

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 28 November 2019** at **2.00 pm**

PRESENT

Councillor M Swinburn
(Vice Chair in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Cessford T
Dunn L

Lang J
Stewart G

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Lennox D

Rickeard P

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Parkin J

Sanderson J

OFFICERS

Angus C
Aviston S
Jackson D
Little L
McEvoy-Carr C

Nicholson S

Scrutiny Officer
Head of School Organisation & Resources
Service Director - Education and Skills
Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Adult Social Care &
Children's Services
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

ALSO PRESENT

Press/Public: 1

43. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed the new members, Paul Rickeard and Julie Parkin to the Committee and introductions from all were provided.

44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Campbell, G Renner-Thompson, K Stow, R Wallace, and Mr A Hodgson.

45. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 3 October 2019, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

46. FORWARD PLAN

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for December 2019 to March 2020 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented. It was confirmed that the report of the School Exclusions Task and Finish Working Group would be reported to Cabinet on 10 December, however it was not included on the Forward Plan as this was not a key decision.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

PRE-SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

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

47.1 Proposal to extend the age range of West Woodburn First School to become a primary school with effect from 1 September 2020.

The Head of School Organisation and Resources introduced the report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) providing the background to the proposals and advising that the outcome of the Statutory Consultation had been inconclusive. As a result Cabinet were now being asked to agree that a further four week consultation be undertaken to look at alternative options, including the potential closure of the school.

Members noted the consultation responses and the concerns that had been raised regarding the viability of the school, particularly given the significant fall in the roll of West Woodburn since the Education in the West consultation. It was confirmed that the pupil numbers in paragraph 14 of the report were the maximum and best case scenario based on the current population and that whilst a school could look financially stable it might not be able to provide the best education for pupils. It was also raised that such low numbers of pupils could in itself raise potential socialisation issues, as well as the difficulties in teaching a varied curriculum to differing age groups. It was not known at this stage what other options could be explored, however the views of pre-school parents would be sought. If the school closed then the catchment would be reallocated and free transport provided to the catchment or nearest school to the child's address.

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

47.2 The Development of Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) for Pupils with SEND in Northumberland.

The Head of School Organisation and Resources introduced the report (attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes) advising that demand for provision for SEND pupils continued to rise across the County. Parents had been clear that they wished for ARP to be located within mainstream schools in their local area thereby allowing pupils to be educated closer to home. The proposal to set up two pilot schemes would allow testing of the educational and financial viability of ARPs before entering into a wider programme of development across the County.

Members were advised that in relation to the ARP in Berwick there was no significant demand for places, pupils were no longer on the school rolls and had either moved to a specialist school, or had been excluded and were in alternative provision (AP). Some funding had been transferred to allow the AP to be located in Berwick from September 2019.

Success of the pilot would be judged on the annual reviews of the pupils accessing the ARP to see if they had made progress and achieved their targets, along with feedback from parents and input from the Headteachers. It was hoped that the ARP would assist in keeping pupils in mainstream education and reduce the level of SEND exclusions.

The Committee welcomed the proposals and were particularly pleased to note that a significant number of schools had made expressions of interest to the Council to develop ARP on their sites. Members hoped that, assuming the pilot was successful, it could be rolled out at other locations in the county.

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

47.3 Key Education Outcomes - 2018-19 Academic Year

The Service Director - Education and Skills, introduced the report to the Committee (attached as **Appendix D** to the signed minutes) advising that the copy of the presentation circulated with the agenda should be treated as an Appendix to the report.

Members were informed that the performance figures contained in the report would be subject to a final national validation process, and that those final outcomes would be reported back to the Committee in due course. The improvement in KS2 maths and english at KS2 was highlighted although the under performance of some larger schools was still an issue to be addressed. Improvement had been made year on year in relation to Attainment 8 and Progress 8, with Northumberland being ranked 2nd and 1st respectively in the North East in 2019.

The Committee were assured that schools in Northumberland had made every effort to ensure they were in receipt of all the pupil premium available to them, however members requested a further update on pupil premium funding at a future meeting. The Chair stated that the report highlighted the good work undertaken so far and what was needed to be done by schools to improve attainment for all pupils in the future.

RESOLVED that:

1. Cabinet be advised that this Committee supported the recommendation as outlined in the report; and
2. A report on pupil premium funding be provided at a future meeting.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

48. REPORT OF THE EXCLUSIONS TASK AND FINISH WORKING GROUP

The Exclusions Task and Finish Working Group report (attached as **Appendix E** to the signed minutes) was introduced by the Service Director - Education and Skills and Councillor M Swinburn, Chair of the Task and Finish Working Group. Members were advised that recommendations, approximate costings and comments made at the previous meeting had been incorporated into this report which would be considered by Cabinet on 10 December. Some positive results had already been noticed through discussions at the Working Group with exclusions down 28% on this time last year.

It was essential to implement Recommendation 1 in order to move any proposals forward and to gain support from all parties. It was clear from all discussions during the process that the provision of early help would play a critical part in increasing inclusion, with proactive work being undertaken rather than just being reactive as happened currently. It was hoped that a well established model identified in another local authority could influence improvements in Northumberland, with a visit to this authority being undertaken by the Schools Admissions and Inclusion Manager. It was confirmed that the recruitment process for the three additional inclusion posts had commenced and one post would have a sole focus on SEND.

RESOLVED that:

1. The contents of the report be noted;
2. The recommendations of the report be noted;
3. The report to be forwarded to Cabinet for their consideration on 10 December 2019.

49. 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 F** to the signed minutes. Further reports would be received in relation to West Woodburn First School and Education Outcomes in due course. Members were reminded to contact the Chair or Scrutiny Co-ordinator if they wished any matters to be raised.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____