

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

14 March 2024

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

**Present:**

Councillor: Jim Lindridge (In the Chair)

Councillors: Councillors, Brian Cowie, Brenda Harrison and Cameron Sharp

Co-opted Members:

Zoe Westley, Special School Representative  
Tracy Gibson, CE Diocese Representative

Also Present:

Officers: Sally Robinson, Executive Director of Children's and Joint  
Commissioning Services  
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education  
Julie Reed, School Place Planning, Admissions and School Capital  
Manager  
Sandra Shears, Head of Finance, Corporate and Schools  
Jackie Webb, Inclusion Co-ordinator  
Julian Heward, Communications and Marketing Team  
Denise Wimpenny, Democratic Services Team

#### **44. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Sue Little, Bob Buchan, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services, Martin Pout, Primary Parent Governor Representative and Jo Wilson, RC Diocese Representative.

#### **45. Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **46. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2024**

Received.

**47. Schools' Capital Works Programme 2024-25** (*Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

**Type of decision**

Key Decision – Forward Plan Ref CJCS 142/23.

**Purpose of report**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the 2024/24 Schools' Capital Works Programme, as detailed in confidential **APPENDIX A**, in order to progress the design and detailed costing exercise in time for the majority of projects to be carried out during the summer holiday period. **This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).**

**Issue(s) for consideration**

The report provided background information in relation to capital funding allocations. At the time of writing the report, capital funding allocations for 2024/25 had not been communicated to the Local Authority. Approval was sought for the schemes proposed in confidential Appendix A subject to the local authority agreeing contributions from schools towards individual schemes in line with the shared funding principles established by the Schools Forum. **This item (Appendix A) contained exempt information under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006), namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Para 3).**

The Committee was referred to Table 1 which outlined the total funding available of £1,194,672 for works and Table 2 which detailed the total cost of schemes proposed including a contingency of £100,000 of which Members' approval was sought.

Following presentation of the report, the School Place Planning, Admissions and School Capital Manager responded to queries raised arising from the report. The proposal to carry forward the remaining balance from 2023/24 was welcomed.

The following decision was agreed with no dissent.

## Decision

- (i) The Committee approved the schedule of 2024/25 capital works programme as summarised in confidential APPENDIX A, subject to the LA agreeing contributions from schools towards individual schemes in line with the shared funding principles established by the Schools Forum. **These items contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Para 3).**
- (ii) That the Executive Director of Children's & Joint Commissioning Services, in consultation with the Chair of this Committee, be given dispensation and discretion to authorise works where an emergency (eg risk of school closure) or a significant health and safety risk is exposed.
- (iii) That the Executive Director of Children's & Joint Commissioning Services, in consultation with the Chair of this Committee, be given dispensation and discretion to add or remove a project(s) as a result of an increase or decrease in the 2025/25 SCA funding allocation.

## 48. **Dedicated Schools Grant – Early Years Block 2024/25** *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

### **Type of decision**

Key tests (i) and (ii) apply – Forward Plan Reference CJCS 143/23

### **Purpose of report**

To present the indicative Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding allocation in relation to the Early Years Funding for 2024/25 and propose the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) that sets hourly rates for providers for 2024/25.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Committee was referred to the 2024/25 funding allocation for the Early Years Block, shown in a table included in the report. Proposals for hourly rate splits for each type of provision in 2024/25 were provided as detailed in the report. The funded hourly rate for 3 to 4 year old provision was £5.63 which included 49p for the teacher pay and pension funding and it was proposed to add the 25p new funding for teacher's pay increases to the overall base rate instead of adding it to the existing 24p supplement, the benefits of which were outlined.

Members were referred to the proposed hourly rate payments for a single 2 year old provision in rate which mirrored the 3 to 4 year old hourly rate proposal with certain exceptions, as set out in the report. Proposed hourly rate payments for the new under 2 year old provision rates were shown in a table included in the report.

At their meeting on 15 February 2024, Schools' Forum had reviewed the hourly rate proposals alongside results of the consultation with providers and voted unanimously to approve the retention of 4% by the local authority to deliver the extended early year's entitlements. Forum also voted unanimously to support the hourly rate proposals across all areas of provision, the 3 to 4 year old rates shown at paragraph 5.3, the combined 2 year old rates shown at paragraph 5.6 and the 9 months to 2 year old rates shown at paragraph 5.7.

Should Committee agree with the recommendations of Schools' Forum, providers would be paid a minimum of £5.10 per hour for 3 to 4 year old provision, £7.57 per hour for 2 year old provision and £10.38 per hour for 9 months to 2 year old provision.

The following decision was agreed with no dissent.

### **Decision**

- (i) The contents of this report and the outcomes from the consultation with providers and Schools' Forum were noted.
- (ii) The recommendation of the Schools' Forum to centrally retain funding of 4% was noted.
- (iii) That the hourly rate funding formula for three to four year old provision for 2024/25, as show in the table at paragraph 5.3, including the new teacher's pay increase of 25p in the base rate to all providers be approved.
- (iv) That the single hourly rate funding formula for two year old provision in 2024/25 as shown in the table at paragraph 5.6, as recommended by Schools' Forum, be approved.
- (v) That the hourly rate funding formula for under two year old provision for 2024/25, as outlined at paragraph 5.7, as recommended by Schools' Forum, be approved.

## **49. Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block 2024/25**

*(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

### **Type of decision**

Key decision - tests (i) and (ii) apply. Forward plan reference is CJCS 144/23.

### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the funding allocation for the High Needs Block in 2024/25 and to seek approval for the 2024/25 budget. The High Needs Block forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

It was reported that the High Needs Block funding allocations for 2024/25 had been published by Government on 19 December 2023. As with other areas of the DSG, funding for the High Needs Block was via a National Funding Formula (NFF).

The budget requirement proposed for 2024/25 exceeded the High Needs block funding allocation by £2.171m (2.146m in 2023/24). The report outlined funding available and the proposed year 1 recovery plan savings that make up the budget requirement. On 23 November 2023, the Schools' Forum had a lengthy discussion to consider a number of options to reduce the projected overspend within the 2024/25 budget. Members of the Schools' Forum did not feel they could support these options as they felt that demand continued to increase and disinvesting at this time would be detrimental to children with SEND.

Officers reported back to Schools' Forum on 7 December 2023 to explain that savings proposals amounting to £0.600m would be taken forward to this Committee for decision and referred Members to the savings proposals within the 2024/25 budget requirement as detailed in the report.

The report detailed that the total high needs funding for 2024/25 was £19.845m. The detailed high needs block planned spend for 2024/25 was also set out in the report and it was highlighted that the budget requirement proposed for 2024/25 exceeded the High Needs Block funding allocation by £2.171m.

In the lengthy discussion that followed, Members considered the comments of Schools' Forum that they did not feel able to recommend the year one recovery plan savings and their concerns that such disinvestment would mean that some of the budget proposals did not meet the educational needs of children. Members acknowledged the hard work of officers and Schools' Forum given the complexity of the issue and the challenges around increased provision and continued reduction in funding and the impact as a

result. In response to queries raised arising from the report, clarification was provided in relation to the issues in terms of out of authority top-ups and the costs associated with independent placements and out of area provision.

Following clarification in relation to the options available, whilst Members acknowledged the concerns of Schools' Forum and, given the need to address the overspend, reluctantly accepted that the savings were unavoidable and there was little choice but to support the cuts given the continuing budget pressures in the High Needs Block. Given the concerns of the Committee and Schools' Forum, it was suggested that a letter be sent to the relevant Government Ministers, to include the Minister for Education, highlighting the impact of continuing pressures on the children of Hartlepool.

The following decision was agreed with no dissent.

### **Decision**

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (ii) That the proposed year 1 recovery plan savings listed in the table at paragraph 3.9 of the report be approved.
- (iii) That the High Needs block budget requirement shown in the table at paragraph 5.1 be approved.
- (iv) That a letter be sent to the relevant Government Ministers, to include the Minister of Education, to highlight the concerns of this Committee around the impact of continuing funding cuts on the children of Hartlepool.

## **50. School Attendance and Absence** (*Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

### **Type of decision**

For information

### **Purpose of report**

To provide an update on pupil attendance and absence in Hartlepool and share what actions are being taken to support improvements in school attendance.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The report provided background information in relation to the importance of school attendance and outlined pupil attendance and absence data for the

previous 3 academic years which was published by the Department for Education annually in October.

Members were referred to tables included in the report which clarified attendance rates across the local authority for all secondary schools and academies compared with national data figures and included attendance and absence rates across primary schools and academies in Hartlepool as well as the level of persistent absence across the local authority for both primary, secondary and academies as a comparator with national figures.

The figures showed that Hartlepool primary schools and academies were close to the national average for attendance and persistent absence. However, the gap between Hartlepool's secondary schools and academies for attendance was almost 2% below the national average attendance and 4% greater than the national average for persistent absence. Members were referred to the main reasons for absence across the age population in Hartlepool as well as the ongoing work of the attendance team and the new guidance issued by the Department of Education to improve school attendance as outlined in the report.

In the lengthy discussion that followed, officers and school representatives responded to issues raised arising from the report. Clarification was provided in relation to the challenges and barriers around attendance, the current work between the Council and DfE Attendance Adviser to improve attendance, measures in place to promote the DfE campaign "Moments Matter, Attendance Counts, the impact of the new statutory guidance.

Concerns were raised in relation to the definition of persistent absence, the potential reasons for unauthorised absences and the challenges around penalties and high levels of exclusions. Members expressed disappointment that the number of exclusions in Hartlepool was above the national average and were keen to see those numbers reduce. Reference was also made in relation to the number of suspensions in schools and the detrimental impact of exclusions on the high needs block funding. Clarification was provided in relation to the potential reasons for high levels of absence and the implications in terms of how reasons for absence were recorded. The need for a clearer definition of illness was also highlighted. The Assistant Director advised that since the report was written, the Education Partnership had met and one of the topics of concern was attendance and exclusions. It had therefore been agreed that this be progressed through working groups and a multi-agency approach recognising that this was not just an education issue.

## **Decision**

That the contents of the report and comments of Members be noted.

## **51. Chair's Closing Remarks**

The Chair was pleased to report that Oliver Huermann had recently appointed to the Youth Parliament. A Member requested that Oliver be invited to future meetings of the Committee. The Executive Director advised that as a Member of the Youth Parliament he had a seat on this Committee.

## **52. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

It was reported that the next meeting would be confirmed following the May elections.

The meeting concluded at 5.15 pm.

**H MARTIN**

**DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

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