

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

13 JUNE 2016

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

Present:

Councillor: Brenda Harrison (In the Chair)

Councillors: John Lauderdale, Shane Moore, George Morris and Jean Robinson.

Councillor Stephen Thomas, Chair of Adult Services Committee (Observer)

Co-opted members:

Jo Heaton, C of E Diocesan Representative

Mark Tilling, Secondary Schools Head Representative

David Turner, Primary Schools Head Representative

Alan Chapman, Special Schools Head Representative

Healthwatch representative: Ruby Marshall.

Officers: Sally Robinson, Director of Child and Adult Services
Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Children's Services
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Alan Clark.

Healthwatch representatives Evelyn Leck.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Shane Moore declared a personal interest in Minute No. 4 'Short Breaks Services Statement' as a service user.

Councillor Brenda Harrison, Jo Heaton, Mark Tilling, David Turner and Alan Chapman declared personal interests as school governors.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2017

Confirmed.

4. Short Breaks Service Statement (*Director of Child and Adult Services*)

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to present the reviewed Short Breaks Services Statement and seek approval for the 2017/18 reviewed statement to be published in accordance with the regulations.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Children's Services reported that Paragraph 6 of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to provide a short break service designed to assist individuals who provide care for disabled children. This duty and the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2010 came into force on 11th April 2011. The regulations require each local authority to produce a short breaks services statement so that families know what services are available, the eligibility criteria for those services, and how the range of short breaks is designed to meet local needs of families with disabled children. The revised statement was submitted as an appendix to the report.

The Assistant Director highlighted that the statement formed the foundation of short breaks services for disabled children and their families and the commissioning of services for 2017/18. It would continue to be reviewed on a bi-annual basis ensuring that any provision is reflective of local need. Parents, Disabled Children and Young People would continue to be involved in the process and the Parent Led Forum (1 Hart 1 Mind 1 Future) would continue to be the driving force behind the shaping of short break services.

A Member commended the service stating that his family had had need of the service in recent years and it had been excellent. The Member also commended the volunteers involved in the Parent Led Forum (1 Hart 1 Mind 1 Future) without whom he and many other people would not know of the services available. The Special Schools Head Representative commended the service but was concerned at the ability of the service to reach the 'hard to reach' families that were probably in most need of the services available. There were numbers of children with SEND issues in mainstream schools whose families were probably not getting the full range of services available to them.

The Assistant Director commented that word of mouth was often the most often used means of disseminating information on these services to the target families as parents shared information between each other. There was still a need to get information out to the hard the reach groups and it was acknowledged that regular dissemination of information to schools was

essential as the staff tasked with SEND responsibilities changed frequently.

A Member raised concern that anecdotally he had heard comments that the resources at Carlton Outdoor Centre were not being used as much because of the recent increases in costs. It would be a shame if these groups were unable to access the service simply on price. The Assistant Director indicated that she would look into the issue as she had been aware the centre had been well used in the past.

Decision

That the Short Breaks Services Statement 2017/18 be approved and published in accordance with the regulations.

5. Safeguarding Activity Report (*Director of Child and Adult Services*)

Type of decision

For information only.

Purpose of report

There is an expectation that members receive regular reports on the arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the local area. The purpose of the report was to provide Children's Services Committee with information relating to safeguarding performance in Hartlepool during the year 2016/17 to enable Members to scrutinise and challenge practice.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Children's Services reported on the detailed statistical information and updates on the Council's performance and activity in relation to safeguarding. The report detailed information relating to –

- Early Help
- Children's Hub Referrals
- Children and Family Assessments (Social Care)
- Children In Need
- Children In Need of Protection
- Looked After Children
- Care Proceedings
- Workforce
- Audit Activity

The Assistant Director stated that report indicated an increase in demand for social care services, though the number of early help episodes had decreased from the year before yet demand for social care support was increasing significantly. This was currently being reviewed within the Children's Strategic

Partnership sub groups to understand the reasons for this shift. The focus of A Better Childhood was to increase the access to and engagement in early help support and yet this was not being seen in the information reported above. Work was planned with schools over the next term and into the new school year from September 2017 to develop locality partnerships to understand the issues and needs in communities and to collectively address these issues on a collaborative locality model.

There had been a significant increase in the needs of families which had led to an increase in demand for social care services and children becoming looked after. The reasons for this continued to be in relation to substance misuse/ domestic violence/ parental mental health and a breakdown in relationships within families. These areas were being reviewed by Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board and would need continued scrutiny.

The Assistant Director highlighted that in order to address the issues and challenges set out in the report the following actions were being implemented:

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- Development of “A Better Childhood Locality Partnerships” to ensure that all partners, particularly schools and local community organisations were involved in the development and design of services and to ensure a collective approach to working with our families;
- A review of the effectiveness of Early Help to understand its impact on the demand for social care services;
- Implement Healthy Relationships approach across all services to support improved family relationships;
- Introduction of Signs of Safety Framework across Local Authority Children's Services to ensure that families understand concerns and were enabled and empowered to positively change;
- Review of how substance misuse services/ domestic violence services and mental health services were supporting families to positively change;
- Carry out reviews of children with disabilities support and stability of placements to identify if there were any specific areas of practice that need further development;
- To implement practice week across all Children's Services on a tri-annual basis and to further embed children's and young people's voice within the process.

The School Head Teacher representatives indicated that the complexity surrounding some children and the resultant work to help address the issues that impacted on schooling was proving significant for schools, particularly secondary schools in the town. Schools did, however, appreciate the significant support they received from the department. There was some concern that a number of issues were arising from families and children that had moved into the Borough only recently. The Assistant Director commented that the housing costs in Hartlepool were some of the lowest in the country, and this was proving to be attractive to some families but no analysis had been undertaken to assess whether this was a significant factor behind the increased demand in services. It was also questioned as to whether budget

pressures and cuts had had some impact but the Assistant Director stated that there had been no specific cut in social care. There had, however been service reductions in many of the support areas that in the past would have provided greater early help.

The Committee also discussed the situation in relation to staffing and the difficulties in recruitment. The Director of Child and Adult Services stated that this was a national problem, though Hartlepool was working closely with sub regional and regional neighbours on addressing some of the issues but it had to be acknowledged that as a small local authority, Hartlepool couldn't always compete with some of the inducements others offered.

The meeting also discussed the difficulties of young adults transitioning into adulthood and the changes in support and services available to them. Societal changes were meaning that it was much more difficult for young people to establish their own homes resulting in many spending significantly longer living at home than in the past.

Workload issues for staff were also discussed and the Assistant Director outlined the structure of the social care teams and the caseload levels staff – both established and newly qualified – were dealing with. The Director stressed that the Council was not, however, carrying a high vacancy rate. There is a relatively high turn-over of staff within the Safeguarding and Support teams however this would be expected due to the nature of the job. This is managed appropriately through ongoing recruitment and, if needed, agency staff although the number of agency staff is low. As had been reported, authorities were working together to address some of the staffing issues and also on arrangements with independent social worker agencies.

The Chair commented that it was increasingly essential that partner agencies worked together to address these issues. There was a general discussion about social worker caseloads and the Assistant Director stated that she would like them to be lower to enable further improvements in the interventions with families, however, it was noted that with a significant increase in demand this was difficult. The significant commitment of staff was noted. The Chair commented that the Committee would continue to offer its full support to staff and schools in addressing this highly important area of work.

Decision

That the report be noted.

6. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

The Special Schools Head Representative informed the Committee that Catcote Academy was opening a retail unit in the Middleton Grange Shopping Centre in the very near future which would sell some products made within the school and also ethically sourced and fair trade products. The opening of the shop unit would build upon the experience pupils had in operating the cafe in

Christ Church for over two years. The Chair welcomed the news as an exciting development for Catcote Academy and encouraged all to visit the shop when it was opened

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 4 July at 4.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

The meeting concluded at 5.00 pm.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 21st June 2017