

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

11 October 2022

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

Present:

Councillor: Jim Lindridge (In the Chair)

Councillors: Councillors Brian Cowie, Christopher Groves, Brenda Harrison, Sue Little, Shane Moore and Sue Little

Also Present: Councillor Mike Young

Officers: Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Jane Young, Assistant Director, Children and Families
Jane Lane, Assistant Team Manager, Fostering and Placement
Julian Heward, Senior Communications and Marketing Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

19. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Moss Boddy, Bob Buchan, Mark Tilling, Secondary Head Representative, David Turner, Primary Head Representative, Joanne Wilson, RC Diocesan Representative and Zoe Westley, Special School Head Representative.

20. Declarations of Interest

None.

21. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022

Received.

22. Annual Performance Report – Children's Social Care (Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To present to Children's Services Committee the annual performance report for children's social care in Hartlepool.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided background information in relation to the requirement under the Children Act 1989 for local authorities to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. A performance report for the activity covering the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 was appended to the report which provided details of demand and activity in children's social care as well as performance against key performance indicators which were reported annually via statutory returns. It was highlighted that whilst the data contained within the report was a provisional outturn at this stage it was unlikely to change significantly when the statutory return was submitted.

The Assistant Director, Children and Families provided a summary and analysis of key headline performance data as set out in the report which included details of contact referrals and assessments, children in need including those in need of protection and children looked after performance information.

In the discussion that followed officers responded to issues raised arising from the report. Clarification was provided in relation to the key drivers in terms of the increase in the number of referrals, case load details and support arrangements in place for social workers.

Members welcomed the report and commented on the positive outcomes and strengths identified in a recent peer audit. The continuing good work was acknowledged despite the challenges both locally and nationally. Members were pleased to note that Hartlepool was the strongest performing Children's Services Department in the Tees Valley and appreciation was expressed to those involved.

The shortage of social workers was discussed at length, the impact as a result as well as the difficulties around recruitment and retention in this area. Emphasis was placed upon the need to increase the number of social workers. Concerns were raised regarding the financial challenges facing smaller local authorities like Hartlepool given the continuing increase in the number of referrals. The benefits of lobbying Central Government and the

town's MP were debated. It was suggested that further discussions be held following the meeting in this regard.

Decision

- (i) The Committee noted the annual Children's Social Care report for 2021/22.
- (ii) That further discussions be held following the meeting in terms of lobbying Central Government and the town's MP regarding the financial pressures facing the Council given the continuing increases in the number of referrals.

23. Annual Fostering Report 2021-2022 and Statement of Purpose March 2022 *(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 2021/22. The provision of foster care is a regulated activity and as such there is a requirement to provide 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, priorities for 2021-22, the voice of Hartlepool foster carers and children and young people who are cared for as well as service developments. 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.

Members welcomed the report and spoke in support of the service. Positive feedback was shared with the Committee in relation to the outcome of discussions with young people and staff as well as recent Fostering Panel training. The Chair took the opportunity to share the feedback from the Fostering Panel Chair as detailed in Appendix 5 to the report.

Decision

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

24. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

The Chairman ruled that the following item of business should be considered by the Committee as a matter of urgency in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(B) (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that the matter could be dealt with without delay.

25. Corporate Parent Training

Reference was made to the suggestion at the last meeting that the young people representatives/care leavers should be invited to a future meeting of Full Council to provide a better understanding of the safeguarding agenda and corporate parenting responsibilities. The Chair advised that following consideration of this issue it was felt that attendance at Council was not appropriate, given the pressures this would place on the young people, the background to which was outlined. A potential motion to Council around corporate parenting responsibilities had also been considered. The Director commented on the option for Elected Members to meet the young people in care in an informal setting and sought Members views on utilising the Celebrating Success Event to be held on 20 October 2022 at 5.30 pm in the Borough Hall to facilitate this. Members were in support of this suggestion and it was agreed that a letter be sent from the Chair to all Members of the Council to encourage attendance at this event.

26. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was reported that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 15 November 2022 at 4.00 pm in the Civic Centre.

The meeting concluded at 5.00 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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