

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

10 September 2024

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

Present:

Councillor: Rachel Creevy (In the Chair)

Councillors: Brenda Harrison, Phil Holbrook, Sue Little, Cameron Sharp and
Vacancy

Co-opted members:

Joanne Wilson, RC Diocesan Representative
Zoe Westley, Special Schools Head Representative

Parent Governor Representatives:

Martin Pout

Also present: Oliver Huermann, Member of Youth Parliament

Officers: Sally Robinson, Executive Director of Children's and Joint
Commissioning Services
Laura Gough, Assistant Director, Children's and Families
Rebecca Stephenson, Assistant Director, Early Intervention,
Performance and Commissioning
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education
Anthony Lowe, Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) Co-ordinator
Ronnie Checksfield, Youth Offending Service (YOS), Team Manager
Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support
Officer

14. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Tracey Gibson (C of E Diocese representative) and Sue Sharpe (Primary School representative).

15. Declarations of Interest

None.

16. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2024

Received.

17. Youth Justice Strategic Plan *(Executive Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework

Purpose of report

To gain approval for the Youth Justice Strategic Plan for 2024-2025 (**Appendix 1**) to be presented to full Council on 3 October 2024 for adoption.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Children's and Families introduced the report and the YOS Team Manager presented the report in detail. The final draft of the Youth Justice Plan for 2024-25 was attached at Appendix 1 and outlined the Strategic Objectives and Priorities for the service. The plan also identified key risks to future delivery. It was noted that the Youth Justice Plan would be submitted to Council on 3 October 2024 to seek adoption of the Plan.

Members were supportive of the plan and acknowledged the support provided to young people which can be challenging. In response to a number of questions from Members, the YOS Team Manager indicated that there were a number of case studies contained within the Plan that identified the strengths and positives of the children and young people involved with the YOS Team and these were highlighted throughout the narrative within the Plan. The service provided for the children and young people was unique and a key aim of the service was not to stigmatise or label the children and young people and to assist this, many meetings with the children and young people took place within the community and the local family hubs.

The YOS Team Manager confirmed that at the time of the disorder none of the children and young people identified as being involved were currently involved with the YOS, although there had in the past been minimal involvement with a couple of those involved. Cleveland Police were complimented on the work being undertaken around dealing with those young people who were involved, the outcomes of which were expected in the next couple of months.

In response to a comment from a Member, the YOS Team Manager confirmed that currently the Youth Justice Board dictated that a Youth Justice Plan was provided on an annual basis. However, discussions were ongoing and it was hoped that the new government would extend this to three yearly.

Decision

- i) The progress made delivering the local Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 was noted.
- ii) The Youth Justice Plan 2024-25 was approved for submission to Full Council on 3 October 2024 for adoption.

18. Short Breaks Services Statement *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

To approve the Short Breaks Services Statement.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services presented the report which included a short break service statement at Appendix A which set out the different types of short breaks available along with the eligibility criteria for specialist short breaks. This statement had been developed in consultation with the Parent Carer Forum.

The Statement formed the foundation for the delivery of short break services for children with disabilities and their families and was reviewed annually to ensure that any provision was reflective of local need. The Short Breaks Services Statement will be published and made available to the general public on the local authority's website and the SEND Local Offer of Services website once approved. The Statement will also be made available in paper format upon request.

During the discussion that followed, it was noted that there were lots of positives in the report for children with SEND, however it was highlighted that there was an increasing number of children with very complex needs in the town. The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services indicated that there were some internal changes being undertaken that would free up some capacity in relation to short break provision but added that the funding for this service was currently maximised. The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services clarified that short breaks was an all-encompassing term and included anything from 1:1 support, visits, overnight stays etc.

In response to a question from a Member, the Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services indicated that on occasion, short break support was rearranged should resources be required elsewhere for example due to the needs of a child in crisis. However,

this was avoided wherever possible and the team had outstanding relationships with all parent and carers and understood the frustration where care changes can impact on family life.

Decision

The Short Breaks Services Statement was approved.

19. 2023/24 Annual Report of Adoption Tees Valley
(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To provide information relating to the activity of the Adoption Service for the April 2023-March 2024 (**Appendix 1**).

Issue(s) for consideration

The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services presented the report which outlined the role of Adoption Tees Valley which was a shared service across the five Tees Valley local authorities and was hosted by Stockton Borough Council. The Plan included comprehensive information relating to performance, recruitment of adopters along with the preparation of adopters. It was highlighted that early permanence continued to be a key priority nationally and regionally and indicators show that this was a positive plan for children in the longer term. The organisation worked hard to provide support from the point a child was placed with a family and throughout that placement, not just when in crisis. The report included a financial budget statement and a review was ongoing to ensure fair and equitable costs across all partner Authorities for 2025-28.

A discussion ensued on the option of birth parents staying in touch with a child post adoption.

Decision

The annual report in relation to the work of Adoption Tees Valley during the financial year 2023-24 was noted.

20. Children's Social Care Annual Complaints Report
(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To present the Annual Report of Children Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2023/24.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning presented the report which provided an analysis of complaints and compliments and outlined where learning had occurred from complaints and actions implemented as a result. It was noted that the vast majority of complaints were concluded at Stage 1 with nine referred to the Local Government Ombudsman, although none of these were upheld. In addition to the above, the Department had received 10 compliments and further details of these were included within the report.

Decision

The contents of the Annual Report of Complaints and Compliments 2023-24 were noted and would be published online.

21. Holiday Activity Fund Programme (HAF) (Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To present the annual report of the Hartlepool Holiday Fun Programme funded by the Department for Education's Holiday Activities and Food Programme.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services introduced the report and the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) Co-ordinator presented the detail. The HAF Co-ordinator informed Members that a decision on future funding of the programme was awaited and was expected in the next couple of months. Details were provided on the criteria for children accessing the programme along with process for doing this. The programme was supported by a number of schools and

further work was ongoing to ensure the children of the town receive the maximum benefit from this Fund.

Clarification was sought on why all schools did not support the programme. The HAF Co-ordinator indicated that it was difficult for schools due to capacity and work was ongoing to make the process as simple and easy to access as possible. It was noted that if funding for the HAF is forthcoming for 2025, the HAF Co-ordinator hoped to attend a meeting of Head Teachers to promote the programme and maximise the benefits.

During the discussion that followed, the Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services acknowledged the work undertaken by the HAF Co-ordinator in engaging with schools and partners to get opportunities and activities up and running. The Chair noted also that there were a number of other organisations providing support including the voluntary and community sector.

The co-opted member of Special Schools highlighted a number of challenges faced with managing the activities during the school holidays as the vast majority of staff had children and valued the time off during the school holidays. Whilst Special Schools had a commitment to delivering these activities there was considerable hidden costs associated with this. The HAF Co-ordinator indicated that there may be ways of providing financial support for additional cover where needed and this funding could be returned should it not be required.

Decision

The Annual Report of the HAF Programme delivered in 2023 was noted.

22. High Needs Provision Capital Allocations 2020-2025 *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To note High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA) to develop SEND provision.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Education presented the report which detailed the total cost of funding of £2,619,873 to support the following which had been approved by the Chair of the Children's Services Committee and the Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services:

- Catcote increased capacity;
- Catcote ASD 6th Form;
- Springwell increased capacity; and
- High Tunstall MLD (Moderate Learning Disabilities).

It was highlighted that there continued to be a pressure on specialist primary places as there was only one Primary Special School (Springwell) in Hartlepool. Scoping work had commenced to extend the school and in the meantime, the school was making some adaptations to the current building to support six more children to prevent them being placed out of the area. Work was ongoing to identify other primary schools to support children with complex SEND within mainstream provision and three schools had expressed an interest.

A lengthy discussion ensued during which the Assistant Director, Education provided clarification in a number of areas. It was noted that whilst the number of children with complex SEND was increasing, it was still proving difficult to recruit into supporting roles within the schools. The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services indicated that as part of the SEND Change Programme, work was ongoing to test some reforms and this had been reported to Health and Wellbeing Board. In particular, reforms around a strong focus of inclusion and strengthening the ordinarily available provision in a mainstream setting was being tested. In response to a question, the Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commission Services informed Members that one of the challenges being faced was the degree of inclusion that varies across schools and work was needed to understand why in order to work with schools to strengthen inclusion. A whole system approach was required with the potential of measures or evaluations being introduced to show how inclusive schools were or how the needs of SEND children were met. The co-opted member for primary schools commented that all schools faced this difficult challenge but the needs of the mainstream children also need to be taken into account. The Assistant Director, Education confirmed that a SEND and Inclusion Advisor had been appointed to work alongside schools to provide support as well as challenge them on their SEND provision as this was a challenge nationally as well as locally.

It was highlighted that any expansion plans for special schools must also include space for the additional provision for some children such as rebound therapy and changing spaces, alongside classrooms. The Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services indicated that the Local Area Inclusion Plan identifies there is an increasing number of children in early years with an identified need and planning for these children needed to start now.

Decision

The schemes approved by the Chair of Children's Services Committee and the Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services were noted.

23. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

There were no items the Chair considered urgent.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 19 November at 5.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

The meeting concluded at 6.15pm

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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