

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 3 May 2018** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson
In the Chair

COUNCILLORS

Cessford T	Stewart G
Horncastle C	Stow K
Lang J	Wallace R
Richards ME	

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Hodgson A	Lennox D
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TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Lyst R	Woolhouse R
Payne S	

OFFICERS

Aviston S	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Johnson A	Project Director (Education & Skills)
Little L	Democratic Services Officer
McEvoy C	Executive Director of Children's Services

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors Dale A, Daley W, Dodd R, Oliver N, Pidcock B, Seymour C.
Guthrie J, Unison Representative
Press/Public: 10

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from J Warner.

2. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

R. Lyst declared that he had an interest in Item 5 Consultation Exercise for Proposed Changes to Post 16 Transport Policy as he had a child in Year 11 who qualified for school transport and therefore he would take no part in the consideration of this item.

Councillor C Horncastle advised that he was a member of the newly created Interim Executive Board of Haydon Bridge High School.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 15 March 2018, as circulated, be signed by the Chair.

4. FORWARD PLAN

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

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS TO BE CONSIDERED BY CABINET

5. JOINT REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLACE

Consultation Exercise for Proposed Changes to Post 16 Transport Policy

Mr. Lyst took no part in this item.

The Cabinet report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) was introduced by Councillor W Daley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Deputy Leader along with A. Johnson, Project Director (Education and Skills). The background and reasons for the the proposed changes were outlined.

In response to a concern raised regarding the reduced choice of 'A' levels available in more rural schools the need for the transport policy to be inclusive for all students was stressed and it was considered that the one-off fee of £50 would allow more students to undertake post 16 education, including courses of a more vocational nature. The Committee was directed to the eligibility criteria and advised that a degree of flexibility was written in to allow some discretion to be used. Each application would be considered individually and an appeals process was also available if there was any dissatisfaction with a decision.

Following comments from some Members, the Chair advised that this was a non-political Committee and the purpose was to question the report and to provide comments which would be taken into account by Cabinet when the report was considered.

It was clarified that the additional cost of £2.213m per annum associated with the change of policy had been included in the agreed Medium Term Financial Plan for the Local Services budget and would not be taken from any educational budget.

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

6. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

6.1 Consultation on Education in the West of Northumberland

The Cabinet report (attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes) was introduced by Councillor Daley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Deputy Leader along with A Johnson, Project Director (Education and Skills). The reasons for the consultation were outlined which included the withdrawal of the Bright Tribe Trust from Haydon Bridge High School. It was recognised that the consultation had been difficult, upsetting and highly emotive, however it was clear that the wish of the Community was to retain Haydon Bridge High School allowing pupils a choice of high school. Councillor Daley advised that the open and transparent consultation had resulted in the current proposals which would preserve, protect and enhance the educational provision in the West of the Northumberland provided that all schools worked together to achieve this goal.

The recommendations were explained in detail and it was highlighted that Cabinet would need to permit the publication of statutory proposals to extend the age ranges of schools and for the proposed closure of Bellingham Middle School as outlined in paragraph (d) and this would result in further consultations being undertaken with reports being brought to a future Committee. The Committee was advised that following publication of this report Hadrian Learning Trust had published the results of their consultation on the proposal to change the age range of the Trust and had now withdrawn this proposal. As such Cabinet was no longer being asked to advise the Regional Schools Commissioner that they did not support these proposals as outlined in recommendation (i). The Committee was advised that it was the role of the local authority to provide system leadership and try to ensure that schools worked together. Officers were thanked for the huge amount of work that had been undertaken.

Councillor Dale addressed the Committee speaking as a Local Ward Member of a school within the Hexham Partnership. She queried the omission of Broomhaugh First School in Table 4 on page 70 and was advised that this was an administrative oversight, however no works were required to the school and the school was mentioned in numerous sections of the report. She paid tribute to all those who had acted and worked together putting their views on what education should be delivered in the future. She highlighted the changes to school funding which would come into effect in 2020/21 and urged the Council to write to the Government voicing their concerns and asked that they continued to support the F40 Group.

Councillor Daley advised that he had already had discussions with the Right Honorable Damian Hinds MP, the Secretary of State for Education and issued an invitation for him to visit Northumberland. He also confirmed that membership of the F40 Group would continue.

During discussion of the report it was stated that the three models in the consultation document had been proposed to stimulate debate and provided an opportunity to produce an alternative option. The high level of involvement in the consultation by all parties and the dignified way in which this was carried out was recognised and all were thanked for their participation and attendance at public meetings. Concern was expressed regarding the continued three tier education system which was being proposed in relation to the Hexham Partnership and the difficulties this would pose in teacher recruitment and retention.

In response to questions raised regarding the sustainability of the two High Schools and levels of funding required to be provided, Members were advised that schools would need to work in partnership, including smaller schools, on how the curriculum could be delivered and services shared across a number of schools. It was clarified that the £1.54m funding for a support plan for Haydon Bridge High School and any further capital investment were new pots of funding and would not disadvantage other schools in Northumberland. It was further clarified that the proposed figure of 720 pupils for Haydon Bridge High School was the required capacity of the school based on the current birth rate in Haydon Bridge and was reducing from a current capacity of 990.

It was recognised that Haydon Bridge High School was in special measures with a lot of work required to bring the school back to good/outstanding and this would be a challenge for the newly appointed Interim Executive Board. The challenges for first schools to become primary schools were also recognised and they would require the support of other schools around them as part of federations or part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). In relation to the sustainability of a sixth form at Haydon Bridge High School it was reported that some pupils found it difficult to gain a place at Queen Elizabeth High School and there was a need for a different type of offer. Any proposal to change the age range for Haydon Bridge High School would require a further consultation if the school remained under the control of the Local Authority.

Members were advised that the SEN consultation had identified a lack of places across the County and a further consultation was to be undertaken. Some funding had been identified within the Medium Term Financial Plan to increase capacity however it was not known at the current time where this would be. Some funding had already been allocated to the Priory School, Hexham to build two extra classrooms. The insufficient number of mainstream places within smaller schools, which was partly due to the lack of experienced staff and resources was acknowledged, however being part of a MAT would allow and encourage the sharing of knowledge and resources.

In relation to the possible creation of a MAT Members were advised that the Local Authority could only do this by working with partners and schools and the Local Authority could only have a 19.9% share. It would be up to individual

schools if they wished to be part of a MAT and work with the Local Authority, however the need to work in partnership with other schools was considered to be the only way forward.

Members of the Committee commented on the open and transparent nature of the consultation. They acknowledged and thanked the Officers and Councillors involved for their hard work in bringing this report forward and their attendance at a large number of consultation meetings in sometimes challenging weather.

Members were reminded that Cabinet on 8 May 2018 would decide on the recommendations as outlined on pages 2 and 3 of the report. If it was agreed to accept the recommendations then work could commence on any that did not involve the publication of statutory proposals, those that required the publication of statutory proposals would be required to be the subject of further consultations and a report would be brought back to this Committee for pre-scrutiny prior to being decided by Cabinet on 10 July 2018.

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

6.2 Outcomes of Consultation on a proposal for closure of Netherton Northside First School

The Cabinet report (attached as **Appendix D**) was introduced by A. Johnson, Project Director (Education and Skills) along with Councillor Daley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Deputy Leader.

The Committee was advised that the consultation had been undertaken at the request of the Governing Body due to the significant drop in pupils attending the school and concern over the lack of social interaction for the children.

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

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

7. MONITORING REPORT

The Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitoring report was attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix E**.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORTS

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

Councillor Daley advised that this would be Andy Johnson's last attendance at this Committee in his previous substantive role as Director of Education and Skills. He would remain with the Authority in the part time role of Project Director (Education and Skills). Councillor Daley continued by thanking Mr Johnson for the support and guidance he had provided to both the administration and himself and he advised of the respect which both Politicians and Officers had for Mr Johnson. The tremendous amount of work undertaken by Mr Johnson and his team was acknowledged.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____