

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 Council Chamber - County Hall on Thursday, 7 September 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

W Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

C Ball
A Scott
M Swinburn
H Waddell

S Fairless-Aitken
C Seymour
T Thorne
A Watson

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

D Lennox

OFFICERS

C Angus
S Barron
D Cookson
N Dorward
A Kingham
L Little
D Street

Scrutiny Officer
Strategic Lead for SEND & Designated
Clinical Officer
Commissioner for Secondary Education &
Sixth Forms
Senior Manager - Education Development &
Collaborative Projects
Executive Director - Children, Young People
and Education
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Director of Education, SEND and Skills

ALSO PRESENT

G Renner-Thompson

Cabinet Member

12 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair advised that it had been agreed at Council the previous day that Councillor Chicken would replace Councillor Dodd as the Vice-Chair of the Committee. He continued by offering his thanks to Councillor Dodd for his work as the Vice-Chair and congratulated him on his appointment as Chair of Health and Wellbeing OSC. Councillor Scott was also welcomed as a new member of

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the Committee.

13 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillor Chicken, A Hodgson, L Houghton, P Rickeard and J Sanderson.

14 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 18 July 2023, as circulated, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

15 **REPORT OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM 2022 - 2023**

The report provided the Committee with an overview and assurance as to the work related to school improvement undertaken by the School Improvement Team across Northumberland in the academic year 2022-2023. Councillor Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People advised that he was proud of the report and highlighted the huge improvement in Ofsted ratings. He drew attention to the contents of paragraph 6.4 regarding the removal of the School Improving Monitoring & Brokering Grant to which the Council had objected, and advised that with the support of this Committee, the Administration of the Council had continued to fund school improvements. Councillor Renner-Thompson also advised that at recent meetings in respect of budget preparations, it had been made clear that this service should not be put forward for savings.

D Street, Director of Education, SEND and Skills provided an introduction to the report to the Committee along with a power point presentation, which would be included with the papers on the Council's website.

Members welcomed and supported the continued funding for the School Improvement Team and hoped that Cabinet would continue this funding in the future. A priority in all school improvement plans was pupil attendance and attainment and whilst this had now nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels challenges still remained on how to continue to drive improvements. An Inclusive Summit was to be held the following week for schools on how to support learners with high anxiety and for pupils not responding to existing interventions with new ways of delivering support to allow pupils to meet their potential.

In relation to the number of new headteachers undertaking the induction programme, it was clarified that this was over two cohorts and that these were not all new headteachers to the County, some had moved between schools within Northumberland, some would be acting headteachers covering for short term absences, and others moved as part of school reorganisations.

In relation to special schools, a new board had been formed to work with one of the special schools to bring them back to their regular high quality performance which they were capable of delivering upon. In relation to inequalities and disadvantaged learners it was stated that whilst there were some successes in

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these groups they were still not as successful as their peers. This was a huge challenge and focus for the Council and it was clarified that a significant amount of resource was provided to this group, not just within education, to close the gap. There were five staff within the school improvement team which was led by D Cookson, with one staff member dedicated to SEND and another to disadvantaged learners.

Members welcomed the transition the service had undergone recognising the structure and support that the service was now able to offer to schools. Headteachers were encouraged to be role models for teachers in terms of looking after their mental health and work/life balance. Training was offered at every level and this always contained an element of mental health support. The Team had also been asked to deliver services within a North Tyneside school as the headteacher had previously worked within Northumberland and the team were also doing some work within Cumbria. The revenue for this work also helped to support the work within Northumberland and the number of schools within Northumberland purchasing SLAs was also increasing. Members were reassured as to the strong working relationships between the Authority and Academies.

A suggested amendment to the last bullet point of the recommendation within the report was put forward by the Chair and supported by the Committee to read as follows:-

Note the changes to funding imposed by the DfE and ***ask that Northumberland County Council continue to fund the service.***

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and that whilst the Committee noted the changes to funding imposed by the DfE they asked that Northumberland County Council continue to fund the service.

16 SEND STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT

The report provided the Committee with an update on progress against actions described within the Northumberland SEND Strategy 2021-2024. A comprehensive introduction to the report and slide show presentation was provided by S Barron, Strategic Lead for SEND and Designated Clinical Officer. A copy of the slide show presentation would be included with the papers on the Council's website.

Councillor Renner-Thompson advised that this was a honest report on the progress of the Council's first SEND strategy with the four priorities all linked together. He highlighted the Council's capital building programme in providing additional special schools within the County and the aim for post 16 SEND pupils to be able to continue to be educated within the County.

Members welcomed the update report and questioned that given the importance of the networking conversations following the SEND employment forum, if it should have been a larger event. Advice was provided that it had been an excellent event and the conversations following the event had been hugely valuable and these could link to other opportunities and the potential of linking to major employment forums in the future. Work would need to be undertaken to

ensure that any employment/training opportunities coming forward would provide a safe environment which would allow pupils to build their confidence and achieve their potential. Assurance was provided that external placement offers would be matched to the attributes of the students and would be meaningful for them.

The sufficiency of teams to match the growing needs of SEND pupils was always a consideration. There was a variety of different training and support through Lead SENCOs and SENCOs for teaching staff to ensure they were able to recognise and meet the needs of children in their own classrooms. The Communication Strategy was continually being refreshed to provide information for parents and carers, however it was clarified that the SEND Employment Forum was for employers to see what support they would need to increase the number of jobs for SEND students. Members were reminded that the Task and Finish Working Group for SEND would be looking at the more granular details of SEND provision. The Group had met once to refine the scope of the review and a redraft of the scope and dates of meetings would be shared with Members soon.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and next steps be supported by the Committee.

17 **REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER**

The Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions that had already been taken and future items was circulated for information along with the work programme for this Committee. The Scrutiny Officer would discuss with the Executive Director the suggested inclusion of a Review of School Counselling Services and an update to be provided on Family Hubs on this Committee's work programme. The Chair advised that he had also asked for a development session to be set up either online or in person immediately following a FACS OSC meeting.

Members were asked to take some time to view the "Look at Me" display outside of the Chamber on their way out and if possible to promote this on social media.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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