

## **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 4 July 2019 at 10.00 am**

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor G Renner-Thompson  
(Chair in the Chair)

#### **COUNCILLORS**

Campbell D  
Cessford T  
Dickinson S  
Dunn L  
Lang J

Stewart G  
Stow K  
Swinburn M  
Wallace R

#### **CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES**

Lennox D

#### **TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

Payne S  
Sanderson J

Woolhouse R

#### **OFFICERS**

Aviston S  
Jackson D  
Little L

Head of School Organisation & Resources  
Service Director - Education and Skills  
Democratic Services Officer

#### **ALSO PRESENT**

Daley W

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for  
Children's Services

Press/Public: 2

## 9. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor W Daley, A Hodgson, C McEvoy-Carr and J Warner.

## 10. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4 April 2019, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair with the following amendment noted:-

Page 4, paragraph 1 - 2017/28 should read 2017/18.

## 11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During discussion of Agenda item 6.5 - Appendix H Councillor Dickinson advised that he was a Managing Director of one of the services involved and Councillor Dunn advised she was also connected to one of the services.

## 12. FORWARD PLAN

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

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

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

#### 13.1 Outcomes of Consultation on a proposal to extend the age ranges of Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools

S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources, introduced the Cabinet report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**) to the Committee advising that 82% of those responding to the consultation in respect of West End First School were in favour of the proposal to extend the age range at the school with clear support from staff, parents and Governors. 70% of those responding to the consultation in respect of Whitley Memorial First School were in favour of the proposal to extend the age range at that school with clear support from the staff, Governors and Diocese. However, whilst 56% of parents agreed with the proposals, 43% did not support the proposals. The large number of responses to the consultation was recognised and welcomed by the Committee as it was felt this reflected the confidence that the community had in both schools.

The issues surrounding the increasing number of surplus places within the Bedlington Partnership were highlighted along with the change from the original proposal of 1.5 form entry (FE) to 1 FE for both schools should

Cabinet approve the publication of a statutory proposal to extend the age ranges of the schools.

In respect of the suggestion from the West End First School Governing Body to extend the age range downwards to include children from age 3, it was considered that this age group was already well provided for through the current on site pre-school provision and there would be no benefit for parents to make any change.

Concern was expressed from Members that the PAN of 120 across the four proposed Primary Schools within the Bedlington Partnership would be unsustainable with a forecast high of only 86 children requiring places in each of the next three years with a subsequent impact on educational standards and teaching staff along with the financial implications. It was recognised that this situation had been brought about by actions outside the control of the Local Authority.

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

### **13.2 Update of School Organisation Plan and other school organisation matters**

S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources, introduced the report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**) outlining the recommendations which Cabinet were being asked to note and approve. Details of responses to the informal consultations undertaken in respect of the permanent building expansions at Whytrig Middle School, Horton Grange Primary School, New Delaval Primary School were outlined.

The Committee were reminded of concerns regarding the viability of West Woodburn First School becoming a Primary School during the statutory consultation period on changes within the Haydon Bridge Partnership. Arrangements put in place to provide additional capacity and provide improved financial stability at the school were outlined and the Federated Governing Body of Otterburn and West Woodburn has now requested that the Council undertake a statutory consultation to reorganise West Woodburn to become a primary school in line with other schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership from 1 September 2020.

Details of the reasons for the proposed consultation to reduce the PAN from 45 to 30 from September 2020 for Mowbray Primary School in the Bedlington Partnership were outlined.

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

## **REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY**

### **14. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The Chair advised that the reports circulated as Appendices D and E would be discussed together with one introduction covering both reports.

#### **14.1 Safeguarding Activity Trends Report (Appendix D) and 14.2 Children in need census activity benchmarking - Annual Report 2018-19 (Appendix E)**

The reports (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendices D and E**) were introduced by A Hartwell, Senior Manager, Performance: Education and Safeguarding, who advised that in Appendix D paragraph 1.6 it should read September 2018. Points highlighted included:-

- There were fewer cases open to Children's Services requiring the involvement of Children's Social Workers compared to the previous report, a development which was in line with the priority improvement plan. The development of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had seen an increase in the number of cases referred for Early Help.
- There had been an increase in the number of Section 47 enquiries over the previous year with 50% of these leading to an initial child protection conference (ICPC) in the most recent quarter which, while above the national average, was in line with the figure from the previous quarter. The timeliness of work remained strong with 85%-90% of S47 enquiries carried out within timescale to ensure that the needs of the child were met quickly.
- The number of Child Protection Plans (CPPs) had peaked at 450 in December 2018 with the number now decreasing. Audits had been undertaken during the period which had shown decision making had been right.
- The number of Looked After Children (LAC) in Northumberland had reduced and was well below the regional rate.

In response to questions from Members the following information was provided:-

- The levels of referrals by the Police had always been consistently high.
- The Legal Gateway Panel allowed more scrutiny to be provided by both Senior Managers within Children's Services and Legal to ensure that all options and alternatives had been explored prior to a child becoming a LAC. The provision of additional early help which was now embedded into the system along with the quality framework had assisted in the reduction in numbers of LAC. Whilst the Gateway Panel looked at value for money from providers, the needs of the child was always considered as the most important factor.
- Whilst there had been a sharp increase in the numbers of children coming to the attention of Children's Services from the most deprived wards in the County, Officers had not specifically looked at the introduction of Universal Credit as a cause.
- The local authority's Early Help Service was available to all family members and not just young children and the impact of its introduction was starting to have an impact on numbers.

- The Children's Safeguarding Board received regular reports on the effectiveness of the MASH and positive feedback had been received from Headteachers on Encompass. The MASH enabled 24 hour referrals.
- The time each child spent in care varied, however a lot of work went into permanency plans for each young person with support provided to families. Children and young people's views were sought as part of their review if this was appropriate.
- Officers would look at how information on the reasons why children became LAC could be provided in the next report.

The Committee welcomed the positive report and thanked Officers who provided a good service in a difficult environment.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of both reports be noted.

### **14.3 Elective Home Education (EHE)**

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix F**) introduced by D Jackson, Service Head - Education and Skills, provided information on elective home education and the actions taken by Officers since the previous report in July 2018 to ensure that children received a safe and suitable education. Members were advised that there had been a continued rise in the number of parents choosing to home educate their children which was of concern to the Local Authority.

Disappointment was expressed by Members that the Home Education (Duty of Local Authorities) Bill which would have provided a statutory right of access had not progressed through Parliament and concerns raised that only 53 of the 136 new families to EHE had opted to have a visit by an Education Welfare Officer. It was confirmed that the agreement by Headteachers as part of the fair access arrangements, that children who left to be EHE could return to the same school within three months if they so wished was across all schools within Northumberland. Ofsted inspections at schools from September would look for any evidence of off-rolling, or parents being co-hersed to remove their children.

The Committee were advised that as part of the work being undertaken by the Exclusion Task and Finish Working Group funding opportunities were being explored with the support of Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP in response to the Timpson Report on School Exclusions.

In respect of young people EHE wishing to sit their GCSEs it was confirmed that it was the responsibility of the parents to arrange and pay for these examinations, although the Local Authority had assisted with arrangements if requested. In response to a question regarding the take up of immunisations Members were advised this information had been requested by the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**RESOLVED** that:-

1. The improvements which had been made since July 2018 in processes to identify, monitor, support and safeguard families in Northumberland who electively home educate their children be noted; and
2. The on-going concerns regarding potential impact on safeguarding and education outcomes for children be noted.

#### **14.4 SEND: Progress Update on the Written Statement of Action**

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix G**) introduced by D Jackson, Service Head - Education and Skills, provided an update on the progress being made on the Written Statement of Action received following Northumberland's SEND inspection in October 2018. The Committee were informed that a SEND conference held the previous week had been very well attended. Eight Lead SENCoS had been appointed who would work across all schools (including Academies) to help support the sharing of best practice. Members questioned how support could be offered to Headteachers in smaller schools who were the designated SENCo.

Funding had been provided for the creation of a Designated Mental Health Lead. Whilst it was recognised that early access to occupational and speech and language therapists was of benefit to young people, the Committee was advised that there were challenges in providing sufficient funding for these services and whilst an SLA had been introduced this had not been as successful as had been hoped. It would continue to be a challenge to provide these services to all schools.

**RESOLVED** that:-

1. The contents of the report be noted; and
2. The ongoing developments be recognised.

#### **14.5 Summer Activity : Development of Place Based Provision**

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix H**) introduced by D Jackson, Service Director - Education and Skills informed Members of the development of holiday provision, future opportunities and improving social mobility in Northumberland. Following the successful pilot of targeted summer provision in 2018 funding had been sourced to allow continued provision from 2019 - 2021 and it was hoped this could lead to a universal offer in the future.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

### **15. REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER**

#### **Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Monitoring Report 2019/20**

The Work Programme and Monitoring Report was attached as **Appendix I** to the signed minutes.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **INFORMATION REPORT**

### **16. 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** \_\_\_\_\_