

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

25 February 2020

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

Present:

Councillor: John Lauderdale (In the Chair)

Councillors: Brenda Harrison, Shane Moore and Barbara Ward

Officers: Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Jane Young, Assistant Director, Children's and Families
Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education
Sandra Shears, Head of Finance (Corporate and Schools)
Ann Turner, School Governor Support Manager
Karen Douglas-Weir, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

86. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Sue Little, Jo Heaton, Church of England Representative, Joanne Wilson, Roman Catholic Representative, Mark Tilling, Secondary Head Representative, David Turner, Primary Head Representative and Zoe Westley, Special Schools Head Representative.

87. Declarations of Interest

None.

88. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2020

Received.

89. Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block 2020/21 (Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Tests (i) and (ii) apply – Forward Plan Ref CJCS 092/19. The report had been intended for submission to the Committee on 28 January 2020, however, owing to the report being deferred at the January meeting, there was a departure from the forward Plan, pending the outcome of the Schools' Forum meeting on 5 February 2020.

Purpose of report

To inform Members of the funding allocation for the High Needs Block in 2020/21 and to seek approval for the 2020/21 budget. The High Needs block forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Issue(s) for consideration

The background to the High Needs Block funding allocations was provided in the report. To address the predicted funding shortfall, a disapplication request had been submitted to the Secretary of State for approval to transfer £0.550m from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. The Secretary of State rejected the disapplication request and proposed an amendment to limit the transfer to 0.5% which equated to £0.329m, a reduction of £0.221m. The planned high needs budget for 2020/21 of £11.381m, a breakdown of which was set out in the report, compared to the expected funding of £11.185m resulted in a potential budget pressure of £0.196m and there were no DSG reserves to meet this deficit.

In response to concerns raised regarding the Secretary of State's decision to refuse the disapplication request and clarification sought around the reasons for this decision, the Committee was advised that the Government had indicated that Hartlepool had benefited from an increase towards the top-end of increases nationally at 16%. Concerns were raised that the significant level of special needs in Hartlepool had not been taken into account and the Committee requested that such issues be reiterated in a letter to the Secretary of State.

Decision

- (i) The contents of the report was noted.
- (ii) The budget requirement of £11.381m for 2020/21, as shown in paragraph 6.1 of the report was approved.
- (iii) That a letter be sent to the Secretary of State expressing the Committee's concerns that the significant level of special needs in Hartlepool had not been considered in the recent decision to reject the disapplication request.

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

Type of decision

Non-key decision

Purpose of report

To determine the Hartlepool Agreed Syllabus for Community and Voluntary Controlled Primary and Secondary Schools in Hartlepool for the school years 2020/25 following consultation with Hartlepool Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), schools and religious groups.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee was advised on the background to the statutory requirement for all community and voluntary controlled schools to provide religious education. Information in relation to the contents of the religious education syllabus was provided together with details of the main changes to the agreed syllabus as set out in the report.

A Member commented that as a member of SACRE she had been involved in meetings with the external Religious Education Consultant, Isobel Short, and took the opportunity to place on record her thanks and appreciation for the invaluable support and guidance she had provided to her personally as a member as well as to teaching staff.

At this point in the meeting Councillor Leisa Smith joined the meeting expressing apologies for her late arrival.

Councillor Lauderdale vacated the Chair and Councillor Smith took the Chair

Thanks were also conveyed to the School Governor Support Manager and all contributors for their hard work and support in terms of the successful delivery of the syllabus.

Decision

The Committee approved and adopted the Hartlepool Agreed Syllabus 2020/25 for use by all community and voluntary controlled schools in Hartlepool.

91. Fostering Service Interim Report 1st October 2019 – 31 December 2019 (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To provide the Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the third quarter of 2019/20 financial year. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and, as such, there is a requirement to provide the Council with performance information.

Issue(s) for consideration

Members were advised of the performance of the Fostering Service for the third quarter (1 October to 31 December 2019) which provided an update on recruitment and retention, the work of the Fostering Panel, staffing arrangements as well as service developments. It was noted there the school buses carrying Fostering adverts had been actioned in this quarter and it was hoped this would trigger enquiries and demonstrative a positive impact. Reference was made to training that had been offered to Foster Carers with two Foster Carers being accredited to deliver Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities training to Foster Carers.

In relation to a request at the last meeting that information in relation to the number of looked after children who had been placed via an Independent Fostering Agency be provided following the meeting, the Committee was advised that as at 18 February 2020, there were 28 (9.2%) looked after children placed independently, with 63.8% currently placed in the Council's in-house care.

The Committee complimented the work of the Fostering Service noting the benefits of the recent advertisements promoting the service in the town and the recent opening event/recruitment campaign at Chatham House.

Decision

That the contents of the report and comments of Members in relation to the work of the Fostering Service be noted.

92. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was reported that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 17 March 2020 at 4.00 pm in the Civic Centre.

The meeting concluded at 4.25 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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