

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at Meeting Space - Block 1, Floor 2 - County Hall on Thursday, 26 May 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

W Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

A Dale
Fairless-Aitken
M Swinburn

R Dodd
M Richardson
A Watson

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson
P Rickeard

D Lennox

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

J Sanderson

OFFICERS

C Angus
D Cookson

A Kingham
L Little
D Street

Scrutiny Officer
Commissioner for Secondary Education &
Sixth Forms
Senior Service Director
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Deputy Director of Education

ALSO PRESENT

G Renner-Thompson

Cabinet Member

Around xxx members of the press and public were present.

7 MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Membership and Terms of Reference for the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as agreed at Full Council on 4 May 2022 were provided for information.

Ch.'s Initials.....

The Chair welcomed Councillor M Richardson to the Committee. He also advised that a Development Session was to be arranged in order that Members of the Committee could be briefed on the purpose and role of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

8 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillors Ball, Dunbar and Thorne, along with L Houghton.

9 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committees held on 21 April, 2022 and 5 May 2022, as circulated, be agreed as a true record of each and be signed by the Chair.

10 **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

11 **EDUCATION STRATEGY BOARD ANNUAL UPDATE**

D Street, Deputy Director of Education provided a comprehensive introduction to the report, advising of the work that had been undertaken by the Education Strategy Board (ESB) since its inception and the wide range of its membership across all spectrums of the educational system. The key priorities were highlighted. Councillor Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member advised that the ESB was a perfect example of how the previously fragmented educational sector had been brought back together for the benefit of all children within Northumberland.

In response to a question regarding priority 6, ensuring that all children were school ready, Members were informed that there had been a significant increase in the measure for the end of early years which was now in front of the national average and the disadvantaged gap had also closed at this stage. The Early Years team had grown in numbers and capacity with an excellent lead officer in place. There was a good blend of Early Years providers and a lot of work done around the development of a digital Northumberland passport, which approximately 90% of providers were now using, in order to ensure that children were school ready, and that information on each child's development from 2 years of age was available when they transferred to school. The development of the passport had been a significant undertaking and the ESB would now like to see it continued into KS1 as it provided information on whether each child was meeting their potential. A key element of the passport that schools received information in the same format from all Early Years settings. The North of Tyne Combined Authority were now going to pilot it in some of their partnerships.

A suggestion was made in relation to priority 9, that building up a child's resilience should also be included as a tool to ensure that they were well prepared for any potential setbacks in later life. This would be fed back to the ESB.

Ch.'s Initials.....

RESOLVED that it be noted that the Committee had reviewed the performance of the Board in its first year and its ability to review, develop and drive the Education and Skills key priorities.

12 THE IMPACT OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

D Street provided an introduction to the report and power point presentation which highlighted the work and impact the School Improvement Team (SIT) had, with improvements across the County, and advising that the service was now valued with the majority of maintained schools and some academies also purchasing the service. The report was endorsed by both Councillor G Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and A Kingham, Interim Co-Director of Children's Services, who advised that there was also an opportunity for the Council to be part of the Test and Learn Phase of Local Authorities being able to bid for schools to become part of a Multi Academy Trust.

Councillor Renner-Thompson advised that Cabinet had already been appraised of the removal of Government Funding and had requested the Director of Finance and S151 Officer to look at budgets to enable the service to continue and he hoped that this Committee would also endorse this way forward.

Members welcomed and endorsed the report advising that there had been transformational change since 2013 and the work across partnerships was very pleasing. There was concern regarding the withdrawal of Government funding and the Committee would support the proposal for this Council to continue to fund the service which would give schools reassurance that improvements would continue to be seen. It was commented that schools and their staff had felt very supported by the Council during the pandemic.

Members were advised that strong leadership in schools was seen as the best way of achieving good outcomes for learners and there were good examples of this across maintained, academies and Diocese schools within Northumberland. KS1 results in Northumberland had always been very strong with the challenge being to maintain these going into KS2. There were currently 19 secondary schools within Northumberland of which 9 were Local Authority schools and 10 Academies and of those 4 were currently rated as inadequate by Ofsted, however whilst the SIT were not working directly with these schools, assurance had been provided that progress was being made at all 4 schools. The cost of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the SIT had not increased in 7 years and it was not thought that the cost of the SLA was a barrier for schools using the service at the current time, however a number of Academies used their own in-house teams.

The Chair commented that the SIT had a significant impact on education in the County and the service was now respected and recommended by peers. He asked that this Committee endorse a message to Cabinet that it was imperative that funding for the SIT be provided until the end of this Administration's term of office and asked that the Cabinet Member take this message back to Cabinet. Thanks and appreciation were also provided to the whole School Improvement Team for their work.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** that:

Ch.'s Initials.....

1. The performance of the team and their ability to develop the quality of education in Northumberland be noted;
2. The changes to funding imposed by the DfE and the possible impact of service be noted;
3. A further report be received once it was known how the reduced funding would be accounted for; and
4. A recommendation be made to Cabinet for funding of the School Improvement Team to continue until the end of this Administration so that the team could continue to develop and offer support to schools both inside and outside of Northumberland.

13 **FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT 2022/23**

The work programme had been circulated for information and any issues which Members wished to bring to the Committee should be raised with the Chair or the Scrutiny Officer in the first instance. The Scrutiny Officer advised of changes to the work programme as follows:-

7 July

- Education Funding from Residential and Commercial Builds (S106) – deferred to 6 October.
- The Northumberland Inclusion Strategy – deferred to 1 September.
- Recommissioning of an Integrated Sexual Health Service – added to 7 July

6 October

- The Regional Schools Commission will attend the meeting. A briefing note will be provided in advance on the parameters of the visit.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....