

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a virtual meeting of the **Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday, 5 November 2020** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor M Swinburn
(Chair in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Campbell D
Cessford T
Daley W
Dickinson S

Dunn L
Lang J
Wallace R

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Hodgson A

Lennox D

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Houghton L

Sanderson J

OFFICERS

Angus C
Barron S

Kingham A
Little L
McEvoy-Carr C

Scrutiny Officer
Strategic Lead for SEND & Designated
Clinical Officer
Interim Service Director, Education and Skills
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Adult Social Care and
Children's Services and Interim Deputy Chief
Executive

ALSO PRESENT

O'Brien K

NHS

94. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stow and Cabinet Members, Councillors Jones and Renner-Thompson.

95. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

(a) 17 September 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 17 September 2020 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

(b) 1 October 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 1 October 2020 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

At this point Councillor Dickinson asked that following the announcement made at Council the previous day regarding the setting up of working groups and specifically in connection with free school meals if this would be the Committee to set up this working group. The Chair advised that it would not be this Committee that would oversee this and it would be Councillor Pattison who would lead on this. He advised on 23 October he had emailed the Executive Director to request a report to be brought to this Committee on free school meals and what was currently being done and the possibilities to expand on this. He had since also forwarded this to Councillor Pattison and the Leader to request that as Chair of this Committee he be included in the cross party working group. He advised that work had already commenced on Child Poverty in the Wansbeck area and outcomes on this were awaited but agreed that this Committee needed to be involved.

Councillor Dickinson advised that there had been no detail provided in the announcement and it had been stated that the Chief Executive would be providing options to be discussed and brought forward but no timescale had been provided. The Committee needed to push for the right representatives and truly cross party inclusion. Assurance that this was being taken forward as an action and would come back to Committee with a timeline and further details was provided.

96. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan of key decisions for November 2020 to February 2021 attached as **Appendix A** to the signed minutes be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

97. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

COVID 19 Update

The Chair advised that this had been removed from the agenda as all Members were due to receive a briefing at 1 pm that day on this subject.

98. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Covid Recovery Report

C. McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's

Services introduced the report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) which had been presented to Cabinet on 13 October 2020. She advised that the situation with Covid was very fluid, at that time the County had been in Tier 2 with concerns that it would be moved to Tier 3, however the situation and changed and the whole Country was now in lockdown. In relation to schools she advised that there were continued interventions from Public Health England along with the Council's Health Protection Teams providing advice and updating risk assessments. It had been reported at the Council meeting the previous day that, as at 2 November 2020, there had been 396 positive cases in schools in the County with 86 schools having one or more cases and 77 schools having no positive cases. Schools would remain open and advice would continue to be provided. The Communications and Engagement Group had continued to meet in order to ensure that the correct messages were provided and regular feedback was provided on the effectiveness. A piece of work was being undertaken into behavioural insights and how to influence people to follow rules and guidelines once the Country was out of lockdown with the Communications Team and Public Health involved with this. The Health Protection Board continued to meet weekly looking at trends and at risk groups with other sub groups also meeting to look at specific areas of work. Work also continued with the voluntary sector to co-ordinate support for the clinically vulnerable.

It was clarified that the Council would, where possible, work to assist parents in ensuring that all pupils got an appropriate education and there was no appetite for the prosecution of parents for pupil absence at the current time.

Councillor Daley highlighted the pop up services which had operated throughout the summer holiday period and the families which had been fed through the opening of the school kitchen at St. Benet Biscops along with East Bedlington Community Centre. He hoped that the working group would learn from this in order to support holiday hunger going forward as a lot of work had been undertaken in advance, to be able to support these schemes. The Executive Director advised that work was ongoing to evaluate the impact and success of these schemes and how to move forward and also stated that pop up services had been used through the October half term week also.

J Sanderson commented that whilst parts of the NEU had made national announcements regarding the closure of schools, he felt very reassured in working with the Council, advising there had been very few comments coming from this area regarding the need to shut schools and the local opinion did not follow the national edict. L Haughton advised that the local NSWTS were of the same opinion and supported maintaining education whilst ensuring that schools were safe in these challenging and quickly changing times. The Union had very clear criteria which must be met and it was felt that this was being done at the current time.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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

SEND Progress Update on the Written Statement of Action (WSOA)

The report (attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes) was introduced by S Barron, Strategic Lead for SEND & Designated Clinical Officer who also provided a powerpoint presentation. Progress made against the key areas for improvement were outlined as follows:

Joint planning and commissioning

- Governance structure reviewed to reflect WSOA actions largely completed and need to look to the future
- Shared understanding of needs across strategic partners as evidenced through 2020 SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Strong, responsive local area approach to commissioning of mental health support during the pandemic

Next steps : Consultation on draft SEND Strategy, articulating the impact that actions being taken have on children, young people and their families, focus on commissioning of therapies

Graduated approach in mainstream schools

Acknowledgment of significant amount of work undertaken to support, empower and challenge schools to deliver inclusive educational practice

- Northumberland Inclusive Education Service launched, providing specialist SEND advice to schools / settings / colleges, free at point of delivery
- Risk assessment process for provision of support for pupils with SEND, support provided to schools / settings
- Graduated approach for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, 'pop up return to school hub', Kooth

Next steps : ongoing delivery and coordination of support for mental health, support, training and challenge for schools and settings

Improving outcomes and preparation for adulthood

Positive assurance provided of progress being made, including

- Increase in reading, writing and maths outcomes at KS1 and KS2 for SEND support and EHCP learners from 2018 to 2019 (except KS1 reading);
- Ongoing yearly reduction in fixed term and permanent exclusions for children and young people with SEND;
- Development of the SEND Dashboard & Local Area Outcomes Framework approved by SEND Board
- Transition pathway between children and adult social care

Next steps : Data development to underpin dashboard and outcomes framework

Impact of COVID-19

- Survey highlighted impact on families on mental & physical health, education and learning and finance

- Most C&YP with an EHCP did not attend school during lockdown and many found home schooling difficult
- Health and social care quickly adopted different ways of working to provide support where it was needed
- Statutory processes were largely unaffected

In response to questions in relation to the new form of “In It Together”, the parent support group it was noted this was now called the Northumberland Parent Carer Forum and had been in operation since June/July 2020. It was small group at the present time but they were able to engage and were working at all levels with the Council. A number of initiatives were being undertaken to increase membership with the involvement of national voluntary organisations which oversaw all Parent Carer Forums and a live question and answer session with parents had recently been held. The use of virtual meetings had been useful as it had increased engagement. Assurance was provided that whilst the group was small, they were already providing significant challenge in respect of policies, procedures etc.

In relation to the statement that some young people had thrived by being at home and not at school and the work being undertaken at Collingwood School, it was commented that there was no overarching theme with this, some young people experienced difficulties with social interactions and therefore not being school was less stressful for a small group of families, others did not access learning at home thereby decreasing stress levels. Different options would be explored with learning to come out of how to reach pupils that had been difficult to reach in the past but this did not apply to all pupils and this would be looked at going forward. This was a key priority of the Education and Skills Team going forward and how to meet the needs of residents more widely and broadly than had been done in the past. Individual success in schools in engaging pupils was being looked at and how these could be replicated in schools across the County.

In respect of the statement that small number of children did not receive any schooling at home and their mental health and physical health became worse, it was stated that this was in relation to a very small number of families with unique circumstances. For some pupils they understood that they worked at school, however it was very hard for them to accept that they should work at home due to the way they viewed learning. The key moving forward would be how to support these young learners and the inclusive education services had been doing a lot of work especially with pupils with autism to engage more. Learners were now back in school, but there was a requirement to have something put in place should the situation happen again. Difficulties encountered by learners with the work they had been given had been raised by the Parent Carer Forum and an action plan had been produced as a result of the survey. A link would be circulated to Members to allow them to see the support being put in place and to improve communications between schools. It was highlighted that a small number of Special Schools had difficulties in remaining fully open if they had positive Covid cases and work was being undertaken on how pupils could access some form of learning so that there was not a continuing start and stop scenario with children in and out of school as this would become a challenge.

In response to questions from Councillor Dickinson regarding the figures

provided in the report, it was clarified that there were two cases where the EHCPs had not been issued within the statutory deadline of 20 weeks and this was due to the individual circumstances whereby face to face assessments in an education setting were required and these had been completed as soon as this had been possible. It was not possible to benchmark the number of interventions by the Northumberland Inclusive Education Services as this was a new service but it was confirmed that all partnerships had engaged in seeking support for SEND pupils. The service had been redesigned to provide support to schools without the need for a SLA and was free at the point of delivery. In relation to the 426 families who responded to the Covid survey Members were advised that this was the highest response rate for SEND and had provided a good insight, with a national survey only receiving 4,000 responses.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

100. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The work programme was attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D** with Members being advised that the Care Proceedings report deferred from this meeting would come to the December meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer advised if any Member of the Committee wished to put forward any item for consideration by the Committee then they should contact either the Chair or himself.

The Chair hoped that the report he had requested would be ready in time to come to the December meeting, but time would be needed to see what came out of the working groups which had only been announced the day before, however information would be shared as soon as this was known, with action being needed before the Christmas holiday period.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR _____.

DATE _____