

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

18 March 2025

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

Present:

Councillor: Rachel Creevy (In the Chair)

Councillors: Martin Dunbar, Brenda Harrison, Michael Jorgeson and Sue Little

(Councillor Gary Allen, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services Committee (Observer))

Young people's representatives:

Oliver Heurman, Member of Youth Parliament

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

Laura Gough, Assistant Director for Children and Families

Rebecca Stephenson, Assistant Director for Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning

Julie Reed, Capital, Governance Site and Systems Manager

Sandra Shears, Head of Finance - Corporate and Schools

Jo Stubbs, Democratic Services Officer

48. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were submitted by Councillors Phil Holbrook and Cameron Sharp, Gillian Hood and Joanne Wilson (Co-opted Members), Adam Palmer, Sue Sharpe and Zoe Westley (School Heads Representatives) and Martin Pout (Parent Governor Representative)

49. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Rachel Creevy declared an interest as Chair of Governors for St Helens Primary School.

Councillor Brenda Harrison declared an interest as a Governor for West View Primary School.

50. Minutes of the meeting held on 4th February 2025

Received.

**51. Dedicated Schools Grant – Early Year's Block
2025/26** *(Executive Director for Children's and Joint Commissioning
Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital)*

Type of decision

Key Decision – CJCS 158/25 tests (i) and (ii) apply

Purpose of report

To present the indicative Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding allocation for Early Years Funding in 2025/26 and propose the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) that sets hourly rates for providers for 2025/26.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee was referred to the 2025/26 funding allocation for the Early Years Block, shown in a table included in the report. Proposals for hourly rate splits for each type of provision in 2025/26 were provided as detailed in the report. The funded hourly rate for 3 to 4 year old provision is £5.90, the funded hourly rate payment for 2 year old provisions are £8.28 while the funded hourly rate payments for under 2 year olds is £11.27. Of these rates 4% will be retained by the local authority with the rest going to the provider depending on eligibility.

At their meeting on 19 February 2025, Schools' Forum had reviewed the hourly rate proposals alongside results of the consultation with providers. They had expressed significant concern at the 30% response rate and had asked that a second consultation window be opened 20-26 February 2025, to ask if the Teachers Pay / Pension Supplement should be retained as a separate supplement or included in the base rate and whether to introduce a deprivation supplement for 2-year-old disadvantaged provision. This had resulted in a 35% response. At a subsequent meeting on 3rd March 2025 Schools Forum had voted to approve keeping the Teachers Pay / Pension Supplement as a separate supplement and the introduction of a deprivation supplement for 2 year old disadvantaged provision. Forum also voted to support the hourly rate proposals across all areas of provision as detailed in the report.

The Assistant Director for Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning informed the Committee that as part of their discussion Forum asked that members be reminded of the potential risk to 2-year-old disadvantaged entitlement hourly rate which might be caused by the introduction to 30 hours per week entitlement to working parents from September 2025. Places for children of eligible working parents could be agreed from 9 months old meaning places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds might be less available depending on take up. A sufficiency assessment is currently taking place and will be completed by the end of March to

ensure that there is enough local provision for all of the children that need it. Officers were taking a number of actions to improve this including an increase in the hourly rate for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and the proposal of funding of a post within the council to support inclusion and help providers support children with emerging additional needs. Members suggested that the town's MP be contacted regarding the unfairness of this situation. The Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services felt that as Schools Forum had raised this as a concern initially any correspondence should come from them.

The Chair queried why the consultation process had been repeated. She asked that members of Schools Forum be reminded that they are representative of multiple schools and should encourage the schools they represent to complete any consultations of this type. Re-consulting, particularly over such a short period, was not useful.

Decision

- I. That the contents of the report and the outcome from both consultations with providers and Schools Forum on 19 February 2025 and 3 March 2025 be noted
- II. That the recommendation by Schools Forum to centrally retain funding of 4% be noted
- III. That the hourly rate funding formula for 3-4 year old provision in 2025/26, as recommended by Schools Forum, be approved
- IV. That the hourly rate funding formula for disadvantaged 2-year-old provision in 2025/26, as recommended by Schools Forum, be approved
- V. That the hourly rate funding formula for working parent 2-year-old provision in 2025/26, as recommended by Schools Forum, be approved
- VI. That the hourly rate funding formula for under 2-year-old provision in 2025/26, as recommended by Schools Forum, be approved

52. Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block 2025/26 *(Executive Director for Children's and Joint Commissioning Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital)*

Type of decision

Key Decision – CJCS 159/25 tests (i) and (ii) apply

Purpose of report

To inform members of the funding allocation for the High Needs Block (HNB) in 2025/26 and to seek approval for the 2025/26 budget. The HNB forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Issue(s) for consideration

The High Needs Block funding allocations for 2025/26 was published by Government on 18 December 2024. As with other areas of the DSG, funding for the High Needs Block was via a National Funding Formula (NFF).

The total high needs funding for 2025/26 is £21.813m. This includes transfers from the Schools Block and Central School Services Block as previously approved by Committee. The budget requirement proposed for 2025/26 exceeds the High Needs block funding allocation by £4.257m (£2.171m in 2023/24). The detailed high needs block planned spend for 2025/26 is set out in the report.

Schools Forum had considered these budget requirements over 2 meetings on 28 January 2025 and 19 February 2025 and details of their budget recommendations were given within the report. Information on the risks and financial implications of going over budget was given including increased demands on the service and continuing funding gaps over the last 3 years. The deficit currently stands at 19.5% and as required a 10-year management plan has been approved by the DfE with regular updates required. The latest update suggests a provisional deficit position of £38.208m by end of March 2031 which there would not be enough cash reserves to sustain.

Details of planned spend budget areas were outlined within the report. These included 2 new budget areas namely the establishment of a nurture base for pupils with high incident behaviour at KS3-4 and a proposal to charge the home school of pupils attending Haven school.

Decision

- I. That the report be noted
- II. That the budget proposal recommended by Schools Forum for 2025/26 be approved acknowledging the funding gap of £4.257m

53. Schools Capital Works Programme 2025-26 *(Executive Director for Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Key Decision – CJCS 162/25 tests (i) and (ii) apply

Purpose of report

To seek approval to the 2025/26 Schools' Capital Works Programme in order to progress the design and detailed costing exercise in time for the majority of projects to be carried out during the school holiday period. Details are provided in the confidential appendix A. **This item contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).**

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided background information in relation to capital funding allocations. At the time of writing the report, capital funding allocations for 2025/26 had not been communicated to the Local Authority. Approval was sought for the schemes proposed in confidential Appendix A subject to the local authority agreeing schools contributing a minimum of 10% towards the condition schemes. **This item (Appendix A) contained exempt information under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006), namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Para 3).**

The Committee was referred to Table 1 which outlined the total funding available of £554,669 for works and Table 2 which detailed the total cost of schemes proposed including a contingency of £100,000 of which Members' approval was sought.

Members queried the high cost of some of the schemes. The Capital, Governance Site and Systems Manager advised that this was a combination of the products used being expensive and a requirement to give the in-house construction team the opportunity to complete all works of a non-specialist nature.

Decision

- I. That the schedule of 2025/26 capital works programme as summarised in the confidential appendix be approved subject to the LA agreeing contributions from schools towards individual schemes in line with the shared funding principles established by the Schools Forum
- II. That the Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services , in consultation with the Chair of Children's Services Committee, be given dispensation and discretion to authorise works where an emergency or a significant health and safety risk is exposed.

- III. That the Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services , in consultation with the Chair of Children's Services Committee, be given dispensation and discretion to add or remove a project(s) as a result of an increase/decrease in the 2025/26 SCA funding allocation.

54. Approval of School Term and Holiday Dates 2026-27 *(Executive Director for Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To seek agreement to the pattern of school term and holiday dates for the school year 2026-27 for community schools and to seek agreement in recommending these dates to governing bodies of Foundation Schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

Issue(s) for consideration

Members were advised that the Local Authority and governing bodies of Foundation schools and Academies work together to ensure a consistent pattern across the town in respect of school term and holiday dates.

In the autumn/spring terms representatives from the Tees Valley region and other north east representatives consulted on a pattern for 2026-27 based on the guiding principles, details of which were set out in Appendix 1. The proposed pattern enabled schools to begin the academic year on Tuesday 1 September 2024 and end the year on Wednesday 21 July 2025.

Following consultation with Head Teachers in Hartlepool and also relevant associations in relation to the school year pattern for 2026-2027 the general consensus from the local authorities within the Tees Valley and other regional authorities was to adopt the model attached at Appendix 1.

Decision

That the scheduled term and holidays dates for the academic year 2026-27 for community schools as appended to the report be approved and recommended to the governing bodies of Foundation Schools and Academies in Hartlepool.

55. Ofsted inspection of Park Road Children's Home and Wilton Avenue Children's Home *(Author)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To present the recent full Ofsted inspection reports of Park Road Children's Home which took place 6-7 November 2024 and Wilton Avenue Children's Home which took place 2-3 December 2024.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee was advised that full inspections of Park Road Children's Home and Wilton Avenue Children's Home had taken place 6-7 November 2024 and 2-3 December 2024 against the judgments and descriptors outlined in the report. Both were judged as good therefore meeting the criteria that 'The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.' The inspection reports were circulated with the agenda documentation. Recommendations for improvements had already been actioned.

Members thanked the staff at both Children's Homes and the wider team that had contributed to these gradings. They demonstrated the benefits to looked after children of Council run homes as positive places for children who are unable to be with their families.

Decision

That the positive inspection reports for Park Road Children's Homes and Wilton Avenue Children's Home be noted.

. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

The Chair ruled that the following items of business should be considered by the Committee as a matter of urgency in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(B) (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that the matter could be dealt with without delay.

The Chair expressed her thanks to Denise Wimpenny, who would be retiring at the end of the month, for her support to Children's Services Committee.

The meeting concluded at 5:35 pm

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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