

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

9th July 2024

The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Rachel Creevy (In the Chair)

Councillors: Councillors Martin Dunbar, Brenda Harrison, Sue Little and
Cameron Sharp

Co-opted Members:

Tracy Gibson, CE Diocese Representative
Martin Pout, Primary Parent Governor Representative
Zoe Westley, Special School Representative
Sue Sharpe, Primary Head Representative

Also Present:

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2 Councillor Gary Allen
was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Philip Holbrook

Councillor Moss Boddy

Officers: Sally Robinson, Executive Director of Children's and Joint
Commissioning Services
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education
Laura Gough, Assistant Director, Children and Families
Roni Checksfield, Team Manager, Youth Offending Service
Julian Heward, Communications and Marketing Team
Joan Stevens, Statutory Scrutiny Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Phil
Holbrook and Shane Moore. Jo Wilson, RC Diocese Representative and
Adam Palmer, Secondary Head Representative.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2024

Received.

4. The Role of the Children's Services Committee

(Executive, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

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 Committee discussed:

- The level of child poverty in Hartlepool. Attention was drawn to the ongoing review of the Poverty Strategy and the importance of building pathways out of poverty, rather than focusing on activities to mitigate the impacts of poverty. The bed poverty initiative recently publicised by the Head of High Tunstall School was also referenced.
- The importance of being able to focus investment on the provision of early help and preventative work into areas / activities that reflect local need.
- Education outcomes in Hartlepool and noted that Key Stage 2 results were now available. Key Stage 4 results would be available in August and a full report on this year's results was to be presented to the Children's Services Committee in January 2025. It was acknowledged that challenges are created in a mixed school economy in terms of improving education outcomes. In Hartlepool, however, the Education Partnership was successful in bringing Academy Trust CEO's and Maintained School Head Teachers together to support each other and the local authority, removing silo working. Hartlepool's small size means that schools work closely and collaboratively with each other.

The Director was thanked for the informative presentation.

Decision

The Committee noted the report.

5. Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2024 - 2025 *(Executive, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework.

Purpose of report

To seek approval from the Committee to begin a 12 week consultation process for the approval of the Youth Justice Strategic Plan.

Issue(s) for consideration

A link to the draft Hartlepool Youth Justice Service Strategic Plan 2024 - 2025 was appended to the report. The report set out the process which would be followed with a further report being submitted to this Committee on the 10th September 2024 to seek approval for the presentation to Full Council on the 3rd October 2024 to seek adoption of the Plan. The final Plan would also be sent to the National Youth Justice Board.

The Committee noted that the Youth Justice Plan provided an overview of the Youth Justice Service and contained priorities, against which a detailed seven point plan had been developed.

- Re-offending
- Early / Targeted Intervention, Prevention and Diversion
- Remand, Custody and Constructive Resettlement
- Risk, Safety and Wellbeing (Asset Plus)
- Restorative Justice
- Effective Governance
- Voice of the Children
- Child First'
- Education, Training, Employment
- Substance Misuse
- Serious Violence & Exploitation
- Over Represented Children

The Committee discussed levels of engagement with the service and the measurement of the performance, with attention drawn to national measures and the three Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) that the service works towards.

A member asked about the National Referral Mechanism, it was noted that decisions had been taking up to 12 months to be made and concern was expressed regarding the impact of this on young people who were vulnerable and open to exploitation. The referral process was, however, speeding up and young people who were waiting for a decision were able to access the Youth Justice Service.

Decision

The Committee noted progress made against the local Youth Justice Plan (2023/24) and approved the required process of consultation.

6. Out of School and Holiday Care *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Key Decision - tests (i) and (ii) applies. General Exception Provisions apply.

Purpose of report

To seek a decision from Children's Services Committee regarding the future provision of OSCAR's out of school and holiday care.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Chair stated that the report would be deferred from consideration at the November meeting of the Children's Services Committee.

Decision

That the report be deferred.

7. Approval of School Term and Holiday Dates 2025-26 *(Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non-Key

Purpose of report

- i) To seek agreement of the Children's Services Committee to the pattern of school term and holiday dates for the school year 2025-26 for Community Schools.
- ii) To seek agreement of the Children's Services Committee in recommending these dates to governing bodies of Foundation schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

Issue(s) for consideration

Members were advised that for a number of years, local authorities have, with some success agreed a unified calendar of term dates across the northern region.

In the spring term 2023-24 the Tees Valley region and a number of other north east representatives consulted on a pattern for 2025-2026 based on the guiding principles as shown in Appendix 1. The proposed pattern enables schools to begin the academic year on Monday 1st September 2025 and end the year on Tuesday 21st July 2026.

Following the consultation, the general consensus from the local authorities within the Tees Valley and other regional authorities was to adopt the model attached as set out in Appendix 1.

During the course of discussions the Committee highlighted the importance of scheduling PD days to focus on professional development and reinforced the need to ensure that they were not used for alternative purposes.

Decision

- (i) That the scheduled term dates and holiday dates for the 2025-2026 academic year for Community schools, as shown in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.
- (ii) That the scheduled term and holiday dates for the 2025-2026 academic year, be recommended to governing bodies of all Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

8. Annual Fostering Report 2023 - 2024 and Statement of Purpose March 2024 *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To provide the Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the year 2023/24 and present the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide for the fostering 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 carers 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.

Emphasis was placed upon the focus of activities on the young person and the instrumental role this played in the provision of outstanding children's services. Particular attention was drawn to the value of the:

- 'Mockingbird' scheme with an assurance that the hub continued to do well and Mockingbird carers continued to meet.
- Children in Care Council as a means of hearing the voice of young, alongside other excellent events, such as the recent BBQ.

Issues in relation to the recruitment and retention of foster carers were discussed. It was noted that recruitment was a national issue that had been exasperated by the COVID pandemic. In relation to retention, the increasing age of Hartlepool's foster cares was an issue, resulting in the need to explore how the needs of this generation could be better met to allow them to continue.

Details of the various types of support offered to foster carers were discussed with the Committee with an emphasis on meeting the child's needs, supporting foster carers, maintenance of placements and the use of placements in or close to Hartlepool wherever possible. 84% of placements being within 20 miles of Hartlepool.

Decision

The Committee noted the report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service in the annual report for 2023/24, the Statement of Purpose and the Children's guide to Fostering.

9. Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To report the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) which took place in March 2024.

Issue(s) for consideration

Hartlepool Borough Council Children's Services received its last ILACS inspection in July 2018 when the service's overall effectiveness was judged to be good and outstanding for children in our care and care leavers. Since this time, the service received two focused visits in accordance with the framework and participated in five annual conversations with Ofsted.

Details of the inspection framework, and other areas of evaluation were outlined. The inspection was undertaken over a two week period with the first week taking place off-site. On 18 March 2024 the short inspection commenced on site and was undertaken by five social care inspectors plus a regulatory social care inspector who attended for two days and a schools inspector who attended for one day.

The inspection report was published on the 16th May 2024 and attached at Appendix A. It included details of the judgements made by Ofsted which demonstrated an improvement on performance since the previous inspection. The grading of four out of five judgements as 'outstanding' and one as 'good' was particularly significant in the context of the recognised increase in complexity of need and demand on services. Hartlepool was in fact one of the top performing children's services in the country.

The Committee acknowledged the commitment of the previous lead Elected Member for Children's Services as recognised in the report and thanked him for his work.

Decision

The outcome of the inspection of children's services was noted.

10. Inspection of HBC Children's Homes (Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To present the recent full Ofsted inspection reports of Stockton Road, Exmoor Grove, Wilton Avenue, Park Rd and St David's Walk Children's homes.

Issue(s) for consideration

Inspections of four of Hartlepool's children's homes had been carried out between January and March 2024, the remaining home at Wilton Avenue having been inspected in September 2023. Details were provided of the Ofsted Social Care Common Inspection Framework, evaluation criteria and

appendices one to five provided the most recent Ofsted inspection report of children's homes ran by Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC).

The Committee welcomed confirmation that the Ofsted inspection judgement had been that all of the homes in Hartlepool were good, overall and across all sub judgements. This provided Members with an assurance that children in our care residing in our children's homes were cared for very well and are cared about by staff teams dedicated to promoting the very best outcomes for them.

Attention was drawn to the increase in demand for places at Exmoor Grove and the limited capacity that existed. Members welcomed the work outlined for Exmoor Grove to return to a care home for short term care provision achieved through the creation of a two bed children's home as part of Phase three works to the Star Centre.

Care Home Managers were congratulated on the success of their homes and emphasis placed upon the need to expand the level of children's care home provision in Hartlepool. The Committee was advised that options for the expansion of provision were being explored, however, a plea was extended to all communities in Hartlepool to support this to enable Hartlepool children to be cared for in Hartlepool

Decision

The positive inspection reports of children's homes ran by HBC were noted.

11. Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs referred to below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

12. To Re-Appoint a Local Authority Representative to Serve on the Governing Body of Kingsley Primary School (Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

Non-Key

Purpose of report

To seek consideration of a nomination for the re-appointment of a Local Authority Governor position on the governing body of Kingsley Primary School.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee considered the re-appointment of a Local Authority Governor on the governing body of Kingsley Primary School for a period of 4 years.

Decision

The re-appointment of a Local Authority Governor on the governing body of Kingsley Primary School, for a period of 4 years, was approved.

13. Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 10 September, 2024 at 5.00 pm in the Civic Centre

The meeting concluded at 6.50 pm.

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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