

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 **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday 18 January 2018** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson

COUNCILLORS

Cessford T	Richards ME
Horncastle C	Stewart G
Nisbet K (Part)	Wallace R
Lang J (Part)	

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Hodgson A	Warner J
Lennox D	

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Payne S	Woolhouse R
Sanderson J	

OFFICERS

Aviston S	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Cookson D	Commissioner for Secondary Education and Post 16 Provision
Hartwell A	Senior Manager Performance: Education & Safeguarding
Johnson A	Project Director (Education & Skills)
Little L	Democratic Services Officer
McEvoy C	Executive Director of Children's Services
Wright A	Principal Social Worker

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor W Daley	Deputy Leader
Councillor B Pidcock	
Press/Public: 1	

71. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from D Campbell, J Lang, ME Richards and S Payne.

72. MINUTES

(a) **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 6 December 2016, as circulated, be signed by the Chair.

(b) **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 14 December 2016, as circulated, be signed by the Chair.

73. FORWARD PLAN

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for February to May 2018 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

74. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

School Admission Arrangements for Community and voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2019/20 Academic Year

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**) was to inform Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation on School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2019/20 academic year. Approval of the arrangements was also requested. The report was before the Committee for pre-scrutiny. The Head of School Organisation and Resources introduced the report to the Committee advising that no change to the admission arrangements was to be undertaken however it was proposed that five schools increase their Planned Admission Number (PAN). Cabinet had already approved capital expenditure to extend the schools in question to accommodate the increase in PAN to the schools. The Deputy Leader commended the detailed report to the Committee. It was noted that the last sentence in the paragraph numbered 1 on page 3 of the report should read "The Local Authority does **not**

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

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

75. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**) provided details of a “test of assurance” required to be undertaken in respect of the Director of Children’s Service. The Senior Manager Performance: Education & Safeguarding introduced the report to the Committee. It was noted that the Director of Children’s Services would no longer have a dual role.

The Executive Director of Children’s Services advised that shortlisting and interviews for the Service Directors posts for Children’s Services and Education and Skills were being undertaken with appointees expected to be in post by May at the latest. She further advised that following the appointments there would be sufficient resources in place however it was important that these be targeted to the right areas.

RESOLVED that the Committee was satisfied that the arrangements for discharging the role of Director of Children’s Services passed the “test of assurance” required by statutory guidance.

75. CHAIR’S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair advised that the next part of the agenda would be re-ordered as follows with the Schools Annual Report and presentation on Educational Outcomes 2017 taken together.

1. SIF Improvement Plan Update Report
2. Annual Report of the Principal Social Worker
3. Schools Annual Report and Educational Outcomes 2017

76. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN’S SERVICES

(a) SIF Improvement Plan Update Report

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) provided the Committee with an update on progress with the Local Authority improvement plan in response to the inspection that was undertaken under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) in January 2016. The Executive Director of Children’s Services advised that the Authority had moved to an overarching Improvement Plan that took forward all of the key areas from the previous SIF plan and also introduced new areas identified during the continued improvement journey. The plan would also form part of the self assessment process required through the Ofsted Annual Conversation. She continued by stating that whilst the Authority needed to continue to demonstrate that they were striving to get to good, the Improvement Plan would ensure that they were providing the right help for those children and families who had need to access services.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

(b) Annual Report of the Principal Social Worker

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix E**) provided information to the Committee on the activities of the Principal Social Worker in 2017 and an overview of the quality of practice and development needs of frontline social workers. The Principal Social Worker introduced the report to

the Committee, highlighting the continuing development of the AYSE programme including the introduction of an Academy in 2018. In response to questions from Members the following information was noted:-

- The AYSE programme was based on models used in other Authorities and adapted to see how these could be best used in Northumberland.
- Exit interviews were held with those leaving the Authority with a number of reasons provided. It was not usually workload that was the main reason for leaving.
- There were links to all universities in the area with collaborative teaching undertaken and input into course content provided. A link with Edinburgh University had been established to improve recruitment into the Berwick area.
- The recruitment of more experienced social workers was still an issue within the North East area generally.
- The emotional resilience required was difficult to replicate in universities but students did gain experience when on work placements.
- Social work was not a 9-5 job and on occasions, when undertaking crisis work or the emergency placement of a child, might involve a much longer working day and stressful situation, but a suitable work-life balance was achievable.

RESOLVED that:-

- The contents of the report and the work completed over the last year be noted; and
- The priorities for 2018 be agreed.

(c) Schools Annual Report and Educational Outcomes 2017 Presentation

The Project Director (Education & Skills) introduced the annual report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) which provided information on the quality of schools and the impact of the Local Authority. In highlighting the Executive Summary section it was reported that two further primary/first schools had been judged as good and the recruitment and retention of teaching staff was the subject of a Task and Finish Group. The newly introduced national funding formula was based on a 2-tier system and therefore high schools within a 3-tier system would not benefit.

A presentation on the Educational outcomes 2017 was provided by the Commissioner for Secondary Education and Post 16 Provision. A copy of the presentation would be available on the Council's website following the meeting and a copy filed with the signed minutes. Information provided included the following:-

- The percentage of children in Northumberland reaching a "good level of development" at the end of the Reception year at school had increased to 75% which was above the emerging national average of 70%.
- At key stage 1 in reading, writing and maths Northumberland were solidly above average in all subjects however there was a wide variation between schools with some smaller schools having very wide swings in

data. The disadvantaged gaps had closed over the last 3 years in all subjects however these remain too large.

- Key stage 2 outcomes were not as strong as early years and key stage 1 and whilst above the national average in writing and in line with reading, Northumberland was behind in mathematics. Again the disadvantaged gaps remained too large in all subjects.
- Nationally pupils entitled to free school meals achieved better than in Northumberland and this remained a key area for improvement.
- The percentage range of children achieving the expected standard combined in reading, writing and maths ranged across different schools from 25% to 92% with some schools consistently underperforming. Additional support and challenge was provided from the school improvement team to those schools underperforming.
- Information was provided on the changes to the way in which GCSEs were being reformed and the differences in the grading system and it was emphasised that the results of the reformed GCSEs could not be compared to the old.
- Attendance in primary and secondary was better than the North East and National averages, however attendance in the secondary phase was inconsistent across schools with wide variations which needed to improve.
- Northumberland was broadly average for the number of exclusions, however there was a high and very worrying tendency to consider permanent exclusion for younger children.
- There was still a significant gap between the achievements of pupils receiving SEN support in Northumberland and all pupils nationally.

The Deputy Leader advised that the Educational Infrastructure Contribution Policy in respect of the Council requiring contributions from developers had now been adopted and a detailed consultation on SEND had been undertaken. There was a commitment from the Administration to improve the educational standards and life choices available to future generations of children in the County and he commended the report to the Committee.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was noted:-

- The rationale behind the changes in grading to GCSEs was not known..
- It had not been possible to provide historic data in respect of Annex 3 as each school had introduced their own system following the removal of SATS.
- The Local Authority write letters expressing their concern to schools with disappointing results, however the Local Authority have no powers over Academies. The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) could seek to rebroker the Academies or remove their trustees and replace however, it was very difficult to attract sponsors to take over failing schools.
- The Revenue and Benefits team had undertaken to identify parents who whilst entitled to claim free school meals do not do so. These parents had been contacted and all but one had signed up which brought more money into the schools. Issues surrounding data protection were being

explored to allow information to be shared between Headteachers and Revenues and Benefits to identify more parents entitled to claim in the future.

- It was clarified that there was not normally a correlation between the performance of schools and money, it was about the quality of leadership and teaching within schools.
- The need to encourage the sharing of best practice between schools was acknowledged, however a barrier to this occurred when schools were competing for the same cohort of pupils. The wider conversation being undertaken in the West of the County was highlighted along with the development of a common education framework for the County.
- The North of Tyne devolution offered an opportunity for the three authorities to work together to share good practice and the possible creation of an “Education Challenge” similar to that undertaken in London was highlighted.
- The Local Authority was currently exploring the possibility of establishing its own MAT due to the difficulties being experienced in attracting sponsors to come forward to take over some failing schools.
- It was thought the inclusion of “High Quality Leadership” could be included on the priorities.
- The value within families that was placed on education had a major impact on the success of individual pupils.
- The appointment of a strong Governing Body with Governors with the relevant skills and able to challenge and hold the leadership to account was recognised as being important to the success of a school. It was possible this could be a future themed scrutiny topic.
- In respect of the decreasing pupil rolls in Berwick and Alnwick it was reported that this could be in part due to the drift of pupils south from schools in Berwick to Alnwick and from Alnwick further south. Members requested a report be provided on the reason for the decreasing numbers in Berwick which should also include information regarding pupils crossing the border into Scotland.

RESOLVED that:-

- The contents of the report be noted; and
- A report be provided to a future Committee on the reasons for the decreasing pupil roll within the Berwick partnership including information on the number of pupils attending school in Scotland.

77. WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT

The Family and Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme and monitoring report was attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix G**.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORTS

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 _____