

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

17 January 2023

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

Present:

Councillor: Jim Lindridge (In the Chair)

Councillors: Councillors Moss Boddy, Brian Cowie, Christopher Groves, Brenda Harrison, Sue Little and Cameron Sharp

Also Present: Edwin Jeffries, Chair of the Joint Trade Unions

Co-opted Members:

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

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Managing Director
Chris Little, Director of Resources and Development
Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education
Sandra Shears, Head of Finance, Corporate and Schools
Julian Heward, Senior Communications and Marketing Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Democratic Services Team

27. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Bob Buchan, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services Committee and Jill Mortimer, MP for Hartlepool.

28. Declarations of Interest

None.

29. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2022

Received.

30. Matters Arising from the Minutes

In relation to the decision taken at the last meeting (Minute 30 refers) to submit a disapplication request to the Secretary of State for Education to set the education services general duties rate at £60 per pupil/place for 2023/24. The authority received a letter on 29 December 2022 approving the request.

In relation to the decision taken at the last meeting (Minute 30 refers) that a request for additional funding be sought from the Secretary of State to assist in discharging statutory responsibilities to schools, the Head of Finance Corporate and Schools outlined the response from the Minister for Schools that there were no plans to reintroduce the Educational Services Grant (ESG) at this stage, details of which were set out below:-

“With regard to your enquiry about the ESG, when the national funding formula was introduced in 2018, the central school services block (CSSB) was created. This includes funding for the retained duties element of the ESG, which is funding for duties which Local Authorities hold in respect of all local schools, including academies. Where Local Authorities continue to provide additional services to maintained schools, and not academies, beyond those funded through the CSSB, these can be paid for using de-delegation. This system creates parity of funding between academies and maintained schools. The Department does not have any plans to reintroduce the ESG at this stage”.

31. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 23/24 to 2024/25 *(Director of Resources and Development)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the MTFS and to enable the Committee to scrutinise / comment on the 2023/24 savings proposals referred from Finance and Policy Committee.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Resources and Development gave an outline of the report originally submitted to the Finance and Policy Committee on 12 December 2022 and updated Members on the subsequent impact of the Government's 2023/24 provisional settlement issued on 19 December. The Director outlined the strategy agreed by the Finance and Policy Committee to address the budget deficit the Council faced in 2023/24 and 2024/25. The

Director advised members that the spending power, including the increased Council Tax and Adult Social Care precept, provided in provisional settlement was £1.188m more than forecast and it would be recommended that Finance and Policy Committee use these resources to reduce use of one off funding to balance the 2023/24 budget and put the Council's financial position on a more sustainable basis. Included in that strategy were a number of budget savings identified across all departments for 2023/24 and the report outlined those proposals that fell within the remit of this committee. The Director highlighted that the Finance and Policy Committee had requested that should any of the savings proposals not be supported by a relevant Policy Committee, that committee should forward alternative proposals to the same value as it was key that the savings proposed across the Council as a whole be met in 2023/24.

The Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services outlined each of the savings proposed for services within this Committee's remit, as detailed in Appendix C to the report.

Elected Members debated issues arising from the report. Officers responded to clarification sought from Members on issues set out in the report. The Committee considered the individual savings relevant to this Committee and a summary of the Committee's discussions and comments were set out below:-

In relation to the proposal to delete the vacant post in the One Stop Shop supporting young people into positive destinations to ensure they are engaged in education, employment and training, a Member raised concerns regarding the impact of this proposal in terms of the potential deterioration in performance a reduction in the team may bring. In response to queries raised in relation to the impact of this proposal, the measures in place to mitigate this issue and the current support arrangements in place for 15-17 year olds were outlined. The Member was reassured by the clarification provided.

Whilst Members concluded that these were difficult decisions, given that any reduction in service was not ideal, the pressures to identify savings were acknowledged and Members recognised that the proposals resulted in the least possible impact on service provision.

Decision

That as requested by Finance and Policy Committee the Committee considered the recommended 2023/24 savings proposed detailed in Annex A - Appendix C relating to the services within this Committees portfolio and Members made the following comments to be reported back to Finance and Policy Committee on 23th January in relation to each of the savings proposed.

Budget Reduction Heading	Budget Reduction 2023/24 £000	Children's Services Committee comments
One Stop Shop	36	No additional comments to those outlined above.
Chatham House Asset Review	25	No specific comments were made.
Governor Clerking Service	20	No specific comments were made.

32. **Dedicated Schools Grant – School Budget Shares 2023/24 and Central School Services Block 2023/24** (Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Tests (i) and (ii) apply – Forward Plan Ref CJCS 130/23

Purpose of report

To provide details of the 2023/24 schools block funding allocation and to propose school budget shares for 2023/24. The Schools Block funding forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Issue(s) for consideration

The Head of Finance (Corporate and Schools) referred to the table included in the report which outlined Hartlepool's Schools Block Indicative Allocation for 2023/24 which totalled £76.531m. 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 £0.711m for 2023/24 had been confirmed based on October 2022 census numbers.

Schools' Forum were required to agree each element of spending against the CSSB on an annual basis. On 18 November 2022, the Schools' Forum had agreed to fund the elements amounting to £0.572m with the balance of CSSB funding (£0.139m) to be transferred to the school's block for 2023/24.

In relation to individual school budgets, at their meeting on 18 November 2022, Schools' Forum voted unanimously to apply an MFG of 0.5%, the maximum allowed along with an appropriate cap which had been calculated at 3%. The report included a table which provided a summary of individual school budgets for 2023/24 which would mirror the NFF, plus the transfer of funding from CSSB proposed block transfers.

In the discussion that followed the school representatives commented that whilst there had been a slight increase in funding allocations such increases did not meet the needs of the school. The tight cost pressures in primary schools as a result of falling numbers were also noted. Reference was also made to the complexities around funding allocations over the past few years and the school representatives took the opportunity to express their thanks and appreciation to the Council's Finance Team for the excellent support they continued to provide.

The following decision was agreed with no dissent.

Decision

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (ii) The agreement by Schools' Forum to centrally retain funding of £0.572m, with the residual £0.139m being transferred to the schools block, as detailed in paragraph 5.5 was noted.
- (iii) The Committee agreed the MFG to be used for 2023/24 as outlined in paragraph 6.1 of the report and noted the recommendation from Schools' Forum of applying an MFG of 0.5% alongside a cap of 3%.
- (iv) That the individual school budget share for 2023/24 as summarised in the table at paragraph 6.2 of the report be approved.

33. Amendment to the Instrument of Government of Fens Primary School *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non-Key decision

Purpose of report

To seek approval of the Committee to amendments to the Instrument of Government of Fens Primary School in accordance with the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 as amended by the School Governance (Constitution and Federation) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report set out details of a proposal to reduce the governing body from the current 16 to 11 with the removal of one Parent Governor position and four Co-opted Governor positions. This would bring the school closer in terms of the number of governors to most of the remaining maintained schools. Two Parent Governor places would be retained which met the minimum requirements of the governance regulations. There would still be

one Local Authority Governor, one Staff Governor and the Headteacher, as required by the regulations and six Co-opted Governors. A copy of the revised Instrument of Government was appended to the report.

The following decision was agreed with no dissent.

Decision

The revised Instrument of Government for Fens Primary School was approved.

34. Pupil Performance 2022 – Headline Indicator Summary *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To provide a summary of the pupil performance measures for Hartlepool from public examinations in the summer of 2012.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided a two year comparison from 2019 (pre Covid and the last test results) within Hartlepool and provided a comparator against national outcomes. The published pupil performance measures for 2019 and 2022, along with national averages, were presented at Appendix A. It was highlighted that Hartlepool's quartile placement for each 2022 measure was also included in the Appendix.

A summary of the performance across early years to key stage 4 was included in the report.

In the discussion that followed officers and school representatives responded to issues raised arising from the report. The links between poor attendance and poor outcomes were discussed at length as well as the contributing factors attributed to poor education performance which included challenges around engaging with hard to reach families, parenting and social issues, the impact of ongoing budget restraints resulting in staffing reductions, the pressures on schools to reduce opportunities for children and young people in terms of non-educational activities and the detrimental impact of the pandemic on education.

The Primary Head representative commented that the outcomes for key stage 2 were positive and, whilst budgets were tight and hardship and social problems remained a challenge in Hartlepool, schools were working hard to continue to provide children with opportunities. The importance of enrichment and opportunities were further debated as well as the need for

schools to be supported in this regard. The Secondary Head representative raised concerns in relation to the external pressures facing families and community issues impacting on education outcomes. Concerns were also raised regarding recent A level results and the implications in terms of future aspirations and achievements.

The Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services highlighted that Hartlepool was a priority investment area and commented on the key challenges in Hartlepool around parenting, attendance, speech and language and communication issues. Compliments and thanks were conveyed to the teaching staff in schools, with continuing reducing budgets, for their hard work in supporting children and young people and the excellent pastoral service offered in schools.

The Committee went on to further discuss performance data, engagement and achievement in the classroom during which the Education Representatives expressed concerns regarding the additional challenges faced by children and young people in deprived areas which had increased during the pandemic, examples of which were shared with Members. The importance of recognising the additional support needs in areas of higher deprivation like Hartlepool were highlighted as well as issues around hidden poverty and the impact of hardship on education outcomes. The work pressures faced by working parents and the difficulties around having the skills to support children with homework were acknowledged.

The Chair referred to grant opportunities available to certain students, details of which would be shared with schools under separate cover following the meeting.

Decision

The contents of the report and comments of the Committee be noted and actioned as appropriate.

35. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was reported that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 14 February 2023 at 4.00 pm in the Civic Centre.

The meeting concluded at 5.35 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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