

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 9 January 2020** 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

Rickeard P

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Payne S

Sanderson J

OFFICERS

Angus C
Aviston S
Hartwell A

Jackson D
Little L
McCormick J

McEvoy-Carr C

Scrutiny Officer
Head of School Organisation & Resources
Senior Manager Performance: Education & Safeguarding
Service Director, Education & Skills
Democratic Services Officer
Acting Senior Manager, Early Help & Intervention
Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services

ALSO PRESENT

Mr N Harrett, Principal, Northumberland College

Press/Public: 1

54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor W Daley and J Parkin.

55. 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.

The Fire Alarm sounded at this point and all present were required to leave the building. The meeting resumed at approximately 10.25 am.

56. MR HARRETT, PRINCIPAL, NORTHUMBERLAND COLLEGE

Mr Harrett was in attendance to provide a presentation to the Committee following the merger of Northumberland College with Sunderland College to become part of the Education Partnership North East which also included Hartlepool Sixth Form College. The Partnership was solely focussed in the North East and worked to strengthen further education provision and shared back office services. He advised that the merger was part of the further education sector structural changes which had been implemented by 1 April 2019.

The challenges facing Northumberland College such as its financial vulnerability, estates and resources, curriculum offer, quality and reputation were outlined. The College had been the subject of Interventions from the Secretary of State, Further Education Commission, Education and Skills Funding Agency and Ofsted with monitoring visits still being undertaken.

Details of the Transformation Programme for the College were provided which included staffing changes; curriculum improvements; safeguarding and support; estate improvements, including health and safety. Changes would ensure that students were put first, finance and budgets would be under control, there would be more parental engagement and more engagement with schools to attract students to the College.

Curriculum planning had been launched in November 2019 and would be informed by educational, economic and social contexts with students being provided with all the skills and information required for them to make informed choices prior to joining the College. The vision was to provide an outstanding curriculum and accessible education and training throughout the County. Investment into the Ashington Campus was being made and it was recognised that there was a need to improve facilities at Kirkley Hall Campus to keep students in Northumberland. Reshaping of the provision would be undertaken in Berwick, which was scattered and did not serve the town properly; Blyth, which should be more aligned to the Port; and in the West of the County, where provision was bad at the current time.

The strategy for 16-19 year olds would provide guidance and routes into work or higher education; provide a strong vocational and technical offer (new T

Levels introduced by Government); offer a strong English and Maths provision and be employability and destination focussed. Improvements to buildings would allow a quality SEND provision to be developed. The adult strategy would be focussed on economic drive activities; provide essential skills such as English, Maths and IT and offer pre-employability and apprenticeships. Technical, vocational and higher education would be more aligned to the needs of the County and a 50+ strategy introduced along with flexible modes of study. A significant amount of time had been spent trying to engage with businesses to ensure the curriculum would meet their employment needs.

Mr Harrett was thanked for his presentation and the steps being taken to improve the College. Students should be focussed on what qualifications they need to gain employment and for their future prospects. In respect of governance and how to prevent the College failing again, Mr Harrett advised that a new Governing Body for the College had been appointed with Governors with specific skills having been sought through a recruitment agency, and additional training had then been provided. The College Governing Body would provide challenge and hold the Management Team to account and this would feed into the Regional Governing Group who was made up of people with the same skills. The College now received a great deal of support along with overview, scrutiny and challenge. The Senior Management Team at the College had completely changed and had been slimmed down. By the end of September 2019 it had been found that Middle Management required strengthening and a new structure put in place for which interviews were being undertaken at the current time.

Members were advised that the College was now working very closely with the Council on a number of workstreams. The Council had no legal framework which allowed monitoring of the College, however this was undertaken by a number of other organisations. In respect of pre-16 year olds, the College had developed a full school engagement plan and held sessions at schools for pupils in Years 8-9 through to Years 10-11. They worked with schools on an individual basis, but not all schools were fully engaged as yet. Some schools had requested that the College take students for vocational subjects such as construction pre-16, however this would only be done for 2 - 3 students at a time who would be placed into normal classes and they would not take a full cohort.

It was confirmed that the Kirkley Hall Campus was already actively working with Newcastle University on a number of projects. It was still early days and time would be required before the reputation of the College improved and confidence in it grew allowing more students to be educated in Northumberland.

Mr Harrett was thanked for his attendance and informative presentation and an invitation extended to come back to the Committee to provide an update following publication of data next year.

PRE-SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORT

57. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES National Funding Formula and School Funding

The Head of School Organisation and Resources introduced the Cabinet report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**) to the Committee. She advised that due to the very late notification on 19 December 2019 of the level of funding that was to be received, the figures contained in the report were not a true reflection of the final figures. Work was still ongoing to finalise individual figures and therefore delegated authority was being requested for the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services along with the Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services to agree the final formula values. A further report would be brought back to this Committee once these had been agreed.

Whilst it was recognised that additional funding would be received due to the increase in pupils, concern was expressed regarding deprivation and the disparity of funding between the North and South of the Country. Efforts would continue to ensure the Government recognised the genuine sparsity and rurality of this County.

In discussing the transfer of funding from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block the Committee welcomed the reduction from 1% in 2019/20 to 0.5% in 2020/21 and recognised the work undertaken in order to achieve this.

Following a question on whether the allocation of funding favoured a two tier system, the Service Director Education and Skills informed the Committee that after strong submissions from this Council to the Secretary of State, the DfE had adjusted the formula to remove the preference.

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

SCRUTINY REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

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

58.1 Young Carers (YC) Support Services

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**) provided the Committee with an up to date picture of the work being progressed to identify, assess and support young carers (YC) across Northumberland. The Acting Senior Manager Early Help and Prevention advised that a comprehensive review had been undertaken over the last 8 to 10 months. The need for a County wide offer had been identified, however this was also required to be flexible to address the needs of each individual carer.

In respect of the third sector involvement, Councillor Dickinson advised that he

should declare an interest as he ran services on behalf of Children in Need advising that the voluntary sector struggled to find youth workers.

It was recognised that some young carers did not identify as such due to the fear that they would be removed from their family and others did not see themselves as carers. The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services advised that a lot of work was required to get young people to identify as a carer and this was the start of the process. A sensitive approach was required and it was clarified that consent would be required from parents unless there was a safeguarding issue.

Members welcomed the report and asked for regular updates to be provided to the Committee.

RESOLVED that the information provided be noted and the proposed changes to the provision of services to young carers be supported.

58.2 Children's Social Care and Universal Credit

The report (attached as **Appendix D** to the signed minutes) analysed activity trends within the social work system to evaluate if there was a link between increased need and the launch of Universal Credit as well as reviewing longer term trends.

It was clarified that the Council was unable to access individual claims for Universal Credit and therefore it had not been possible to analyse the data in sufficient detail to say if there was a causal link. A child was only made the subject of a Child Protection Plan if they were subject to abuse or long term neglect and it must be demonstrated that they were at significant risk of harm. Members were advised that it had still been a useful exercise to undertake.

RESOLVED that the position regarding access to universal credit data and the ongoing work being undertaken within the local authority on this issue be noted.

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

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

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

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____