

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 the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday 5 December 2019** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson
(Chair in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Cessford T
Dickinson S
Dunn L
Lang J

Stow K
Swinburn M
Wallace R

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Hodgson A
Lennox D

Rickeard P

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Sanderson J

OFFICERS

Angus C
Harper-Coulson R
Little L
McEvoy-Carr C

Nicholson S
Spaven L

Scrutiny Officer
NSCB Business Manager
Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Adult Social Care &
Children's Services
Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Senior Manager - Family Placement

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor W Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Press/Public: 1

50. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Campbell and G Stewart; J Parkin and D Jackson

51. 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.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

PRE-SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

52. REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (NSCB), PAULA MEAD

R Harper-Coulson, NSCB Business Manager, presented the report to the Committee extending the apologies of Paula Mead, the Independent Chair of the NSCB. He advised that the NSCB had now been replaced by the Northumberland Safeguarding Children Committee (NSCC), however the Independent Chair would continue to support the NSCC until April 2020. Members were advised that the goal, over time, was that a Sub-Regional Strategic Safeguarding Partnership would take over responsibility from the NSCC as many issues keeping children and young people safe from harm were not restricted by geographic or organisational boundaries. C McEvoy-Carr, Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, was undertaking this work with other Directors of Children's Services, Chief Operating Officers of CCGs and the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police in the North East, however it was confirmed that local arrangements would not be lost.

Members offered their thanks to Paula Mead for the large amount of work she had undertaken over the years she had been in post and welcomed that working with fathers had now been identified as a priority. Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services highlighted the achievements and commended all involved for the work undertaken and the impact that this had on the lives of young people.

In response to a question related to the scrutiny of audits which had been undertaken, it was clarified that this was the role of the Safeguarding Partnership who held other agencies to account and ensured that identified actions were being addressed and implemented. The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with assurance that this work was being undertaken with the figures in the report providing a snapshot. It was confirmed that schools were in a good position to implement the new sub-regional policies and procedures which had recently come into force. The NSSP had changed the way it worked and schools now played an active part in setting threshold levels resulting in a smoother process. In respect of safeguarding in schools, the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Service advised that this was monitored on a regular basis and the Local Authority worked with schools to ensure any problems identified were rectified as a matter of urgency.

Members were advised that the last available data had shown that in a third of cases which came to the attention of the NSSP mental health issues had been identified within the family.

RESOLVED:-

1. The content of the Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board final Annual Report be noted; and
2. The Committee noted that the Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board had now been replaced by the Sub regional Strategic Safeguarding Partnership and the Northumberland Safeguarding Children Committee as set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

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

The Annual Report of Northumberland County Council Fostering Service 2018-2019

L Spaven, Senior Manager, Family Placements, introduced the report to the Committee highlighting key areas of the report.

It was clarified that the aim was always to have looked after children (LAC) placed in a family setting provided that this met the identified needs of individual children. Foster carers within Northumberland had children placed with them who had complex and challenging needs, which was not always the case in other areas. The service has worked with its own cohort of registered foster carers to increase placement choice and stability. Only when it was assessed that the child's needs could best be met in a residential provision would Northumberland's LAC be placed in residential care. If children were unable to be placed with in-house foster carers, independent fostering agencies would be used. Breakdowns with in-house placements were less than those placed through independent fostering agencies. It was recognised that it was not always in the best interests or safety for a child to be placed within a 20 mile radius of their home. This would always be risk assessed.

In respect of the recruitment and retention of foster carers within Northumberland, it was confirmed that a great deal of information and support was provided which assisted in keeping the level of foster carers stable. She advised that the predominant reason for the deregistration of foster carers was retirement, carers adopting the children in their care and others were due to lifestyle changes. Advertising was used to break down misconceptions surrounding who could foster children and encouraged potential foster carers to come forward from a diverse population. The recruitment campaign runs throughout the year with specific focus to link in with national events. A suggestion was made that presentations could be made to the Local Area Councils to promote fostering and encourage more people to come forward for consideration. Councillor Dickinson highlighted a video which had been made in 2016 which provided excellent information.

Councillor Daley wished to place on record the huge debt and gratitude to foster carers within Northumberland who looked after some of the most vulnerable children.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The contents of the report be noted; and
2. Members acknowledged the report and performance information in regard to the period April 2018 - March 2019.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____