

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

AGENDA



Tuesday 19 January, 2016

at 4.00 pm

**in the Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Fleet, Griffin, Hall, Lauderdale, Lawton, Loynes and Simmons.

Co-opted Members: Julie Cordiner and Michael Lee

Six Young People's Representatives

Observer: Councillor Richardson, Chair of Adult Services Committee

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on date 1 December, 2015 (*previously circulated and published*).

4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

None.

5. KEY DECISIONS

None.



6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

- 6.1 Children's Early Help Peer Review – *Director of Child and Adult Services*

7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- 7.1 Adoption Service – 6 Month Interim Report May – October 2015 – *Director of Child and Adult Services*
- 7.2 Fostering Service Interim Report 1 July 2015 – 31 October 2015 – *Director of Child and Adult Services*
- 7.3 Safeguarding Children in Hartlepool – *Director of Child and Adult Services*
- 7.4 Hartlepool Education Commission – Update Report – *Director of Child and Adult Services*
- 7.5 School Balances – *Director of Child and Adult Services*

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – 9 February, 2016 at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.



CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

19 January 2016



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: CHILDREN'S EARLY HELP PEER REVIEW

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For decision – non key

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To present to Children's Services Committee the findings of a Tees wide Early Help Peer Review undertaken in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 In early 2015 the Directors of Children's Services across the four Teesside authorities agreed to jointly participate in a peer review of the arrangement for early help. The Peer Review / Peer Challenge programme is a core element of the LGA's sector led improvement offer to local authorities. The work is coordinated through the LGA but is managed and delivered by the sector, for the sector. The peer review process is designed around the individual needs of the participating local authorities and recruits senior managers from the sector based around the expertise required in any local area.

3.2 The decision to focus on a peer review of early help arose from a regional benchmarking analysis that highlighted key challenges and issues faced by local authorities in the Teesside area in providing services for vulnerable children. The aim of the review was to better understand the drivers for demand and the effectiveness of early help arrangements across the sub region to divert children from requiring specialist social care services.

- 3.3 The review was a two stage process, stage one was undertaken by a small team in May 2015 led by Colin Green, a retired Director of Children's Services. This phase involved in the four local authorities of Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Stockton to seek to understand the challenges faced and the local data around demand and need. Phase two again involved the local authorities but was much wider in scope and engaged with multi agency partner organisations and included audit and observations of practice. On this occasion the review team was much bigger with senior officer from local authorities, health and the police again led by Colin Green.
- 3.4 Feedback from the peer review has been through a high level multi agency presentation to the local authorities and partners on the findings and an individual letter to each individual authority reflecting the findings specific to the local area. This letter is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The LGA peer review of early help was an in depth scrutiny of the early help offer in Hartlepool with an examination of the effectiveness of the work undertaken by both the Council and its partners. The review was undertaken through a series of focussed interviews and an audit of 10 early help cases currently active to workers. The findings of the peer review are detailed in the letter at **Appendix 1**. The letter reflects on the wider findings across the sub region as well as specific commentary of the findings in Hartlepool under each sub-heading.
- 4.2 The letter makes recommendations for both local authorities and its partnerships. There are no individual recommendations for Hartlepool Borough Council and many of the recommendation support the drive to more effective integrated and collaborative working between local authorities and with partners. The Tees Valley Directors of Children's Services will be considering these recommendations in detail at their next meeting and developing a plan for implementation.
- 4.3 The findings and recommendations from the review are in line with the work being undertaken to deliver the Better Childhood Programme and will be used to inform the future service delivery model as this work progresses.

5. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no risk implications arising from this report.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial considerations arising from this report.

7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 There are no legal considerations arising from this report.

8. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The continuous development and improvement of early help and prevention services for children will reduce the impact of poverty on children and their families and the peer review supports this process.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The peer review focussed on developing and improving services for vulnerable children and their families.

10. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 There are no staff considerations arising from this report.

11. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 There are no asset management considerations associated with this report.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the findings of the LGA peer review and endorse the work of officers to learn from this review and deliver continuous improvement in services in line with the recommendations.

13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 Delivering continuous improvements in early help services provided to vulnerable children and their families will ensure children have their needs met early and before these become acute, problematic or harmful for them.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Government Association Children's Early Help Review, November 2015

15. CONTACT OFFICER

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Sally Robinson
Director of Children's Services
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Civic Centre
Hartlepool
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Separate letters for:
Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton Borough Councils

November 2015

Dear Sally

RE: CHILDREN'S EARLY HELP REVIEW

Thank you for commissioning the Children's Early Help Peer Review. The team received a warm welcome and excellent co-operation and support throughout the process. It was evident to us that all those we met were enthusiastic about how your early help services within the local authorities and working with partners can be developed and improved.

Following the scoping work undertaken as Phase 1 earlier this year, we agreed that the review would focus on:

- The role of partners in the development and delivery of early help
- Testing of thresholds and early help practice through auditing ten early help cases from each Council and through observations of practice including of first contact arrangements
- The resources available and their deployment in each borough for early help services.

In addition, in the course of our work we have gathered information on governance and performance management and systems which we will also comment on.

This letter sets out our findings. It has attached as appendices reports on the audit findings and the First Contact observation for your borough. These stand alone and should be read in conjunction with the letter.

We used our experience to reflect on the evidence presented on early help through documentation and meetings with managers and practitioners from local authorities, NHS bodies, Police, Schools, and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in the four local authorities. We are grateful to you, your staff and partners for the open and direct way

they discussed their work. With all we could see their passion and commitment to improve outcomes for children and families in your borough.

1. Governance and Strategy

The Early Help Strategy needs to be led and governed by a strategic partnership connected to existing governance structures. This means a children and young people's strategic partnership chaired by a senior leader from one of the statutory partners and which has a clearly defined relationship to the Health and Wellbeing Board and the LSCB. This body needs to have the membership, mandate and capacity to drive the development of the Early Help strategy and its implementation and performance management. It was evident that where such leadership is not or has not been present the Early Help strategy's development is slow and implementation, coordination and performance management are all less effective.

All the LSCB chairs are clear that they do not see the LSCB in this leadership role. They see the LSCB's role as needing to focus on safeguarding and child protection and in its quality assurance and monitoring impact role in respect of early help.

Discussions with partners that work across more than one local authority boundary reflected their desire to have more commonality of approach between the local authorities. We speculated that servicing four partnerships may mean that partners are less able to provide the senior leadership and input to each partnership.

All the partnerships are local authority led. It was reflected to us by some partners that they may be too local authority centric. The Early Help strategies of the local authorities reflect this in varying degrees. Some are explicitly local authority strategies while others have been developed with partners as joint strategies. However all read as primarily local authority documents. This reflects that the local authority has the leadership role for early help and there is pressure on the local authority to ensure there is an early help offer i.e. national guidance and Ofsted.

Now that in varying degrees the early help offers are in place this may be a good time to look at whether within each partnership there is an appetite for more distributed and systemic leadership of the Early Help strategy. This would require very explicit discussions with partners about their part in providing distributed and systemic leadership.

It was evident from our discussions that there is not a common understanding of what the terms early help and prevention mean. This absence of a common understanding inhibits clarity about roles and the development of a clear view of what the early help offer and the pathway within that offer should be. This is an area where a common approach across the four local authority areas would help partners to promote and embed such a common understanding.

One approach to this would be articulating a common ambition for children and families across the four local authority areas with its own branding. An example of

this approach is the work Leeds City Council has done with partners to develop a vision and strategy for a “Child Friendly Leeds”.

Hartlepool:

Hartlepool developed a local authority Early Help strategy rapidly in response to the very substantial reductions to the Early Intervention Grant (EIG) funding in 2010 and the flexibilities allowed under the remaining EIG funding. While the Children’s Partnership was involved in the development of the strategy, it was explicitly a local authority strategy. The strategy was implemented and this can be seen in the way Hartlepool’s local authority early help services are well coordinated, have a sense of being a team and in the quality of some of the work undertaken. The strategy has continued to evolve and is currently being reviewed as part of a wider programme of work to improve the impact of early help services as part of the local authority’s Transformation Challenge programme. This work includes some in depth work by IMPOWER exploring Hartlepool’s data and patterns of service response. This work includes forensic analysis of why children become looked after and whether current early help services are focused on the issues most likely to lead to family breakdown or the serious abuse or neglect of children.

The intention is that this work will be taken forward on a multi-agency and multidisciplinary basis which will require the engagement and buy-in of partners through the Children’s Partnership. It would be helpful if this work could be shared across the four Tees local authorities.

2. The Role of Partners and Partnership in early help

1. Operational partnerships.

We saw many examples of good operational partnership working. The mechanisms are slightly different in each local authority but all have elements of locality based working and the development of early support arrangements with and to schools. We also saw a variety of innovative schemes being taken forward to try out new approaches e.g. Fairer Start in Stockton, Encompass in Hartlepool, Team Around the School in Middlesbrough and no schools exclusions in Hartlepool.

We saw evidence of early help improving outcomes for children and families with each local authority continuing to build on the success of their Troubled Families work. The enthusiasm of practitioners is an important part of this positive approach to families who must benefit from their work with staff who believe in what they are doing and bring enthusiasm to their work.

Services for disabled children and their families and for those with special educational needs were not a particular focus for the review. Where these service areas were discussed, it was evident that there has been positive progress in implementing the Education, Health and Care changes.

An operational area where more commonality across the four local authority areas would help is having a common document describing thresholds. There is a revised threshold document for Stockton and Hartlepool Boroughs as part of the development of the Multi Agency Children's Hub (MACH). For partners working across all four local authorities the different expression of thresholds is potentially confusing. Our observation would be that the differences between the current documents are more of style than substance.

The differences in interpretation of the application of consent has an operational impact. It appeared to us that, in some First Contact arrangements, the local authority staff were taking on the seeking of consent that should have been dealt with by the professional making the referral. We also saw an example in the Encompass Project where information was being shared usefully but without sufficient regard to issues of consent.

Finally, we saw commitment and enthusiasm to the Hartlepool/Stockton MACH. What was less clear was whether there is sufficient consensus about the longer term vision for the MACH and what its scope will be. There are also unresolved issues about the resources required and whether additional resources are required or not.

Hartlepool:

Good practice examples of partnership working:

- Integration of the early help services
- Good engagement of schools with families
- Range of services with the VCS
- Operation Encompass providing schools with early information on domestic violence

2. NHS Partners

The NHS landscape is undoubtedly difficult for partners to navigate and understand given the pace of change over the last three years and the many changes of personnel in key roles. While local authorities and other partners such as the Police can appear complex to NHS colleagues, they have not experienced the same rate of organisational change. Even when there have been substantial organisational changes i.e. reshaping how early help services are organised in local authorities, there is often continuity of staff which means relationships are maintained.

Given this complex landscape and the need for collective effort to be effective, we would suggest that there is an early help Review led by the Children and Young People's Partnerships aimed at clarifying the roles of the key NHS agencies and identifying what the priorities are between the NHS bodies and partners for progressing the development of early help services.

We saw in the example of how CAMH services have developed over the last couple of years, benefiting from substantial investment from commissioners, what can be done when clear priorities are set and there is an effective governance structure and

project management. There was universal recognition of the improvement in CAMHS services while recognising there is more to do. There was confidence that more would be done. The work on Street Triage between the Police and mental health services was another example of impact being achieved where clear priorities are set for change supported by good delivery. This could be a useful starting point for thinking further about how adult mental health services contribute to the early help offer for children and families.

The well-received changes in the organisation of School Nursing in Stockton were another example of this kind.

The transfer of school nursing, health visiting and family nurse partnership commissioning to local authorities offers opportunities for integration, co-location and engagement. This is an opportunity for the local authorities to show how they can develop their system leadership capability given the strong interest of NHS stakeholders including GPs, schools, nurseries and other early years providers and acute health services in these services.

Hartlepool:

- Evidence of good operational relationships with CAMH provider.
- Enthusiasm for re-commissioning of HV and School Nursing.
- Opportunities to engage GPs in specific services developments they are interested in i.e. HV re-commissioning. They did engage with the reshaping of School Nursing.
- Relationships with CCG and the Commissioning Support Unit (CSU) not clear enough and reflected in comments above about the need for clearer designation of roles and priorities between the LAs and the CCG and CSU.

3. Police

The view of the Police contribution to early help is positive as they meet if not exceed the expectations colleagues have of their contribution. There is a strategic commitment to early help which enables a positive response from Police partners. The Police want, and with further cuts probably need, to try to shape their delivery corporately across the four local authorities. They are significantly affected by the diversity of approaches across the four local authorities. The service has to consider efficiencies and effectiveness of both its delivery and the processes which underpin them. There are clear opportunities for the service to rationalise its partnership delivery but to do so they need partner support in return.

They wish to be heard more as a partner. They wish to be central to the shaping of the future local multi-agency vision and policy, evidencing a real appetite to lead, either alone or with partners, any agreed developments concerning the provision of safeguarding and Early Offer of Help services.

The Police Service does not separate out its operational activity for adults and children but considers vulnerability at any age as its core business. The service needs to have partners recognise and be sensitive to this approach in the development of services. Multi Agency working for the police is about children and adults so the concept of the

MACH, as much as they are supporting it, is causing them to separate functions around intelligence, research and decision making for children and adults. They would prefer this is avoided.

There is a desire from local Police to do more at an operational level. The ability of neighbourhood policing staff to support local discussions and decision making within the early help arena is now being recognised nationally. Their input at one of three early offer locality discussions observed by the review would have been extremely helpful in both adding knowledge concerning a family as well as in identifying the best person to be the lead professional.

We noted that domestic abuse triage is undertaken by the police as a single agency within a police environment with no partners present or readily available for discussions. Further triage/assessment then takes place within social care First Contact. It is widely recognised that joint triage for both the victim, for safety planning by police and Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) services, and for any children involved is hugely effective and supports both the Multi-Agency-Risk-Assessment-Conference (MARAC) process as well as decisions for interventions on behalf of the children at whatever appropriate level.

This joint triage activity we assume will be delivered within the MACH or any Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) style of working. However there could be benefit in starting joint triage earlier and working to the same method across the four local authorities.

Hartlepool

The discussion on the MACH and with the senior Police team showed differences of view on the vision for the MACH. While the Police are signed up for this there are areas of concern they have which they would like more fully recognised. The issues appear to be about the direction of development for the MACH for the future i.e. whether it will develop adult safeguarding functions in the future.

4. Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

It was evident that there are strong and established relationships across partners and that each local authority has a well-established and very active VCS.

Where there was more variability was in how far the VCS felt it was included in the shaping and development of services. This was expressed in how well the VCS felt they were supported by the local authority through their commissioning of services and in building capacity in the VCS. There were good practice examples of how the local authority had enabled local VCS organisations to successfully compete for commissioned services. For the VCS they wanted local authorities to take an inclusive view of how needs could be met and seek the best qualified provider rather than give preference to their own provision.

The VCS want recognition of how they bring substantial additional resources into the area and how local authorities can help facilitate the VCS in this. They also welcome the opportunity to take on leadership roles and it was evident that there are individuals

and organisations with the capability to take on leadership roles in the development of early help services and who can contribute to the development of more distributed leadership.

Hartlepool

There was a good understanding of early help from the VCS seen during the review. There appear to be mature and longstanding relationships between the Local Authority and the VCS. Relationships between the VCS and NHS services seemed less secure with information sharing identified as an issue as well as NHS services attendance at meetings. The VCS reported good relationships with the Police and Schools.

Of particular importance for the VCS are the sound relationships with the Local Authority on issues of funding and commissioning with long lead in times to discussions where contracts or funding is ending. There is also good Local Authority support for the VCS making bids to external funding agencies. The importance of the VCS role in securing external funding is recognised.

5. Local Authority Partnership

We saw a growing recognition that more can be done by working together across partners and potentially across local authorities. All the local authorities are facilitating building confidence in early help practice across the partnerships. All have directed significant resource into the early help offer.

Each local authority has its own areas of innovation and experimentation. We think there must be greater opportunities for sharing learning from this work and in particular considering which approaches are having the most impact. Examples would be Hartlepool's work as part of the Transformation Challenge award and the Fairer Start programme in Stockton.

Of necessity the local authorities have taken on a leadership role and this has at times been and needed to be quite directive. As the shape of early help services becomes clearer, this may be an opportunity for the local authorities to take more of a systemic leadership role and expect more leadership from partners and allow partners the space within which to take on leadership roles.

Hartlepool

Hartlepool has been very explicit in taking the leadership role for early help. The partnerships within the Local Authority are good. There is a strong sense of common purpose. This is helped by this being a small borough with a stable staff team where elaborate structures are not needed to support good coordination and communication. Partners are engaged with the development of the Transformation Challenge Programme and now may be a good time to move to a more explicit system and distributed leadership model for early help services in the Borough.

6. Schools

Schools are making a substantial contribution to the early help offer in all four local authorities. They employ a range of staff who deliver early help services. Quantifying this contribution might well help develop the dialogue with schools about the scope of their role and what the role of the local authority is in supporting and developing the early help offer from schools. Schools early help services work better when there is support from a local authority early help team. We saw evidence that when schools collaborate this delivers improved outcomes. Schools can see that early help can help improve attainment and contribute towards the outcomes they are measured on.

The level of collaboration between schools varies across the four local authorities and where this is weaker this is not helpful to the strength of the early help offer. Such collaboration is also likely to assist schools engagement with strategic forums and we think this kind of engagement is important for promoting distributed leadership for early help and safeguarding.

Hartlepool

Hartlepool schools seemed to have a good understanding of what early help is. Their focus on working with the family and not just the child was particularly impressive. Schools are investing in early help resources. They feel well supported in their early help work. However, completion of CAFs by schools seemed very low and no CAFs by schools were seen as part of the audit work.

There are good examples of collaboration between schools and between schools and the Local Authority, e.g. collaboration between primary and secondary schools in universal support for transitions backed up by targeted support where necessary and accessed through CAF. This collaboration is based on networks rather than formal structures which seems to work well in a small borough where personal relationships are strong.

3. Testing of thresholds and early help practice

We audited ten early help cases in each local authority area and undertook practice observations including of the first contact arrangements. There are separate reports for each local authority on the case audits and the observations of the first contact arrangements. These are contained in appendix 1 and 2 attached to this letter.

4. Performance management and Systems

We also looked at the performance management and related systems that support early help. These seem to us to be integral to ensuring good early help practice.

To encourage the development of shared responsibility and accountability for early help we think an outcomes framework agreed across the four local authorities and their partners would be helpful. The four LSCBs have commissioned work to develop a shared outcomes and performance management framework. If this is successfully delivered then having a shared framework for early help would provide a comprehensive framework to understand and evaluate performance. At present all the partnerships struggle to demonstrate the impact of their early help services. In particular to understand whether the current services and the way they operate are likely to reduce in the short or medium term demand for specialist services including child protection and looked after children services.

The absence of such a framework means it is harder to hold agencies to account or to identify if they understand their responsibilities for performance management of early help services.

There is a need for better data to hold the system to account and understand such key issues as whether the right children and families are receiving early help services and statutory services. Better data would assist improved service commissioning. Key to this is an effective electronic system to record and report on early help work and which can be used by all partners. There are some good systems in the local authorities i.e. eCAF but none provide all that is required.

Such systems combined with mapping of workflow are needed to understand the capacity of the early help system and to be able to distribute early help resources in a way that will maximise their impact.

There also needs to be clarity about where the multi-agency performance management for early help is located. The four LSCBs have identified their role in overseeing the quality of early help work but given they are not leading the Early Help strategies it does not seem appropriate that they have the lead role in performance management. This would be best performed by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership which has the lead for the Early Help strategy.

Hartlepool

The presentation of the Hartlepool activity data is straightforward but would benefit from a commentary. This may be available but was not in the reports provided to the review team. The inclusion of a greater range of early help data would help provide a full picture of activity across the continuum of need. Ideally, this would also include the activity of partners.

5. Resources Employed

We have looked at the information provided on resources employed for early help. It is not presented in a consistent enough format to draw any conclusions other than it appears that the resources available in each Borough for early help are significantly different. A spreadsheet showing some of the information for each Borough was given to the peer team. This is based on Stockton's classification of expenditure with items entered for the other Boroughs where this is available.

The spreadsheet also includes the figures from the NE LAs benchmarking exercise which further evidences the apparent differences in resources available for early help services across the four boroughs. We think this would warrant a deeper exploration. This would require time and resources from the local finance teams to undertake the detailed work to achieve comparability of information and the subsequent detailed analysis required.

Recommendations:

We make the following summary points for your consideration:

1. That you pursue with partners, the development of a common vision for children and families across the four Tees Local Authorities.
2. The growing political appetite for closer working across the four authorities could help the above suggestion a reality.
3. Consider whether such a joint vision could be the start of work to bring greater convergence to the way early help services are organised and delivered across the four boroughs including:
 - Thresholds
 - Service pathways
 - Service design
 - Performance management
 - EH plans
 - Electronic case management systems
4. With NHS bodies you conduct a review of priorities and working arrangements and contribution to Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership across the Tees LAs.
5. Develop of a common approach to data collection and performance management of early help services, building on the work already commissioned to develop a common approach to performance management across the four LSCBs.
6. Review the management of the process in First Contact services so that you are confident it is compliant with Working Together guidance and provides clarity on the status and timescales for work throughout the process.
7. Develop opportunities to share learning from research and analysis and the many early help initiatives and innovations being made across the four boroughs.
8. Develop a Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland MACH or MASH based on a common model with the developing Stockton and Hartlepool MACH.

We hope this letter is a helpful reflection of the findings from this Early Help review. The Children's Improvement Advisor for the North East Region, Ann Baxter, has been sent a copy of this letter and will be in touch with you to discuss the findings. Ann can be contacted by email: baxter.ann@icloud.com or by phone on 07577495153. A copy of the letter will also be sent to the LGA Principal Adviser for the NE Region Mark Edgell.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to receive a review and to everyone involved for their participation.

Peter Rentell

**Programme Manager (Children's Services)
Local Government Association**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

19th January 2016



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: ADOPTION SERVICE – 6 MONTH INTERIM
REPORT MAY – OCTOBER 2015

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information only.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children Services Committee with information relating to the work of the Adoption Service from 1 May to 30 October 2015. The adoption service is a regulated service and as such is required to provide the executive side of the council with regular performance information.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Hartlepool Adoption Service is managed in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the Adoption Regulations form the basis of the regulatory framework for the conduct of adoption and adoption support agencies.

3.2 In order to comply with the National Minimum Standards (2011) the Local Authority is required to produce progress reports on the adoption service which is considered by the executive side of the Council every 6 months.

3.3 This Interim Report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, the constitution of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters.

4. ADOPTION ACTIVITY

4.1 Hartlepool Adoption Service has been active and fully involved in the recent Expression of Interest of the five regional local authorities in seeking funding to look at the feasibility and creation of a regional adoption agency. We have recently been informed that this submission has been successful and are looking forward to the prospect of this merger. The unification of the five smaller authorities namely Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Darlington and Stockton will see the regionalising of services from Advertising, Recruitment, Training and Assessment through to the provision of After Adoption Support services being delivered centrally. The benefits of this will be immense offering greater placement choice for social workers placing children with adopters, a centralised place for prospective adopters, a reduction in the need for children to be placed outside of the area and a reduced need for inter-agency placement fees.

4.2 In May 2015 the Government announced the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). Nationally £1.9 million has been reserved to provide therapeutic support to children and young people who have an adoption order, dependent upon the outcome of an assessment. The Adoption Service has raised awareness of the ASF to all known adopters and is available to provide information to those who may be eligible to receive services.

The Post Adoption Support Worker has received training and support in accessing the fund and has made several successful applications on behalf of families who have adopted.

4.3 Hartlepool Adoption Service has invested their remaining Adoption Reform Grant in a number of initiatives designed to strengthen local performance and practice namely:

- Improving publicity and marketing information and activity with the aim of recruiting an increased number of adopters;
- Continuing the Family Finder Post dedicated to finding adopters for children who are waiting for adoption and ensuring best practice in planning placements and introductions;
- Strengthening the role of the Post Adoption Support Worker taking into consideration the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund in May 2015;
- Continuing the role of the Post Box Coordinator and the delivery of post adoption support services particularly to adults who have been adopted;
- Effective management of the computerised Post Box Contact which is now fully compatible with the Integrated Children's System module making the process more efficient and the arrangements more manageable;
- To continue delivering the two stage assessment process for adopters focusing on maintaining the reduced timescales for training and assessment;

- From July 2015 utilising the Inter-agency fee grant to claim refunds of procured placements which meet the criteria as dictated by the Department of Education Guidance.

4.4 **Staffing**

In the last 6 months the complement of the Adoption team has remained stable with no changes in staffing arrangements. This has provided consistency in terms of recruitment and support to approved adopters.

A slight under spend and careful use of the of the Adoption Reform Grant has allowed us to continue the part time post of Family Finder for a further 12 months allowing us to continue our focus on finding adoptive families for those children who have complex needs, sibling groups and have historically found difficult to place,

The adoption team consists of a Team Manager who has responsibility for the fostering and adoption service, an Assistant Team Manager also covering both services, there are three full time Adoption Social Workers, a part time Family Finding Post and 0.5 Team Clerk support.

4.5 **Marketing & Publicity Activity**

In the last six months there has been a renewed focus on marketing and publicity to attract prospective adopters to Hartlepool. This has included adverts in local press and Primary Times magazine; information distributed to schools and G.P. services and the inclusion of Hartlepool's details on the newly introduced National Gateway for Adoption 'First4Adoption' website and a distribution of marketing materials in selected key areas where historically there has been an interest.

4.6 **Recruitment**

Between 1 May and 30 October the service has received 11 enquiries from prospective adopters, 6 of which have been invited to attend a preparation group.

N.B. In the previous six months the service received 12 enquires with 4 enquires progressing to attend the preparation group. It is felt that the explanation for this is related to the changes in monitoring recruitment. We are now recording all enquires and opposed to previously when only those which progressed to initial visit were included.

4.7 **Preparation Training**

From 1 November 2013 Hartlepool Adoption service commenced using the two stage preparation and assessment process intended to reduce the timescale for the approval of adopters to a maximum of 6 months inclusive of consideration at Panel and Agency Decision. It is pleasing to report that the adoption service has implemented this process confidently and all

assessments undertaken have continued to be completed within this timescale.

Adopters attend four days of modularised training which has been reconfigured to meet the needs of the 2 stage assessment process. An initial one day training event takes place with a further three days taking place at a later stage. This allows adopters to join the training at either stage and maintain the timescale of assessments of less than six months.

Between 1 May and 30 October 2015 there has been 1 one day preparation event which took place in August with a further 3 days of training taking place in September. This has resulted in 6 adopter assessments commencing.

A further one day training event will take place in January 2016 with this training being concluded in April. It is expected that this training will result in a further 3 adopter assessments commencing.

4.8 **Post Approval Support Groups**

All adopters who have been approved or are currently being assessed will be invited to attend regular support groups. From January 2016 we will be holding evening groups every other month. Topics will include; managing children's behaviour, talking to your child about adoption, managing introductions, post adoption support, and facing up to Facebook. Whilst these sessions are not mandatory there is an expectation for adopters who are going through the assessment process and those who are approved to attend and this is encouraged.

4.9 **Panel activity**

Panel has continued on a fortnightly basis and agenda items include both fostering and adoption matters. Since 1 May and 30 October 2015, 12 Panel Meetings have taken place.

Panel membership has remained relatively stable and during the course of the previous year, only one panel member (our elected member) has resigned. We now have a newly elected member who has joined us recently.

Panel members have received training in relation to 'Siblings Together or Apart' looking at the research around assessing sibling relationships

Plans are also in place for panel members to attend the 'Effective Panels' training. A full day training event planned for the New Year, to be delivered by a Consultant trainer.

Matters considered and recommended by Panel in relation to adoption include:

- The approval of adopters;
- The match of approved carers with children whose plan is for adoption;
- Reviews of adopters who have been approved for more than 6 months.

Between 1 May and 30 October 2015, Panel has considered the following business:

- Two adoptive couples and one single second time adopter have been approved;
- The matches of six children (including 1 sibling groups of three children) with adopters.

There are effective processes in place for the recommendations made by panel to be considered by the Agency Decision Maker and the timescale for this is within 10 working days of the Panel meeting taking place. This timescale is adhered to robustly.

4.10 **Family Finding Good Practice**

The Adoption Team continues to appreciate the significant benefits of the Family Finding post. The worker has timetabled monthly Family Finding Meetings for those children waiting for adoptive placements. These meetings build upon the current planning for permanence arrangements and focus on identifying and matching children with potential adopters, reducing any delay or drift and ensuring that children are placed more swiftly in their adoptive placements.

The Family Finding social worker has also been intensely involved in identifying adoptive placements for those children who have been difficult to place. Effective and positive working relationship have been established with the voluntary sector and other local authorities, both regionally and nationally, resulting in the placement of a sibling group of three children and a single child with complex needs in the interim period from May to October 2015.

The Family Finding social worker has been instrumental in working positively with Social Workers to improve the quality of Child Permanence Reports and has been able to assist in the completion of pieces of work to support their preparation again strengthening timeliness of the reports being prepared and considered by Panel.

5. **SUMMARY**

- 5.1 There are new and exciting opportunities ahead for the Adoption Service. Hartlepool has been part of the successful regional bid to secure funding to look at the prospect of the five neighbouring authorities and voluntary agencies working together to become a larger Regional Adoption Agency. This will provide greater placement choice for children's social workers and

more opportunities for adopters to be matched with children from the same cultural background, with opportunities for reduced waiting time for children to be matched with their adopters.

- 5.2 The Family Finding post has ensured that there have been timely and appropriate matches and reduced the level of drift and delay for children being placed with adopters.
- 5.3 The service has achieved its target to have the Post Box system transferred to an electronic system leading to this being managed more effectively and securely.
- 5.4 There is a worker who has an identified role to offer Post Adoption Support to any adopters needing this service and this ensures that any arising needs are responded to promptly with the aim of preventing these from escalating. The Post Adoption Support Worker has attended training delivered by the Adoption Support Fund and has been successful in making several applications to the fund for therapeutic support for children and young people who have been adopted.
- 5.5 The Adoption Team is in a strong position, there is the capacity within the team to meet the timescales for all assessments that are in process and the service has reorganised its adoption preparation training modules to fit in with the new two stage assessment process. Over the last six months there has been a continued decrease in the number of children needing adoptive placements however we are aware that this situation can change quickly and as a service we need to be in a position to respond swiftly to any need for adoptive placements. We are targeting our recruitment on finding adoptive families for sibling groups and children with more complex needs, however we recognise that there is a need to search nationally for the right family for some of these children.
- 5.6 The service remains eager and enthusiastic to recruit new adopters to meet the needs of children needing adoption.

6. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The primary risk is related to the viability and timescale of the setting up of the Regional Adoption Agency which is still within its infancy. Should this not progress in the timescale planned then the Adoption Service would continue without major change or alteration.

7. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The adoption service is in a fortunate position where we have been able to benefit from the Adoption Inter-Agency Fee Grant to seek re-imbursement of the £27,000 fee relating to difficult to place children. There are plans for this to cease in July 2016 and therefore this benefit cannot be relied upon.

- 7.2 We have been able to reallocate some of our approved adopters to be used by other local authorities generating some income for the adoption service. It is envisaged that as children's adoption plans continue to be stable and recruitment increases that in 2016 we will have more adopters to be available to other authorities.

8. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

No implications.

9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 It is envisaged that the increase in child and family poverty may have an impact on the number of children coming into the looked after system.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 The Adoption team is open and receptive to accepting applications from adopters from a range of different backgrounds, ethnicity and sexuality. Our marketing and recruitment information reflects this.

11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 In the last 6 months the complement of the Adoption team has remained stable with no changes in staffing arrangements. This has provided consistency in terms of recruitment and support to approved adopters.
- 11.2 A slight under spend and careful use of the of the Adoption Reform Grant has allowed us to continue the part time post of Family Finder for a further 12 months allowing us to continue our focus on finding adoptive families for those children who have complex needs, sibling groups and have historically found difficult to place,
- 11.3 The adoption team consists of a Team Manager who has responsibility for the fostering and adoption service, an Assistant Team Manager also covering both services, there are three full time Adoption Social Workers, a part time Family Finding Post and 0.5 Team Clerk support.

12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

No implications.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

Children's Services Committee is asked to note the Adoption Agency Interim Report and action plan update for May to October 2015.

14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Adoption Agency is a Regulatory Service of the Council and as such Children's Services Committee require information about how services are delivered and their effectiveness.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Adoption Regulations and National Minimum Standard 2011.

16. CONTACT OFFICER

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CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

19 January 2016



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: FOSTERING SERVICE INTERIM REPORT
1 JULY 2015 – 31 OCTOBER 2015

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children Service's Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the second quarter of 2015/16. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and as such there is a requirement to provide the executive side of the Council with performance information on a quarterly basis.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The work of the Fostering Service is subject to National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of Foster Care for children looked after. The National Minimum Standards, together with regulations for fostering and the placement of children looked after, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Fostering Agencies.

3.2 The report provides 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.

3.3 The Fostering Services Minimum Standard 25.7 requires Fostering Services to ensure the executive side of the Local Authority:

- Receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency once every 3 months;
- Monitors the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children;
- Satisfies themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.

4. FOSTERING ACTIVITY

Staffing

- 4.1 The Fostering Team consists of a Team Manager who has management responsibility for the Fostering and Adoption Service, an Assistant Team Manager and six social work posts. We have had a period of stability in relation to staffing, with the only significant changes being that we have successfully appointed an experienced social worker on a 12 month temporary contract who commenced employment at the beginning of July 2015, this post is to cover the post held by the current family finder. A permanent Social Worker commenced maternity leave in July 2015.
- 4.2 The Fostering Team continues to benefit greatly from the support of a team clerk. The role of this worker is to continue to offer admin support to the Fostering Team and she is responsible for the planning, preparation and smooth running of Fostering and Adoption Panel.
- 4.3 In addition the Fostering Team continues to benefit from the ongoing role of Family Finder who continues to be instrumental in family finding for those children and young people in need of permanency via long term fostering, this post has been extended for a further 12 months.

5. RECRUITMENT & RETENTION AS OF 31 October 2015

- 5.1 There are currently 108 foster carers (including 13 of those approved as Connected Persons). These carers provided placements for 144 children. This represents a decrease of one fostering household since the previous quarter and an increase of 28 children placed from the previous quarter.
- 5.2 In addition to this the service continues to assess and support Connected Persons Carers, currently there are 13 Connected Foster Carers, an increase of 3 from the previous quarter.

- 5.3 Of the 108 approved fostering households, there are two foster carers who are currently unavailable or on hold due to the individual circumstances of the carer.
- 5.4 The fostering team has joined with the four neighbouring local authorities within the Tees Valley to form Tees Valley Fostering, a recruitment and marketing initiative which shares resources and strategies to enable increased recruitment activities to take place across the sub region. To date the group has launched an advertising campaign through the mediums of local radio, local buses and attended outdoor shows throughout the summer months to raise the awareness of fostering. Going forward the group is focusing on producing a television advert which has been delayed and will now be aired in January 2016. To date, this activity has been successful in generating an increase in fostering enquiries to the team. We are also hopeful that this will be positive in recruiting more foster carers for sibling groups and teenagers.
- 5.5 The table below provides details of the recruitment activity which has taken place in the second quarter of 2015.

Initial Enquiries – including survey of where did people hear about the service	Initial Enquiries 12 Source Internet 2 Own volition 3 Hartbeat Facebook 3 Friend recommendation 4
Information packs sent out between 1/10/14 and 31/12/14	11
Initial Visits How many proceeded	4 2
Preparation Group	A preparation group has not been held during this second quarter
How many prospective Carers are waiting for a group?	There are currently 2 prospective carers waiting to attend preparation training and in stage 1 of assessment

6. TRAINING & POST APPROVAL SUPPORT

Training

- 6.1 As part of their development and progression, all new carers are encouraged to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council Standards for

Foster Carers Portfolio within a 12 months post approval timescale. All approved Connected Person's Carers have an increased timescale of two years to complete the portfolio. Support in completing the portfolio is available from both supervising Social Workers and existing approved carers wishing to reach progression level Band 4 where there is a requirement to provide mentoring and support. We continue to have a high proportion of our carers who achieve their CDWC qualification within the required timescale.

- 6.2 All foster carers are required to complete a record of the training they have attended for the year of their approval. The four mandatory courses are child protection, first aid, attachment and E-Safety. There is a requirement that these courses are completed within one year of approval and updated every three years.
- 6.3 Foster carers are provided with bespoke training specific to their needs whilst caring for looked after children. The bespoke training is reviewed annually and reflected on during the foster carers annual reviews. In this quarter foster carers have been required to attend Managing Allegations Training.

Support

- 6.4 Foster carer support groups have continued to take place monthly. Groups are usually attended by 20+ foster carers and offer an element of training, usually provided by a guest speaker delivering information which is of interest to carers and an informal Support Group Session towards the end of the evening. This quarter topics have included participation and solution focused practice.
- 6.5 The Support Groups are arranged and facilitated by at least two members of the Fostering Team who are available to discuss any issues raised by individual carers or the group as a whole.
- 6.6 The fostering team also facilitate a bi- monthly coffee morning for foster carers, which is an informal support meeting.
- 6.7 The Fostering team worked alongside the four neighbouring authorities to organise and facilitate a retention activity in the form of a fun day in celebration of fostering. The event was of a competitive nature between the five authorities with foster families and Looked After children competing in fun activities. The event was very well received and attended.

7. PANEL ACTIVITY

- 7.1 The Family Placement Panel continues to be held on a twice monthly basis and agenda items include both fostering and adoption matters. Between 1 July and 31 October 2015, eight panel meetings have taken place. The panel has a full cohort of members now available. Any new appointments continue

to receive induction training and ongoing training throughout the year. Yearly appraisals of panel members are also undertaken.

7.2 From 1 July to 31 October 2015 the Panel has made recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker on the following fostering matters:

- Two Foster Carer approvals;
- The matches of two children with long term Foster Carers;
- Thirteen foster care reviews.
- Three foster carer resignations.

7.3 There are effective processes in place for the recommendations made by Panel to be considered by the Agency Decision Maker and the timescale for this is within 10 working days of the Panel meeting taking place.

8. FAMILY FINDING GOOD PRACTICE

8.1 The Family Finding Post created as part of the Adoption Reform Grant will be extended for a further year. The Family Finder has been instrumental in developing links with independent agencies and ensuring processes work efficiently between the local authority and the independent agencies.

8.2 The Family Finder worker has ensured that plans for permanence are identified as early as possible and that a Permanency Planning meeting is closely followed by a process meeting to minimise delay for children and ensure that social workers are supported in producing quality timely matching reports.

9. PROGRESS AGAINST PRIORITIES 2015

9.1 Attached at **Appendix 1** to this report is a table detailing the priorities for the year 2015/16 and the progress achieved during the first quarter of 2015.

10 SUMMARY

10.1 The number of children becoming looked after in the second quarter has increased, however this is also in line with an increase in connected carer foster carers. We are continuing to recruit, assess and approve new carers consistent with an aim to be able to offer placement choice to placing social workers. We currently have a number of surplus of carers for babies and younger children and have been able to offer neighbouring local authorities short term use of these carers reducing the reliance of Independent Fostering Agencies. We continue to need placements for sibling groups of 3 or more and older teenagers which will be the focus of ongoing targeted recruitment campaigns.

- 10.2 The service continues to recruit and assess prospective Foster Carers to provide placement choice. The fostering service will continue to work in collaboration with the Tees Valley local authorities in respect of fostering recruitment. In addition to this the team will continue to respond to requests for Connected Person's assessments.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The number of Looked After Children has increased over the last few months and it is important that we continue strive to place children locally where appropriate. There is a risk that if we cannot recruit local high quality foster carers we will not have the best placements for children and young people in Hartlepool.

12. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

No implications.

13. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

No implications.

14. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

No implications.

15. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

We continue to strive to recruit foster carers from all backgrounds to ensure we can meet the needs of all children and young people needing to be placed with foster carers.

16. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

No implications.

17. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

No implications.

18. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 18.1 The Children's Service Committee is asked to note the report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service in the second quarter of 2015/16.

19. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 19.1 The Fostering Service is required to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to children looked after by the local authority and provide regular reports to the Children Services Committee to enable the Committee to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.
- 19.2 Children's Services Committee has an important role in scrutinising the activities of the fostering services to ensure that performance in this area is robust.

20. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Fostering National Minimum Standards Services 2011;
- Fostering Regulations 2011;
- Fostering Annual Report 2014/2015

21. CONTACT OFFICER

- 21.1 Christine Croft, Team Manager, 8 Church Street, Hartlepool, TS24 7DJ
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Fostering Services Action Plan

Priority	Progress Achieved Quarter 2	Lead Officer	Target Date
Target recruitment to attract foster carers for older children and sibling groups and those with more challenging behaviours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment strategy in place Bus Shelter and Billboard campaign completed and rebooked for January 2016 Fostering advert on Argos till receipts throughout Nov/Dec 2015 Facebook advertising focussing on teenagers TV advert planned to air in January 2016 Leaflets redesigned to feature teenagers 	Jacqui Dixon	Ongoing
To continue to offer and deliver an extensive training programme to our carers to ensure that all of our fostering households have achieved the CWDC qualification within the allocated timescales and can demonstrate continued professional development as foster carers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All foster carers who have been approved for more than a year have completed the standards, those recently approved are working towards. A support group is in place where experienced carers support new carers to complete the standards 	Christine Croft	April 2016
To continue with family finding post enabling children and young people to have 'permanency' in their lives as early as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family finding post has been secured for a further 12 months. Procedures are in place and proving effective to ensure early matching and permanence. 	Emma Howarth Christine Croft	April 2016

7.2 Appendix 1

To hold life appreciation events for all children where permanency is the option.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life appreciation events have taken place. Family finder post supporting this. 	Emma Howarth Christine Croft	April 2016
To continue to demonstrate our appreciation of the commitment provided by our foster carers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual celebration event planned, takes place in February each year. Fostering families fun sports day planned for August 2015. Fostering Christmas party arranged for 18 December 2015 	Jacqui Dixon Christine Croft	April 2016
To continue to strive to support our carers to engender stability within placements for our looked after children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly evening support groups held Supervising social workers provide regular supervision and support visits. Supporting mentoring of new carers by experienced carers Placement support team continue to work with carers and young people to support and maintain placements 	Supervising social workers Christine Croft Margaret Hennessey	April 2016
To consult foster carers in relation to the performance of the Local Authority in relation to support, training and retention of foster carers and to use this information to develop future priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual consultation survey sent to carers Feedback forms reviewed during annual foster care reviews. 	Christine Croft Jacqui Dixon	April 2016
Continue to facilitate sons and daughters group for children of foster carers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular meetings and activities have taken place Specific training planned for children and young people 	Placement Support team	April 2016

7.2 Appendix 1

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sons and daughters of Foster Carers to be invited to attend preparatory training. 	Christine Croft	
To further improve the quality of the care provided to children and young people to ensure better outcomes are achieved for children and young people in all aspects of their lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All carers have attended education for looked after children training All carers have a personal development plan highlighting training requirements. 	Christine Croft	April 2016
To review the approval ages and status of the more experienced carers with a view to encouraging them to provide placements for older children with more complex needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with carers has taken place at a support group meeting Training planned 	Christine Croft Jacqui Dixon	April 2016
To continue to work within the the BAAF 2 stage assessment process providing timely assessments, recruitment and training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The BAAF 2 stage process is proving effective. 	Christine Croft	April 2016
To continue to work collaboratively with the neighbouring authorities to share resources and expertise in foster carer recruitment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tees Valley Fostering holds regular meetings attended by Hartlepool Joint recruitment activities planned for 2015/16 	Jacqui Dixon	April 2016

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

19 January 2016



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN HARTLEPOOL

1. TYPE OF DECISION / APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 There is an expectation that members are regularly informed of safeguarding activity within their area. The purpose of this report is to provide Children Services Committee with information relating to safeguarding in Hartlepool to ensure they are fully informed.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined within "Working Together 2015" as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment;
- Preventing impairment of children's health or development;
- Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

3.2 The legislative framework for safeguarding sits within the Children Act 1989 (as amended within Children Act 2004) and Section 47 of this Act details the duties required of local authorities to make decisions to protect children. This includes providing the local authority with the remit for compulsory intervention into family life if a child is felt to be at risk.

- 3.3 Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on local agencies to ensure they consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children when carrying out their functions.
- 3.4 Working Together 2015 sets out the requirements for inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- 3.5 This report covers safeguarding activity from 1st April 2015 to 30th September 2015.

4. EARLY HELP

- 4.1 Early Help activity is the support offered to families as early as possible to prevent families needing to access social care services. There are currently two Early Help teams within the council that offer family support to any family identified as needing a multi agency response before an intervention from statutory services. The table below shows the number of common assessments from 2013 to 2015. The information shows that there are a steady number of common assessments carried out each year.

**Number of Common Assessments completed and submitted
to First Contact and Support Hub**

Apr 2013 – Mar 2014	437
April 2014 – Mar 2015	466
Apr 2015 – Sept 2015 (half year)	347

- 4.2 The Better Childhood Programme is reviewing all early intervention activity to understand how to improve the identification of families that need support earlier. Initial discussions with universal services indicate that common assessment is a barrier to early identification which is being further explored with partners. The current reporting system does not show whether the early work undertaken with families is effective in preventing families needing specialist services. Work is currently underway to review reporting processes within the current children's systems.
- 4.3 Interestingly if the numbers of common assessments are replicated in the second half of the year as have been submitted in the first half of the year the numbers will have significantly increased from 2013 and 2014. This does not reflect the partnership information gained via the surveys for the Better Childhood Programme that common assessment is a barrier to undertaking early assessment therefore this will need to be closely monitored over the next few months to understand the trends. Further in depth analysis is being undertaken to understand which agencies are completing the assessments to understand the drivers and barriers.
- 4.4 It is expected that if a child/ family's needs are identified early and support is offered at this early stage this should support an improvement in outcomes. This should therefore reduce the need for further specialist services e.g. social care.

The number of children subject to a protection plan and those that need to be looked after are not reducing in line with the number of children having a common assessment. We are therefore reviewing through the Better Childhood Programme whether children and families' needs are being identified early enough.

5. CONTACTS AND REFERRALS

- 5.1 In Hartlepool the First Contact and Support Hub (FCSH) provides the “front door” to children’s services. These include general enquires, request for support and safeguarding referrals.
- 5.2 Referrals for children’s social care are expected to be completed on a SAFER referral form. This allows the referrer to set out their concerns which can then be further explored to understand the type of intervention needed to support the family or what intervention is needed to protect the child/ren. The pathways to support can be advice and guidance, early help services or children’s social care depending on needs. This decision is taken by the team manager within FCSH. The following table sets out the numbers of referrals to children’s social care.

Number of Referrals by category of need

	2013 (as at 31 March)	2014 (as at 31 March)	2015 (as at 31 March)	Current (Apr - Oct 15)
N1 - Abuse or neglect	956	622	620	307
N2 - Child’s Disability	34	59	62	30
N3 - Parental illness or disability	25	28	48	19
N4 - Family in acute stress	128	114	99	46
N5 - Family dysfunction	119	380	329	148
N6 - Socially Unacceptable Behaviour	9	27	15	1
N7 - Low Income	1	0	5	0
N8 - Absent Parenting	6	6	15	3
N9 - Cases other than Children in Need	4	10	9	3
N0 - Not Stated	2	1	3	0
TOTAL	1284	1247	1205	557

- 5.3 There have been 557 referrals within the last six months which if this continues at the same rate is likely to be similar to previous years. The main reason for referral is recorded as neglect however work we have recently carried out for the Better Childhood Programme shows that this is in the majority of cases related to Domestic Abuse and/ or Substance Misuse. This being further explored within the Better Childhood Programme.
- 5.4 Work is currently underway to develop a Multi Agency Children’s Hub which will include police, health and education representatives. Safeguarding referrals will

be reviewed by all agencies within the Hub to ensure that all information is shared to ensure robust decision making takes place. A performance management framework is being developed for the MACH which will be shared with Committee once the Hub is implemented.

6. CHILD PROTECTION

- 6.1 Local authorities, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, also have a duty to make enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

As of 31 October 2015 there were 138 children subject to a protection plan within Hartlepool. This needs to be monitored as it is currently looking to be higher than our position in 2014 and may be indicating an increasing trend.

6.2 Child Protection (number)

	2013 (as at 31 March)	2014 (as at 31 March)	2015 (as at 31 March)	Current (Oct 15)
Hartlepool	136	128	142	138

6.3 Child Protection – Age Bands (number)

	2013 (as at 31 March)	2014 (as at 31 March)	2015 (as at 31 March)	Current (Oct 2015)
Unborn	1	3	0	2
0-4	57	58	59	49
5-9	48	41	48	44
10-15	28	17	28	36
16+	2	7	4	7

There are a total of 51 children aged 4 and under subject to a protection plan which represents the largest age group within the child protection cohort.

The following table sets out the length of time children are subject to a child protection plan.

6.4 Length of time on Child Protection Plan (number)

	2013	2014	2015	Oct 2015
3 months or less	44	34	26	36
More than 3 months but less than or equal to 6 months	35	27	32	33
More than 6 months but less than 1 year	44	24	54	26
1 year but less than 2 years	7	44	19	33
2 years and over	6	0	11	0

- 6.5 The number of children who have been subject to a Child Protection Plan for more than one year has increased from March 2015 but has still not reached the high number of 2014. There are currently a number of large sibling groups within this cohort which therefore will be contributing to an increase.

6.6 Child Protection Plan for second or subsequent time (number)

2013	2014	2015	April '15 – Oct '15
29	4	29	24

The number of children on a protection plan for a second or subsequent plan continues to be at similar levels

A previous audit of second and subsequent plans highlighted that there were a number of factors contributing to this with no one specific reason. However ongoing exploration will take place to identify any trends or reasons that need to be addressed.

7. CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES BEING SUPPORTED BY CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The number of children with disabilities who are being supported by children's social care is as set out below.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Autism/Asperger Syndrome	32	42	48
Learning	44	49	48
Mobility	6	7	10
Multiple	30	32	25
Other	15	18	14
Total	127	148	145

8. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- 8.1 The number of looked after children for the last three years is set out below along with the age groups of these children:

2013	2014	2015	Current (Oct 2015)
192	207	163	192

The number of looked after children in 2015 was 163 which was the lowest number within the last three years. This figure has increased to 192, as at October 2015, which is back to the numbers of 2013 although it has not yet reached the highest point in 2014. Work is being carried out within the Better Childhood Programme to understand what can be done to reduce this number. A number of pilot interventions, such as overnight stays with families, are being

carried out to see if this can support an improvement in outcomes for children thus reducing the need to become looked after.

Ages of Looked After Children

	2013	2014	2015	2015 (Current Oct 2015)
0-4 years old	46	46	28	33
5-9 years old	37	40	27	38
10 -15years	73	80	77	78
16+	36	41	31	43

- 8.2 We strive to place all children with Hartlepool approved foster carers, however this is not always possible either due to a lack of a suitable in house placement or children's specific needs that can only be met within residential provision. The placements types are set out below:

	2013	2014	2015	Current Oct 2015
In house placements	149	149	116	142
Independent Fostering Agencies	18	25	21	17
Residential	11	13	11	16

The number of children placed within residential provision has increased. Early analysis of this increase shows that the needs of the children are becoming more complex and a number of these placements are being supported by health funding based on these complex needs.

9. WORKFORCE

- 9.1 It is important that families are supported by a highly skilled workforce and workforce development is a key priority for the department. Families tell us that they want consistent support which means that a stable, highly motivated workforce is of paramount importance. The following table shows the total numbers of social workers across the last three years and shows that we do not currently employ any agency workers and sickness levels are at their lowest (as at 30 September):

	2013	2014	2015
Total number of social workers (FTE)	98.2	98.8	105.64
Numbers of vacancies	0	3	0
Number of days of work missed due to sickness absence in previous 12 months	1729	945	512
Total number of agency workers (FTE)	3.7	3	0

10. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT – BETTER CHILDHOOD PROGRAMME

- 10.1 The local authority with partners received funding via the Government's transformation challenge award to develop the Better Childhood Programme. The Better Childhood Programme aims to reduce the number of children needing to receive specialist services. The two main areas within the programme is the development of a Multi Agency Children's Hub (MACH) and the development of community based multi agency working. It is expected that both these areas will support the workforce to identify children earlier that need help and also to more effectively sustain change within families at this earlier point. Work is currently ongoing with partners to look at different ways of working and this will be presented to members once redesign proposals are developed.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 It is important that effective safeguarding practice is in place to reduce any risks to children and this report highlights areas that need further exploration.

12. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 There are no financial implications to consider within this report.

13. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 13.1 Safeguarding practice is underpinned by a legislative framework (Children Act 1989 (as amended within Children Act 2004)

14. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 14.1 There are a number of children being supported by social work teams that are experiencing poverty. Workers work with the families to mitigate the effects of poverty and also to improve their outcomes through benefit maximisation and employment opportunities.

15. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 15.1 All children are supported where needs have been identified.

16. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 16.1 No implications

17. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

17.1 No implications

18. RECOMMENDATIONS

18.1 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the report which sets out children's safeguarding activity April 2015 – September 2015.

19. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

19.1 It is expected that members are regularly informed of children's activity in order to understand needs across the population and use this information to inform any relevant decision making.

20. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Children Act 1989;
- Children Act 2004;
- Working Together 2015.

21. CONTACT OFFICER

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CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

19th January 2016



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: HARTLEPOOL EDUCATION COMMISSION –
UPDATE REPORT

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 This report is for information.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To provide a summary of the actions taken and any impact since the previous report to Committee.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The background and recommendations of the Hartlepool Education Commission have been reported in the Commission's final report, published in September 2015.

3.2 The Commission's report was publically launched on 6th October 2015, where a mandate was received to action the recommendations outlined in Section 5 of the report document.

3.3 This is the first update report tabled for consideration by Hartlepool's Children's Services Committee, some two months after the launch of the Commission report.

4. ACTIONS AND IMPACT

4.1 A governance structure has been drafted – see **Appendix A**. The Education Improvement Board will oversee the strategic direction and impact of the work done as a result of implementing the Commission's recommendations. The Leadership Group will provide operational leadership to the workstreams, coordinated through a Project Officer. The workstream leads

will be experienced Officers with a track record of getting things done. [The Leadership Group will have its first meeting on 4th January 2016.]

- 4.2 Resource has been allocated to administrative and data analysis support. A science expert has been recruited to lead on the aspects of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) contained within the report's recommendations, and a secondary English expert has been recruited. Additionally, an audit of mainstream secondary mathematics provision in all of Hartlepool's secondary schools has been carried out by an independent expert. The outcomes of this audit will be reported to headteachers in January.
- 4.3 There is clear overlap with education and skills improvement work being carried out across the wider Tees Valley, under the Transforming Tees umbrella. Great care has been taken not to duplicate similar work being done across both of these projects, but rather to ensure that resources are maximised and that learning can be shared to the benefit of all children and young people across the Tees Valley.

5. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no risk implications.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 To fund the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, an amount of £250k has been allocated to 2015-16 and to 2016-17. An interim budget overview for the year to December 2015 is presented below:

Staffing costs	£100k
Workstream costs	£32k
Miscellaneous	£ 3k

- 6.2 A more detailed financial report will be tabled at the Leadership Group meeting on 4th January.

7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 There are no legal considerations.

8. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are no child and family poverty considerations.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations.

10. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

10.1 There are no staff considerations.

11. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

There are no asset management considerations.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 Committee to note the contents of this report, and to acknowledge further summary reports are scheduled on a quarterly basis.

12.2 Committee to receive updates from workstream leads on a planned basis, to be determined.

13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS.

13.1 There are no decisions required from this report.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

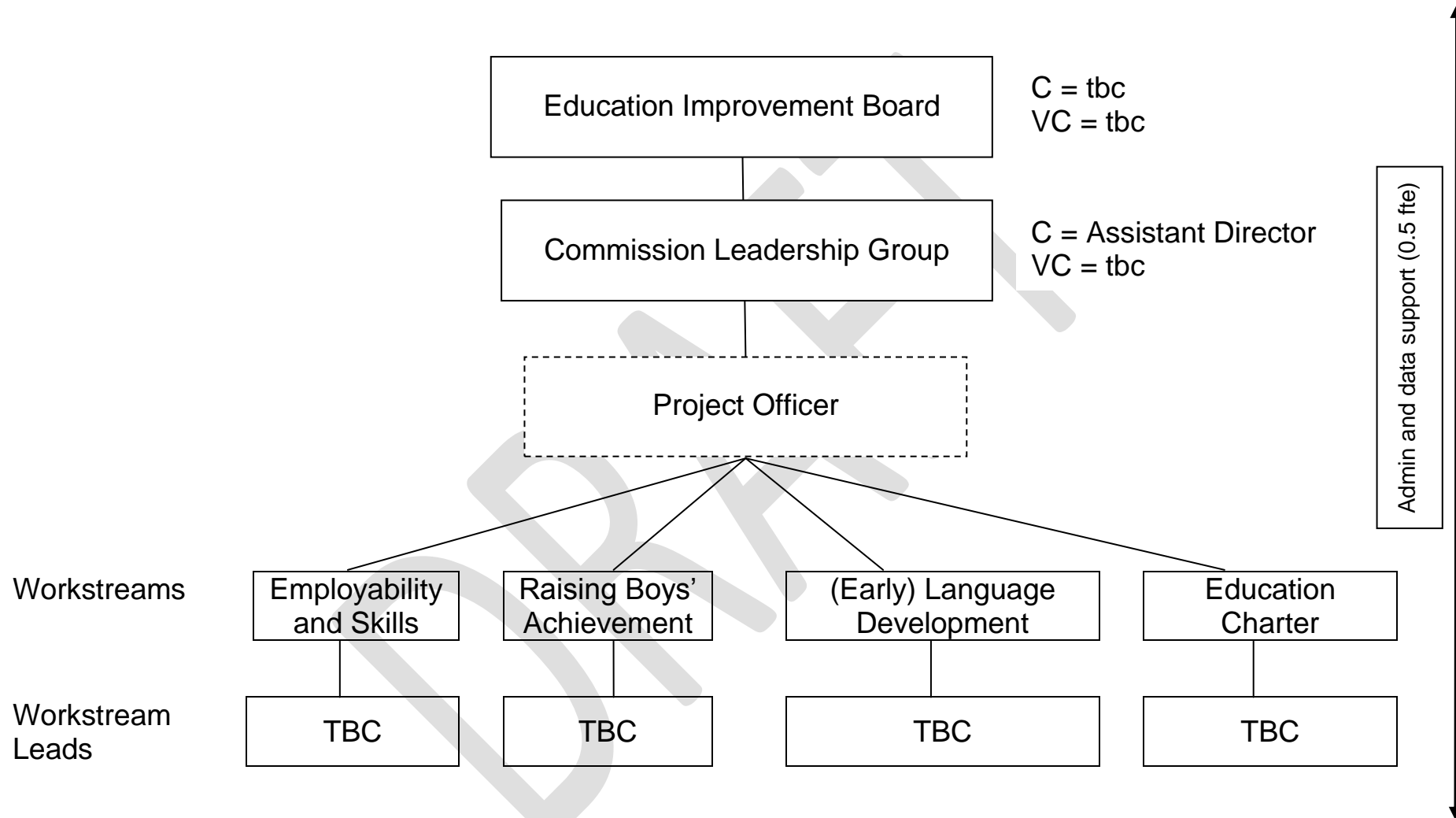
Hartlepool Education Commission report (previously published).

15. CONTACT OFFICER

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HBC Commission Governance



CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

19 January 2016



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: SCHOOL BALANCES

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 This report is for information.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the surplus balances held by schools.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Every year schools are asked to complete two balances surveys: the first as at year ending 31st March, and an update in the following December. This report refers to the survey carried out at year end (31st March 2015).
- 3.2 The results from the surveys are then reported and discussed at Schools Forum. The last report was presented to Schools Forum on 19th June 2015.
- 3.3 The report contained a detailed breakdown of the total school balances held by each school at 31st March 2015 and details of the planned use of these balances. Schools Forum agreed that a robust challenge would be made to ensure that schools are spending their balances effectively. They also agreed to set up a Task & Finish Group to look at monitoring mechanisms for school balances.

4. SURVEY RESULTS AS AT 31ST MARCH 2015

4.1 All schools were invited to participate in the survey. All maintained schools responded to the survey. One academy declined to complete the survey and eight academies did not respond.

- 4.2 Where a school applies for exceptional or additional funding from the local authority, school balances will be taken in to consideration. If this information has not been provided then the school will be required to provide details of their balances and a copy of their statutory accounts if applicable. This information will then be used to update the balances survey, and to decide if the application for exceptional or additional funding should be granted.

5. PROJECTED OUTTURNS

- 5.1 The predicted schools balances as at 31st March 2015 was £3.277m (Academy conversions have been removed for comparative purposes). The forecast balances were revised as part of the 2015 spring term monitoring visits to £3.763m, as shown in **Appendix 1** (column a) compared to actual school balances (column b) of £3.976m, an increase of £0.212m (5.6%). Of the increase, £0.074m relates to a late allocation from the DfE for Pupil Premium. Column d shows the actual school balances as a percentage of the 2015/16 Individual School Budget (ISB)
- 5.2 Current practice (in line with previously accepted DfE guidance) is that retained school revenue balances should not normally exceed 8% of the annual budget share for primary or special schools, and 5% for secondary schools. Deductions in respect of 'committed' balances are made when assessing whether a particular school balance is deemed excessive. The DfE have stated that local authorities should be mindful of the strategic financial planning that schools undertake when holding retained balances. It is also acknowledged at a local level that schools hold balances due to the uncertainty the current funding reform is creating. Authorities are encouraged to consider their balances review mechanism in the context of:
- a. schools who have built up significant excessive uncommitted balances;
 - b. situations where some level of redistribution would support improved provision across a local area.
- 5.3 Using the Department for Education (DfE) guidance on excessive balances (regardless of commitments) above 8% (primary) and 5% (secondary) then:
- 17 of the 24 primary schools exceed 8% of their annual budget share;
 - 1 of the 2 secondary schools exceed 5% of their annual budget share;
 - the primary special school exceeds 8% of their annual budget share.

6. PLANNED USE OF BALANCES

- 6.1 Schools are asked to provide details of the commitments against their school balances. There are a number of permitted categories against which schools may commit unspent funds from one year to the next. For 2015/16 financial year and 2016/17, these are listed below:

- Employees
- Premises
- ICT
- Supplies & Services
- Transport

- 6.2 Schools have planned to use £2.473m of the balances to support the 2015/16 budget, shown in column e. This reduces the school balances to £1.503m. After commitments five primary schools would still exceed the 8% threshold.
- 6.3 In addition, a further £0.521m (column f) has been identified to support the 2016/17 budgets, which leaves uncommitted balances of £0.982m.
- 6.4 Following forward planning visits with schools, it has become apparent that some schools will need to use part of their uncommitted balance to fund pressures arising in 2016/17. The pressures relate to the full year effect of the increased pension costs for teaching staff and the increase in the national insurance rate.
- 6.5 A further £0.299m was carried forward in respect of "Other funds"; these include PE Grant Funding, Out of School Clubs and Community Facility balances.

7. SCHOOLS FORUM ACTION

- 7.1 Schools Forum has asked local authority officers to draft a protocol for consideration. The purpose of this protocol is to be clear about how schools and academies with consistently high excessive balances will be challenged, and how unspent funds may be 'clawed back' to support local improvement priorities as described at 5.2.b. above.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no risk implications.

9. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 There are no financial considerations.

10. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 There are no legal considerations.

11. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 There are no child and poverty considerations.

12. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations.

13. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 13.1 There are no staff considerations.

14. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 14.1 There are no asset management considerations.

15. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 Committee note to note the contents of this report.
- 15.2 Committee to consider the protocol requested by Schools Forum at a future Committee meeting.

16. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 16.1 Funding allocated by the government for the education of children and young people should be spent on such. Excessive unspent education funds held in reserve will not improve the provision or outcomes for the children and young people in Hartlepool.

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 There are no background papers to this report.

18. CONTACT OFFICER

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Analysis of School Balances as at 31 March 2015

APPENDIX 1

	Outturn 2014/15			Actual Balance 31.3.15 as % of 2015/16 ISB	Planned Use of Balances		
	School's latest projected outturn at 31st March 2015	School's actual outturn at 31st March 2015	Variance over/(under)		Planned use of balances to support 2015/16 budget	Planned use of balances to support 2016/17 budget	Total Uncommitted balances 31/03/17
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)
1	131,327	197,301	65,974	16.3%	113,448	0	83,853
2	65,974	77,288	11,314	9.0%	42,000	35,288	0
3	233,382	206,668	(26,714)	5.4%	206,668	0	0
4	155,746	144,913	(10,833)	29.7%	99,913	45,000	0
5	48,609	48,539	(70)	7.0%	24,869	0	23,670
6	201,747	224,346	22,599	12.4%	180,000	0	44,346
7	106,861	61,618	(45,243)	6.9%	38,849	22,769	0
8	130,000	123,908	(6,092)	9.3%	23,575	50,000	50,333
9	54,993	103,570	48,577	2.1%	0	103,570	0
10	120,752	131,678	10,926	11.2%	58,000	0	73,678
11	83,659	77,913	(5,746)	5.3%	40,466	25,000	12,447
12	125,955	148,334	22,379	12.1%	34,197	4,686	109,451
13	233,242	251,765	18,523	18.5%	117,000	90,000	44,765
14	152,828	160,049	7,221	19.3%	84,598	50,639	24,812
15	116,344	113,457	(2,887)	9.3%	91,796	0	21,661
16	159,010	196,382	37,372	15.8%	22,500	79,500	94,382
17	77,817	76,801	(1,016)	9.6%	34,977	0	41,824
18	99,186	98,793	(393)	16.7%	86,805	0	11,988
19	452,024	445,068	(6,956)	27.4%	415,084	0	29,984
20	26,820	15,775	(11,045)	1.6%	15,775	0	0
21	48,058	47,055	(1,003)	5.8%	47,055	0	0
22	35,911	27,060	(8,851)	3.9%	0	0	27,060
23	144,704	128,546	(16,158)	8.9%	53,625	5,000	69,921
24	239,023	248,198	9,175	19.3%	150,000	0	98,198
25	52,180	61,278	9,098	4.3%	40,584	0	20,694
26	422,719	427,390	4,671	29.3%	381,005	9,750	36,635
27	44,532	132,196	87,664	9.9%	70,078	0	62,118
Total All Sectors	3,763,403	3,975,889	212,486	10.7%	2,472,867	521,202	981,820

NB School academy balances are reported to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and these schools are held to account by this organisation.