

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

**FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

At a meeting of the **Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday 20 July 2017 at 10.00 am**

**PRESENT**

Councillor G Renner-Thompson  
(in the Chair)

**COUNCILLORS**

Campbell D  
Cessford T  
Lang J  
Nisbet K  
Richards ME

Stewart G  
Stow K  
Swinburn M  
Wallace R

**CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES**

Hodgson A

Warner J

**TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

Lyst R  
Payne S

Sanderson J  
Woolhouse R

**OFFICERS**

Johnson A

Interim Director of Children's  
Services

Hartwell A  
Little L  
McEvoy C

Senior Manager Performance  
Democratic Services Officer  
Service Director, Children's  
Services

Smeaton B

Children's Improvement &  
Development Manager

**ALSO PRESENT**

Daley W

Deputy Leader and Cabinet  
Member for Children's Services

### **13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Reverend D Lennox and D Lally.

### **14. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman with the following amendment noted:

Declaration of Interest add at the end of the paragraph "in September 2018".

### **15. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

The published Forward Plan for July to October 2017 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY CABINET**

### **16. JOINT REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES**

#### **Changes to the Post 16 Transport Policy Payment Options**

Members were asked to note the extract of minutes of Cabinet held on 11 July 2017. (Copy attached to signed minutes)

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

### **17. REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **Regionalising Adoption Proposals**

Members were asked to note the extract of minutes of Cabinet held on 11 July 2017. (Copy attached to signed minutes)

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY**

### **18. REPORTS OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **(a) Performance and Finance Quarterly Report**

The report attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B provided the Children's Services' financial and performance position for quarter 4 2016-2017. A Hartwell, Senior Manager, Performance, introduced the report to the Committee and highlighted that additional information provided in paragraph 4.4 had been requested at the meeting in February 2017. The

Committee was also advised that the information on the year end budget position had been split between Children's Social Care and Education and Skills for the first time.

During consideration of the report, the following information was noted:-

- Targets for young offenders and care leavers in education, employment or training were not being met locally or nationally and therefore a specific focus was being made on these groups and alternative ways to engage were being explored.
- In respect of the increased demand from individual pupils with special educational needs or disability (SEND) and how these were met in smaller schools it was clarified that support would always be provided but this could increase the school's deficit. The Schools Forum was looking at making funding more equitable across Northumberland by the pooling of High Needs block additional SEND funding. In the case of academies, SEND funding was paid directly to the school. A review of place planning and SEND was currently being undertaken.
- In respect of the £2m unallocated savings across Children's Services the Interim Director of Children's Services advised that this was an historical amount attributed to savings not being achieved in a restructure in 2013/14 due to a number of reasons. It was considered this was misleading and the Interim Director of Children's Services would work with the new administration to provide realistic figures.
- In relation to the Children's Social Care element it was noted that due to the high cost of out of county placements along with the increase in foster carer allowances made this aspect very challenging to manage. The use of independent fostering agencies had reduced, however there were still some long term placements through these agencies. The high cost of placing children through independent agencies was recognised as a national problem and it was hoped that a review of pay for in-house foster carers would encourage more people to come forward as potential local authority foster carers. The use of independent agencies was limited with children only placed following the agreement of the Service Director.
- If a school was forced to become an academy and they had a budget deficit there was a statutory obligation for this to be met by the local authority. Concern was expressed regarding the long timescale for the academisation of one particular school within Northumberland with debts still being accrued and the local authority no longer having any involvement with the school. The Interim Director of Children's Services would report back on what was the position if there was a budget surplus on conversion to an academy.
- School Improvement Partners (SIPs) were employed by a school on a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in order to provide challenge, advice and support and whilst these were tailored to each school there were

some common themes. Whilst take up of SIPs was voluntary, there was a 85% take up by schools. The Committee requested a report on SIP visits be provided at a future meeting.

- The number of permanent exclusions had increased which was a concern. Pupil referral units were provided at KS2 and KS3 levels, with schools encouraged to keep pupils in mainstream education at KS4. The various reasons for permanent exclusions were discussed. The increase in elective home education was also of concern. A Pupil Placement Panel met monthly to help reintegrate pupils back into mainstream education. The regulations in relation to placement in schools were clear in that if the nearest school had a place then that school would be directed to take the pupil regardless of whether it was an academy. However it was noted that popular schools had waiting lists from which pupils were allocated a place which in practice meant that these schools were always full. A Member reported increased incidents of anti social behaviour related to exclusions from a certain academy and figures would be provided in relation to that school.

The Interim Director of Children's Services advised that there was a great deal of information in relation to the above in the last Annual Report.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The information be noted;
2. The position regarding the £2m unallocated savings was acknowledged and the Committee requested that this figure be removed;
3. A report on School Improvement Visits would be brought to a future meeting.

### **(b) Safeguarding Activity Trends Report**

The report attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C provided an analysis of social work activity trends and case allocation as well as highlighting national developments regarding the Department of Education safeguarding indicators.

The Service Director, Children's Services advised that in relation to social worker caseloads, there were a number of newly qualified social workers with reduced caseloads which along with staff sickness meant that more experienced social workers, on occasion, had a greater caseload than was ideal. There was a shortfall of experienced social workers being recruited nationally and it was hoped that a new Memorandum of Understanding which sought to address higher payments to agency workers would help the situation. It was considered the use of agency workers was disruptive to families and not cost effective and the Committee was pleased to note the use of agency workers had gone down.

Timescales for the production of assessments had been reduced and work was now being undertaken to improve the quality of reports received.

The retention of Social Workers was suggested as a further topic for a Task and Finish Group following conclusion of the one to consider Teacher Recruitment and Retention.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **19. THEMED SCRUTINY**

At the previous meeting it had been agreed that a Task and Finish Group be set up to consider Teacher Recruitment and Retention. Information had been circulated in advance of the meeting, a copy of which would also be filed with the signed minutes. The Chair advised that a number Committee Members had volunteered and the group would be made up as follows:-

Councillors: M Swinburn (Chair), T Cessford, G Renner-Thompson, M Richards, R Wallace  
J Sanderson and J Warner (Co-opted Members)

Officers: A Johnson, K Angus or Leanne Furnell (HR)

A suggestion was made that an exit questionnaire could be forwarded to teachers who left over the period of the Task and Finish Group which could provide useful information for the Group.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **20. WORK PROGRAMME**

A revised work programme was circulated and would be attached to the signed minutes. It was noted that a number of items were still subject to agreement by the Business Chair. The Teacher Recruitment and Retention Task and Finish Group would report back to the Committee in March 2018.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **INFORMATION REPORTS**

### **21. Policy Digest**

This report, available on the Council's website, provided details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which might be of interest to Members. Any Member who would like a printed copy should contact the Democratic Services Officer.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_