

## **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 6 June 2019** at **10.00 am**

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor G Renner-Thompson  
(Chair in the Chair)

#### **COUNCILLORS**

Campbell D  
Cessford T  
Dickinson S  
Dunn L  
Lang J

Stewart G  
Stow K  
Swinburn M  
Wallace R

#### **CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES**

Hodgson, A

Lennox D

#### **TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

Lyst R  
Payne S

Woolhouse R

#### **OFFICERS**

Little L  
McEvoy-Carr C

Reiter G

Democratic Services Officer  
Executive Director of Adult Social Care and  
Children's Services  
Service Director - Children's Social Care

#### **ALSO PRESENT**

Daley W

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for  
Children's Services

Press/Public: 1

### **1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Details were provided on the Membership which had been agreed by Council at their meeting on Wednesday 1 May 2019. The Chair welcomed the newly appointed Members to the Committee.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from J Warner.

## **3. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4 April 2019, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## **4. FORWARD PLAN**

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

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET**

### **5. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **Proposal and Rationale for changes to Morpeth Children's Centre**

The Cabinet report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) and introduced by the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, provided Members with an overview of the context of the proposal and rationale for changes to the use of the current Morpeth Children's Centre building. Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services was also in attendance to listen to the views of the Committee.

Assurance was provided that the Children's Centre delivery would not be reduced as a result of the change and the proposal would add capacity to the provision available to support education for children with Special Education Needs in Northumberland.

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

## **REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY**

### **6. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **6.1 Review of the Corporate parenting strategy and work plan**

The report (attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes) provided a progress and impact update in relation to the action plan from the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-2020 which informed the development of the revised strategy. The Service Director - Children's Social Care talked of the positive impacts the plan was having as detailed in the report and highlighted that whilst the numbers of children placed within 20 miles of their home addresses had increased, there was sometimes a requirement to place children further away for their own safety. In respect of the areas for improvement he advised that the strengthening of the Corporate Parenting Board continued with the views of looked after children and care leavers taken into account.

Members welcomed the progress that had been made. In response to a question regarding children with mental and emotional health issues, it was confirmed that whilst this was a challenge the service did work closely with mental health colleagues. A specific piece of work was underway with the Children and Young Peoples' Service to allow help to be accessed in a timely manner. Front line staff had a wide understanding of the range of support and specialist services which were available however additional training would continue to be provided to allow staff to identify specific problems.

In respect of Adopt North East the Committee was advised that this was still in its early stages and had a number of staff changes, however more stability was starting to be seen. The adoption service within Northumberland had been very good and whilst the Council no longer had control, it was important to ensure that the new process was working and all involved were very committed to the process. It was clarified that no children would become looked after purely because their family had been evicted, there would also need to be other issues before this would occur. The service worked closely with colleagues in housing to ensure that statutory obligations were met.

In relation to stability for children, it was confirmed that a lot of work had been undertaken in respect of the recruitment and retention of social workers. The first cohort of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Academy were now working with the second cohort now going through the Academy and a third cohort were due to start in September 2019. It was expected this would help to stabilise the workforce in the future, however the recruitment of experienced social workers still remained a challenge, particularly in the more urban areas of the County. In order to provide more stability for children it was also stated that children would only be required to change schools if absolutely necessary.

**RESOLVED** that the progress that had been made in relation to the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the work plan be noted.

## **6.2 Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2017-18**

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) provided details of the education outcomes of Northumberland's looked after children (LAC) for the academic year 2017-18. An introduction to the report was provided by Councillor Daley who advised that the report recognised the factual progress and recognised where it needed to improve. He thanked the Virtual School

Headteacher and her team who had a real understanding of what was required to improve the outcomes for all LAC.

The Virtual School Headteacher reminded the Committee that the figures being reported were in relation to the 2017/28 academic year due to the wait for national data. She also reminded Members that the cohort number in each year group was very low, with pupils attending individual schools and all had made better progress since becoming LAC than they had previously. It was highlighted that pupils did not sustain the rate of progress through KS2 to KS4 and work was underway to address this.

In response to a question regarding the level of fixed term exclusions (FTE) and number of sessions lost the Committee was informed that the service was helping schools understand some of the issues of LAC and strategies had been put in place to help schools with this. Local data had shown the situation has improved this year with fewer FTE but further work was required. Work was also being undertaken by this Committee's Task and Finish Working Group on exclusions. Some LAC attended Alternative Provision in order to access more vocational studies however following an announcement by Ofsted it was hoped that schools would be able to broaden their curriculum and offer more vocational qualifications in order to keep more students engaged.

The addition to the Virtual School of an Educational Psychologist to meet the needs of those LAC with EHCP had an immediate positive impact and this would be evidenced in the next report.

**RESOLVED** that:-

1. The positive education outcomes be noted; and
2. The increasing strengths and improvement over time of Northumberland's Virtual School be noted.

### **6.3 Peer Challenge - Care Leavers Service**

The report (attached as **Appendix E** to the signed minutes) provided Members with an update of the actions to be undertaken following the Peer Challenge undertaken in September 2018 including a current view of the education, employment and training status of Northumberland's care leavers. The report was introduced by the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services and the Service Director - Children's Social Care.

Members thanked Officers for the excellent report and were happy to note that young people had been given a voice. They were pleased to note the work in respect of opportunities to support care leavers into employment and education within the various directorates across the Council. In relation to the Council Tax exemptions for care leavers it was confirmed that this had been agreed as part of the Council's budget process.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted.

## **6.4 Twelve Month Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Review**

The report (attached as **Appendix F** to the signed minutes) which presented a review of the implementation of the MASH after 12 months was introduced by the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services and the Senior Manager Specialist Services, First Contact and MASH. Councillor Daley highlighted that this was the first all age MASH within the Northumbria Police Command area and was now being used as a template across the Command Area.

In response to a question regarding the use of school support staff to accompany a child who was removed whilst at school, it was confirmed that this would only occur if the staff member offered and they were the most appropriate person and it was in the child's best interests, it would never be expected of them to do this.

Concern in respect of the recording system presently being used was noted and a Member suggested that Power BI be looked at once the Council had transferred to Office 365.

In respect of the high numbers it was commented that these were only those accessing the MASH. It was expected that Officers would report if resources were lacking and it was confirmed that resources were continually being reviewed.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted.

## **7. REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER**

### **Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Monitoring Report 2019/20**

The Work Programme and Monitoring Report was attached as **Appendix G** to the signed minutes. The Committee were reminded that an extra meeting on Monday 5 August 2019 had been requested.

Further items for possible additions to the work programme were identified as follows:-

ASYE Academy

Adult Learning Services transfer to North of Tyne Combined Authority

These would be discussed by Chairmen's Group for their decision on whether these should be added to the work programme.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **INFORMATION REPORT**

### **8. 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.

### **9. URGENT BUSINESS**

The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services advised that they have received notification that a targeted Ofsted inspection would be taking place later this month. She thanked the Labour Group who had given up their room in order to help facilitate this.

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

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