

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 **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Monday 11 February 2019 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson
(in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Campbell D
Cessford T
Stewart G

Stow K
Swinburn M
Wallace R (Part)

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Hodgson A
Lennox D

Warner J

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Payne S

Woolhouse R

OFFICERS

Aviston S
Hartwell A

Jackson D
Little L
McEvoy-Carr C

Head of Schools Organisation & Resources
Senior Manager Performance: Education & Safeguarding
Service Director - Education and Skills
Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

ALSO PRESENT

Daley W

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Press/Public: 1

52. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair requested Members to join him in a minutes silent reflection on the life of Councillor Bernard Pidcock who had passed away on Saturday.

Councillor Pidcock a Member and previous Chair of this Committee would be sadly missed by all and condolences were expressed to his wife and family.

53. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor M Richards, R Lyst and J Sanderson.

54. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 10 January 2019, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

55. FORWARD PLAN

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for February to May 2019 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

56. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

56.1 School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2020/21 Academic Year

The Cabinet report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) informed of the outcomes of the consultation on School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2020/21 Academic year as required by the School Admissions Code 2014. Approval of the admission arrangements was also being sought from Cabinet. The Head of School Organisation and Resources introduced the report to the Committee. Councillor W Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services was in attendance. The Committee was advised that no responses had been received to the consultation on admission arrangements for the 2020/21 academic year. Informal consultation was required to be undertaken on the proposals to expand the accommodation at Horton Grange and New Delaval Primary Schools and Whytrig Community Middle School as a result of increasing pupil numbers in Blyth and Seaton Delaval. Capital funding had already been agreed for these proposals.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that this Committee supported the recommendations as outlined in the report.

56.2 The Outline Business Case for the replacement of school buildings for Hadrian Learning Trust schools

The Head of School Organisation and Resources introduced the Cabinet report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**) which set out the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the replacement of school buildings for the

Hadrian Learning Trust Schools to the Committee. Councillor W Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services was also in attendance. It was highlighted that the report also included a request to approve the development of an OBC to evaluate the options for capital investment in the Seaton Valley Federation of Schools.

Members questioned the safety of the increased number of pupils accessing the Queen Elizabeth High School site and were advised that this would be the subject of future discussions and any infrastructure improvements that were required could be secured through a Section 278 Highways Agreement. It was clarified that fixtures within the building would be included in the build, however furniture, ICT equipment etc would ordinarily be funded through the school's budget. Costs for any temporary accommodation required for students through the building phase was included in the OBC. It was thought that specialist teaching areas could be provided within the existing buildings following the decant of the Hydrotherapy building with standard classrooms housed in temporary accommodation.

Project Management of the build was included in the OBC and it was clarified that Sue Aviston, would be Project Director with expert advice secured through external sources. A Project Board including Executive Directors of the Council would provide governance of the scheme. A Local Steering Group established which would include local Councillors, representatives of the Hadrian Learning Trust, members of the Project Board and would be Chaired by Councillor Daley.

In respect of what would happen to the land leased from the Council to the Hadrian Learning Trust should the Trust cease it was confirmed that as long as the land continued to be used for educational purposes the lease would continue. If educational use of the land ceased then the Secretary of State would make a decision on the future use of the land. The existing middle school site would return to the ownership of the Council following it being vacated, again with the decision on the future use made by the Secretary of State.

It was commented that moving the middle school onto the same site at the west of the town could have an unintended consequence of reducing the pupil numbers at St Joseph's Middle RC School. It was clarified that the relocated middle school would have a 5 form entry and it would be the responsibility of the HLT to ensure the separation and smooth running of the two schools within the same site.

The Committee welcomed the very clear and detailed Outline Business Case, acknowledging and thanking officers for their extensive work in bringing this forward.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that this Committee supported the recommendations as outlined in the report.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

57. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Annual Test of Assurance

The Senior Manager Performance: Education and Safeguarding introduced the report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) to the Committee. Statutory guidance on the role of the Director of Children's Services required the Council to carry out a test of assurance when the responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) changed. As a result of Mrs McEvoy-Carr's appointment to the post of Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services her duties had been extended beyond those of the DCS. Assurances were provided that the systems and governance structures previously reported to this Committee in January 2018 remained in place however there was a wider resource at Executive Team level to support Mrs. McEvoy-Carr in improving outcomes for children and young people.

RESOLVED that the Committee confirmed that the arrangements for discharging the role of Director of Children's Services passed the "test of assurance" required by Statutory Guidance.

58. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

58.1 Children's Social Care Annual Self Assessment

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix E**) advised of the outcome of the annual self assessment for children's social care. The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services advised that this was the second self assessment undertaken and provided an update from the previous. The self assessment had been subject to planned regional scrutiny in December 2018 and following this had been updated and had been discussed with Ofsted as part of the recent annual conversation. The Continuous Improvement Plan was currently being finalised and would be reported to a future meeting.

The Committee were pleased to note that the majority of the top 10 improvement priorities had largely been achieved and acknowledged the positive progress that had been made over the past 18 months. It was recognised that there was still work to be undertaken to achieve the vision for the service. The difficulty in the recruitment of experienced social workers was a national problem, however the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (AYSE) Academy for newly qualified social workers was working well with the first eight social workers about to graduate, the next eight ready to start and a waiting list for the following intake. The value of consistency for families was highlighted. Members were pleased to also note the positive feedback from families gathered as part of the audit process.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that no further areas for scrutiny were identified.

58.2 Haydon Bridge High School - post OfSTED update

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix F**) provided an update on the progress being made at Haydon Bridge High School and the support being offered via the Local Authority and the Interim Executive Board (IEB). The Service Director - Education and Skills advised that the school had made steady progress but still had a long way to go. He outlined the actions taken by the Local Authority including the appointment of a new headteacher and IEB. It was recognised that middle leadership still required improvement however a number of new staff were now in post and progress was being made. Councillor Daley advised of the vocational centre which was to open as part of the school in September 2019.

Mr Woolhouse advised that staff felt they had always worked hard and were now being asked to work harder. They also had concerns regarding workloads and teaching across multi-disciplinary areas. The Service Director advised that he was hoping to visit the school after the half-term break.

It was commented that whilst Progress 8 had improved since 2016 and 2017, some students could have been disadvantaged and not achieved the results they were capable of. The level of persistent absenteeism had reduced and was in line with other schools within Northumberland. A further report would be provided to the Committee following the next Ofsted monitoring visit.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The acknowledgement made by OfSTED of the input and support from the local authority be noted; and
2. The contents of the report and the fact that progress had been made although the school continued to need to make significant improvements be noted.

59. REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Monitoring Report 2018/19

The Work Programme and Monitoring Report was attached as **Appendix G** to the signed minutes. Changes to the work programme were noted as follows:-

- Corporate Parenting Report deferred to the meeting on 30 April
- Additional items -
 - 4 April - Children's Scrutiny Plan and information report on Opportunity North East
 - 30 April - SEND Programme

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORTS

60. 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_____