

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

22 June 2023

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

Present:

Councillor: Jim Lindridge (In the Chair)

Councillors: Harrison, Holbrook and Moore.

Zoe Westley, Special Schools Head Representative

Martin Pout, Parent Governor Representative

Officers: Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning

Sandra Shears, Head of Finance - Corporate and Schools

Ann Turner, Governor Support Manager

Jane Wilson, Fostering Team Manager

Sue Mansell, newly appointed Fostering Team Manager

Amanda Whitaker, Democratic Services Team

It was highlighted that there were newly appointed members to the Committee. At the request of the Chair, members and officers introduced themselves and the Chair welcomed members to the Committee.

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Cowie, Little and Sharp

Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representative

Tracy Gibson, C of E Diocese representative

Adam Palmer, Secondary School Head representative

Sue Sharpe, Primary School Head representative

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

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2023 were received.

4. The Role of the Children's Services Committee

Type of decision

For information

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee received a presentation by the Director outlining the responsibilities and structure of her Department and the role and remit of the Children's Services Committee. The presentation also included an overview of the strengths and challenges. Following the presentation, the Chair expressed his appreciation to Officers and referred to positive partnership working.

Decision

The Committee noted the report.

5. Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block

2023/24 (*Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

Type of decision

Key Decision – reference CJCS 135/23

Purpose of report

To seek approval for the special school funding model within the High Needs Block which forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Issue(s) for consideration

Further to minute 44 of the Committee held on 14th March 2023, Committee members were advised that finance officers within the Local Authority and Springwell and Catcote schools had worked together to develop top up rates for each pathway based on the needs of the children on different pathways. The proposed top up rates, based on three pathways, were set out in the report.

The proposed costs presented in the report compared the amounts paid to special schools in the financial year 2022/23. The budget available in 2023/24 to fund special school top-ups is £3.762m. The budget for financial year 2023/24 needed to fund the April to August interim request of £1.354m along with 7 months pro-rata of the new cost model basis (£2.303m). This gives a total budget requirement of £3.657m against the budget available of £3.762m. It was highlighted

that new commissioning agreements will need to be put in place to commission based on places needed on each pathway to ensure that the funding model meets the needs of the children in Hartlepool.

It was reported at the meeting that at a recent meeting of the Schools' Forum, the Forum had unanimously supported the proposal as set out in the report.

The Special Schools Head Representative expressed appreciation of the funding which would help both schools.

Decision

The Committee approved the special schools funding model as set out in the report.

6. To Nominate a Local Authority Representative to serve on the Governing Body of Grange Primary School *(Executive Director of 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 governing body of Grange Primary School.

Issue(s) for consideration

A schedule was submitted with the report setting out details of a vacancy that existed at Grange Primary School together with details of the application received. One application had been received for the position, as set out in a confidential appendix to the report. **This item 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).** Discussions had taken place between the applicant, Chair of Governors and Head Teacher regarding the skills the applicant could contribute to the Governing Body.

Decision

The Committee approved the local authority nomination of the applicant as set out in confidential Appendix A in respect of Grange Primary School.

7. To Nominate a Local Authority Representative to serve on the Governing Body of Fens Primary School (*Executive Director of 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 governing body of Fens Primary School.

Issue(s) for consideration

A schedule was submitted with the report setting out details of a vacancy that existed at Fens Primary School together with details of the application received. One application had been received for the position, as set out in a confidential appendix to the report. **This item 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).** Discussions had taken place between the applicant, Chair of Governors and Head Teacher regarding the skills the applicant could contribute to the Governing Body.

The Director highlighted that this was the last meeting that the Governor Support Manager would be attending, prior to her retirement. Tribute was paid to Ann Turner's 48 years of service and dedication.

Decision

The Committee approved the local authority nomination of the applicant as set out in confidential Appendix A in respect of Fens Primary School

8. North East Fostering and Recruitment and Retention Pathfinder (*Executive Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

Type of decision

Non-Key Decision

Purpose of report

To provide the Committee with details of the North East Foster recruitment and retention pathfinder and seek approval for Hartlepool Borough Council to participate in this pilot.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Board was advised that earlier this year, the Government had published its response to the independent review of children's social care. *Stable Homes: Built on Love* which sets out ambitious plans for the reform of children's social care. Under the pillar of *'putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care'* the Government had outlined its intention to invest in an ambitious fostering recruitment and retention programme and selected the North East region to pilot this work. The Government is investing over £24 million to introduce regional support hubs and an investment of over £3 million has been provided for the creation of a North East Pathfinder. Sunderland City Council is leading the Pathfinder in partnership with Together for Children and the twelve local authorities have committed to working collaboratively to roll out the pathfinder in the region. Work has commenced with the Department for Education (DfE) to co design a regional support hub that provides support, details of which were set out in report.

The Committee was advised that the overarching aim of the work is to increase the number of foster carers who are approved, thereby increasing the choice of placements for fostering service providers, improving matches and preventing placement breakdowns for children in our care. A Collaboration Agreement is in the process of being agreed by each of the 12 regional local authorities and the pathfinder is on track for the Support Hub to become operational soon. A diagram included in the report showed how the regional support hub will work

Following clarification regarding funding arrangements, the following decision was agreed with no dissent.

Decision

The participation of Hartlepool Borough Council in the North East Foster Recruitment and Retention Pathfinder was approved.

9. Inspection of Local Area Arrangements for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities - *Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*

Type of decision

No decision required, the report was for information.

Purpose of report

To report to the Committee the findings from the inspection of the Local Area Arrangements for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Issue(s) for consideration

The report of the Hartlepool Local Area SEND Inspection was appended to the report. The inspection had judged that the local area partnerships arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It was noted that despite being awarded the highest judgement outcome, the local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.

Committee members acknowledged the positive report which was considered to be the correct outcome of the inspection and a testament to the working arrangements in Hartlepool. A Committee member advised that it was highlighted in one of the parents discussions with inspectors about the complexities of 'sign posting' for parents, particularly in relation to health services. This concern was acknowledged at the meeting and an assurance was given that Officers were working with health colleagues and parents to make it easier to navigate health pathways.

Whilst recognising the distinction between statutory and non-statutory services, concerns were expressed at the implications of the recommendation of the Neighbourhood Services Committee, agreed by Full Council, to cease the provision of post-16 travel for young people with SEND. The Director responded that she was aware of the concerns. Complaints and a petition which had been received were being properly responded to. The Department was also supporting families if they had difficulties arising from changes in the post-16 travel policy and were working with the parent/carer forum in terms of how the Department could assist. The Director advised that it may be appropriate to await the outcome of the response to the complaints and petition before further consideration is given to this matter by the Committee. Appreciation was expressed that this issue had been raised at this Committee.

Decision

The Committee noted the findings of the inspection of local area arrangements for children and young people with SEND and the positive outcome achieved.

10. Annual Fostering Report 2022-2023 and Statement of Purpose March 2023 *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

No decision required, the report was for information.

Purpose of report

To provide the Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the year 2022/23 and to present the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for this service.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background around the production of the annual report of the Fostering Service which was appended to the report. The report 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, 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. Additionally there is the Children's Guide to Fostering and the Annual Schedule of Training for Foster Carers which were also appended to the report.

Members welcomed the report, expressed support for the service and reiterated the Fostering Team Manager's comments complimenting the team and its relationship with foster carers.

Decision

The Committee noted the report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service in the annual report for 2022/23, the Statement of Purpose and the Children's guide to Fostering.

11. Any Other Items which the Chair Considers are Urgent

None.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 12 September at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

The meeting concluded at 5.30 p.m.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 29 JUNE 2023