

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 10 January 2019** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson
(in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Lang J
Pidcock B
Richards ME
Stewart G

Stow K
Swinburn M
Wallace R

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Lennox D

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Payne S

Woolhouse R

OFFICERS

Jackson D
Little L
McEvoy-Carr C

Smeaton B

Service Director - Education and Skills
Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Adult Social Care and
Children's Services
Children's Improvement & Development
Manager

ALSO PRESENT

Daley W

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for
Children's Services

Press/Public: 1

45. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor T Cessford, A Hodgson, R Lyst, J Sanderson and J Warner

46. MINUTES

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

47. FORWARD PLAN

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

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

48. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

48.1 Presentation - Local Area SEND Outcomes

The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services introduced the presentation slides which had been circulated as **Appendix B** within the Agenda, a copy of which would be filed with the signed minutes. She highlighted that this was a Local Area inspection across education, health and care not a Local Authority inspection. The process of the inspection and the information that was required to be provided was outlined. She advised that the Webinar with focus groups across Northumberland was the first one to be undertaken nationally and there had been mixed responses from parents who took part. It had been acknowledged that the Self Assessment Report had been transparent and open and the 'areas of significant weakness' as identified within the Written Statement of Action had been acknowledged as appropriate. In respect of the emerging strengths she had been pleased to note that the new leadership structure and action plans were highlighted as providing a solid ground to take improvement forward and that frontline staff were making a valued difference to children and young people with SEND and their families. The Committee was informed that the Executive Director would meet with parent groups to discuss the inspection outcomes.

Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services advised that the feedback session had been in line with what was expected. There had been a slow pace of improvement since 2014, however this had accelerated within the last 16 months. He thanked the staff and partners involved who had stepped up and put in a huge amount of work. There were key areas to deal with however the trajectory was positive.

In respect of the implications of the additional work this would mean on school staff, without any additional funding, it was clarified that training for schools had been undertaken in 2018 and whilst there would be some additional tasks this would allow a fair and consistent approach to be provided.

An update would be provided to this Committee following the submission of the Written Statement of Action.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and an update would be provided at a future meeting following the submission of the Written Statement of Action.

48.2 Safeguarding Activity Trends Six Monthly Report

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**) provided an analysis of social work activity trends and case allocation as well as highlighting national developments regarding the Department for Education safeguarding indicators. The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services along with the Children's Improvement and Development Manager presented the report. Context on the figures for children protection cases was provided with information on the wide range in numbers of cases across the North-East region with this Authority being in the middle range. Some work had been undertaken to address and understand the reasons and a report would be brought back to Committee when this work had been completed. There was multi agency approach to reducing the risks to enable children to stay within the family rather than being taken into local authority care. The work of the charity Safe Families for Children was highlighted, this Charity worked to provide host families for children who required short term support and prevent them from being placed into local authority care.

The figures provided in respect of the number of cases per social workers were a snapshot and workload was based on a weighting system taking various factors into consideration. There had been a change in the management structure and ways to provide additional support to staff developed. The social work academy was working well with the support being provided to newly qualified social workers detailed for the Committee, this provided a direct pathway to a career which reduced the need to employ agency workers. There was a national shortage of experienced social workers and therefore the recruitment of such was still a challenge.

In order to minimise disruption to children, staff worked in more generic teams with a named social worker looking at all aspects of the child's life including how the family function and the impact this had on the child. The social worker would also have oversight of any additional specialist resources required to work with the child or family.

The Committee asked that information be provided in the next report on the number of agency workers historically against the numbers now.

RESOLVED

1. That the information be noted; and
2. Data be provided in the next report on the historic and current use of agency workers.

48.3 Schools Annual Report

The report (attached as **Appendix D**) informed the community of Northumberland of the quality of schools and the impact of the Local Authority. The Service Director - Education and Skills presented the report to the Committee advising that whilst the version circulated at the meeting contained photographs the text had not changed to that previously circulated. He highlighted his introduction in the report stating that there had been significant improvements in education attainment in the previous five years with pupil attainment in 2017-18 both in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 in the top 20% nationally; attainment in Key Stage 2 was in line with the national average and attainment at GCSE was higher than the national average. Whilst Ofsted inspection outcomes had been strong for first, primary and middle schools there continued to be an unacceptable number of secondary schools judged as inadequate and whilst most had joined Multi Academy Trusts the Local Authority would work in partnership with them to support their improvement.

Councillor Daley advised that this was a comprehensive report and whilst it had many positives there was still work to be done to tackle the dip in secondary performance. The Local Authority was now working with the Regional Schools Commissioner in relation to Academies to provide support with the aim of improving outcomes for all children within Northumberland. He advised of the opportunity for the North of Tyne Combined Authority to produce an Education Challenge following on from the success of the London Challenge in improving outcomes. He continued by stating that he was proud that this was one of the only Local Authorities continuing to invest in their school buildings and commended the report to the Committee.

The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services advised of additional funding of £24m through Opportunity North East some of which would be used in Northumberland to help improve results with specific schools receiving the additional funding. She advised of her membership on the Board of Experts which would drive the project forward liaising with the Department for Education on which schools would receive funding.

The Committee were informed of the national policy which prevented Local Authorities from opening new schools; however, funding could now be provided through Section 106 funding from new housing developments which would allow existing schools to increase their capacity to meet the additional need. A Member reported that following visits to local schools and the Sure Start Centre he had found staff morale to be good, they were very enthusiastic and the training provided to staff was very good. It was noted that there was a high by-in to the Service Level Agreements for services from the Local Authority.

The Committee acknowledged and thanked Officers for the positive report.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

REPORT FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

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

National Funding Formula and School Funding

The Service Director - Education and Skills introduced the report (attached as Appendix E) which would be considered by Cabinet on 15 January to the Committee highlighting the recommendations in the report. He advised that the date of the Schools Forum in the first recommendation should read 21 November. A large part of the information contained in the report had previously been before this Committee for consideration. Councillor W Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services was in attendance and advised of the continuing representations being made to Government in relation to the implementation of the National Funding Formula and the impact this would have on some schools within Northumberland. He further stated that during the recent visit by the Secretary of State for Education he was able to demonstrate the wide variation in the size of schools and rurality of some parts of the County. The focus was to get the best outcomes for the young people of Northumberland and the proposed funding formula reflected the real pressures on schools.

The Committee noted the reduction in the Schools Block Dedicated Schools Grant and the challenges in setting the respective formula values for 2019/20, along with the responses received to the consultation with schools. Work was being undertaken by this Committee to address the high level of school exclusions and subsequent cost to the High Needs Block.

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

50. 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. The Democratic Services Officer advised that the meeting scheduled for Thursday 2 May 2019 would be moved to accommodate the North of Tyne Mayoral Election taking place on that date. A new date would be communicated to Members when this had been agreed. The Annual Assessment for Children's Social Care would be added to the programme for a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORTS

51. 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 _____