

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

23 JUNE 2021

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

Present:

Councillor Lindridge (In the Chair)

Councillors Ashton, Boddy, Fleming, Groves, Harrison and Moore

Co-opted members:

Jo Heaton, C of E Diocesan Representative

Joanne Wilson, RC Diocesan Representative

Mark Tilling, Secondary Schools Head Representative

Lisa Greig as substitute for Zoe Westley, Special Schools Representative

Also in attendance

Councillor Riddle

Sue Sharpe, Chair Schools Forum

Officers: Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

Sandra Shears, Head of Finance (Corporate and Schools)

Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning

Julian Heward, Senior Public Relations Officer

Amanda Whitaker, Democratic Services Team

1. Apologies for Absence

David Turner, Primary Schools Head Representative

Zoe Westley, Special Schools Head Representative

2. Declarations of Interest

A personal interest was declared by Councillor Moore during consideration of agenda item 6.1 – Proposal to increase capacity for SEND education provision.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2021

Received.

4. Proposal to Increase Capacity for SEND Education Provision *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Key Decision - test (i) applies

Forward Plan Reference Number: CJCS 111/21

Purpose of report

To share proposals with the Committee to prudentially borrow £1.550m to increase capacity for Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Education Provision at Catcote Academy. The borrowed funding would be paid back through the High Needs Block (HNB).

For this Committee to refer the request to Finance and Policy Committee, to then seek Council approval for prudential borrowing.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report advised the Committee that the Children and Families Act 2014 and subsequent SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 years set out the duties placed on Local Authorities in relation to children with additional needs. It was highlighted that locally the increase in children needing support had significantly increased.

A Schools Capital report had been presented to this Committee on 2nd March 2021 which had set out the situation in relation to SEND provision. A new build at Catcote had been proposed to increase the provision. The report had highlighted a shortfall of £2.050m. The Local Authority had recently received a SEND capital allocation of £0.500m therefore the proposal was to borrow £1.550m. The Committee was assured that Officers would continue to seek external grant funding for this project and any successful bids would reduce the amount of prudential borrowing required for this project. However, a commitment was needed to approve the prudential borrowing to enable the commencement on site to deliver the project within the timescale.

The significant risks if the build does not go ahead were set out in the report with financial and legal implications also detailed. With regard to consultation, it was noted that the school have been significantly consulted on the needs of the children and how they can meet the needs. The Schools Forum had considered the proposal at a meeting on 10th June 2021. The Forum had been wholly supportive of the proposal to ensure that children with SEND were supported within the right

environments. However the Forum wanted funding opportunities to be considered e.g. use of future High Needs Capital Provision Capital Allocations, further exploration of Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) applications and use of any underspends in the High Needs Block. It was noted that there was concern that we were being reactive however it was acknowledged that the High Needs Block Review that is being currently undertaken will be addressing the need to be more proactive. The minutes from the Schools Forum had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting and the Chair of Schools Forum, Sue Sharpe, attended the meeting to update the Committee that the Forum had a robust discussion on the issues arising from the proposal but was fully supportive of the recommendation.

Following presentation of the report, Committee members expressed support and sought clarification on the background to Catcote Academy not having had investment for a significant number of years, the increase in the number of children with SEND and child and family poverty considerations.

Decision

The Committee unanimously supported the proposals and referred the report to Finance and Policy Committee to support a sustainable solution for the provision of additional capacity for children with SEND and to seek approval from Council to Prudentially Borrow £1.550m saving the HNB annually between £0.343m and £0.783m.

5. The Role of the Children's Services Committee

Type of decision

For information.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee received a presentation by the Director outlining the role and remit of the Children's Services Committee as set out in the Council Constitution and the service areas of the authority that fell under its management. The presentation also included an overview of the Council's current budget position.

The Director responded to Member questions arising from the presentation relating to ongoing funding issues, implications of child and family poverty, the number of children in care and the fostering service.

Decision

That the presentation be noted.

6. Schools Admissions Forum

Type of decision

Non Key decision

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee was advised that at the Annual Council meeting, the Chair of this Committee had been appointed to the Forum and had referred consideration of the appointment of the remaining 2 vacancies to this Committee.

Decision

Councillors Groves and Moore be appointed to the 2 remaining vacancies on the Forum.

7. Educational Recovery Programme

Type of decision

For information.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director provided the Committee with a verbal update relating to the Education Recovery Team set up by the Government in January 2021. The Committee was advised that the remit of the Team was to develop post-Covid Education Recovery Plans with a national focus supporting those children and young people who had been most impacted by the pandemic, particularly disadvantaged students. Over 100 regional meetings had been held facilitated by Sir Kevan Collins and Sir Allan Wood that had invited educational leaders from schools, colleges and universities with both Local Authorities and MAT/Trust involvement to support the development of that recovery plan. Hartlepool had taken part in the discussions as part of a Regional workshop and had been represented by primary Head Teachers, secondary Head Teachers and Local Authority representatives. As part of those discussions, Sir Allan Wood had outlined that the proposal to Government was for a £15 billion package that would support investment in teaching quality, additional catch up tutorial funding and the possibility of supporting extended days.

The Director advised the Committee that on 2 June, the proposal for £15 billion had been reduced to £1.4 billion which, according to the Department for Education, had resulted in the following:-

- £250 million to help provide 500,000 teacher training opportunities
- £153 million for training for early years staff to support learning and development

- Additional funding for year 13 students to repeat a year if they feel they have missed out due to the pandemic
- 100 million hours of tuition for children aged 5-19 by 2024
- Children aged 5-16, in receipt of tutoring, will receive up to 15 sessions of tuition to support them to catch up

As a consequence of this position, Sir Kevan Collins had stood down as Education Recovery Commissioner as he did not believe it was 'credible that a successful recovery can be achieved with the proposed programme of support and associated funding'.

Members discussed issues arising from the update. It was proposed that a letter be sent to the Secretary of State, on behalf of the Committee, to express concern that the level of funding allocated would not be sufficient for the required educational recovery. It was highlighted that although the criteria to access free school meals was statutory, there were also a large number of children who whilst not meeting that criteria were 'missing out' as their families were 'just managing'.

Decision

That a letter be sent to the Secretary of State, on behalf of the Committee, to express the concerns expressed by members.

The meeting concluded at 5.10 p.m.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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