding good practice

The Business Unit Manager recognised that whilst the period of 1 April to 30 September 2013 had been a challenging one for the Adoption Team, there had been an increased level of positive and productive team work

undertaken to ensure that adopters continued to be supported to a high level.

The following had recently been implemented with a view to improving the provision of the Adoption Service:

- Family Finding Post
- Post Adoption Support Worker
- Life Appreciation Days
- Foster to Adopt placements.

A Member sought clarification on the 'Foster to Adopt' placements. The Business Unit Manager informed Members that where a child was likely to be placed for adoption through a placement order, the child would be placed with an adoptive placement at the earliest opportunity to maximise ties with that family. Whilst it was acknowledged that there was a slight risk with this strategy should the adoption not be approved, it would only be progressed when it was considered the right thing for the child and the adopters. In response to a question from a Member, the Business Unit Manager commented that there had been foster carers who have progressed to adopting the child they were fostering and this had been supported in the past. It was noted that foster carers were fully engaged in the whole process from planning to implementing placements for children and fully understood the timescales involved.

The Chair highlighted that the Adoption Service in Hartlepool was highly regarded nationally and in view of the recent changes in legislation and the staffing issues, everyone involved in the Adoption Service was congratulated for the ability and willingness to operate at 100%.

Decision

The Adoption Agency Interim Report and Action Plan Update for April to September 2013 were noted.

88. Fostering Service Quarterly Report – 1 July – 30 September 2013 *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To provide information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the second quarter of 2013/14. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and as such there was a requirement to provide the executive side of the

Council with performance information on a quarterly basis.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the work of the Fostering Service which was subject to the National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of Foster Care for children looked after. The report provided details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff and Foster Carers, the constitution of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective Foster Carers and progress in relation to the priorities set out in the Fostering Annual Report.

The report detailed the fostering activity undertaken along with the recruitment and retention of foster carers as at 30 September 2013. It was noted that there were potential foster carers waiting for a group which was planned to take place in December 2013. A table of training which had been made available to all foster carers within the second quarter of 2013/14 was included in the report. Also included in the report was the Family Placement Panel activity during the period 1 July and 30 September 2013. Further details were provided on the following:

- Family Finding Good Practice
- Child Appreciation Day
- Edge of Care Scheme
- Progress against Priorities 2013/14

The Fostering Team was congratulated on their hard work and commitment to the provision of a Fostering Service within Hartlepool and recognised for being such a good team who were completely committed to meeting the needs of the corporate family.

Decision

The report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service in the second quarter of 2013/14 was noted.

89. Raising of the Participation Age *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To provide an update on local performance relating to the Raising of the Participation Age and associated activities.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the participation of young people in learning beyond statutory school age which was seen by successive Governments as a key mechanism for reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Also included in the report was an update on local performance relating to the Raising of the Participation Age and associated activities. It was noted that the September Guarantee was an offer by the end of September, of a place to young people completing compulsory education in 2013 and for those who left compulsory education in 2012. This was a key mechanism for securing the participation of young people in learning beyond statutory school age. Included in the report was a table which showed the number of young people entering years 12 and 13 with a guaranteed offer in Hartlepool and on a national basis.

Further statistics were provided which highlighted the post 16 Education Destination Measures along with the 16-18 NEET Performance and the tracking of the cohort.

In response to clarification sought by a Member, the Head of Youth Support Services commented that it was unlikely that raising the participation age would have an impact on young people aged 18 who were NEET due to the high numbers of young people already engaged in learning which would be sustained throughout the age of 17-18. A Member highlighted the importance of challenging further education providers to ensure the additional learning undertaken by all young people aged 16-18 made a difference and enhanced their opportunities of gaining employment.

A Member commented that it was difficult for young people to enter into the workplace and questioned what could be done to assist them. The Head of Youth Support Services acknowledged the difficulties faced by young people, especially when they find themselves in a competitive labour market with more experienced adults. One of the key issues highlighted to young people was that they need to recognise that they may need to change careers on a number of occasions and need to concentrate on developing transferrable skills.

A co-opted member congratulated the team on the work being undertaken in such difficult times and highlighted that further education providers needed to have flexible arrangements which some post 16 providers in Stockton already had in place.

The Director of Child and Adult Services informed Members that the performance of the team compared well nationally and this report opened up the debate which will continue on a regional level, including through the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership, to secure funding for better skills pathways. It was recognised that there were some excellent facilities and vocational pathways in the further education sector within the town and these should be utilised to assist young people with the transition from education into employment. However, it was acknowledged that some young people may need to leave Hartlepool to gain the skills and experience required through training and employment, although it was hoped they would return to find suitable employment.

One of the young people's representatives questioned what was in place should any of the young people leaving school aged 16 refuse to enter into any further education. The Head of Youth Support Services indicated whilst there were no sanctions to compel young people to continue with their education, the Youth Service were committed to assisting young people pursue further education through developing positive relationships and working alongside them to remove any perceived barriers to further learning. Great success had also been secured working alongside the parents of young people who may be initially reluctant to engage.

A Member referred to the success of the Future Jobs Fund which had provided a number of placements for young people that had progressed into permanent employment. The importance of ensuring all young people leave education with at the very least, a basic qualification in English, Maths, Science and Technology where possible was reiterated to ensure the outcomes from schools matches expectations.

Decision

The progress made to date in relation to the Raising of the Participation Age and associated activities was noted. Further updates from Officer would be provided as and when further data became available.

90. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent – Children's Services Committee Training

The Chair referred to the training sessions that had been arranged for all Members of the Committee, including co-opted members and young people representatives, as noted at the last meeting of the Committee. A letter had been forwarded to everyone detailing the three different sessions arranged for the following dates:

Tuesday 14 January 2014 – 4.30pm, Council Chamber, Civic Centre
Tuesday 18 March 2014 – 4.00 pm, Council Chamber, Civic Centre
Thursday 19 June 2014 – 4.00pm, Council Chamber, Civic Centre

Everyone was urged to attend each session and to confirm which sessions

they can attend with the Democratic Services Team.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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