

## **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 March 2020** at **10.00 am**

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor G Renner-Thompson  
(Chair in the Chair)

#### **COUNCILLORS**

Cessford T  
Dunn L  
Stewart G

Stow K  
Swinburn M

#### **CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES**

Hodgson A

Rickeard P

#### **TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

Payne S

Sanderson J

#### **OFFICERS**

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

Reiter G  
Simpson C  
Wright A

Scrutiny Officer  
Head of School Organisation & Resources  
Head of Early Help, Prevention and Support  
Service Director, Education & Skills  
Democratic Services Officer  
Executive Director of Adult Social Care &  
Children's Services  
Service Director, Children's Social Care  
Team Manager, AYSE Academy  
Head of Safeguarding

#### **ALSO PRESENT**

Councillor W Daley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Press/Public: 1

## **66. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lang and Wallace; D Lennox and J Parkin

## **67. FORWARD PLAN**

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

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **CABINET REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE**

### **68. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2021/22 Academic Year**

An extract from the minutes of Cabinet on 11 February 2020 was attached for information as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes.

## **SCRUTINY REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

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

#### **69.1 Ofsted: Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services**

The report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C** provided an overview of the recent Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC) that had taken place in Northumberland in January 2020. A further report and a copy of the Ofsted report, which had been embargoed until 2 March 2020, had been circulated and uploaded to the Council's website prior to the meeting and would also be attached to the signed minutes.

The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services advised that following the previous Ofsted inspection under the previous inspection framework in 2016, regular scrutiny of the improvement plan had been undertaken by this Committee. The latest inspection report stated that Northumberland Local Authority Children's Services had been judged as Good in all four categories. It was stated that the "Local Authority had successfully delivered improved and good-quality operational practice in most areas of service provision, by means of thoughtful strategic and determined focus. As a result, children were helped, protected and cared for to a good standard."

Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services highlighted the level of support which had been provided for front line staff in

order for this to be achieved. He congratulated and thanked the Executive Director, Leadership team and staff for their work in bringing about a change in culture which had resulted in a positive impact on the children and young people in Northumberland.

The Committee was advised that the Local Authority had worked hard to improve Northumberland's reputation and quality of Court work following a highly critical report from Judge Hudson. The judiciary now had high regard for the work of social workers, managers and legal representatives. Work would continue to ensure that services were delivered and improved for the benefit of the young people with identified areas of development already being addressed.

**RESOLVED** that the content of the report and the findings of the associated Ofsted report are noted.

## **69.2 Education and Skills Annual Report**

The report (attached as **Appendix D** to the signed minutes) was introduced by the Service Director, Education and Skills. He advised that this was the sixth report and highlighted the positive progress being made in a number of areas including SEND provision, the reduction in the level of school exclusions and the high percentage of first and primary schools in the County which had been judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

The need for schools to work together to improve outcomes for all children was highlighted with a need to narrow the disadvantage gap in all schools by sharing good practice and to ensure that Pupil Premium was being used fully to support this. An analysis of Pupil Premium was undertaken annually and the Committee requested a report be brought to this Committee providing this data. In order to continue to improve GCSE results there was a need to get schools out of special measures, ensure that disadvantaged pupils perform at the same level as non disadvantaged pupils and continue to improve SEND provision. It was reported that an Education Improvement Board was to be established and would focus on improving outcomes for all children.

It was clarified that there was still no legislation giving local authorities the power to ensure the quality of education being provided for those pupils being home educated and no right of access unless there was a safeguarding issue. All children known to Social Care were monitored through the Virtual School. Prior to the General Election there had been a Members Bill moving through Parliament to give local authorities more powers to address this issue and Councillor Daley advised that he would submit a letter to support the reintroduction of this. The Committee was advised of actions taken by other local authorities to try to engage with home educated students and parents to try to influence their return to school. It was suggested that this might be an area that this Committee could investigate. A further suggestion was made that contact be made with parents when a child was removed from school to ascertain the reason for removal and advise of the implications for the education of the child. An update would be provided in the Virtual Headteacher's Annual Report.

In relation to the time taken to provide resources for SEND students, Members were advised that there was a statutory time period for an assessment of the student's needs and decision on whether an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) was required.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. the contents of the report be noted; and
2. a report providing an analysis of the use of Pupil Premium Funding be provided.

### **69.3 Youth Service Review Update**

The report, attached as **Appendix E** to the signed minutes, provided Members with an update on the implementation of the Youth Service Review which took place in 2018/19 and was introduced by the Head of Early Help, Prevention & Support. She advised that the management team was now in place and work had been completed with an external consultant in relation to vision and values with outcomes agreed. The new recording system would provide clearer evidence of the numbers of young people being supported and the impact that the intervention work was having for them.

Councillor Daley advised that the contrary to an article published in the press, the Council had retained its youth service with the funding only moved from one budget heading to another.

In response to a question, the Committee was advised that it was not possible at this time to state that provision met demand, however the recording system would provide that information so that in future resources would be redistributed whereas previously work was undertaken on a more adhoc basis. Support would be provided to third sector organisations to make funding bids.

**RESOLVED** that the content of the report and the positive steps taken to implement the review be noted.

### **69.4 Annual Report of ASYE Academy Evaluation**

The report (attached as **Appendix F** to the signed minutes) advised that the ASYE Academy had been set up in order to help alleviate the challenges in the recruitment and retention of social workers and provide newly qualified social workers with a robust and nurturing introduction to social work. The fourth cohort of eight students had just commenced in the Academy at the beginning of the week with only one social worker who had been supported in the Academy having left the Council's employment since 2018. The development of the Academy had generated interest in working in Northumberland with a good response to adverts each time and enabled the recruitment of high calibre staff. Feedback from service users had been positive and Ofsted had stated in their report that the investment by the Council had resulted in a strong and valued Academy which enabled a culture of high support, protected caseloads and enhanced learning opportunities.

Officers advised that they had been able to start to identify those who would move into more senior roles and the reduced turnover in staff was important in terms of continuity for young people and children within Northumberland.

The possibility of rolling out this model to other local authorities as good practice could be considered now that it had been externally verified by Ofsted.

Councillor Daley advised that a Graduation Ceremony was taking place on Wednesday 18 March and invited Members to attend.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **PRE-SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORT**

### **70. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix G**) set out the outcomes of the informal consultation on the proposed options for the future of West Woodburn First School. This consultation had arisen as a result of the significant drop in pupil numbers at the school since the previous statutory consultation on a formal proposal to extend the age range of West Woodburn was undertaken in September 2019. The report also included a request for Cabinet to permit the publication of a statutory proposal.

The Head of School Organisation and Resources introduced the report advising that at the current time the school had no pupils on its roll; there had been no applications for a school place in September; and 9 out of 10 responses to the consultation supported the closure of the school.

Disappointment was expressed that no alternative local solution had been found and that the only available option was for the Committee to support the recommendations.

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

## **REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER**

### **71. 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 H** to the signed minutes.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_