

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 **Friday 8 September 2017** at **10.00am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson
(Chair, in the Chair for items 22-26 & 28)

Councillor R Wallace
(Temporary Chair, in the Chair for item 27)

COUNCILLORS

Cessford T
Lang J
Nisbet K

Richards M
Stewart G

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Lennox, Rev D

Warner J

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Payne S
Sanderson J

Woolhouse R

OFFICERS

Aviston S
Bird M

Johnson A

Head of School Organisation and
Resources
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Interim Director of Children's
Services

Public (2)

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Campbell, Daley, Stow and Swinburn.

23. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

24. DISCLOSURES OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Renner-Thompson declared that he had previously been involved in discussions about education in Belford but had taken legal advice that he would be able to participate in the discussion.

Church representative Jo Warner referred to how St. Mary's was a Church of England school and declared that she had previously been its acting headteacher. It was clarified that as this was previous employment, it would not prevent Ms Warner from participating in the discussion.

25. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The published Forward Plan for August to November 2017 (attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A) was presented.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

26. APPOINTMENT OF TEMPORARY CHAIR

Councillor Renner-Thompson decided to step down from chairing the Belford item as it was in his electoral division, so a temporary Chair was required to be appointed for the item as the Vice-chair was not present. Following this it was:

RESOLVED that Councillor R Wallace be appointed temporary Chair for the 'Education in Belford' item.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

27. REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Education in Belford

The Committee considered the report which explained how the governing bodies of St Mary's Church of England Middle School and Belford First School had both agreed in requesting consultation be organised on the reorganisation of education in Belford. Members were asked to consider whether to recommend to Cabinet that the consultation should go ahead.

The proposal to be consulted on was to increase Belford Middle School's age range from 4 - 9 to 4 - 11, and to close St Mary's CoE Middle School. The report was a background paper with sufficient information to start the

consultation. A further report would then set out the results of any consultation if one went ahead.

In considering whether to proceed with the consultation, members noted that a total of 40 students currently attended St. Mary's Church of England Middle School; 13 in Year 5; 21 in Year 6, two in Year 7 and four in Year 8. The Interim Director of Children's Services had attended a joint meeting of the governing bodies of each school which all governors of both schools had attended. All governors had agreed and also signed a written request asking for the consultation to proceed.

Regarding a question about whether the change to a Primary School could lead to a fragmentation of the three tier Berwick School Partnership, members were advised that if the consultation was to go ahead, all Berwick schools would be able to have their say on such matters. A separate but connected piece of work about educational standards in north Northumberland was due to be undertaken but should not hold back this consultation, which had already been delayed due to purdah and the council elections in May 2017.

Members drew attention to how some parents might want their children to go on to the Duchess' High School rather than Berwick High School. In response it was confirmed that there was some capacity in the new Duchess High School, parental choice existed and no changes were being proposed for the Alnwick Partnership catchment. It was clarified that the report's reference to a proposal that children from Belford Middle School went on to Berwick High School was a usual feature of consultation processes to present an option to consult on. This did not preclude any parents choosing to applying for their children to instead attend Glendale Middle School or the Duchess' High School; it added to rather than prevented choice.

Members stressed that school reorganisations could be emotive; it was very important that all parents and stakeholders were made aware of the remit of this consultation and if the same message could be communicated to all affected. The process so far had involved parents and teachers, and parents wanted the consultation.

Members were also reminded that the recommendation was limited to requesting support for undertaking the consultation process, and if agreed, the next report in the process that would be presented to this Committee and Cabinet in due course would contain details of feedback received in response to the six week consultation.

Further discussion took place regarding the Ofsted categorisation of 'coasting' and the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner. Members were advised that the Regional Schools Commissioner was entitled to take action on schools identified as coasting including contacting the school or Diocese about them taking action to address the situation. Two schools in Northumberland had been identified as coasting; 25 had been targeted for improvement and support; this had reduced from 43 three years previously.

Members unanimously supported the proposal for the consultation process to

proceed.

Further reference was also made to the process followed for school reorganisations, and how the Committee would receive a further two rounds of reports. Further information could be provided for committee members about the procedure followed on each occasion.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be recommended to agree to the recommendations in the report.

28. URGENT BUSINESS (if any)

In response to a query about consultation on a restructure in another school partnership, the matter could be discussed with officers following the meeting.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....