

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

19 November 2024

The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Rachel Creevy (In the Chair)

Councillors: Martin Dunbar, Brenda Harrison, Phil Holbrook, Michael Jorgeson and Sue Little

Co-opted members:

Zoe Westley, Special Schools Head Representative

Also present: Oliver Huermann, Member of Youth Parliament

Officers: Sally Robinson, Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Rebecca Stephenson, Assistant Director, Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning
Sandra Shears, Head of Finance (Corporate and Schools)
Emma Rutherford, Executive Head Teacher – Vulnerable Pupils
Jackie Webb, Inclusion Co-ordinator
Micky Froud, Sendiass Manager
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Prior to commencement of business the Chair reported the resignation of the current Vice Chair, Councillor Sharp and nominations were sought for a replacement. It was agreed that Councillor Dunbar be appointed Vice-Chair for the remainder of the municipal year.

24. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Gary Allen,, Martin Pout, Parent Governor Representative and Jo Wilson, RC Diocesan Representative

25. Declarations of Interest

None at this point in the meeting. However, Councillor Creevy declared a personal interest later in the meeting (Minute 32 refers)

26. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2024

Received.

27. Dedicated Schools Grant (Former Education Services Grant Rate Per Pupil – Disapplication Request *(Executive Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Key decision

Purpose of report

To report the outcome of Schools' Forum held on the 15 October 2024 and their decision in relation to the 2025/26 Education Services General Duties Rates. The Committee was asked to agree that the Local Authority should present a disapplication request to the Secretary of State in order to ensure that the Local Authority can discharge its statutory responsibilities

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee was advised that new national funding arrangements introduced in 2017/18 shifted responsibility for funding statutory duties from a specific grant to the Dedicated Schools Grant. The government provided no additional funding to schools to cover this cost shift. Members were reminded that since 2017/18 the Council has had to apply for disapplication, in order to secure this funding. For the financial year 2025/26, the local authority proposed a rate of £60 per pupil. The rate was unchanged from 2017/18, which meant the rate would have remained unchanged for nine years.

It was reported that the Schools' Forum had considered this proposal and did not agree to transfer the funding to this Local Authority. Schools were clear that it was not because of concerns about the quality of services provided by the Local Authority, but they considered that funding statutory duties from school budgets was a budget cut and this funding should be provided by the Government. Regulations state that if agreement cannot be reached with maintained schools the matter would need referring to the Secretary of State for a decision. This had been the

consistent view of Schools' Forum for the past eight financial years. In each of these financial years, the Local Authority had successfully applied to the Secretary of State for disapplication of the Regulations. This meant that the local authority was able to remove the required element of funding to ensure that statutory responsibilities were discharged.

A Member suggested that given the change in Government, that alternative methods be explored to avoid the need for submission of a disapplication request each year.

Decision

- (i) Agreed the 2025/26 funding rate at £60 per pupil/place.
- (ii) Agreed to submit the disapplication request to the Secretary of State to set the Education Services General Duties rate at £60 per pupil/place for 2025/26.
- (iii) Noted this would be the ninth consecutive year the local authority had applied for disapplication and that the previous seven applications had been successful.

28. Sendiass Annual Report (*Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To present to members the Annual Report of the Hartlepool Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) for September 2023 - August 2024.

Issue(s) for consideration

Members were provided with the background to the SENDIASS Service. The Committee was referred to the SENDIASS Annual report, attached at Appendix 1, which provided a key overview of the information, advice and support being offered to children, young people (aged 0-25 years) and their parent/carers about matters related to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). Between September 2023 and August

2024, SENDIASS had provided information, advice and support for 182 cases, details of which were set out in the report.

It was noted that over the next 12 months SENDIASS would continue to provide and develop the service to meet local demand, the background to which was provided.

In the discussion that followed Members welcomed the report and commented on the benefits of the service. Members emphasised the importance of promoting the service utilising the Communications and Marketing team and it was suggested that information be displayed in various settings including GP surgeries and hospital waiting rooms. Clarification was provided in response to issues raised which included information in relation to engagement with schools. The Chair requested that future reports should include details of engagement activity with schools.

Decision

That the contents of the report and comments of Members be noted and that the report be published online.

That future reports include engagement activity with schools.

29. School Attendance and Absence *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To provide an update on pupil attendance and absence in Hartlepool and and to inform Members on legislation changes which took effect in September 2024. The report also highlighted what actions are being taken to support improvements in school attendance.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided background information in relation to the importance of school attendance and outlined pupil attendance and absence data for the previous 3 academic years. The data for the academic year 2023/24 was for the autumn and spring terms combined.

Members were referred to tables included in the report which clarified attendance rates across the local authority for all secondary schools and academies compared with national data figures and included attendance and absence rates across primary schools and academies in Hartlepool as well as the level of persistent absence across the local authority for both primary, secondary and academies as a comparator with national figures.

The figures showed that Hartlepool primary schools and academies were performing above the national average for attendance and below the national average for persistent absence. Members were referred to the main reasons for absence across the age population in Hartlepool as well as the ongoing work of the attendance team and the new guidance issued by the Department of Education to improve school attendance as outlined in the report.

In the discussion that followed, officers and school representatives responded to issues raised arising from the report. Clarification was provided in relation to the challenges and barriers around attendance and the ongoing work to improve attendance.

Decision

That the contents of the report and comments of Members be noted.

30. Children Missing Education – Annual Report *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To provide an up to date report in relation to the number of children identified and tracked as a child missing education.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided background information in relation to the statutory guidance in place for tracking and identifying children who are missing from or not receiving a suitable education.

The Committee was advised that in the last academic year 2023-24 there were 193 referrals with 190 traced. In relation to numbers missing from education, these continued to be investigated and procedures followed, details of which were provided.

Decision

The Committee noted the report and the work of the School Attendance Team to deliver the local authority statutory functions in relation to Children Missing Education.

31. Elective Home Education (*Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To provide updated information in relation to Elective Home Education (EHE)

Issue(s) for consideration

Members were advised that there continued to be rising numbers of children being removed from school to receive Elective Home Education. There had been an increase from 55 receiving EHE in October 2019 to 259 in October 2024. EHE information by year group was also provided. At present 59 children receiving EHE had identified special educational needs and 10 children receiving EHE with social care involvement. The report provided details of the reasons for removal, the schools children ceased to attend due to EHE as well as dates EHE commenced. There were currently 26 children who were not accessing suitable provision and there were currently 34 children where parents had no other communication with the team other than in writing, details of which were provided.

Following presentation of the report, officers responded to issues raised arising from the report. The Chair requested that future reports should include a breakdown of any physical or mental health related problems.

Decision

- (i) That the contents of the report and comments of Members be noted.
- (ii) That future reports include any physical or mental health related problems.

32. Permanent Exclusions *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To provide information relating to permanent exclusions from Hartlepool schools.

Issue(s) for consideration

It was reported that the number of permanent exclusions from a school setting continued to increase year on year. In the most recent Government data the number of permanent exclusions in England rose by 44%, from 6500 in 2021-22 to 9500 in 2022-23.

The national picture was more starkly replicated within the North East which had both the highest increase in secondary school suspensions (267% over 16 years) and the highest rate of permanent exclusions across England (4.4 per 1000 pupils).

Children and Young People with additional barriers to learning and wellbeing were disproportionately more likely to be excluded.

The number of permanent exclusions had risen year on year from 2020. In the last academic year (2023-24) there were 69 pupils who received a permanent exclusion. Of these 69, 66 were from Hartlepool schools with four rescinded when the exclusion was appealed by parents. The further three were children resident in Hartlepool who were permanently excluded from schools outside of Hartlepool.

The main reason for permanent exclusion from Hartlepool school in 2023-24 was 'persistent disruption.

At the time of writing the report (23.10.2024) there had been six permanent exclusions in the academic year 2024-25. However, there had been a further eight permanent exclusions as at the date of this meeting taking the total to fourteen. This figure in the comparable timeframe in the last academic year was seventeen.

The continued increase in permanent exclusions had led to significant pressure on service delivery at The Horizon School. Alternative provision was having to be utilised on a regular basis to ensure that all children who had been permanently excluded had a full time, appropriate education provision.

In the lengthy discussion that followed, officers responded to a number of queries raised arising from the report. Members raised concerns in relation to the increasing numbers of exclusions, the potential reasons for the increase and the impact on life chances and education outcomes as a result. The number of exclusions of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds was also a concern and the need for more support in this regard was emphasised. Disappointment was raised in relation to the challenges around the number of teachers leaving the profession and the role of school governors in terms of managing exclusions were also highlighted.

At this point in the meeting Councillor Creevy declared a personal interest as a School Governor in Hartlepool.

Following further discussion in relation to the need to examine this issue in further detail, it was agreed that a Working Group of this Committee be established to include appropriate school representatives and that Councillor Dunbar should act as Chair.

Decision

That the contents of the report and comments of Members be noted.

That a Working Group of this Committee be established to include all Members of this Committee, appropriate school representatives and Councillor Dunbar be the appointed Chair.

33. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 10 December 2024 at 4.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

The meeting concluded at 6.30 pm.

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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