

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

1 July 2025

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

**Present:**

Councillor: Melanie Morley (In the Chair)

Councillors: Moss Boddy, Bob Buchan, Martin Dunbar, Philip Holbrook and Sue Little

Also Present: In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2 Councillor Martin Scarborough was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Brenda Harrison

**Co-opted Members:**

Gillian Hood, C of E Diocesan Representative  
Sue Sharpe, Primary Schools Head Representative  
Zoe Westley, Special Schools Head Representative

Parent Governor representative:  
Martin Pout

Officers: John Macilwraith, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services  
Laura Gough, Assistant Director, Children and Families  
Rebecca Stephenson, Assistant Director, Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning  
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education  
Phil Gleaves, Operational Lead for Pre Court  
Jo Stubbs, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were submitted by Councillor Brenda Harrison

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

None

### **3. Minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

Received.

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

#### **Type of decision**

Budget and Policy Framework

#### **Purpose of report**

To present the Youth Justice Strategic Plan for 2025-2026 and gain approval from the Committee to begin the consultation process for approval of the plan.

#### **Issue(s) for consideration**

Hartlepool Youth Justice Service was established in April 2000. A multi-agency service it is made up of representatives from HBC Children's Services Department, Police, Probation, Health and Education. There is a statutory requirement to prepare an annual local Youth Justice Plan for submission to the national Youth Justice Board.

During the consultation process the plan will be presented to Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee (June 2025), Safer Hartlepool Partnership (July 2025) and Audit and Governance Committee (July 2025). A further report will then be submitted to this Committee (September 2025) to seek approval for the presentation to Full Council (October 2025) to seek adoption of the Plan. The final adopted Plan will also be sent to the National Youth Justice Board.

The Youth Justice Plan provides an overview of the Youth Justice Service and contained priorities, against which a detailed seven point plan had been developed as follows:

- 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 draft plan was appended to the report.

The Operational Lead for Pre Court advised that the results of the restorative justice programme fluctuate depending on the willingness of young people to engage with the process. With regard to the 2024 riots all those young people involved had completed a programme of work that included reparation work with police.

Members paid tribute to Roni Checksfield who had previously presented this report to Members for a number of years and had passed away earlier in the year. They asked that a message be sent to his family expressing condolences.

The Chair praised officers for the plan's progress in 2024/2025. She noted that the plan for 2025/2026 would return to the Committee in September upon completion of the consultation progress.

### **Decision**

That the progress made against the local Youth Justice Plan 2024/2025 be noted.

That the draft local Youth Justice Plan 2025/2026 be approved for consultation as outlined prior to the final report being presented to Children's Services Committee in September 2025.

That condolences be forwarded to the family of Roni Checksfield on behalf of the Committee.

## **5. The disaggregation of the Children's Multi-Agency Hub from Stockton-On-Tees** *(Assistant Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning)*

### **Type of decision**

Key – General exception applies

### **Purpose of report**

To present the joint proposal between Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) and Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council (SBC) to disaggregate the joint Children's Hub (CHUB) and each authority having their own separate CHUB.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The National Policy direction for Children's Social Care aims to transform children's social care by improving outcomes, keeping families together, enhancing information sharing and fostering partnership and multi-agency collaboration. Guidance had been received and it was felt that the current joint arrangement was not consistent with future direction of

children's services for both authorities. Therefore HBC and SBC were seeking to disaggregate from the joint CHUB.

In 2024 an Ofsted inspection rated the Hartlepool CHUB as outstanding while the SBC Childrens Services is currently rated as requires improvement. The disaggregation would allow SBC to prioritise and manage their arrangements in line with making improvements. Hartlepool will continue to prioritise Hartlepool children and focus on the new reforms.

Hartlepool CHUB staff had been informed of the proposal and it was anticipated that some staff may transfer to the Stockton CHUB. The split in demand is broadly 65% Stockton, 35% Hartlepool however other variables such as role requirements under the new reforms and vacancies across all children's services in Hartlepool would be taken into consideration. There had been extensive discussions with leaders of SBC Children's Services. It was expected that the final disaggregation would not be completed until April 2026. This was a slight extension to the previous completion date of January 2025 to allow SBC to put the necessary processes in place.

Members were advised that this would be a complicated process involving legal discussions with current and potential new contractors. There would also be financial implications although these were unconfirmed at the moment. HBC CHUB staff had been informed immediately when the decision had been made, unfortunately this meant that the finer detail was not yet available. Staff were a priority in this process, second only to the safety of children.

It was noted the joint front door had been a success, and that the separating would be a parting as friends, with continued close links.

The Chair asked that officers bring a brief update to the September Committee meeting.

## **Decision**

That the following be noted:

- I. This paper on the disaggregation of the Children's HUB
- II. The positive relationship between Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees
- III. The success of the shared CHUB
- IV. The national reform expectations and requirements for Hartlepool

## **6. Families First reforms** *(Assistant Director, Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning)*

### **Type of decision**

For information

### **Purpose of report**

To present information regarding the Families First for Children reforms and how these are being progressed in Hartlepool

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Independent Care Review and National Panel review made a number of recommendations to transform support and protection in children's social care. In response the Department for Education had published an implementation strategy setting out a range of proposed reforms. The Families First for Children programme brings together some of these recommendations into a reform initiative to improve support for families and children. These reforms have 4 key elements as follows:

- I. Overarching system-led reform including leadership, partnerships, culture and information sharing;
- II. Welcoming and effective family help: Family help/lead practitioners, Family Help Service and multi-disciplinary team around the family;
- III. Dedicated and skilled Child Protection response: Lead Child Protection Practitioners, multi-agency child protection teams and parental representation and
- IV. Unlocking the potential of family networks; Bringing family networks through the new systems: Family Group Decision Making, Family Group Conferencing and Family Network Support Packages

Key features of each of these elements were outlined in the report and by the Assistant Director, Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning. A timetable for completion of the reforms was also included with details of HBC's key partners.

The Assistant Director, Early Intervention, Performance and Commissioning confirmed that multi agency professionals would be fully involved in the process.

When responding to a question from a Member about how involved GPs are within the safeguarding arena, she confirmed that they are involved appropriately, share information when required, submit child protection conference reports and attend child protection meetings when

appropriate, she also gave details of additional health staff who have oversight of children in addition.

When responding to a question regarding Home schooled children, the Assistant Director Education confirmed that they are overseen by the virtual school and efforts were made to dissuade parents from taking children out of school including a 15 day cooling off period. Upcoming legislation is going through parliament regarding not home schooling any child identified as being in need of child protection. Potential reasons for homeschooling were discussed including issues around a lack of suitable places for SEN children.

The Chair confirmed that there had been discussions with the MP around the requirements of the implementation strategy. Members of the Committee would be briefed on the Childrens Wellbeing and Schools Bill as it progresses through parliament and its implications for Hartlepool.

### **Decision**

That the report be noted

## **7. Ofsted inspection of Exmoor Grove Children's Home and Stockton Road Children's Home** *(Assistant Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning)*

### **Type of decision**

For information

### **Purpose of report**

To present the recent full Ofsted inspections reports for Exmoor Grove Children's Home (21-22 January 2025) and Stockton Road Children's Home (18-19 February 2025)

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

Inspections of 2 of Hartlepool's children's homes had been carried out between January and February 2025. Ofsted inspections of children's homes are carried out annually and take account of a number of issues. Exmoor Grove was rated outstanding while Stockton Road was rated good. The full inspection reports were appended for information.

### **Decision**

That the positive inspection reports of Exmoor Grove and Stockton Road Children's Homes be noted.

**8. School's Capital Works Programme** (*Executive Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

**Type of decision**

For information

**Purpose of report**

To inform Members of the delegated decision process relating to the reallocation of £25 thousand to fund the High Tunstall College of Science (HTCS) Hydrotherapy Pool changing rooms renovation.

**Issue(s) for consideration**

The 2025/26 Schools Capital Works Programme was approved by Members in March 2025. It included a project for HTCS's Hydrotherapy pool to replace the existing filtration system at an estimated cost of £25,000. On 12 May the Managing Director used the urgent decision making powers delegated under MD8 at part 3 of the constitution to reallocate these monies to renovate the changing rooms. This change was agreed at the school's governing body meeting. A copy of the decision record detailing the decision, the reasons for it and why it was urgent was appended to the report.

**Decision**

That the officer decision record and the reasons it was taken were noted.

**9. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent**

The Chairman 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.

**Minute 10: English Martyrs School and Sixth Form College – School Times and Transport**

**Minute 11: Poverty Action Group**

**10. English Martyrs School and Sixth Form College – School Times and Transport**

A Member highlighted that English Martyrs School were planning to change their closing time from 3.15pm to 2.45pm as of September 2025. She was concerned at the impact this would have on pupils accessing transport home. The school had been informed that this change would

result in a 25-minute wait for buses at the end of the school day and might result in behavioural issues. The Assistant Director, Education, confirmed that English Martyrs had been made aware of these concerns but as they were an Academy the Council had no jurisdiction to prevent this from happening. She suggested that a letter be sent to the School on behalf of the Committee highlighting Members' concerns around these issues. Concerns around large numbers of children being excluded from English Martyrs had also been raised with the Head, diocese and trust as a matter of concern. The Interim Director noted that this was a separate issue but he was keen to undertake school visits and work with schools for the benefit of pupils.

### **Decision**

That a letter be sent to English Martyrs School on behalf of the Committee highlighting the concerns raised by Members around transport and potential behavioural issues.

## **11. Poverty Action Group**

The Chair advised that she would be seeking a volunteer to sit on the Poverty Action Group and bring updates back to the Committee quarterly. Details of the group and what would be required would be emailed out to Members. The first meeting of the group was scheduled for September.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September at 5.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

### **Decision**

That any Member wishing to be part of the Poverty Action Group to notify Democratic Services.

The meeting concluded at 6:05pm.

**H MARTIN**

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

**PUBLICATION DATE: 9 July 2025**