

**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 7 June 2018 at 10.00 am**

**PRESENT**

Councillor G Renner-Thompson  
In the Chair

**COUNCILLORS**

Campbell D  
Cessford T  
Lang J  
Nisbet K

Stewart G  
Stow K  
Wallace R

**CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES**

Lennox D

**TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

Payne S

Woolhouse R

**OFFICERS**

Aviston S  
Jackson D  
Little L  
McEvoy C

Head of School Organisation and Resources  
Service Director - Education & Skills  
Democratic Services Officer  
Executive Director of Children's Services

**ALSO PRESENT**

Press/Public: 1

**1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Membership and Terms of Reference for the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee as agreed by Council on 2 May 2018 were provided.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from C Horncastle, R Lyst and W Daley.

## 3. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 3 May 2018, as circulated, be signed by the Chair.

## 4. FORWARD PLAN

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

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## REPORTS TO BE CONSIDERED BY CABINET

### 5. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

#### 5.1 Regional Adoption Agency

The Cabinet report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) was introduced by the Director of Children's Services. The report provided an update on the progress of the development proposals for the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for the North East which would be subject to approval in September 2018 by the Cabinets of each of the five participating local authorities. Authority was being sought to undertake consultation with stakeholders on the current proposals to create the RAA. The preferred business model for "Adopt North East" was now a local authority hosted model which would operate through the delegation of the Constituent Councils' adoption functions. It also advised that North Tyneside Council would act as the host authority.

It was confirmed that since this was last reported to the Committee when concerns were raised regarding the proposed model at that time of a Joint Venture Company, further financial analysis had indicated that this model would be considerably more expensive than current arrangements in each local authority. The financial modelling also highlighted that there was a clear and significant financial difference between proposed models with the hosted model assessed as more efficient.

Staff would be TUPED across from authorities to the RAA. As staff employed by this Council carried out both Fostering and Adoption work the Committee was advised that the complicated process of disaggregating the two budgets had commenced. It was expected that efficiencies would be seen in respect of the RAA within three years, however the levels were difficult to predict due to variances in the number of adoptions undertaken.

The Committee welcomed the change in the proposed model and requested that an update be provided on the impact of the creation of the RAA following its first full year of operation.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet be advised that this Committee supported the recommendations contained in the Report.

## **5.2 Northumberland Draft School Organisation Plan**

The Cabinet report (attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes) was introduced by the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Head of School Organisation and Resources. The report requested Cabinet's approval for publication of the plan in July 2018 subject to comments being received from schools and other partners and also outlined the results of the statutory consultation processes for the expansion of the Dales School and the increase in places at Hexham Priory School.

Members were advised that whilst there was no formal requirement to publish a School Organisation Plan it was considered beneficial to do so in order that information was available and accessible for all interested parties. Whilst the plan would be effective for the period 2018 to 2021 it would be refreshed on an annual basis to reflect changed data and school circumstances.

Consultations would be undertaken with the Governing Bodies of both The Dales School and Hexham Priory in connection with the proposed modification to the implementation dates due to changes with the project timelines and contingency plans were being drawn up. It was expected that the additional places at Hexham Priory would become available in a phased way although all children who were expected to start in September would do so. Officers advised that data was held by the local authority showing demand for the School. It was confirmed that recruitment of extra staff for the expansion of the Dales School was underway. It would be the responsibility of the Dales School to determine how staff worked between the sites.

The Committee asked that page numbers be included on the contents page of the Plan and that a key be provided in respect of the coloured catchment plans.

**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 CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **6.1 Annual Report Of The Virtual Headteacher 2016-17**

The report (attached as **Appendix D** to the signed minutes) was introduced by the Virtual School Headteacher. She advised that this report was in respect of the previous year 2016-17 due to validated data being published at the end of March 2018. The Executive Summary was highlighted with Members being

reminded that this had been the first year of the new GCSEs when coursework was no longer included and relied solely on marks from the examination itself.

Members welcomed the positive report and advised that it was good to see the progress of looked after children. The efforts of the Virtual Headteacher and her team were recognised and they were thanked for their work. In response to questions from Members the following information was provided:-

- Whilst there had been no fixed term exclusions for the tenth year running, this was due to earlier intervention, intensive support being put into the school to stabilise behaviour and other strategies to address the problem. There were also a few managed moves to alternative provision when the relationship between the child and school had broken down.
- Pupil Premium was used to improve training on how to better meet the emotional needs of the looked after children in schools and understand the impact the child's history can have. A multi agency approach was essential.
- The use of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) was not thought to be a useful measure of progress as these were undertaken at particularly difficult times for children, however they were required to be completed in order to be used as a reporting measure to the DfE.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted

## **6.2 Safeguarding Activity Trends Report**

The report (attached as **Appendix E** to the signed minutes) was introduced by the Executive Director of Children's Services. She advised that it was recognised nationally that there had been a large increase in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans (CPP) this year which had led to increased caseloads for social workers. The allocation of resources was challenging with recruitment of experienced social workers who were able to manage difficult cases still an issue. There was a targeted recruitment campaign to attract both newly qualified and experienced staff to Northumberland with the aim to reduce the reliance on agency workers. All team and individual caseloads were closely monitored and evaluated with new cases being allocated appropriately.

In response to questions, the Committee was advised in order for a child to be subject to a CPP they would have suffered significant harm and/or would be at a continuing risk of further harm, and where it was considered that parents were unable to safeguard children without any statutory intervention. It was clarified that this would be a multi-agency decision. A significant amount of early intervention work was now being undertaken with parents to try to reduce the need for CPPs, however this could only be achieved with the parents consent. Work was also undertaken to identify problems at an early stage with resources allocated to work in schools in some areas. All schools had a statutory duty to report concerns, however it was known that resources within some schools to provide pastoral care were reducing.

Members were informed of the various reasons why looked after children from outside the area could be placed within Northumberland and vice-versa. Looked after children remained the responsibility of the local authority from where they came and hosting local authorities should be advised of all children placed within their area.

The Committee advised it would be useful to understand how the Council was performing against other local authorities in the region and requested comparison data on activity to allow benchmarking to be undertaken be included in the next report.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted and that additional regional comparison data would be provided within the next report.

## **7. THEMED SCRUTINY**

### **Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

A working group had been set up to look at the difficulties encountered in the recruitment and retention of teachers specifically within Northumberland. The working group had met three times with a number of Headteachers from schools in Northumberland invited to attend in order to help understand the problems encountered and provide suggestions as to how these could be addressed. The report (attached as **Appendix F** to the signed minutes) included a number of recommendations and provided the background and discussions which had led to these recommendations.

The Service Director - Education & Skills advised that this was a valuable piece of work and highlighted that it was likely that teacher recruitment and retention would also be raised across the North East through the Education Challenge as part of the North of Tyne Devolution.

The three tier school system was highlighted as having an ongoing negative impact especially in mixed economy partnerships. Also of concern was changes to school funding with schools cutting experienced and more expensive staff to save money and the subsequent impact this would have on students' learning.

It was brought to the Committee's attention that in some areas housing had previously been provided in order to attract key workers to the area and providing rent-free accommodation for a limited period for teachers was also an area that could be explored.

A number of the recommendations were already being implemented with an Awards Ceremony being held shortly. The Service Director - Education & Skills advised that all the recommendations would be explored to ascertain which were achievable and how this could be done and work be undertaken to see how they would link in to proposals from the North of Tyne to prevent duplication. An action plan would be brought back to the Committee in due course.

**RESOLVED** that an action plan would be provided at a future meeting.

**8. 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**. It was expected that there would be a number of changes made to the work programme following discussions with the Executive Director of Children's Services and an updated version would be presented to the next meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**INFORMATION REPORTS**

**9. 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** \_\_\_\_\_