

## **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 15 March 2018 at 10.00 am**

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor G Renner-Thompson  
In the Chair

#### **COUNCILLORS**

Cessford T  
Horncastle C  
Lang J

Nisbet K  
Richards ME  
Stewart G

#### **CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES**

Hodgson A

Lennox D

#### **TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

Payne S  
Sanderson J

Woolhouse R

#### **OFFICERS**

Aviston S  
Barron S  
Hartwell A

Johnson A  
Little L  
Wallace A

Head of School Organisation and Resources  
Head of SEN Strategies  
Senior Manager Performance - Education & Safeguarding  
Project Director (Education & Skills)  
Democratic Services Officer  
Head of Safeguarding - Children's Services

#### **89. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from D Campbell, W Daley, C McEvoy, K Stow, R Wallace and J Warner.

#### **90. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 6 February 2018, as circulated, be signed by the Chair.

In response to updates requested the following information was noted:

- It was not known if the Government would provide additional resources in respect of the Home Education (Duties of Local Authorities) Bill.
- Performance Targets were currently being updated and a draft would be available on the Council's website in March.
- A brief report would be provided to the Committee on the level of permanent exclusions across Northumberland.

## **91. FORWARD PLAN**

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for March to June (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented. Members were advised that two items had been added to the Forward Plan, both of which would be reported to this Committee for pre-scrutiny.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **REPORTS TO BE CONSIDERED BY CABINET**

## **92. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

### **(a) Outcomes of the Special Educational Needs & Disability Strategy and Capacity Consultation**

The report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) provided an update on the outcomes of consultation that had been carried out seeking views on the Northumberland Area SEND strategy. The consultation, which had been co-produced with parents, included a range of options and ideas on how capacity could be increased within the County's special schools. The report provided an update on the outcomes of informal consultation on the proposals to increase the capacity at Hexham Priory School through the enlargement of its building, and at The Dales School, Blyth through the addition of a satellite site in Ashington. The Project Director (Education and Skills) introduced the report to the Committee highlighting the recommendations and key issues. He advised that capital funding had been approved for building works at both Hexham Priory and Ashdale sites from Council budgets.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was noted:-

- Places would be increased at both Hexham Priory in the West and at Ashdale for the Blyth and Ashington areas in the first instance and consultation would be undertaken on where there was a need to expand provision in other parts of the County.
- The consultation was being carried out to identify need and capacity but there was still an ongoing issue on how the places would be financed as the high needs block was currently £1.7m in deficit.
- It was expected that the cost of out of County placements would reduce.

- Figures could be provided for the previous expansion to The Priory School by way of prudential borrowing compared to the more expensive cost of buying places at an out of county provision.
- When a child required additional educational needs above those provided by a mainstream school then an Educational Health Care Plan would be requested and the school would need to identify how they had supported the child. Reports would be collected from other agencies involved with that child.

Concern was expressed regarding reducing SENCO provision in academies, the increasing number of exclusions which may include students with undiagnosed SEND or SEND students not understanding behaviour policies and the lack of influence the local authority had on these organisations. The Committee was advised that whilst the local authority could not get involved in matters relating to staffing structures, they could raise concerns with the Regional Schools Commissioner. Professionals were working very closely with parents and carers.

The need to ensure that top up funding was used on the child for which it was intended was stressed and the need for strong networks across schools to maximise the use of existing services effectively and efficiently was highlighted. Schools would be encouraged to provide specialist SEND provision with integration to mainstream classes which was a format used in other areas of the North East.

The increase in pupils diagnosed with Aspergers, Autism, ADHD and ASD was a national picture however it was noted that not all SEND pupils required special school provision.

The Committee requested a slight change to the wording of recommendation 2 to read:-

“Approve a more detailed consultation on options to expand capacity for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities with a focus on all parts of the County particularly the North.”

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet be advised that this Committee supported recommendations 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 as outlined in the report and that recommendation 2 should be changed to read:-

*“Approve a more detailed consultation on options to expand capacity for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities with a focus on all parts of the County particularly the North.”*

## **(b) Children’s Social Care Improvement Plan**

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**) provided an updated position on progress in relation to the Children’s Social Care Improvement Plan. The Committee was advised that since the agenda had been published additional information was available and a revised Improvement Plan was available for Members. A letter in connection with the

Ofsted focussed visit was also made available for Members. It was confirmed that the report and Improvement Plan would also be presented to the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Group and Cabinet.

It was clarified that the priorities outlined from page 3 of the report were in no particular order. In response to an issue with the Authority being notified of children being placed within Northumberland from outside the area, it was confirmed that a review of policy had been undertaken and notification would always be provided between local authorities if they were placing children into a different area. Independent agencies would also be advised of this requirement.

Members requested that when acronyms were used these should be preceded in the first instance with the full name/spelling.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet be advised that this Committee supported the recommendation to note the progress made against the actions of the Improvement Plan and that no further areas for additional scrutiny had been identified.

## **REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY**

### **93. WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT**

The Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme and monitoring report was attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**. Members had been notified of additional meeting dates in April and May. Additional Information requested in request of reducing numbers of pupils in the Berwick partnership would be brought to a future meeting and the request for a report on permanent exclusions to be brought to a future meeting would be considered by the Business Chair.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **INFORMATION REPORTS**

### **94. 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**\_\_\_\_\_