

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

20 July 2021

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

Present:

Councillor: Jim Lindridge (In the Chair)

Councillors: Moss Boddy, Tim Fleming, Christopher Groves, Brenda Harrison and Shane Moore

Co-opted Members:

Mark Tilling, Secondary Head Representative

Officers: Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education
Jane Wilson, Fostering Team Manager
Julian Heward, Senior Communications and Marketing Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

8. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Jo Heaton, Church of England Diocesan Representative, David Turner, Primary Schools Head Representative, Joanne Wilson, RC Diocesan Representative and Zoe Westley, Special School's Head Representative.

9. Declarations of Interest

None.

10. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2021

Received.

11. Holiday Activities and Food Programme *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To update members of Children's Services Committee on the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme delivered at Easter 2021 and outline plans and developments for the delivery of the scheme during the summer holiday 2021.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services presented the report which provided background information in relation to the expansion of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme across England in 2021 as previously reported to Committee in March 2021. The HAF delivery during the school Easter holidays was a great success with a number of events and activities being delivered, details of which were provided.

The plans for the delivery of the summer HAF scheme were well underway and the programme would fund the popular 'free swims' that had been delivered in previous years for four weeks during the summer holidays. This year in order to wrap the food offer around the activity, HBC leisure Recreation and Participation Service was working in partnership with the School Catering team to provide a nutritious meal alongside the swimming activity. It was anticipated that this HAF offer would reach a minimum of 2,500 children and young people. Given that the HAF Steering Group was keen to ensure that the programme reached all eligible children, it was proposed that food boxes that contained the ingredients and recipe for three nutritious hot family meals were prepared and distributed, available for all eligible children.

In the discussion that followed, the Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services responded to issues raised arising from the report. Members spoke in support of the initiative, commenting on the benefits as a result and were pleased to note the high level of engagement and take-up. Concerns were raised in relation to the ongoing challenges for families in need and Members were keen to see the scheme expanded to include the October half term holiday. It was suggested that this be raised with the Department of Education at the appropriate time.

The Committee took the opportunity to thank all teams who had contributed to the success of the programme.

Decision

- (i) The Committee noted the successful delivery of the HAF Programme during the Easter holidays which was far reaching and benefitted children and young people despite the Covid restrictions.
- (ii) The Committee noted the proposals and preparation for the delivery of the programme over the 2021 summer holidays.
- (iii) That the comments of Members, as detailed above, be noted and actioned as appropriate.

12. Fostering Annual Report 2020-2021 and Statement of Purpose March 2021 *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To provide Children Service's Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the year 2020/21. The provision of foster care is a regulated activity and as such there is a requirement to provide the the Council with performance information on a regular basis and also annually.

This report is also to present to Children's Services Committee the Statement of Purpose for this service.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background around the production of the annual report of the Fostering Service, attached at Appendix 1, which outlined details of the service's full activity including governance arrangements, how placements were made, recruitment arrangements, how carer's were rewarded and trained together with priorities for 2021-22. Reference was made to the requirement to produce a Statement of Purpose to include aims and objectives, a copy of which was appended to the report.

In the discussion that followed the Fostering Team Manger responded to a number of queries raised arising from the report. In relation to the potential reasons for the conversion rates from enquiry to approval being low, assurances were provided that this had been actively pursued by the Team. With regard to priorities that were partially achieved, clarification was provided in relation to the background and planned actions to address the priorities to attract foster carers for older children and sibling groups and those with more challenging behaviour as well as the proposed plans to ensure a range of accessible training for foster carers.

A Member referred to some difficulties that had been experienced by the Fostering Panel during a meeting conducted on skype and suggested that future meetings be held on Microsoft Teams.

The Committee welcomed the report and compliments and thanks were conveyed to the Fostering Panel, service staff as well as foster carers and all contributors to the service for their hard work and support.

Decision

That the contents of the report and comments of Members be noted and actioned as appropriate.

13. Covid in Schools – Verbal Update *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services reported on the challenges faced by schools over the last year and indicated that despite such challenges schools had remained open. The Director took the opportunity to pay tribute to all schools for their hard work in managing such extremely difficult circumstances.

The School Representative and Assistant Director of Education, who were in attendance at the meeting, commented on the impact of the increase in the number of isolations since the half term break, the challenges in delivering education on-line, technical difficulties experienced with technology no longer meeting current needs as well as issues around laptop licenses expiring. Extra curricular activities were also planned to ensure students were prepared for forthcoming exams, details of which were provided.

The Assistant Director was pleased to report that there had been no Covid outbreaks in any Hartlepool schools in the previous term and transmission rates of the virus appeared to be from outside in the community. Children and young people had responded extremely well despite the uncertainties. The impact and additional demands the virus had placed on the workforce were discussed. The School Representative and Assistant Director responded to issues raised arising from the update. Clarification was provided in relation to the potential number of students in the vulnerable category who may qualify for early vaccinations. In relation to the impact of the pandemic on school attendance, Members were advised that information of this type would be provided to a future meeting of this Committee.

Members expressed their thanks and appreciation to all staff for the dedication, support and care they continued to provide to the children and young people of Hartlepool.

Decision

That the contents of the update and comments of Members be noted and actioned as appropriate.

14. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was reported that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 7 September 2021 at 4.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 5.00 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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