

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 **Thursday 4 April 2019** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson
(Chair in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Campbell D
Cessford T
Lang J
Stewart G

Stow K
Swinburn M
Wallace R

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Lennox D

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Lyst R
Payne S

Woolhouse R

OFFICERS

Aviston S
Hartwell A

Jackson D
Little L
McEvoy-Carr C

Head of School 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

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from A Hodgson, Councillor M Richards, J Sanderson and J Warner.

69. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 7 March 2019, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Wallace advised that he was Vice-Chair of Whitley Memorial CE First School Governing Body and would take no part in the consideration of Item 5 on the agenda. Councillor Cessford advised that he had a personal but non prejudicial interest in Item 5 on the agenda as he had previously taught at Bedlington Community High School which was now Bedlington Academy.

R Lyst advised that he had a personal interest in Item 6 as his daughter was entitled to receive school transport.

71. FORWARD PLAN

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for March to June 2019 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented. An additional item for this Committee had been added since the Forward Plan had been circulated as follows:-

6 June 2019 - School Organisation Plan 2018-2019 Annual Update.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

72. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Proposed consultation on extending the age ranges of Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools.

The Cabinet report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) set out a request from the Governing Bodies of Whitley Memorial CE First School and Bedlington West End First School to carry out a consultation on a proposal to extend the age ranges of the two schools to become primary schools with effect from 1 September 2020. The report was presented to Members by S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources with Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, in attendance to ascertain the Committee's views prior to consideration at Cabinet on 9 April, 2019.

In respect of concerns from Members regarding over-capacity, Officers confirmed that they had met with Headteachers within the Bedlington Partnership where this had been discussed. The Local Authority had submitted an objection to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) in respect of the proposal by Meadowdale Academy to become a primary, as part of their consultation. The Local Authority would continue to work with the RSC to reduce the risk of any of the schools closing.

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

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

73. JOINT REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES

Review of the Implementation of the new Post 16 Transport Policy

The report (attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes) provided the Committee with information on the implementation of the new Post 16 Transport Policy, the issues that had arisen and measures taken to address them. The report also provided details of the further steps being taken to improve the management of the student travel scheme in 2019/20.

Members welcomed the report and the increased number of students using post 16 transport. It was noted that whilst the scheme was under budget this financial year, it was expected that costs would rise due to increasing student numbers accessing the scheme and a requirement to grow transport capacity. It was commented that the figures did not show if increased numbers of students were accessing further education and it would be useful if those figures and data on whether the policy had affected pupil choice could be provided.

The Director of Education advised that a lot of work had been undertaken to ensure students had access to a suitable course. As part of their initial application students had to advise why they wished to access a particular course. C Tulett, the Head of Employability and Skills been part of the decision making process and had been able to compare the specifications of courses on offer and match these with the aspirations of students, with students able to benefit from free transport to a more distant establishment when needed.

RESOLVED that the contents be noted.

74. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Children's Social Care Improvement Plan 2019

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) provided a new Improvement Plan in relation to Children's Social Care and was introduced to the Committee by A Hartwell, Senior Manager Performance: Education & Safeguarding. He advised that the three key priorities were different to those in 2018 and reflected how the service was developing. One round of monitoring had been undertaken since the report had been published and details would be provided to both the Children's Safeguarding Board and to this Committee in due course.

In response to a question, the Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services advised that it was a requirement to assess connected persons as foster carers when children might become looked after and confirmed that a large number of children were placed with families or friends.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

75. 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 E** to the signed minutes.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

76. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Opportunity North East

The Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services advised that a formal launch event had been held at Middlesbrough Football Club at which the schools which would benefit from the additional funding were announced. The four schools in Northumberland were :-

Berwick Academy
Blyth Academy
James Calvert Spence College
NCEA Duke's Secondary School

Diagnostic reviews would be undertaken in either the summer or autumn terms depending on which phase schools were part of with interventions commencing in September or January. A presentation had been made to the North Area LAC and she could attend other LACs if requested.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

77. URGENT BUSINESS

Anti-Racist Education in Northumberland Schools

A report (attached to the signed minutes) requested by the Chair following media coverage regarding the withdrawal of direct funding for Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC), who delivered anti-racism workshops to a small number of schools, was circulated to Members of the Committee and time allowed for them to read this.

The Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services advised that in recent years a number of other local authorities had also withdrawn funding for SRtRC workshops in their schools with only Gateshead and South Tyneside Councils continuing this practice. A decision had been made by Officers to not renew the contract with SRtRC as they felt it did not necessarily offer value for money and it was considered that resources would be better targeted to deliver a whole range of anti-discriminatory work across a larger number of schools. All schools had been advised of this decision and no objections had been received. Schools could make their own choice of their preferred providers for such workshops delivered in their own school. A number of schools directly commissioned with other providers who offered sessions addressing a whole range of equalities issues.

The Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services offered assurance that education regarding all forms of anti discrimination remained a priority within the authority and there continued to be a number of other organisations offering input and interventions around anti racism and wider protected characteristics within all schools.

R Lyst advised that he had been one of the teachers who had received training from SRtRC and whilst he did not have an issue with the decision to withdraw funding he considered that SRtRC should have a right of response to the report. The Committee was advised that the report had only been requested in response to adverse media coverage and social media comments stemming from a statement from SRtRC.

Councillor Daley highlighted that Stonewall had identified Northumberland County Council in the top 5 performing authorities for their equality work.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORT

78. 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 _____