

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

10 December 2024

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

Present:

Councillor: Rachel Creevy (In the Chair)

Councillors: Martin Dunbar, Brenda Harrison, Phil Holbrook and Michael Jorgeson

Co-opted Members:

Martin Pout, Primary Parent Governor Representative

Young People's Representatives: Oliver Huermann, Member of Youth Parliament

Also Present:

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2 Councillor Aaron Roy was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Cameron Sharp

Councillor Feeney

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

Laura Gough, Assistant Director, Children and Families

Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

34. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Sue Little, Cameron Sharp, Zoe Westley, Special Schools Head Representative, Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese Representative and Sue Sharpe, Primary Schools Head Representative.

35. Declarations of Interest

None

36. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2024

Received

37. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 to 2027/28 *(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 for Children's and Joint Commissioning Services presented the report which reiterated that all councils across the country were facing significant financial challenges owing to the impact of inflation and demand on services along with historic inadequate increases in government funding to meet these challenges. As outlined at Finance and Policy Committee in November, the Council had a forecast budget deficit of £10.519m for 2025/26 and £13.122m over the full MTFS period.

As in previous years, addressing the deficit needed to be managed through budget saving actions which sought to minimise the impact on services where possible and use of reserves. With regard to savings, proposals totalling £2.954m had been proposed for 2025/26 and a total of £3.109m over the MTFS period. Pending publication of the local government finance settlement in late December, the acceptance of the proposals for 2025/26 and utilisation of reserves at the indicated level of £3.5m would leave a remaining budget gap of £4.065m. It was currently assumed that Hartlepool's allocation of the increases in government grants would meet this remaining gap for 2025/26. Should the government funding not be sufficient to close the remaining gap, additional savings would need to be identified and approved for 2025/26. Details of the individual savings were provided in Appendix B with the items relevant to this Committee shaded for ease of reference.

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. Members welcomed that the savings proposed could be achieved with minimal impact on service delivery.

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

Review of work of Management Information Team

Members welcomed that this proposal would ensure income covered the cost of delivery.

Closure of Oscars out of school and holiday provision

In response to assurances sought that alternative provision would be available during school holidays, the Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services advised that whilst it was acknowledged that removal of the service may impact on those children who were currently accessing the service during school holidays, alternative provision was available in the town and holiday information would be available from the childcare team.

Increase sufficiency of placements for children in our care

A Member commented on the benefits of the proposals to increase placements for children in care in Hartlepool. The Chair emphasised the importance of promoting foster carers and reminded Members to promote and share the foster care campaign.

Decision

The savings proposals detailed in Appendix B relating to the services within this Committee portfolio were approved to be reported back to Finance and Policy Committee on 20 January 2025.

38. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was reported that the next meeting would be held Tuesday 4 February 2025 at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 4.20 pm.

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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