

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

18 JANUARY 2022

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

Present:

Councillor: Jim Lindridge (In the Chair)

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

Co-opted members:

Joanne Wilson, RC Diocesan Representative
Mark Tilling, Secondary Schools Head Representative
David Turner, Primary Schools Head Representative
Zoe Westley, Special Schools Head Representative

Also present: Councillor Sue Little.

Officers: Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education
Sandra Shears, Head of Finance, Corporate and Schools
Julian Howard, Communications and Marketing Team
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

40. Apologies for Absence

Jo Heaton, C of E Diocesan Representative.

41. Declarations of Interest

None.

42. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2021

Received.

A Member commented on the minutes of the meeting of 19 October 2021 and the discussions around School Crossing Patrols and the fact that there was no vote taken by Members at the meeting. It was noted that a vote had taken place at the Neighbourhood Services Committee on the same date.

43. Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block 2022/23 *(Director Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Key decision - tests (i) and (ii) apply. Forward plan reference is CJCS 120/21.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the funding allocation for the High Needs Block in 2022/23 and to seek approval for the 2022/23 budget. The High Needs Block forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning reported that the High Needs Block funding allocations for 2022/23 had been published by Government on 16 December 2021. As with other areas of the DSG, funding for the High Needs Block was via a National Funding Formula (NFF).

Hartlepool benefited from an 11% (£1.489m) increase in 2022/23 (12% in 2021/22). This is the third successive year of significantly increased funding. In addition to the 11% increase in core high needs block funding, a further allocation of £0.616m for Hartlepool had been announced following the autumn spending review. This further amount was to help cover the costs of the health and social care levy, along with any colleges and other providers offering extra hours of study to students with high needs.

Officers were in the process of establishing a three-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for provision for pupils with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The MTFS will take a longer term view of forecast demand and level of need for pupils with SEND in Hartlepool. This will provide a clearer understanding of budget requirements and affordability of budget options over the three year period. Council officers, Schools' Forum and Head Teachers were working closely to establish the MTFS. An independent external consultant had been engaged to assist in the review.

The increases in funding from 2020/21 to 2022/23 allowed the Schools' Forum to consider the continuation of increased funding to both maintained schools and special schools for pupils with SEND in 2022/23, pending completion of the MTFS.

The report detailed that the total high needs funding for 2022/23 was £14.520m (subject to government updates in June 2022). The detailed high needs budget was also set out in the report. This planned budget

include two proposals for implementation in 2022/23. The first proposal is to increase the SEND top-up ranges payable to schools to fund additional provision and support for pupils with SEND. At their meeting on 21 September 2021, Schools' Forum voted unanimously to recommend continuation of the increased SEND top-up ranges in 2022/23, along with a further year's inflation at 2.75%. The cost of this proposal in 2022/23 was estimated at £0.182m. This cost was considered fully affordable within the High Needs Block funding available.

The second proposal is to increase the level of Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) payable to special schools (Springwell Primary School and Catcote Academy). At their meeting on 21 September 2021, Schools' Forum voted unanimously to continue to apply backdated annual increases of 3% to special school's MFG for a further year, along with an additional year's increase at 3% for 2022/23. The cost of this proposal in 2022/23 was estimated at £0.241m. This cost was considered fully affordable within the High Needs Block funding available.

The Assistant Director stated that while there was a high level of confidence regarding the affordability of budget proposals presented, this position may not be sustainable in future years. To mitigate this risk, both proposals were restricted to one financial year (2022/23) whilst the MTFS is completed. The MTFS would allow for a greater consideration of risk for the demand and complexity of SEND provision over a three-year planning period.

The Chair welcomed the report and whilst the funding for schools was an extremely complex area, he welcomed the additional resources going into Hartlepool's schools.

A recorded vote was requested on the recommendations set out in the report.

In accordance with Rule 15.5 of the Council's Procedure Rules, a recorded vote was taken.

Those for:

Councillors Moss Boddy, Tom Cassidy, Tim Fleming, Christopher Groves, Brenda Harrison, Jim Lindridge and Shane Moore.

Those abstaining:

None.

Those against:

None.

The following decisions was, therefore, agreed unanimously.

Decision

1. That the contents of the report be noted;
2. That the recommendation from Schools' Forum to increase the SEND top-up ranges in 2022/23 at an estimated cost of £0.182m be approved;
3. That the recommendation from Schools' Forum to increase the protection to special schools MFG budget in 2022/23 at an estimated cost of £0.241m be approved;
4. That the 2022/23 budget as set out in the report be approved.

44. Dedicated Schools Grant – School Budget Shares 2022/23 and Central School Services Block 2022/23 *(Director Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Key decision - tests (i) and (ii) apply. Forward plan references CJCS 117/21 and CJCS 119/21 were combined within the report.

Purpose of report

To provide details of the 2022/23 schools block funding allocation and to propose school budget shares for 2022/23. The schools block funding formed part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Issue(s) for consideration

The Head of Finance, Corporate and Schools reported that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published indicative National Funding Formula (NFF) allocations for 2022/23 during July 2021. In December updated allocations based on the October 2021 school census were released by ESFA. Hartlepool had agreed to adopt the "hard" formula that mirrors the NFF. This approach continued to be supported by the Schools' Forum for 2022/23. In adopting the "hard" formula, local authorities were still required to consider how they set their individual school budgets (ISBs) for 2022/23. Any transfers to and from the schools block from other DSG blocks must be considered. Also, a local approach to setting a Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) and Cap must be agreed and implemented.

Consultation on setting individual school budgets (ISBs) took place with Schools' Forum during September to November 2021. These discussions were on the basis of the indicative NFF published in July 2021. At their meeting on 18 November 2021, Schools' Forum voted in favour of applying the maximum possible MFG (the regulations allow an MFG of up to 2%), along with an appropriate cap. The need for a cap could not be calculated until ESFA released the Authority Pro-Forma Tool containing individual school data on 20 December 2021. At their meeting on 21 September 2021, Schools' Forum agreed to the transfer of

£0.173m from the Central School Services Block (CSSB) to the Schools Block. The transfer represents CSSB funding remaining, after permitted planned expenditure on historic and ongoing commitments.

The report detailed a Hartlepool schools block allocation of £72.648m for 2022/23 based on October 2021 census numbers. This was an increase of £1.868m for 2022/23, or 2.64%.

The Head of Finance reported that the ESFA had made a change to the funding of National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) for schools from 2022/23 onwards. The ESFA would make payment for NNDR direct to billing authorities instead of including NNDR funding within the DSG. This means that the premises amount of £0.631m quoted in the budget was not passed to the authority but would be used by ESFA to pay rates on behalf of schools.

Unit values for basic per pupil funding (known as AWPU) have been increased by 3% from the current financial year, along with similar increases across other formula factors. The guarantee of a minimum per-pupil funded amount per school remained within the NFF for 2022/23. The minimum per pupil funding levels in 2022/23 had increased to £4,265 (from £4,180) for all primary schools and £5,525 (from £5,415) for all secondary schools.

The Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) of the DSG funds local authorities for the statutory duties and other commitments they hold for maintained and academy schools. CSSB funding of £0.731m for 2022/23 (£0.769m in 2021/22) had been confirmed based on October 2021 census numbers. The historic cost element of the CSSB (originally approximately 50% of the block) had been reduced by 20% in 2022/23 for the third successive year as part of government's strategy to gradually remove funding for historic items that were expected to reduce in cost over time. Although a number of historic items for Hartlepool no longer require CSSB funding, there were two historic items remaining that would not reduce or come to an end in the short to medium term. These related to the school contribution to licences and the pension costs associated with the former Brierton school closure.

At their meeting on 9 December 2021, Schools' Forum voted unanimously to apply an MFG of 2.0% (the maximum allowed), along with an appropriate cap if required. Having analysed the school budget requirement using October 2021 pupil numbers and characteristics released by ESFA on 20 December 2021, the maximum MFG of 2.0% was affordable, alongside a cap of 3.4%. This would mean that all schools would receive an increase per pupil of at least 2.0% and no more than 3.4% in comparison to 2021/22.

The Head of Finance reminded Elected members that the local authority must inform the ESFA that it had approved the individual schools budgets by 21 January 2022.

In response to a Member question, the Head of Finance indicated that the costs relating to the CSSB funding and Brierton School included the ongoing commitment to the pension fund for those staff that had not been redeployed and were made redundant when the school closed.

The Schools representatives recorded their thanks to the Head of Finance and her team for the excellent support they had been given during the budget preparation process and the ongoing support they received.

A recorded vote was requested on the recommendations set out in the report.

In accordance with Rule 15.5 of the Council's Procedure Rules, a recorded vote was taken.

Those for:

Councillors Moss Boddy, Tom Cassidy, Tim Fleming, Christopher Groves, Brenda Harrison, Jim Lindridge and Shane Moore.

Those abstaining:

None.

Those against:

None.

The following decisions was, therefore, agreed unanimously.

Decision

1. That the contents of the report be noted;
2. That the agreement by Schools' Forum to centrally retain funding of £0.558m, with the residual £0.173m being transferred to the schools block was noted;
3. That the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to be used for 2022/23 be approved and the recommendation from Schools' Forum of applying an MFG of 2.0%, alongside an appropriate cap be noted;
4. That the individual school budget share for 2022/23 as summarised in the report be approved.

45. Annual Report of Children Social Care Complaints and Compliments 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021 (*Director Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To present to members the Annual Report of Children Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2020/21.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning reported on the Annual Complaints and Compliments Report which provides information on the complaints for children's social care and public health. It summarised information in relation to complaints that had been received and responded to, as well as compliments received during the reporting period. Production of the report had, unfortunately, been delayed due to the impact of Covid-19 on the work of the department.

During 2020/21, 46 compliments had been received relating to children's social care. This was a significant increase from 2019/2020. These ranged from an expression of thanks and appreciation in the form of a thank-you card to written communication.

A total of 40 complaints were received in 2020/21. The number of complaints received had increased by 4 from the previous year. Of the 40 complaints received in 2020/21, 20 were not considered further leaving 20 complaints for investigation. Overall, although there was an increase of 4 in the number of complaints received in 2020/21 compared to the previous year, there was a decrease of 5 in the number of complaints investigated in 2020/21 compared to the previous year. Details of the different stages of investigation are included within the annual report.

The Chair welcomed the report as it showed how the department was learning from the complaints received. There was some concern expressed that some of the complaints may have arisen due to a lack of understanding as to how some service users express themselves.

Decision

The Committee noted the contents of the Annual Report of Complaints and Compliments 20120/21 and that the report will be published online.

46. Hartlepool's Strategy for the Early Years (*Director Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

Type of decision

Non key decision.

Purpose of report

To recommend that members of Children's Service Committee approve Hartlepool's Strategy for the Early Years.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Education reported that in 2020 the Local Government Association (LGA) supported a multi stakeholder review into the delivery of support for children in their early year's services in Hartlepool. As a result of that review a number of recommendations were made that, if implemented, would have a positive impact on the delivery of early year's services in Hartlepool which would, in turn, improve outcomes for children. As a result of the review an Early Years Strategic Planning Group was established. The remit of this group was to create an Early Years Strategy with clear priorities to address the recommendations and drive improvements in the outcomes achieve by children in their early years.

The first draft of the Early Years Strategy was prepared based upon Local Authority officers' knowledge and experience. This served as the basis for open consultation which took place between the 24th September, 2021 and the 29th October, 2021. The feedback from the consultation process was summarised in the report and the Assistant Director indicated that the comments had been reflected in the revised draft strategy appended to the report and submitted for the Committee's approval.

The Assistant Director highlighted to the Committee that early years was widely reported to be under-funded and was subject to national political debate. There was already a budget deficit for the provision of funded two year old childcare places which was being addressed through a Task and Finish Group of the Schools Forum. Many of the ideas for action noted in the strategy were no-cost, however, some would need funding. It was hoped that much could be achieved through multi agency collaborative working, the sharing of resources and budgets and through the announcement of further funding for the early years as highlighted in the latest spending review.

The Chair welcomed the strategy commenting on the importance of getting the delivery of early years support right to provide Hartlepool's children with the best basis for their education. The strategy would strengthen the delivery of services to young families but did rely on 'parental buy-in' to that as their support and involvement was essential to the work undertaken in education settings. The Chair also commented that all the abbreviations in the report needed to be explained to ensure it was accessible to all who read it.

A Member questioned the provision of speech and language services in all primary schools as ensuring good speech and language skills was

essential for all aspects of their continued education. The Primary Schools representative commented that these services were available to all schools with most schools utilising the enhanced services available. The need for the services was, however, increasing and quantitative data supported this. Parents, and in some cases grandparents, were needed to support this work but not all had those skills. Unfortunately, some of these issues spanned several generations of families. Support work with families was now more often conducted at the school rather than off-site, though attendance by some parents was still an issue.

A Member commented that a key statement in the report highlighting the 'alarming increase' in poverty in Hartlepool was a significant backdrop to the task faced in improving the outcomes for Hartlepool children. If not addressed, there would simply be a further generation that either failed or found it difficult to engage with support agencies in the future. Many of the fundamental issues needed to be addressed through central government as unless the needs of those families were addressed now, then further problems down the line were only too predictable. Members commented that with the resources that the local authority had there was a need to be realistic as to what could be delivered. Members questioned if there was a need, now or in the future, for Members support through formally writing to Ministers seeking further funding in light of the local situation.

The Assistant Director welcomed Members support and commented that not all the issues were educational which was why there was a multi-agency approach being adopted. Those partnerships in delivering services would be essential going forward, particularly in light of the funding situation. A Schools representative commented that schools were making great strides in improving children's outcomes and the children themselves more often than not understood that their way to a better future was through education. Members supported the comments adding that poverty did not always mean negative outcomes. The strategy highlighted what could be done and the importance of the early years work. The Chair concluded the debate indicating that the only way [we] would know if this strategy had delivered would be in future quantitative data.

Decision

That the Hartlepool Strategy for the Early Years, as submitted, be approved.

47. To Nominate a Local Authority Representative to Serve on the Federated Governing Body of Golden Flatts and Lynnfield Primary Schools *(Director Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

To consider a nomination for the Local Authority Governor position on the Federated Governing Body of Golden Flatts and Lynnfield Primary Schools.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Education reported on the application that had been received for the vacant positions on the Federated Governing Body of Golden Flatts and Lynnfield Primary Schools. The report contained exempt information under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government), (Access to Information), (Variations Order 2006) namely, information relating to any individual (Para 1).

Decision

The Committee approved the local authority nomination of the applicant as set out in confidential appendix to the report.

48. To Nominate a Local Authority Representative to Serve on the Governing Body of Fens Primary School *(Director Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Education withdrew the report at the meeting.

Decision

That the report be withdrawn.

49. 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 15 February 2022 at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

The meeting concluded at 5.10 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 26 JANUARY 2022