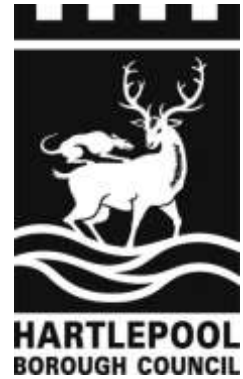


CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

AGENDA



Tuesday 15 February 2022

at 4.00 pm

**in Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool.**

A limited number of members of the public will be able to attend the meeting with spaces being available on a first come, first served basis. Those wishing to attend the meeting should phone (01429) 523568 or (01429) 523019 by midday on Monday 14 February and name and address details will be taken for NHS Test and Trace purposes.

You should not attend the meeting if you are required to self-isolate or are displaying any COVID-19 symptoms such as (a high temperature, new and persistent cough, or a loss of/change in sense of taste or smell), even if these symptoms are mild. If you, or anyone you live with, have one or more of these symptoms you should follow the NHS guidance on testing.

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Boddy, Cassidy, Fleming, Groves, Harrison, Lindridge and Moore.

Co-opted Members: Jo Heaton, C of E Diocese and Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Mark Tilling (Secondary), David Turner (Primary), Zoe Westley (Special).

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Councillor Fleming, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services Committee

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2022 (*previously circulated and published*).

CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone.

The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

No items.

5. KEY DECISIONS

- 5.1 School Admission Arrangements for 2023-24 – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*
- 5.2 Commissioning of Short Break Activities for Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*

6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

No items.

7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- 7.1 Fostering Service Interim Report - 1st July 2021 – 30th September 2021 – *Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 15 March 2022 at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.



CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

15 February 2022



Report of: Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

Subject: SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2023-24

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Key Decision test (ii) applies. Forward Plan Reference Number: CJCS 122/21

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To consider and agree the proposed admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled school in Hartlepool for 2023-24 academic year. As the local authority, the Council is the admission authority it is therefore responsible for determining the admission arrangements for these schools.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 It is a mandatory requirement of the national School Admissions Code that all schools must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted to schools, including the criteria that will be applied if there are more applications than places at the school (oversubscription). Admission arrangements are determined by admission authorities. The local authority (LA) is the admission authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, while the Governing Body is the admission authority for Voluntary Aided and Foundation Schools, and the relevant Trust for an Academy or Free School.
- 3.2 All admission authorities must set admission arrangements and their published admission number annually. Where changes are proposed to admission arrangements, the admission authority must first consult on those arrangements. If there are no changes proposed they only need to be consulted on at least every seven years. Consultation must be for a minimum of six weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January of the school year before those arrangements are to apply. The consultation period

allows parents and carers, other schools, religious authorities and the local community to raise any concerns about proposed admission arrangements.

4. STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 It is a statutory requirement of all admission authorities must determine arrangements every year, even if they have not changed from previous years and a consultation has not been required. Admissions authorities must determine admissions arrangements for entry in September 2023 by 28 February 2022 and these must be published on their website for the whole offer year. The LA must receive a copy of the admission arrangements of other admission authorities, including Academies, before 15 March in the determination year and provide details on its website of where these can be viewed. Information on how to refer objections to the Schools' Adjudicator (which must be made by 15 May 2022) will also be available on the website.
- 4.2 The LA must publish online, with hard copies available for those who do not have access to the internet, a composite prospectus for parents by 12 September 2022, which contains the admission arrangements for each of the state-funded schools in the LA area to which parents and carers can apply.

5. PROPOSALS - CONSULTATION FOR ADMISSIONS FOR SEPTEMBER 2023-24 ACADEMIC YEAR

- 5.1 There are no changes proposed to the current admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools that require public consultation.
- 5.2 The published admission number for each Community and Voluntary Controlled school is detailed in **APPENDIX 1** to this report which Committee are asked to approve.
- 5.3 The admission arrangements including the over-subscription criteria in respect of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools are included in **APPENDIX 2**.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 No material financial implications.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There will be a breach of statutory duty imposed on the LA if admission arrangements for 2023/24 are not determined by 28 February 2022 and

published on the Council's website by 15 March in the determination year (2022), The School Admissions Code 2021.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Members of the Admissions Forum have been informed that the Local Authority propose no changes to the current admissions arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.

9. CHILD AND POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 There are no child and poverty considerations.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations.

11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 There are no staff considerations.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 Members are recommended to agree the following recommendations in respect of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, when determining the admission arrangements for 2023/24:

- that the admission numbers, as recommended in **APPENDIX 1**, be approved
- that the current admission arrangements, detailed in **APPENDIX 2**, be approved

13. CONTACT OFFICER

Amanda Whitehead
Assistant Director: Education
Telephone 01429 523736
E-mail amanda.whitehead@hartlepool.gov.uk

Sign Off:-

Director of Resources and Development



Chief Solicitor





PROPOSED ADMISSION NUMBERS 2023/24

Community and Voluntary Controlled School	2023/2024
Clavering Primary School	60
Fens Primary School	60
Golden Flatts Primary School	30
Grange Primary School	50
Greatham C of E Primary School	15
Kingsley Primary School	60
Lynnfield Primary School	55
Rift House Primary School	36
Rossmere Primary School	55
St. Helen's Primary School	45
Throston Primary School	60



Hartlepool Borough Council

School Admissions Arrangements 2023/24

ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS DETERMINED ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR 2023/24

The admissions policy for entry to community and voluntary controlled primary schools, effective from 2023/24 admissions round, is as follows:

Pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan where the school is named in the Plan, will be admitted to the school. The remaining places will be awarded in the following priority order:

Oversubscription Criteria:

1. Looked after children and children who were previously looked after but immediately after being looked after became subject to adoption, child arrangements order, or special guardianship order¹ including those who appear [to the admission authority] to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. A looked after child is a child who is (a) in the care of a local authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989).
2. Those children who have brothers or sisters who will be attending the school at the time of admission;
3. Those children who live in the school's admission zone;
4. Those children who are distinguished from the great majority of other applicants whether on medical grounds or by other exceptional circumstances and who would suffer significant hardship if they were unable to attend the school;
5. Those children who live closest to the school as determined by a straight line distance measurement; from the address point for the child's home to the address point of the school, using the Local Authority's computerised measuring system, with those living closer to the school receiving the higher priority.

Tie-breaker:

¹ A 'looked after child' is a child who is (a) in the care of a local authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989) at the time of making an application to a school. A child is regarded as having been in state care outside of England if they were in the care of or were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other provider of care whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society. This includes children who were adopted under the Adoption Act 1976 (see Section 12 adoption orders) and children who were adopted under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (see Section 46 adoption orders). A 'child arrangements order' is an order settling the arrangements to be made as to the person with whom the child is to live under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 as amended by Section 14 of the Children and Families Act 2014. Section 14A of the Children Act 1989 defines a 'special guardianship order' as an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian (or special guardians).

If more children qualify under a particular criterion than there are places available, priority will be given to those children who live closest to the school (as described under criteria 5). Should it not be possible to separate two or more applications, for example two applicants who live at an equal distance from the school, the Local Authority's computerised system will use random selection.

Definitions:

Sibling: Sibling refers to brother or sister, half brother or sister, adopted brother or sister, step brother or sister, or the child of the parent/guardian's partner and, in every case, the child should be living in the same family unit at the same address. In all cases the responsible parent will hold the child benefit for those children permanently living at that address. A brother or sister living at the same address must be attending the preferred school at the same time as the child who is applying. *Please note, this criteria only applies to siblings who are of compulsory school age, not younger siblings who attend a nursery setting attached to a school*

Twins or multiple birth children: If you have more than one child who are twins or part of a multiple birth going through the application process this year, you must make a separate application for each child and indicate on each online or paper form that your child has a sibling also going through the process. For community and voluntary controlled schools, we will offer a place to the other child(ren) if one of your twins/multiple birth children is offered the last place available and you have applied to the same school for the other child(ren).

Distance: Distance will be measured by a straight line measurement from the address point of the child's home address to the address point of the school, using the Local Authority's computerised measuring system, with those living closer to the school receiving the higher priority.

Admission Zone: All Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in Hartlepool have a defined geographic area called an Admission Zone. Do not assume that you live within a particular schools admission zone as some streets are split. To find out which admission zone you live in contact the School Admissions Team on telephone number 01429 523765 or 01429 523768. Please note, a child is not guaranteed a place at an admission zone school.

Medical Grounds/Exceptional Circumstances: A panel of specialist officers will determine whether the evidence provided is sufficiently compelling to meet the requirements for this criterion. If you think your child has a particular medical or social need to go to a certain school, you must provide supporting evidence from a doctor, psychologist or other professional involved with your child. The supporting evidence must relate specifically to the school you are claiming medical grounds/exceptional circumstances for, and clearly demonstrate why it is only that school that can meet your child's needs in a way that no other school can. If you are applying on-line for a place under this criterion, please send your supporting evidence to the Admissions Team by the National closing date, which should include your child's name and date of birth.

NB: Exceptional social reasons do not, in the view of the Authority, include domestic inconvenience arising from parents' work patterns, child-minding problems, separation from particular nursery/primary school friends. Problems of this kind are widespread and cannot be classed as exceptional. Medical reasons do not include temporary conditions. They are permanent medical conditions which require special treatment available at the preferred school only. Medical evidence must be provided and the Authority's officers must be satisfied that the child would suffer to a significant degree if he/she went to any other school.

NOTES:**Criteria 1 Applications**

- Applications from children who are looked after must be accompanied by a letter from the Social Worker confirming the legal status of the child and the reasons for the school preferences. Any change of legal status and/or placement arrangements must be notified to the Admissions Team.
- Applications for previously looked after children must be accompanied by a copy of any Special Guardianship Order, Adoption Order or Child Arrangements Order.
- Applications for children previously in state care outside of England must provide evidence of their child's previously looked after status with accompanying paperwork to evidence this eg a UK adoption order or a copy of the adoption order from the child's country of origin.

Criteria 2 Applications

To obtain a school place under the sibling criteria the sibling must still attend the school at the time when the child for whom the place is sought joins the school. This criterion only applies to siblings who are of compulsory school age, not younger siblings who attend a nursery setting attached to a school.

Criteria 4 Applications

A panel of officers will determine whether the evidence provided is sufficiently compelling to meet the requirements for this rule. The evidence must relate specifically to the school applied for under Criteria 4 and must clearly demonstrate why it is the only school that can meet the child's needs. Criteria 4 applications will only be considered at the time of the initial application, unless there has been a significant and exceptional change of circumstances within the family since the initial application was submitted.

All schools in Hartlepool have experience in dealing with children with diverse social and medical needs. However in a few very exceptional cases, there are reasons why a child has to go to one specific school. Few applications under Criteria 4 are agreed. All applications are considered individually but a successful application should include the following:

- specific professional evidence that justifies why only one school can meet a child's individual needs, and/or
- professional evidence that outlines exceptional family circumstances making clear why only one school can meet the child's needs
- if the requested school is not the nearest school to the child's home address clear reasons why the nearest school is not appropriate
- medical cases – a clear explanation of why the child's severity of illness or disability makes attendance at only one specific school essential.

Evidence should make clear why only one school is appropriate.

Examples of cases which have been accepted under Criteria 4

- A child with limited mobility who is only able to walk to their nearest school, as their admission zone school is further away.
- A child for whom only one school is suitable due to child protection issues.

Examples of cases which have not been accepted under Criteria 4

- Case made for continuity of child minding arrangements, such as using a childminder that children are already familiar with who caters for children attending certain schools, or childminding by family members living close to a specific school. These cases were not upheld because they are not exceptional. Many families rely on complex childminding arrangements.
- Cases made for children with specific learning and/or behavioural needs where the professional evidence submitted is not school specific. All schools are able to support children with a wide variety of individual needs. If a child's individual needs warrant an Education, Health and Care Plan, this will name the appropriate school.

- Medical cases where even though there is a severe illness, more than one school could deal with the child's needs.

How to apply under Criteria 4

- Parents/guardians should submit all relevant information including professional evidence, with their application. If applying online, written information should be received before the closing date for applications and include the child's name and date of birth. Information provided after the closing date will only be considered when there are significant changes of circumstances.
- Applications under Criteria 4 will only be considered when supported by a letter from a professional involved with the child or family, for example, a doctor, psychologist or police officer. Supporting evidence should demonstrate why only one named school can meet the social/medical needs of the child or family.

Criteria 5 Applications

Should it not be possible to separate two or more applications the Local Authority's computerised system will randomly select.

Admission of Children below Compulsory School Age and Deferred Entry

A child is entitled to a full-time place in the September following their fourth birthday. A child's parents may defer the date at which their child, below compulsory school age, is admitted to the school, until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age, or beyond the beginning of the final term of the school year for which an offer was made. A child may take up a part-time place until later in the school year, but not beyond the point at which the child reaches compulsory school age. Upon receipt of the offer of a place a parent should notify the school in writing, as soon as possible, that they wish to either defer their child's entry to the school or take up a part-time place.

Admission of Children outside their Normal Age Group

A request may be made for a child to be admitted outside of their normal age group, for example, if the child is gifted and talented or has experienced problems such as ill health.

Any such request should be made in writing to the headteacher of the school. The Local Governing Committee will make its decision about the request based on the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child. In addition to taking into account the views of the headteacher who has statutory responsibility for the internal organisation, management and control of the school, the Local Governing Committee will take into account the views of the parents and of appropriate medical and education professionals.

Summer Born Children

The parents of a summer born child, i.e. a child born between 1 April and 31 August, may request that the child be admitted out of their normal age group, to the reception class in the September following their fifth birthday and that that the child will remain in this cohort as they progress through school.

Parents who want to make this request should make an application for their child's normal age group at the usual time. The application to the local authority should include this request and in addition it should be made in writing to the headteacher of the school. The local authority will liaise with the Local Governing Committee that will make its decision about the request based on the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child. In addition to taking into account the views of the headteacher, who has statutory responsibility for the internal organisation, management and control of the school, the Local Governing Committee will take into account the views of the parents and of appropriate medical and education professionals.

Parents will be informed of the outcome of the request before primary national offer day.

If the request is agreed by the Local Governing Committee, the application for the normal age group may be withdrawn before a place is offered. If the request is refused, the parent must decide whether to accept the offer of a place for the normal age group, or to refuse it and make an in year application for admission to year one for the September following the child's fifth birthday.

Where a parent's request is agreed, they must make a new application as part of the main admissions round the following year.

One admission authority cannot be required to honour a decision made by another admission authority on admission out of the normal age group. Parents, therefore, should consider whether to request admission out of the normal year group at all their preference schools, rather than just their first preference schools.

Waiting Lists

In addition to their right of appeal, applicants will be offered the opportunity to be placed on a waiting list. This waiting list will be maintained in order of the oversubscription criteria set out below and not in the order in which applications are received or added to the list. Waiting lists for

admission will operate throughout the school year. The waiting list will be held open until the last day of the summer term. Inclusion on the school's waiting list does not mean that a place will eventually become available.

Infant Class Size Regulations

Infant classes may not, by law, contain more than 30 pupils with a single qualified teacher (subject to the provisions in the School Admissions Code for 'excepted children'). Parents do have a right of appeal in accordance with the infant class size regulations if the school is oversubscribed and their child is refused a place.

The Local Governing Committee will, where logistically possible, admit twins and all siblings from multiple births where one of the children is the last child ranked within the school's PAN.

In-Year Applications

An application can be made for a place for a child at any time outside the admission round and the child will be admitted where there are available places. Applications should be made by contacting the local authority admission team at School Admissions, Hartlepool Borough Council, Centre for Excellence in Teaching & Learning, Brierton Lane, Hartlepool, TS25 4BY, on 01429 284368 or by email at admissionsteam@hartlepool.gov.uk

Where there are places available but more applications than places, the published oversubscription criteria will be applied.

If there are no places available, a request can be made that the child is added to the waiting list.

Right of Appeal

Where a parent has been notified that a place is not available for a child, every effort will be made by the local authority to help the parent to find a place in a suitable alternative school. Parents who are refused a place have a statutory right of appeal. Further details of the appeals process are available by writing to the chair of governors at the school address or in the local authority schools admissions team, details above

Fair Access Protocol

The school is committed to taking its fair share of children who are vulnerable and/or hard to place, as set out in locally agreed protocols. Accordingly, outside the normal admission round the Local Governing Committee is empowered to give absolute priority to a child where admission is requested under any local protocol that has been agreed by both the school and the Local Governing Committee for the current school year. The Local Governing Committee has this power, even when admitting the child would mean exceeding the published admission number (subject to the infant class size exceptions).

Nursery

For children attending the school's nursery, application to the reception class of the school must be made in the normal way, to the home local authority. Attendance at the school's nursery does not automatically guarantee that a place will be offered at the school.

False evidence

The Local Governing Committee reserves the right to withdraw the offer of a place or, where a child is already attending the school, the place itself, where it is satisfied that the offer or place was obtained by deception.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Local Authority's admission guidance for parents.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

15th February 2022



Report of: Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

Subject: COMMISSIONING OF SHORT BREAK ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND/OR DISABILITIES

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Key Decision (general exception applies)

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to ask members to approve a procurement process through tender submissions for short break and specialist equipment services for children with SEND (Special Education Needs and/ or Disabilities) and their families.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Short breaks are part of a continuum of services which support children, young people with SEND and their families. They include the provision of day, evening, overnight and weekend activities for the child and young person, and can take place in a child's home, the home of an approved carer, or in a residential or community setting. The breaks usually have two aims: to enable children/ young people to participate in fun, interesting and safe activities and to provide a break from caring for parents.

3.2 There are a range of short break options commissioned and provided by Hartlepool Borough Council which includes Exmoor Grove Children's Home, Short Break activities as set out in this report and direct payment process for families to source and access their own support. A report was presented to committee on 12th October 2021 which set out information about short break services and the council's short break service statement.

3.3 The local authority have a statutory duty to provide short breaks to children and young people with SEND to safeguard and promote their welfare. It is

important that families have a number of options to choose from for short breaks to ensure that the short break meets their child and family's needs.

- 3.4 Hartlepool Families First currently deliver the short break and specialist equipment service. The contract for this comes to an end in April 2022. Therefore there is a need to undertake a procurement process for these services to ensure there is no gap to services for families.

4. PROPOSAL

- 4.1 It is proposed to go out to tender for a Short Breaks Extended Activities and Specialist Equipment Service for three years with an additional two years included as an option dependent on performance and the budget situation.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Information gathered by the Parent Carer Forum from parents states that the services currently delivered are highly valued and they offer varied activities for children and young people with SEND. Information was included in the Short Break Service Statement presented to Children's Services Committee in October 2021.

6. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There is a risk that if this service is not procured there will be children and young people with SEND and their families not able to access the support they need. This will therefore mean there is a risk that families will hit crisis point and needs may escalate. These needs may need to be met through children's social care adding further pressure to the system.
- 6.2 These activities offer value for money as they are group activities and providers are able to source additional funding to support children and families. If these activities were not available it is highly likely that families will request direct payments which the council would need to provide due to the council's statutory duties for children with disabilities. This would be more costly than an activity based model as set out in this report.
- 6.3 Short Breaks offer respite care for families which is of paramount importance to support families.

7. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The service will be re-tendered in line with the current allocated budget therefore there are no specific financial implications.

8. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are no legal considerations within this report.

9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The provider will be expected to support children or young person with SEND depending on individual needs.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 The commissioning of short break services is likely to have a positive impact on all children and young people with SEND and their families. The service will be expected to support children and young people with SEND appropriate to their individual needs,

11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 There are no staff considerations for Hartlepool Borough Council employees.

12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations within this report.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 For members to approve the procurement of short breaks services for children and young people with SEND.

14. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 14.1 The current contract comes to an end in April 2022 and a decision needs to be made to prevent a gap in services for families.

15. CONTACT OFFICER

Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning
Level 4, Civic Centre 01429 523732; danielle.swainston@hartlepool.gov.uk

Sign Off:-

Director of Finance and Policy ☒

Chief Solicitor ☒

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

15 February 2022



Report of: Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

Subject: FOSTERING SERVICE INTERIM REPORT
1st July 2021 – 30th September 2021

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children Service's Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the second quarter of 2021. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and as such there is a requirement to provide the executive side of the Council with performance information.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The work of the Fostering Service is 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.

3.2 The report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff and Foster Carers, the constitution of the Fostering Panel, activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective Foster Carers and progress in relation to the priorities set out in the Fostering Annual Report.

3.3 The Fostering Services Minimum Standard 25.7 requires Fostering Services to ensure that the Executive of the Local Authority:

- Receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency once every 3 months;
- Monitors the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children;
- Satisfies themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.

4. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION (as of September 2021)

- 4.1 The fostering team continues to recruit and assess prospective Foster Carers to limit the Authority's dependence upon more costly, external provision for children. In this quarter, the number of children requiring an independent agency placement has increased by 5 and is now 41. There has also been an increase in the number of young people moving to a residential setting, going from 29 as at 30.6.21 to 33 as at 30.9.21. This demonstrates that demand upon services continued to grow in this quarter, so that in house provision could not meet every child's need.
- 4.2 The number of Foster Carers fluctuates considerably due to the temporary nature of those approved via Regulation 24 who are Foster Carers, though not yet formally approved via Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker (ADM). To ensure that reporting is as accurate as it can be, information on Foster Care numbers will be taken from tacit knowledge of the Fostering Service, supported with information from the Local Authority's data team. There are currently 162 Foster Carers (one more than at Q1), of these 59 are approved as Connected Carers, 37 via Panel and ADM and a further 22 subject to Regulation 24 and in the process of being assessed as Connected Carers. These Carers provide placements for 196 children and young people in total, 136 of those are in 'Mainstream' provision and 60 children/young people are with Connected Foster Carers. There are 16 young people in (in house) Staying Put arrangements with their previous Foster Carers, and 3 in Staying Put with independent Foster Carers. The provision is for post 18 care leavers.
- 4.3 Of the 162 approved Fostering households, there were 13 which were 'on hold' due to the individual circumstances of the Carers. This equated to 12 placements. There are 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.
- 4.4 The service has seen three Foster Carers be de-registered during this quarter. Two were 'mainstream' carers who had made the decision to resign for personal reasons and the third was a Connected Carer who had gone on to secure a Special Guardianship Order for their grandchild.
- 4.5 In the year 2019/2020 there were 316 children in our care, which increased to 346 in 2020/2021, an increase of 9.4%. The first quarter of 2021/22 showed a slight reduction in the numbers at 332 which represented a

decrease of 4.05%. In the second quarter this has reduced again to 313 children in our care as at 30th September 2021.

- 4.6 Despite the above (as described in 4.1) there has still been an increased need for externally provided placements. This is an indication that the current pool of Carers is not sufficient (in terms of breadth of 'offer') to meet need; recruitment of carers for groups of brothers and sisters and for older young people therefore continues.
- 4.7 The table below provides details of the impact of the recruitment activity which has taken place in second quarter of 2021.

Initial Enquiries	9
Information packs sent	9
Initial Visits	8
Preparation Group	Skills to Foster was run in July 2021 with 3 'mainstream' fostering households and 3 connected care households (7 people in total)
How many prospective Carers are in the assessment process?	26 Connected Carers 7 Mainstream' Carers

5. FOSTERING PANEL

- 5.1 In this quarter, the Fostering Panel has met on four occasions and made recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on the following fostering matters:
- One 'mainstream' Foster Carer approval
 - Three Connected Carer approvals
 - The match for permanence of a little girl with HBC Foster Carers
 - One 'best interest' decision
 - Four Foster Care reviews
 - Three Foster Care Resignations.
- 5.2 There are effective processes in place for the recommendations made by Panel to be considered by the Agency Decision Maker and the timescale for this is within 5 working days of the Panel meeting taking place.

6. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 In this quarter (from July 2021) the Fostering Team staffing situation has remained stable with no changes. There is a Social Worker who will be taking maternity leave in 2022 and action has been taken to secure her

cover at that time. A business support officer will take maternity leave over the same period and her cover has also been secured.

- 6.2 The Fostering Team retains the role of a designated 'Family Finder' who drives the search for permanent placements for those children and young people for whom Long Term Foster Care is the agreed plan. In this quarter the number of children who have had agreed (via Panel) a best interest decision for permanence via Foster Carer is one. The child's current Foster Carer wishes to offer her permanence.
- 6.3 Emma Howarth continues to search for permanent carers for numerous other children whose 'best interest decision' has been approved. There are two sibling groups (of two) children and four individual children for whom there is as yet no identified family. There are seven sibling groups (of varying size), and 10 individual children currently placed with their prospective permanent carers and awaiting a match at panel and, finally, two individual children and a sibling group of three children for whom family finding has just begun. This work is monitored by the Assistant Director who, on a monthly basis, tracks the plans for every child who has a plan to be permanently cared for.

7. SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS

- 7.1 The Special Guardianship Order (SGO) lead for the council, Laura Jeffreys', work continues. Laura is reviewing the permanence plan for 40 children in our care with a view to establishing whether a Special Guardianship Order would better meet their needs. This work is initially in consultation with the child/young person's Social Worker (SW), the Foster Carer and the key team around them. Laura is gathering feedback and themes in order to inform where there may be barriers to a lesser order being considered and this will be discussed with Senior Managers in the next quarter.
- 7.2 The review of all Fostering policies and procedures has been completed in this quarter, by Social Worker Alison Bousfield. The documents will remain 'draft' until Foster Carers have been fully consulted (as described previously) and any financial implications discussed, before each is placed on the Council's intranet for transparency and ease of access.
- 7.3 Two Social Workers from the Fostering Team were identified to become the leads on Connected Care (CC). Their key responsibilities are to be the contact point for all HBC Children's Social Workers regarding process in order to:
- Receive information following Public Law Outline and/or court hearings where there is a likelihood that a CC assessment is required i.e. early notification into the CC leads - to include the actual order.
 - At above point meet with the Child's worker to consider joint visit, timescale for the assessment, book panel date.
 - Undertake joint visit (with Child's SW) to a family when a viability assessment is being considered in order to inform the family of the

requirements of Fostering and to inform family and Child's SW whether their situation is likely to meet those requirements or not.

- Meet with Child's SW and legal team to share the above information so that there is an auditable decision making process and agreed way forward.
- Complete assessments within regulatory timescales and timescales for court.
- Post approval - undertake the Supervising Social Worker role to support the family and liaise with SGO lead and Child's SW to prepare for SGO, where that is the plan.
- Provide Support and Training Groups for all CC providers in conjunction with the Fostering Team and the SGO lead - Skills to Foster and annual schedule of training to be offered across the piece; additional support and training specific to the needs of CC providers and SGO carers to be planned together
- Arrange support group to run quarterly as a minimum - again linking with SGO Lead so that there is no duplication of provision.
- Represent HBC in the Regional Meetings (Led by Fostering Network) to ensure best practice and learning from research.

The impact of the above activity will be reviewed in December 2021.

7. Participation officer Kim Butler has led on the following pieces of work with Foster Carers in this quarter:

- Foster Care Charter – has been reviewed;
- Foster Care training for January to March has been scheduled for circulation in the next quarter;
- Young people who are part of our Children in Our Care Council are considering helping with our Foster Care recruitment campaign;
- Participation session offered to Foster Carers - Kim helped foster carers in creating their profiles for children and young people to see prior to meeting them. Kim gave Carers an opportunity in this session to share any other problems they may have had.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Demand for Foster Care placements continues, despite the gradual reduction in the overall number of children in our care. There are implications from this for Hartlepool Borough Council, whose aim is to care for its own children and young people wherever possible. The inherent risk is the pressure placed on budgets whenever there is an increased use of independent provision. This has been mitigated this year by increasing capacity in terms of staffing which means greater 'availability' to carers who need the best support possible to keep our children safe and stable. Also, we continue to focus on recruitment and completing robust Foster Care assessments to meet our children's needs locally.

9. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 There are no specific financial considerations within this report.

10. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 There are no specific legal considerations within this report.

11. CONSULTATION

- 11.1 Foster carers are supported by their supervising social worker and the social workers make contact with them regularly. Their views are heard and responded to. Foster Carers were asked what they wanted to be offered in terms of their annual schedule of training for 2021/22 and their ideas have been incorporated. The responses from the Foster Care Survey for 2021/22 will assist us in the identification of priorities and development of the Service for 2022/23.

12. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 The Fostering service ensures that it supports all Foster Carers to enable them to support our children and young people.

13. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 13.1 The service continues to recruit and assess prospective Foster Carers to provide placement choice with a range of Fostering Families which reflect the needs of the children we care for. This year's Foster Care Conference included a session around the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and Asexual community. Foster Carers asked for further training on this subject and a session was duly built into the annual schedule of training for this year.

14. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 14.1 There are no staff considerations for Hartlepool Borough Council employees.

15. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 15.1 There are no asset management considerations.

16. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 16.1 The Children's Service Committee is asked to note the report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service.

17. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 17.1 The Fostering Service is required to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to children looked after by the local authority and provide regular reports to the Children Services Committee to enable the Committee to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.
- 17.2 Children's Services Committee has an important role in scrutinizing the activities of the Fostering Service to ensure that performance in this area is robust.

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Fostering National Minimum Standards Services 2011;
- Fostering Regulations 2011;
- Fostering Annual Report 2020/21

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