

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 8 November 2018** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor M Swinburn
Vice-Chair In the Chair

COUNCILLORS

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

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Lyst, R	Sanderson J
Payne S	Woolhouse R

OFFICERS

Aviston S	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Harper-Coulson R	LSCB Business Manager
Jackson D	Service Director - Education and Skills
Little L	Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Daley W	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Bell J	Assistant Principal of Student Services, Northumberland College
Mead P	Independent Chair, Northumberland NSCB

Press/Public: 2

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors K Nisbet and G Renner-Thompson, A Hodgson and D Lennox.

30. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 6 September 2018, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

31. FORWARD PLAN

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for November 2018 to February 2019 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

32. PRESENTATION BY NORTHUMBERLAND COLLEGE

Jen Bell, Assistant Principal Student Services at Northumberland College was in attendance and provided a presentation on the vision for adult learning and skills in Northumberland. A copy of her presentation would be filed with the signed copy of the minutes. She advised that whilst she was new to this role she had taught in the College for 30 years. The impact following the creation of the North of Tyne Combined Authority who would hold the budget for adult education in the future was not known.

The Committee was advised that the vision of the College had not changed and this was to be an exceptional college that embraced enterprise, innovation and creativity for the success of all students regardless of their age. There were substantial programmes of study at entry level, levels 1 - 3 and Higher Education along with apprenticeships, employability related short courses in various areas of the County which improved the job seeking skills of students. Short vocational Certificate of Competence courses which assisted people back into work were undertaken at the Kirkley Hall Campus which also offered residential accommodation for students. Bursary and loans were available to those wishing to study subject to qualifying criteria.

In response to a question regarding the large geographical area of Northumberland and support for outlying areas she advised that there was a centre in Berwick which was just about to move to new premises; a small centre in Hexham and there was an offer in Blyth which was mainly surrounding engineering, but this had been scaled back this year. In more remote areas students were transported by buses and feeder buses into Berwick, Ashington and to Kirkley Hall which also offered accommodation for students.

In response to a question regarding the merger with Sunderland College and how this would impact on the delivery of courses and whether these would be aligned with the requirements of the Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) she advised that the College would always scrutinise what they offered and this should always be to meet the demand of what the region required. They would also look at what subjects students wanted to study but all would be linked to available funding whether courses were cost effective and value for money.

The Director of Education and Skills offered an opportunity, following the merger with Sunderland, for the College to engage with the Council to discuss

working together rather than competing with Northumberland Adult and Learning Skills (NALS) for the same students in order to rationalise the courses on offer and reduce duplicate provision. This would enable a growth in high quality provision and allow better opportunity to specialise in subjects such as for the offshore and renewables markets. Ms Bell advised that she would take this offer back to the College for their response.

In response to a question regarding free education for veterans, she advised that there was no such offer at present specifically for veterans, however she had received an email just the previous day regarding this and it would be investigated. Members were advised that a Corporate Business Development Unit which worked with businesses and industry to identify which skills were required to fill positions and create opportunities for students to study in order to meet these opportunities.

The Committee requested that an update be provided to a future meeting on the possibility of a closer working relationship between Northumberland College and NALS along with courses on offer after the completion of the merger with Sunderland College. Ms Bell was thanked for her attendance and presentation which was welcomed.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and a further update be provided once the merger with Sunderland College had taken place.

33. REPORT OF PAULA MEAD, NSCB INDEPENDENT CHAIR

Paula Mead, the Independent Chair of the NSCB introduced the report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) to the Committee advising that the Board had a statutory duty to publish an Annual Report which described how partners safeguard vulnerable children and young people in the County. The report provided detailed information on how partners worked together, what went well and what could be improved. Information regarding three Serious Case Reviews which had been published during the year 2016/17 was also included and learning from these had been embedded through prompt delivery of action plans prior to their publication. The key function of the Board was to ensure the coordination of safeguarding across the whole system; to quality assure and hold agencies to account and scrutinise data and intelligence. She highlighted Operation Encompass which was launched across schools in Northumberland in 2016/17 whereby in domestic violence incidents Police liaise with a child's school the next day to advise of the situation enabling the school to offer support to the child; and the "Onecall" approach in Northumberland which had been nationally recognised as best practice. She advised that due to changes in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements as outlined in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 this would be her last report as Chair of the Board however the functions would still be delivered upon.

Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services thanked Paula Mead and Robin-Harper Coulson for their work over the previous four years and for the in depth and easy to read Annual Report which included priorities which were detailed and focussed. He advised that Police

were now trained to view domestic violence incidents through the eyes of children and were aware of how incidents could have a massive impact on individual children and he was pleased at the development of the relationship with schools.

Ms Bell advised that Northumberland College used “Onecall” and had found the service to be very helpful.

In response to a question regarding County Lines, the Committee was advised that although they were aware of this the Police had advised that it was not a big problem in Northumberland at the current time although due to the proximity to Newcastle it could well become so in the future. Councillor Daley advised that this also linked into the report on School Exclusions later on the agenda as this group of young people excluded from school were vulnerable to exploitation. The Committee were reminded of the Private Members Bill regarding home education and Mr Harper-Coulson advised that he was very keen to be involved in discussions on this subject. He advised that in respect of County Lines train operators etc were looking out for children travelling unaccompanied and communication had been given to front line staff.

The Chair thanked those involved for the report and commented on the sad details behind individual cases. He commended the professionals who dealt with such cases and who were directly involved with families, and was pleased to note the developments and massive advances made to protect children.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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

34.1 Update on Academic Outcomes

Dean Jackson, Director of Education and Skills provided a powerpoint presentation which gave detailed information on the education outcomes for 2016-17. A copy of the presentation had been circulated with the agenda as **Appendix C** and was filed with the signed minutes. He advised that some data was yet to be validated and some had already changed very slightly since the information had been circulated. He commented that these were the best results for a number of years.

The percentage of children in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) reaching a good level of development (GLD) was 3.5% above the national emerging average and had increased by 10% over the last 4 years. Early years outcomes from SEND learners were increasing over time for both children with EHCP and for those on SEND support. At Key Stage 1 the overall position compared with the national average had improved over the last 4 years in all subjects however there was a wide variation between schools with a small number of larger primary schools underperforming. The performance of disadvantaged pupils had increased over the last 3 years, however the pace of improvement needed to be accelerated to narrow the gap. The outcomes at Key Stage 2 had risen for all subjects in 2018 and whilst Northumberland was above national averages in reading and writing they remained slightly behind

in mathematics. There was a need to address a decline in attainment for pupils with EHCP at Key Stage 2 across all subjects and it was expected this would also be picked up as an issue in the awaited Ofsted report.

In respect of the new key measure Progress 8 the average score was -0.01 however there was a wide range of individual school's attainment with 8 out of 15 schools at or above the 2018 provisional national average. The average Attainment 8 score was 45.9 again with a wide range of individual school's attainment with 8 out of 15 schools at or above the 2018 national average of 44.3. Although still below the national average in Attainment 8 the Authority has moved from 5th out of the North East authorities to 3rd and 1st for Progress 8 and was now 91st in the Country as opposed to 121st in 2017.

In relation to the transfer of pupils across two/three tier forms of education there was a need to schools to work closely together at an earlier point in time to ensure the transition was smooth and children got back to their peak quickly. There was a need to share how well performing schools did this with those who were less successful through this process.

In regard to each child with an EHCP or SEND support it was considered that achievement should be measured from the starting point of what the child could do at the start of the year and a goal set for the end of each year for each individual child as this would be a better measure of their progress. It was noted that the number of children with a EHCP had increased dramatically over the number who previously had SEN Statements.

The Director of Education and Skills advised that he was in constant contact with the Regional Schools Commissioner in respect of academies within Northumberland and had requested that the Secretary of State give control of certain schools back to the Local Authority, in the meantime work continued to get schools to engage and provide the best education for all children in Northumberland. The Committee was advised that failing schools were no longer required to become academies and the correct leadership in a school was a vital aspect in the success of a school. Councillor Daley advised that a large proportion of the additional funding for schools in the North East would be spent in Northumberland and Tees Valley.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his presentation and advised that it was pleasing to see progress that had been made and helpful to know the areas where work was still required.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

34.2 Children Permanently Excluded from School

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) provided an update on the rising numbers of permanent and fixed term exclusions within Northumberland schools and academies. The Director of Education and Skills introduced the report to the Committee advising the rising number of children being excluded from school was a priority for the Local Authority to address. There were concerns regarding zero tolerance policies within some schools

whereby previously pupils would have been disciplined for minor infringements of rules these pupils were now being excluded. Exclusion had an major impact on the education of pupils and could have consequences for the rest of their lives. The safety of excluded pupils was another major concern when an alternative provision was not always able to be provided in a timely manner.

There was increasing financial pressure on the High Needs budget due to the levels of exclusion and the requirement for the Local Authority to provide alternative provision. The Committee was advised that a meeting had taken place with most secondary school Headteachers the previous week concerning the level of exclusions with them being informed of the level of funding which could be made available to schools if it was not required to be used to fund alternative provision for excluded pupils. The Committee were assured that the Local Authority were very strong in challenging all exclusions but were not always included in exclusion review meetings within academies where other options could be explored. It was clarified that funding followed a child however this did not cover the increased cost of providing an alternative education.

It was suggested that the academisation of schools was a factor in the increasing levels of exclusions and this should be looked at as part of a Task and Finish Group as well as disadvantaged pupils and the robustness of how governing bodies ratified decisions to exclude pupils. The Committee was advised that a Psycho Therapist had been employed at one school to help pupils with mental health issues and if this was found to be a successful the model could be used elsewhere.

The Committee agreed that a Task and Finish Group be created in order to try to address the rising level of exclusions within the County and volunteers to join the Group were as follows:-

M Swinburn (Vice-Chair who would Chair the Group)
T Cessford
M Richards
R Wallace
S Payne (Teacher representative)

Meeting dates would be advised with the Chair requesting that Members commit to attending all meetings. Terms of Reference for the Group would be agreed at the first meeting.

RESOLVED that:

1. The content of the report be noted;
2. A task and finish group be established to investigate the causes of the substantial increases in both fixed and permanent exclusion and to develop recommendations on working with partners, targeting resources and developing strategies to significantly improve the current situation.

34.3 Schools Capital Programme

The report (attached as **Appendix E** to the signed minutes) provided an update on the progress of the delivery of the School Capital Investment Programme and was introduced by Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources. A powerpoint presentation was also provided showing photographs of various projects across the County and a copy of which would be filed with the signed minutes. She advised that the Council had invested or agreed to invest over £42.9m in delivering the schools capital programme since May 2017 with 70 projects delivered in 64 schools across the County. Details were provided of all schemes within the report which also included information on the Early Years Capital Grant funding to grow capacity for free childcare for 3 to 4 year old children of working parents; Basic Need grant funding to grow capacity in a number of schools across the County; the reorganisation of some partnerships and subsequent investment into schools; and the funding provided to increase the number of special school places with an extension to Hexham Priory and the creation of the Ashdale unit in Ashington.

She advised that once a school has closed the building then becomes the responsibility of the Property Services Section of the Council to either bring back into use or sell to help fund the Council's Capital Programme.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

35. REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Monitoring Report 2018/19

The Work Programme and Monitoring Report was attached as **Appendix F** to the signed minutes. Members were advised that the report on Corporate Parenting had been deferred from December to January and that a Youth Service Review Report would be received at the meeting in December. Any further additions or changes to the work programme would be circulated with the next agenda.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORTS

36. 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 _____