

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

5 December 2023

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, Philip Holbrook, Sue Little and Cameron Sharp

Co-opted Members:

Sue Sharpe, Primary Head Representative  
Martin Pout, Primary Parent Governor Representative  
Zoe Westley, Special School Representative

Also Present: Councillor Tom Feeney

Officers: Sally Robinson, Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services  
Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning  
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education  
Julian Heward, Communications and Marketing Team  
Denise Wimpenny, Democratic Services Team

### **33. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Shane Moore, Bob Buchan, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services and Adam Palmer, Secondary Head Representative.

### **34. Declarations of Interest**

None.

### **35. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023**

Received.

**36. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 to 2026/27** *(Director of Finance, IT and Digital and Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

**Type of decision**

Budget and Policy Framework

**Purpose of report**

To provide an update on the MTFS and to enable the Committee to scrutinise / comment on the savings proposals referred from the Finance and Policy Committee.

**Issue(s) for consideration**

The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services presented the report to Members outlining the background to the current financial position. At the meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee on 27 November an updated MTFS report had detailed the forecast budget deficit of £3.149m for 2024/25 and £8.080m over the MTFS period. As in previous years the addressing of the deficit needs to be managed through budget saving actions, which seek to minimise the impact on services where possible and also use of reserves.

To support the meeting of this budget gap, savings proposals totalling £1.792m had been proposed for 2024/25 and a total of £2.792m over the MTFS period. The acceptance of the proposals for 2024/25 would leave a remaining budget gap of £1.357m to be met from reserves in that year.

Members' comments on the recommended savings proposals were sought, as set out in Appendix C relating to the services within this Committee's remit to enable feedback to be reported to Finance and Policy Committee on 22 January 2024. The Executive Director reminded Members that in the event that Members did not support the savings, alternative proposals would have to be identified.

Elected Members considered each of the savings proposals within the Children's Services Committee's remit and the Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services responded to queries raised.

Set out below is a summary of the Committee's discussions and comments in relation to the savings proposals:-

**Activities for Children in Care**

Members supported this proposal following assurance that children in our care would not be detrimentally affected by the decision.

### **Local Welfare Support**

Concerns were raised in terms of the adverse effects on the most vulnerable in the town and the long term implications of this proposal. A number of queries were raised in terms of the impact of this reduction and clarification was sought whether if the saving was made, additional financial assistance and support could be accessed from other sources. The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services referred to additional support schemes that had been provided in recent years through schemes such as the Local Council Tax Support Scheme, Holiday Activities and Food Programme and the Household Support Fund. Members noted the proposal to remodel the Household Support Fund and discussed the potential implications of such changes as well as alternative options to avoid this saving.

The option to access grants via the voluntary and community sector were highlighted and the Primary Governor Parent Representative referred to potential support options in the community sector including a clothing support scheme which the Chair agreed to explore further following the meeting.

Whilst acknowledging the saving proposal was challenging, the Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services advised that if the proposal was not supported there was no other service area within the department which officers could put forward as an alternative saving. The Chair advised that officers were having to suggest savings that were very challenging due to the budget position. Following further debate, Members reluctantly supported this saving.

### **Children's Homes – Block Booking Provision**

Members welcomed that this saving could be achieved through cost avoidance and therefore supported the proposal.

### **Pupil Premium**

In response to queries raised, clarification was provided in relation to the pupil premium budget arrangements and potential impact on schools as a result of the proposal to amend the pupil premium split from 60% currently paid to schools and 40% retained within in local authority to a 50/50 split. Members were advised that the proposals should not impact on the school's core budget. Members supported this proposal.

### **Decision**

That the recommended savings proposals, as detailed in Appendix C, in relation to the services within the remit of this Committee be supported and

Members comments, as outlined above, be utilised to formulate a response to be presented to Finance and Policy Committee on 22 January 2024.

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

It was reported that the next meeting would be held on 23 January 2023 at 4.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 4.40 pm.

**H MARTIN**

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

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