

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 **Council Chamber, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday 6 February 2020** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson
(Chair in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Campbell D
Cessford T
Dunn L
Lang J

Stewart G
Stow K
Wallace R

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Hodgson A
Lennox D

Rickeard P

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Parkin J
Payne S

Sanderson J

OFFICERS

Angus C
Aviston S
Barron S
Connor M
Gerard J
Hartwell A

Kingham A
Little L

Scrutiny Officer
Head of School Organisation & Resources
Head of SEND Strategies
Head of Early Help, Prevention and Support,
Acting Manager, Learning and Skills Service
Senior Manager Performance: Education &
Safeguarding
Director - Business Development
Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor W Daley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Press/Public: 1

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Dickinson and M Swinburn; C McEvoy-Carr and D Jackson.

61. FORWARD PLAN

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for February to May 2020 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

PRE-SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORT

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

School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2021/2022 Academic Year

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**) advised Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation on School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2021/22 Academic year as required by the School Admissions Code 2014. Approval of these arrangements was also sought. The Head of School Resources and Organisation advised that no responses had been received to the consultation. The report also confirmed the Schools Adjudicators' decision to reduce the PAN (published admission number) at Mowbray Primary from September 2020 and also highlighted the PAN reduction at Bedlington West End Primary from September 2020 as a result of the statutory consultation undertaken in 2019 for the Bedlington reorganisation.

The Committee was advised that the Council had responded to consultations in respect of proposed admission changes to Academies, over which the Council had very limited powers. Any decision to be made in respect of the current consultation on West Woodburn First School would be made outside of the normal process.

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

SCRUTINY REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

63. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The role of Director of Children's Services - Test of Assurance

The report (attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes) was introduced by

the Senior Manager Performance: Education & Safeguarding. He advised that statutory guidance on the role of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) required the Council to carry out a "test of assurance" when the responsibilities of the DCS changed. As good practice, the Council had agreed to review these arrangements on an annual basis even when they had not changed.

The systems and governance structures, which had previously been reported to the Committee in February 2019, largely remained in place and were attached as Appendix A to the report.

RESOLVED that the arrangements for discharging the role of Director of Children's Services passed the "test of assurance" required by statutory guidance.

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

64.1 Learning and Skills Service Draft Self-Assessment for 2018/19

The report, introduced by the Acting Manager, Learning and Skills Service, (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) provided an overview of the draft Northumberland Learning and Skills Service (LSS) Self-Assessment Report for 2018/19. The report provided an early indication of the service performance in the academic year 2018/19 and was subject to the nationally validated data which would be released early in 2020. It was explained that the format was different to previous reports due to changes in the OFSTED framework, however the Service continued to perform well against the national average with achievement rates significantly above.

It was confirmed that Northumberland has a small base of alternative local providers of further education compared to other areas. Some local and regional providers are commissioned to deliver some specialist apprenticeship programmes to NCC apprentices as LSS does not deliver all the required vocational programmes. Curriculum planning was underway for next year working with employers to ensure these covered the skills required. The Service was committed to working with Northumberland College to ensure that all students were able to access the right offer for them.

Staff development was ongoing with regular observations undertaken to ensure continuous improvement. Staff not meeting required standards had been provided with an individual action plan and support provided to ensure improvement.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

64.2 SEND: Progress Update on the Written Statement of Action

The report (attached as **Appendix E** to the signed minutes) and introduced by the Head of SEND Strategies, provided an update on the progress being made on the Written Statement of Action received following Northumberland's SEND inspection in October 2018. The significant amount of work, particularly

surrounding the graduated response in mainstream schools was highlighted along with the improved outcomes in reading, writing and maths and reduction in exclusions. The next visit was to be undertaken on 18 February 2020 and would focus on the impact and preparation for adulthood.

The Committee were advised nationally there were more boys than girls with SEND, and data could be shared with Members on the improved outcomes for each. It was difficult to quantify how schools used the graduated approach as while a school may be good at literacy it might not necessarily be good at addressing the social, emotional and mental health needs of a child and vice-versa. Regular monitoring of the turnover of SENCO's and capacity was undertaken, due to the stressful nature of the role and the difficulties that could be encountered with a change in staff. It was a challenge for all schools, and especially the smaller rural schools with less resources, to ensure that all pupils received all the support they required. The need for support for SENCOs had been recognised in the DSG report previously discussed at this Committee with 0.5% of the budget ring fenced to protect front-line services.

Councillor Daley advised that the contents of the Written Statement of Action received in 2018 had not been a surprise and the majority of issues had already been identified and were being addressed within the new structure. He highlighted the work undertaken to support SENCO's including the three conferences that had been held and discussions at the Headteachers conference along with the Trailblazer pilot with the Mental Health Service in Blyth and Hexham. A lot of work had been undertaken to improve the quality of the Education Health Care Plans which were now more robust and focussed more on the impact and outcomes for each young person. He was confident that the work undertaken and support provided had considerably improved the offer for both children and staff within schools.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report and ongoing developments be noted.

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

65. 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 F** to the signed minutes.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____