

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

4 DECEMBER 2018

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

Present:

Councillor: Brenda Harrison (In the Chair)

Councillors: Ann Marshall, Marjorie James, John Lauderdale, and Shane Moore.

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

Co-opted members:

Jo Heaton, C of E Diocesan Representative

Healthwatch representative: Ruby Marshall.

Officers: Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Mark Patton, Assistant Director, Education
Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning
Jane Young, Assistant Director, Children's and Families
David Ward, Head of Finance, Child and Adult Services
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

53. Apologies for Absence

Healthwatch representative Evelyn Leck.
Mark Tilling, Secondary Schools Head Representative.
David Turner, Primary Schools Head Representative.

54. Declarations of Interest

Jo Heaton declared an appropriate personal interest as a head teacher.

55. Minutes of the meeting held on

Received.

56 Term and Holiday Dates 2020-21 *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

To seek agreement of the Committee to the pattern of school term and holiday dates for the school year 2020-21 for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.

To seek agreement of the Committee in recommending these dates to governing bodies of Aided and Foundation schools, and Academies in Hartlepool.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Education reported that Local authorities for a number of years have tried with some success to agree a unified calendar of term dates across the northern region from Yorkshire to Northumberland, based on guiding principles agreed by the regional group in 2012-13.

In the summer term 2018 representatives from the Tees Valley region and other north east representatives consulted on a pattern for 2020-21 based on the guiding principles. They then agreed to consult on this proposal within their own authorities. The proposed pattern enables schools to begin the academic year on Monday 1 September 2020 and end the year on Tuesday 20 July 2021.

Following discussions, arrangements were made to consult all head teachers in Hartlepool and also the relevant associations / unions through the Director's termly meetings on the school year pattern for 2020-2021. On the completion of local consultation in the region, the general consensus from the local authorities within the Tees Valley and other regional authorities is to adopt the model submitted as an appendix to the report.

Decision

1. That the scheduled term dates and holiday dates for 2020-21 for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools as shown in Appendix A to the report be approved.
2. That the scheduled of term and holiday dates for 2020-21 be recommended to governing bodies of all Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools, as well as academies, in Hartlepool.

57. Review of Hartlepool Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To update members about the required statutory review of the Hartlepool Agreed Syllabus for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools in Hartlepool for the academic years 2018 to 2023.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Education reported that at the meeting on 17 October 2017, the Committee received a report on the review process which involves working closely with a Senior Adviser for Religious Education from a neighbouring local authority that has been responsible for the production of the last two Agreed Syllabuses for that local authority, and the adoption of these syllabuses by Hartlepool.

As part of the preparatory work for the review of the Hartlepool Agreed Syllabus, RE Coordinators from Hartlepool primary, Voluntary Aided, RC and CE schools and academies have been attending meetings of SACRE and have had the opportunity to attend training, access additional resources, as well as taking part in joint activities such as Interfaith Week. These meetings have been included in consultation exercises on the revised syllabus.

The Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) has met on three occasions and has been considering the contents of the Syllabus, including aims and purpose, elements of RE, concepts, subject content from early years to sixth form. Consultation with the ASC is ongoing as the revision process continues with regular meetings agreed well in advance.

It hoped that the revised Syllabus will be ready for adoption by Hartlepool Borough Council and launched to schools in the autumn 2019. The Syllabus is being revised alongside the syllabus for a neighbouring authority and timelines will become clearer in due course.

The Chair commented that as a member of SACRE she had been involved with meetings with the external advisor who was a very inspirational character. The Chair also referred to some of the excellent events held as part of Interfaith Week including one at the Central Hub involving school children.

Decision

The Committee noted the ongoing review of the Agreed Syllabus for RE, and the proposed adoption of a neighbouring local authorities Agreed Syllabus, adapted to meet the needs of Hartlepool schools.

58. Strategic Financial Management Report - as at 30th September 2018 *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services and Director of Finance and Policy)*

Type of decision

For Information.

Purpose of report

The report informed Members of the 2018/19 forecast General Fund Outturn, the 2018/19 Capital Programme Monitoring and provided details for the specific budget areas that the Committee was responsible for.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Head of Finance, Child and Adult Services referred to the reports submitted to the Finance and Policy Committee highlighting the potential overspend for the financial year, the reasons behind that and the measures being implemented to manage and reduce the overspend.

The detailed appendices to the report showed a forecast overspend of £1.2m. The main reasons behind this were an increase in the number and costs of Looked after Children. This overspend reflected an additional £2.5m of funding provided in 2018/19, as previously identified in the MTFS (Medium Term Financial Strategy). These pressures were affecting the majority of councils with responsibility for these services. The report also set out details of the Capital Budget expenditure to 30 September and the Head of Finance indicated that there were no specific issues to draw to Members' attention.

The Chair commented that she did not wish to see the expenditure on Looked After Children being 'blamed' for the overspend. The spend on these children and young people was an essential part of the excellent services provided by the Council. The Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services stated that the budget pressures for Looked After Children were a direct consequence of the increased demand on these key services. Officers were working with partner organisations on addressing the root causes of the increasing referrals in improving, for example, the work with people with substance misuse issues.

Decision

That the report be noted.

59. Children's Safeguarding Partnership Arrangements *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non key decision.

Purpose of report

To seek members approval to the establishment of a Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership.

To seek members approval to Hartlepool Borough Council hosting the new safeguarding partnership (Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership).

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning reported that the Children Act 2004 required areas to establish local Safeguarding Children's Boards with all partners. Hartlepool Safeguarding Children's Board was established and had been in existence since this date.

A national review of Local Safeguarding Boards was published in March 2016 (Wood Review). This set out recommendations for a different approach to partnership safeguarding arrangements. The Government in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 abolished Local Safeguarding Boards as established in the Children Act 2004. In their place it placed duties on three 'safeguarding partners' - the local authority, any Clinical Commissioning Groups operating in the area and the Chief Officer of Police - to make safeguarding arrangements that respond to the needs of children in their area.

The Act allows two or more areas to combine their safeguarding arrangements if they wish. Hartlepool Borough Council and Stockton Borough Council already had effective partnership working through the Children's Hub, the Tees Valley Adoption Agency and the Emergency Duty Team. Due to this established working it was agreed to explore a new safeguarding arrangement across North Tees.

A project group and partnership group were established at the beginning of 2018 with Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, Hartlepool and Stockton-On-Tees Clinical Commissioning Group and Cleveland Police. Work had been undertaken through these groups to develop a new model which was set out in a Business Case attached as an appendix to the report. The business case sets out the model, however, there is further work needed to develop the detail of the model. This work will take place within the project group and partnership group.

It is proposed that the new model will be tested in January 2019 alongside the current arrangements. An ongoing review would take place to ensure that any learning is captured in the new arrangements. It was intended for the new model to go live formally in April 2019 with the new partnership arrangements being published in April 2019 (as required within the Children and Social Work Act 2017).

The Assistant Director indicated that in terms of the proposed budget for 2019/2020; under the new arrangements this would be the same as the current budget for 2018/2019.

Members questioned if it would be possible to provide the new service within the existing budget and was there a possibility that savings could be identified. The Assistant Director indicated that at present this was unknown. It was intended that initially the new joint service would work with a stand still budget. This may be sufficient, savings may be identified, or additional resources may need to be identified. The Assistant Director stated that the financial position would be clarified after the first six months of operation.

The involvement of schools in developing the new service was welcomed by the Diocesan Representative as being forward thinking and proactive.

Decision

1. The new safeguarding partnership arrangements for Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees as reported were approved.
2. That approval be given to Hartlepool Borough Council hosting the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership which was intended to commence operation in April 2019.

60. Fostering Service Interim Report - 1st April 2018 – 30th September 2018 *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

The report provided the Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the first and second quarter of 2018. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and as such there was a requirement to provide the executive side of the Council with performance information.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Children's and Families reported that the work of the Fostering Service was 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.

The Assistant Director informed the Committee that there were currently 126 foster carers (including 28 of those approved as Connected Persons). These carers provided placements for 215 children and young people and 52 children/young people in Connected Care foster placements. There were 11 young people in Staying Put placements, which is for post 18 care leavers.

Of the 126 approved fostering households, there was currently 1 foster carer who is currently on hold due to the individual circumstances of the carer, equating to 2 placements. There were a small number of placements that cannot be used due to the specific matching needs of the children/young people already in that foster placement.

Details of the recent recruitment activity was reported which showed that from 16 initial enquiries, 4 applications were currently in the assessment process. An update on the work of the Family Placement Panel was also provided as well as details of the updated staffing situation following the adoption team moving to Tess Valley Adoption.

The Assistant Director also highlighted that the local authority had developed a new Foster Care Recruitment Strategy aimed at significantly increasing the foster care numbers, there had been a steady increase of looked after children and it was essential that the service was able to provide foster placements for those children, particularly for sibling groups and placements for adolescents. In partnership with the Communications and Marketing team a review of the fostering brand was currently being undertaken with the children in care council undertaking market research with members of the public to develop a new fostering brand. There would be a refresh of the Fostering Website and a new poster campaign to be advertised on local bus shelters and on the councils buses and waste disposal trucks. Over the next 12 months the focus would be on refreshing the Tees Valley website and more locally we would continue the quarterly publications in both Hartbeat and the Primary Times. This advertisement campaign had been launched in November 2018.

The fostering team had continued the recruitment in collaboration with the four neighbouring local authorities within the Tees Valley, Tees Valley Fostering, the initiative shares resources and strategies to enable increased recruitment activities to take place across the sub region.

The Assistant Director also reminded Members that in July 2018 Ofsted rated Hartlepool Borough Council as GOOD overall and judged the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers as Outstanding.

A Member questioned how long it took, on average, to become a foster carer and was the drop in numbers between those that initially enquired to those that made it on to a training course, as reported, usual. The Assistant Director stated that the department's approach to advertising and recruitment was a 'drip-drip' approach. Advertising was refreshed regularly with adverts in Hartbeat etc on regular basis. It often took a while for people to come forward to make that initial enquiry and then could also take quite some time, even a couple of years, before they came forward to be assessed. It had to be right for them and a balance had to be struck between giving people time but not too long. Social workers often delivered information packs to people to have an initial chat with them about the process. This was a life changing decision so people could often take some time to come to the decision to proceed.

Members questioned if there were any specific drivers behind the increasing numbers of looked after children. The Assistant Director indicated that the predominant reasons were parental mental health issues, parental substance misuse and parental neglect. Work was ongoing with officers across all departments and with partner agencies to develop ways of addressing these issues but they were whole system problems and more often than not beyond one agency to resolve.

A Member asked if the roll-out of Universal Credit was having an impact on the numbers of looked after children. The Assistant Director commented that income wasn't usually an issue on its own, there were always a number of factors and issues. The Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services added that officers could not show a causal link between Universal Credit and the increase in the numbers of looked after children but it could be considered a contributing factor.

The Chair welcomed the report and wished to record her thanks to the excellent work undertaken by officers in the fostering service. The Chair referred to a recent meeting of the Children in Care Council held in Newcastle that she had attended where it was clear from the experiences of children from other areas that Hartlepool was getting it right and many of the things children in care wanted to see happen were being done here.

Decision

That the report be noted.

61. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

There were no items the Chair considered urgent.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 22 January 2019 at 4.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

The Chair extended Christmas best wishes to all committee members.

The meeting concluded at 4.35 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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