

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 3 October 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

Hodgson A

Lennox D

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Sanderson J

OFFICERS

Aviston S
Dixon L
Jackson D
Kaur S
Kingham A
Little L
Reiter G

Head of School Organisation & Resources
Apprentice
Service Director - Education and Skills
Principal Social Worker
Director - Business Development
Democratic Services Officer
Service Director - Children's Social Care

ALSO PRESENT

Daley W

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for
Children's Services

Press/Public: 1

36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr S Payne.

37. MINUTES

37.1 5 September 2019

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 5 September 2019, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

37.2 16 September 2019

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 16 September 2019, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

38. FORWARD PLAN

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for October 2019 to January 2020 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

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

39.1 Annual Report of the Principal Social Worker

The report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) introduced by G Reiter, Service Director - Children's Social Care and S Kaur, Principal Social Worker, provided an update on the activities of the Principal Social Worker and an overview of the quality of practice and development needs of frontline social workers.

The recruitment of experienced social workers remained a challenge nationally and it was hoped that Northumberland's "Grow our Own" model would assist locally with the shortage of experienced children and family social workers. A number of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) newly qualified social workers had remained with the Authority and some were now in Advanced Practitioner roles choosing to remain as frontline workers rather than moving to management roles which had been the case previously. The Principal Social Worker had also attended recruitment events in other areas of the Country to promote the benefits of living and working in Northumberland and raise the profile of the North East.

Turnover of staff within Northumberland was lower than the national average, however the highest figure remained within the safeguarding teams due to the higher level of caseloads, nature of work and its associated demands. The importance of consistency for children and families was recognised and work was ongoing regionally to help authorities retain experienced social workers and lessen the reliance on agency staff. There would, however, always be a need for agency social workers to cover short term gaps. Work was continuing to manage caseloads with support being provided along with continuing professional development opportunities. No structured rotation of social workers was undertaken due to the need for consistency for families as previously highlighted although this could be looked at on an individual basis if necessary.

Councillor Daley highlighted the tremendous work being undertaken and together with the Chair and Members of the Committee thanked the Service Director, Principal Social Worker and the teams of social workers for their hard work and commitment in helping the most vulnerable children and families.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the contents of the report and acknowledge the work completed over the year.

39.2 SEND: Progress Update on the Written Statement of Action

The report (attached as Appendix C to the signed minutes) provided an update on the progress being made on the Written Statement of Action received following the SEND inspection in October 2018 and was introduced by D Jackson, Service Director - Education and Skills. He advised that central government had promised additional funding for SEND and that details would be provided at a later date once it had been confirmed..

The DfE monitoring visits had demonstrated progress was being made across the three areas of concern and the key developments being undertaken were highlighted. The SEND strategy was currently being refreshed and would be more parent friendly. Advanced SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) had been recruited across all localities and were seconded for one day every two weeks to provide support for SENCOs in schools. Training offered for SENCOs had been well attended and accessed by most schools. There was additional work to be undertaken to improve the quality and input to Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) and a request had been made by schools for a more simplified document. The Committee was advised that 92 requests had been made in July 2019 for an EHCP, however not all would end with an EHCP or a place in a Specialist provision.

The newly created post Head of Inclusive SEND Services would have oversight of all SEND services to schools to ensure there was no fragmentation of services as had previously been the case.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

40. REPORT OF THE EXCLUSIONS TASK AND FINISH WORKING GROUP

The report (attached as **Appendix D** to the signed minutes) provided an update on the work and findings of the Exclusions Task and Finish Working Group which had been set up at the request of this Committee. Information was also provided on learning from other authorities and key partners.

Councillor M Swinburn, Chair of the Working Group, thanked the Members of the Working Group, Officers and guest speakers for their attendance and input. He advised that the process had been longer than expected, however it had been important to ensure that all areas were considered along with implications, as being excluded from school could impact on the welfare, education and entire life of a young person with many ending up in the criminal justice system. Changes were required which would allow more preventative measures rather than being reactive.

D Jackson, Service Director - Education and skills, advised that the full report summarised the meetings which had been held over a 6 month period. He advised that whilst the level of exclusions had reduced there had already been 5 exclusions in the 5 weeks since the start of the autumn term. The Local Authority were working with Headteachers and Chief Executives of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) to bring down the level of exclusions. It was expected that a further report be provided at the next meeting which would include costed recommendations for the Committee's decision on which to take forward.

Specific points highlighted and discussed were noted as:-

- Pupils spent significant periods of time in Alternative Provision (AP) after being excluded and it was considered AP should also be used more as a means to prevent exclusion (i.e. inclusion). It was thought this was related to the way in which AP was currently funded. It also allowed schools to off-roll the more difficult pupils which could improve academic results and Ofsted outcome.
- There was a lack of specialist Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) provision and earlier identification of issues was required. It was thought First and Primary Schools sometimes managed behavioural issues rather than trying to access specialist services and therefore when pupils transferred to secondary schools their individual needs had not been identified and receiving schools were not being made aware of potential problems. This was something that needed to be addressed so that all schools could access services.
- In relation to the existing Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for Key Stages 1,2 and 3 the maximum stay of 20 weeks was not being adhered to with pupils staying in excess of 52 weeks. There were differing opinions from Headteachers regarding the necessity of providing a Key Stage 4 PRU.
- A Fair Access Protocol required full buy-in from all Headteachers/MATs with all schools working within the Protocol.

- “Early Help” meant the earlier identification of any issues and did not refer to the age of the young people. To avoid this misconception, it was suggested that a different term could be used.
- There was a need to grow the numbers and role of the Inclusion Support Workers (ISWs) and at their meeting on 2 October, Schools’ Forum had approved funding for 3 new posts. It was thought that one of the posts would have a specific focus on SEN. ISWs worked with the family of a young person once excluded during the 6 days prior to accessing AP, but it was recognised that it would be beneficial to be able to work with the young person and their family at an earlier stage.
- The newly created “Head of Inclusive SEN Services” would have senior management responsibility over all the SEN Services offered to schools. Headteachers would be encouraged to provide more time each week to allow SENCOs to undertake their duties.
- It had taken Cambridgeshire County Council 10 years to get to the stage it was now at with only one permanently excluded pupil in 2018/19. Their Education Inclusion Manager was keen to work with Northumberland to assist in reducing the levels of exclusions.
- It was thought that the Early Intervention Funding which allowed a wrap around service for families had been agreed for a further year.

Councillor Daley advised that cuts to the Youth Service had been at managerial level and whilst the service had been removed from schools there had been no reduction in the number of frontline staff who now delivered the service on the streets in the most challenging areas.

Members welcomed the detailed report and looked forward to receiving costed recommendations with Councillor Swinburn advising that the vision was to have a Northumberland Approach with all Schools in the County signed up.

RESOLVED that

1. The content of the report be noted; and
2. Costed recommendations from the Exclusions Task and Finish Working Group be presented to the Committee for their decision on how to take them forward.

41. 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 E** to the signed minutes.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

INFORMATION REPORT

42. 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_____