

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

3 February 2026

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

**Present:**

Councillor: Melanie Morley (In the Chair)

Councillors: Moss Boddy, Bob Buchan, Martin Dunbar, Brenda Harrison and Philip Holbrook

Co-opted members:

Gillian Hood, C of E Diocesan Representative  
Joanne Wilson, RC Diocesan Representative

Parent Governor Representative:

Martin Pout

Young people's representatives:

Oliver Huermann, Member of Youth Parliament

Officers:

Alison Sutherland, Executive Director of Children's Services  
Laura Gough, Assistant Director (Children and Families)  
Rebecca Stephenson, Assistant Director (Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning)  
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education  
Julie Reed, Capital, Governance Site and Systems Manager  
Lisa Adams, Head of Service (Early Help)  
Sandra Shears, Head of Finance - Corporate and Schools  
Fiona Stobbs, Senior Advisor (Inclusive Learning and SEND)  
Kelly Armstrong, Strategic Children Commissioner  
Julian Heward, Senior Public Relations Officer  
Jo Stubbs, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer

### **36. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were submitted by Councillor Sue Little and School Heads Representatives Sue Sharpe and Zoe Westley.

### **37. Declarations of Interest**

None

**38. Minutes of the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2025**

Received.

**39. School Admission Arrangements for 2027-28**

*(Executive Director, Children's Services)*

**Type of decision**

Key

**Purpose of report**

To consider and agree the proposed admission arrangements for community schools in Hartlepool for 2027-28 academic year.

**Issue(s) for consideration**

Members were informed that it was a statutory requirement of all admission authorities to determine admission arrangements every year and the arrangements for entry in September 2027 must be determined by 28 February 2026. The published admission number for each community school was appended to the report.

**Decision**

- I. That the admission arrangements be approved in respect of community schools for 2027-28
- II. That the admission numbers, including the reduction for Rift House Primary School, be approved in respect of community schools for 2027-28

**40. Dedicated Schools Grant – Early Years Block**

**2026/27** *(Executive Director, Children's Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital)*

**Type of decision**

Key

**Purpose of report**

To present the indicative Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding allocation for Early Years Funding in 2026/27 and propose the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) that sets hourly rates for providers from April 2026.

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

The Committee was referred to the 2026/27 funding allocation for the Early Years Block, shown in a table included in the report. Proposals for hourly rate splits for each type of provision in 2026/27 were provided as detailed in the report. The funded hourly rate for 3 to 4 year old provision were £6.25, the funded hourly rate payment for 2 year old provisions were £8.63 while the funded hourly rate payments for under 2 year olds were £11.69. 3% of these rates will be retained by the local authority with the rest going to the provider depending on eligibility.

At their meeting on 12 January 2026, Schools' Forum had reviewed the hourly rate proposals alongside results of the consultation with providers. They had recommended retention of the maximum 3% to allow the authority to deliver the early year's service and agreed the proposed hourly rates for 2026/27 for all entitlements. Participation in the consultation process had been higher than usual despite the limited response time.

### **Decision**

- I. That the report be noted.
- II. That the retention of £0.465m (3% of total funding) to deliver the early years service as recommended by Schools Forum be approved.
- III. That the hourly rate for 3 to 4-year old provision as detailed in the report and recommended by Schools Forum be approved.
- IV. That the hourly rate for 2-year-old Working Parent provision as detailed in the report and recommended by Schools Forum be approved.
- V. That the hourly rate for 2-year-old Families Receiving Additional Support provision as detailed in the report and recommended by Schools Forum be approved.
- VI. That the hourly rate for under 2-year-old provision as detailed in the report and recommended by Schools Forum be approved.

## **41. Dedicated Schools Grant – School Budget Shares 2026/27 and Central School Services Block 2026/27** *(Executive Director of Children's Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital)*

## **Type of decision**

Key

## **Purpose of report**

To provide details of the 2026/27 Schools Block funding allocation within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), propose school budget shares for 2026/27 and present the draft budget requirement for the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB).

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

The Head of Finance – Corporate and Schools - presented the report that highlighted the Hartlepool Schools' Block allocation of £90.841m based on October 2025 census numbers. This showed an increase of £1.167m for 2025/26 or 1.3%. It was noted that Central Schools Services Block Funding totalled £0.666m which includes historic items relating to the schools' contributions to licences and pension costs associated with the former Brierton school closure. These had been considered and agreed by the Schools' Forum on 16 September 2025 totalling £0.619m leaving residual funding of £0.047m which the Schools Forum had recommended be transferred to the high needs block to support the financial pressure on supporting pupils with SEND. Schools' Forum had also recommended a block transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2026/27 and had voted in favour of applying the maximum possible Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) along with an appropriate cap which had been calculated at 2.97%.

A table detailing the School Budget Share 2026/27 was included in the report.

A member queried the process around the funding of students who join schools mid-term. The Head of Finance – Corporate and Schools – advised that the current Growth Fund Policy approved by Schools Forum states that if more than 15 pupils join a school between census points additional funding is given. A member also queried whether SEND funding was allocated based on diagnosis or the beginning of the assessment process. The Senior Advisor for Inclusive Learning and SEND advised that while it was based on a confirmed diagnosis schools would still be expected to make adjustments for pupils during the assessment process.

## **Decision**

- I. That the report be noted.
- II. That the agreement of Schools Forum to the budget requirement of £0.619m for the Central School Services Block and to the

transfer of the residual funding from Central School Services Block (£0.047m) to the High Needs Block be noted.

- III. That the agreement by Schools Forum to transfer 0.5% of schools block funding (£0.454m) to the High Needs Block be noted/
- IV. That use of Minimum Funding Guarantee be approved for 2026/27 and that the recommendation of Schools Forum that this be applied at 0.00% alongside a cap of 2.97% be noted.
- V. That the School Budget Share for 2026/27 as summarised in the report be approved.

## **42. OFSTED Inspection of Park Road Children's Home** (Executive Director, Children's Services)

### **Type of decision**

For information

### **Purpose of report**

To present the recent full inspection report of Park Road Children's Home by OFSTED which took place on 5 and 6 November 2025.

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

OFSTED are required to inspect children's homes annually under the Children's Homes Regulations 2015. The inspection of Park Road Children's Home had taken place on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025. The service was judged as good overall and outstanding for the effectiveness of leaders and managers. The full inspection report was appended to the report.

The Chair and Members praised the Leadership Team, staff and young people at Park Road Children's Home for their efforts which had led to this overall 'Good' OFSTED rating. They asked that the Chair send them a letter to this effect on behalf of the Committee. However they felt that having read the inspection report an overall rating of 'Outstanding' would have been deserved in this case.

### **Decision**

- I. That the positive inspection report of Park Road Children's Home be noted.
- II. That letter of thanks be sent from the Chair to the leadership team, staff and residents of the Children's Home on behalf of the Committee.

### **43. Special Educational Needs (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Capital Plan** *(Executive Director, Children's Services)*

#### **Type of decision**

For information

#### **Purpose of report**

To share the Local Authority's Capital Plan priorities for Special Educational Needs (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) for children and young people in Hartlepool 2025-2028.

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

A sufficiency assessment had recently taken place for children and young people with SEND in Hartlepool using information provided by schools and partner agencies. This had identified current and emerging needs and demonstrated a need to increase capacity in Hartlepool in order to avoid expensive out of area placements. The Local Authority had previously received a High Needs Provision Capital Allocation grant from the Department for Education to develop specialist provision, £0.257m of which was unallocated. A further SEND white paper was due for publication and it was anticipated that this would include an allocation for 2026-2029 onwards. Details of Hartlepool's Capital Plan priorities were appended to the report. These included schemes in development and schemes for consideration. These had been prioritised to meet future needs and would be reviewed annually. Should there be insufficient funding it was possible that not all schemes would be able to go ahead.

Members praised the Strategic Children Commissioner for a comprehensive report. The Chair highlighted the Government's strategy around keeping children with SEN in mainstream settings as far as possible, confirming that officers would work with schools on this. She also noted the importance of early intervention before pupils were older and intervention became more expensive. A member noted the reference to some people with complex and challenging behaviour being accommodated at residential schools away from their family or not receiving any education. The Strategic Children Commissioner confirmed that there were limited numbers affected in this way and there was continuous assessment of those that were. The Executive Director for Children's Services confirmed officers would work with their counterparts in neighbouring authorities in order to deliver these services in the best way possible.

#### **Decision**

That the contents of the SEND and AP Capital Report be noted.

#### **44. Any Other Items which the Chair Considers are Urgent**

The Chair ruled that the following items of business should be considered by the Committee as a matter of urgency in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(B) (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that the matter could be dealt with without delay.

The Chair advised Members that the next meeting of the Committee had been rescheduled and would now take place on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March at 4pm. She also indicated that an Inclusion Education Forum would take place on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March at Hartlepool Town Hall Theatre. The focus would be Aspirations For All and among the guest speakers would be the Secretary of State for Education. All members of the Committee would be invited and they were urged to attend.

The Youth Parliament representative gave an update on recent work ahead of the end of his term next month. The Chair thanked him for his work and service to Hartlepool .

The meeting concluded at 5:30pm

**H MARTIN**

**DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

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