

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

14 November 2023

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

Present:

Councillor: Jim Lindridge (In the Chair)

Councillors: Councillors, Brian Cowie, Brenda Harrison, Sue Little and Cameron Sharp

Co-opted Members:

Sue Sharpe, Primary Head Representative
Jo Wilson, CE Diocese Representative
Tracey Gibson, RC Diocese Representative

Also Present:

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

Councillor Tom Feeney

Officers: Sally Robinson, Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services
Jane Young, Assistant Director, Children and Families
Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning
Amanda Whitehead, Assistant Director, Education
Sandra Shears, Head of Finance (Corporate and Schools)
Emma Rutherford, Executive Head Teacher, Vulnerable Pupils
Jackie Webb, Inclusion Co-ordinator
Julian Heward, Communications and Marketing Team
Denise Wimpenny, Democratic Services Team

21. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Philip Holbrook, Bob Buchan, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services, Zoe Westley, Special School Head Representative and Adam Palmer, Secondary Head Representative.

22. Declarations of Interest

None.

23. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023

Received.

24. Youth Justice Strategic Plan *(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 for the Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2023/2024 (Appendix 1) to be presented to Full Council on 30 November 2023 to seek adoption of the Youth Justice Plan 2023/2024.

The report had been presented to the Safer Hartlepool Partnership and Audit and Governance Committee for consultation where there were minor suggested changes.

The final plan will also be sent to the National Youth Justice Board.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Children and Families presented the draft Hartlepool Youth Justice Service Strategic Plan 2023/2024, as part of the consultation process, a copy of which was appended to the report. Feedback would be incorporated into the final plan which would be reported to Children's Services Committee prior to final adoption of the plan by Full Council. The final plan would also be sent to the National Youth Justice Board.

The Committee was advised that the Youth Justice Plan provided an overview of how the Youth Justice Service, the Youth Justice Service Strategic Management Board and wider partnership would ensure that the service had sufficient resources and infrastructure to deliver youth justice services in its area in line with the requirements of the National Standards for Youth Justice Services.

Members were referred to the key strategic objectives and priorities for 2023/24, as set out in the report.

In the discussion that followed presentation of the report, officers responded to issues arising from the report. A query was raised in relation to how performance data would be reported following implementation of the plan. Members were advised that regular performance data updates were reported to the Youth Justice Board Partnership Boards and such data was utilised to inform the following year's strategy. The Chair was pleased to announce that performance data in relation to the Strategy received by the Partnership that day had been positive with no risks identified.

Decision

- (i) The Committee noted the progress made against the local Youth Justice Plan (2022/2023).
- (ii) The Committee approved the Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 to be presented to Full Council on 30 November for adoption.

25. Dedicated Schools Grant (Former Education Services Grant Rate Per Pupil) – Disapplication Request *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital Services)*

Type of decision

Key Decision – CJCS 138/23 tests (i) and (ii) apply

Purpose of report

To report the outcome of Schools' Forum held on the 18 October 2023 and their decision in relation to the 2024/25 Education Services General Duties Rates. The Committee was asked to agree that the Local Authority should present a disapplication request to the Secretary of State in order to ensure that the Local Authority can discharge its statutory responsibilities.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Committee was advised that new national funding arrangements introduced in 2017/18 shifted responsibility for funding statutory duties from a specific grant to the Dedicated Schools Grant. The government provided no additional funding to schools to cover this cost shift. Members were reminded that since 2017/18 the Council has had to apply for disapplication, in order to secure this funding. For the financial year 2024/25, the local authority proposed a rate of £60 per pupil. The rate was unchanged from 2017/18, which meant the rate would have remained unchanged for eight years.

It was reported that the Schools' Forum had considered this proposal and did not agree to transfer the funding to this Local Authority. Schools were

clear that it was not because of concerns about the quality of services provided by the Local Authority, but they considered that funding statutory duties from school budgets was a budget cut and this funding should be provided by the Government. Regulations state that if agreement cannot be reached with maintained schools the matter would need referring to the Secretary of State for a decision. This had been the consistent view of Schools' Forum for the past seven financial years. In each of these financial years, the Local Authority had successfully applied to the Secretary of State for disapplication of the Regulations. This meant that the local authority was able to remove the required element of funding to ensure that statutory responsibilities were discharged.

Decision

The Committee:

- (i) Agreed the 2024/25 funding rate at £60 per pupil/place.
- (ii) Agreed to submit the disapplication request to the Secretary of State to set the Education Services General Duties rate at £60 per pupil/place for 2024/25.
- (iii) Noted this would be the eighth consecutive year the local authority had applied for disapplication and that the previous seven applications have been successful.

26. Children Missing Education – Annual Report *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To provide an up to date report in relation to the number of children identified and tracked as a child missing education.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided background information in relation to the statutory guidance in place for tracking and identifying children who are missing from or not receiving a suitable education.

The Committee was advised that in the academic year 2022-23 there were 129 referrals, 104 traced at the time of writing the report and 25 remained missing from education. The 25 outstanding continued to be investigated

and procedures followed, details of which were provided. It was thought that of the 25 untraced, 20 were believed to have returned to their country of origin and 5 moved in large local authorities and waiting to be allocated a school place.

There had been an increase in the number of pupils who remained missing this academic year from 18 in the academic year 2021-22 to 25 this academic year.

Following presentation of the report, the Inclusion Co-ordinator responded to issues raised. Clarification was provided in relation to the Council's statutory responsibilities and tracking arrangements.

Decision

The Committee noted the report and the work of the School Attendance Team to deliver the local authority statutory functions in relation to Children Missing Education.

27. Elective Home Education *(Executive Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To provide updated information in relation to Elective Home Education (EHE)

Issue(s) for consideration

Members were advised that there continued to be rising numbers of children being removed from school to receive Elective Home Education. There had been an increase from 55 receiving EHE in October 2019 to 170 in October 2023. EHE information by year group was also provided. At present 34 children receiving EHE had identified special educational needs and 12 children receiving EHE with social care involvement. The report provided details of the reasons for removal, the schools children ceased to attend due to EHE as well as dates EHE commenced. There were currently 26 children who were not accessing suitable provision and there were currently 34 children where parents had no other communication with the team other than in writing, details of which were provided.

In the lengthy discussion that followed, officers responded to issues raised arising from the report. In response to a query raised in relation to the number of children returning to school following a period of home education

the Executive Head Teacher, Vulnerable Pupils agreed to provide this information following the meeting.

Members raised concerns in relation to the increasing numbers of parents choosing to home educate, the potential reasons for the increase and impact on schools and education outcomes as a result. Clarification was provided in relation to the challenges around home education and school representatives referred to the impact on the curriculum and resources when children returned to school following a period of home education. It was noted that there was no requirement for parents to follow the curriculum and the local authority had not powers to monitor home education activities. Members noted that this was a national as well as a local issue and were of the view that it should be drawn to the attention of central government as more needed to be done in terms of legislation to manage this issue. It was suggested that a letter be sent to the Minister for Education to highlight the Committee's concerns in this regard.

Decision

- (i) That the contents of the report and comments of Members be noted.
- (ii) That the number of pupils returning to school following a period of home education be provided following the meeting.
- (iii) That a letter be sent to the Minister for Education on behalf of the Committee to highlight the Committee's concerns in relation to home education.

28. Children's Social Care Annual Complaints (*Executive Director Children's and Joint Commissioning Services)*

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To present to members the Annual Report of Children Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2022/23.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning reported on the Annual Complaints and Compliments which provided information on the complaints for children's social care and public health. It summarised information in relation to complaints that had been received and responded to, as well as compliments received during the reporting period

Members were referred to the Annual Complaint report, attached at Appendix A which provided an analysis of complaints and compliments during the reporting period. During 2022/23, 49 compliments had been recorded relating to children's social care. This was a significant increase from 2021/2022.

A total of 46 complaints were received in 2022/23. The number of complaints received had decreased by 15 from the previous year. Of the 46 complaints received in 2022/23, 26 were not considered further leaving 20 complaints for investigation. Details of the different stages of investigation were included within the annual report.

Decision

The Committee noted the contents of the Annual Report of Complaints and Compliments 2022/23 and that the report would be published online.

29. 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.

30. Vaping in Schools

In response to concerns raised in relation to the increasing prevalence of vaping in schools and the challenges for schools in terms of managing this, the Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning advised that actions had arisen from a recent Head Teachers meeting and discussions at Health and Wellbeing Board and a session would be set up to specifically look at this issue.

31. Reparation Projects

The Chair referred to discussions at the Youth Justice Board in relation to reparation projects and sought any ideas in relation to reparation projects to feed into the Youth Justice Board. A Member was pleased to report that Victoria Ward had reached the fifth stage of the Safer Streets Initiative and also referred to funding available from the PCC Million Hours Project which could benefit children and young people.

32. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was reported that the next meeting would be held on 5 December 2023 at 4.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 5.00 pm.

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HR

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