

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, 7 April 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

R Dodd (Vice-Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

L Dunn
M Swinburn

Fairless-Aitken
A Watson

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson

OFFICERS

C Angus
S Aviston
M Connor
N Dorward

S Kaur
A Kingham
L Little
J McCormick

C McEvoy-Carr

G Reiter

Scrutiny Officer
Head of School Organisation and Resources
Head of Early Help, Prevention and Support
Senior Manager - Education Development &
Collaborative Projects
Principal Social Worker
Service Director - Education and Skills
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Senior Manager - Early Intervention and
Prevention
Executive Director of Adults and Children's
Services
Service Director - Children's Social Care

81 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors C Ball, A Dale, W Daley along with L Houghton, D Lennox and J Sanderson.

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82 FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions for April to July 2022 had been shared with Members for information. The Scrutiny Officer advised that there was to be an additional Cabinet on 26 April to consider the outline case for Astley High School and Whytrig Middle School, with pre-scrutiny at an additional meeting of this Committee on 21 April 2022.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

83 BERWICK PARTNERSHIP ORGANISATION

The report for Cabinet set out the findings of the meetings that had taken place with schools in the Berwick Partnership since April 2021 to discuss the organisation issues facing the partnership and to identify potential models of organisation that could address those issues. The results of an informal survey with parents and the wider community in the area served by Berwick Partnership were also included in the report.

Cabinet were also being asked to permit a first stage informal consultation with wider stakeholders in the area served by Berwick Partnership schools to establish whether any models of organisation that might be brought forward at a later date for consultation should consist of only 3 tier models of organisation or include 3 tier and 2 tier (primary/secondary) models of education. Other key areas such as Special Educational Needs, post 16 and early years provision would also be included as part of the first stage of wider phase of consultation.

C McEvoy-Carr advised that a significant investment was being made in order to provide sustainable education for the future and a significant amount of work had already been undertaken to get to this stage. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to influence the education system in Berwick and the Council wished to understand what the community wanted and what would be in the best interests of children in the area. S Aviston provided a comprehensive introduction to the report with the aid of a power point presentation. Councillor Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member and Councillor for Bamburgh which was within the Berwick Partnership advised that the process had first commenced in 2019 looking at Berwick High School and had now expanded to include the whole Berwick Partnership. He highlighted that 28% of pupils travelled to schools outside the Partnership and this trend needed to be reversed and encouraged everyone to take part in the consultation if Cabinet approved this report.

Officers advised that the community needed to understand the challenges that were facing the Partnership and that it was not about individual schools. The consultation would provide an opportunity to address these challenges and confirmed that face to face events would be held in Berwick and that staff, Unions and Councillors would all be part of the process. Clarity was sought on the impact of moving schools from the Berwick Partnership to Alnwick. The Committee were informed there was evidence to suggest parents were choosing to move their children to the Alnwick Partnership and this was an opportunity to establish more formally the level of parental choice being expressed.

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Members welcomed the ongoing dialogue and the proposed next steps, along with the open way in which the consultation would be undertaken. The Committee understood this was a complex issue and appreciated the work that had gone in to getting to this stage. They also requested that consideration be given to the difference in career progression and retention of teaching staff in two tier and three schools as part of the discussions.

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

84 **FAMILY HUBS IN NORTHUMBERLAND**

A comprehensive introduction to the report was provided by J McCormick and M Connor, giving an update on the work that Children's Social Care and a range of partners were currently undertaking to establish Family Hubs in Northumberland. These would provide a new "core offer" based on the Leadsom Report with emphasis on the colocation of family health services with other Early Help professionals to provide support to children and young people aged 0-19 and their families. Effective early intervention could improve children's wellbeing, educational attainment and life chances, lead to improved mental health and lead to lower crime, unemployment and other negative outcomes.

The family hubs would provide a central access point for integrated services whether it was in a building named a family hub, another building or a virtual access point. Outreach posts were also provided in more rural localities and mobile play vans would continue to operate. A multi-agency implementation plan was in place being led by group of strategic leaders from across the range of partners, with five stakeholder groups being established to drive the implementation forward.

Funding had been secured and was being utilised to provide a communications post, building adaptations, including midwifery and clinical rooms and the provision of IT equipment for digital and virtual delivery. Additional national funding would be in place for three years (although the amount is not yet known) and it was hoped that the Council would be able to "grow their own" social care staff for the future to help address shortages nationally across the sector.

Members welcomed the report and the work being undertaken to support children, young people and families in the County and thanked the Officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and that the Committee supported the transition of Children's Centres to Family Hubs.

85 **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S PRINCIPAL SOCIAL WORKER**

A comprehensive introduction to the very detailed report was provided by S. Kaur. The report provided updates to the Committee on the input and work of the Principal Social Worker in 2021 and an overview of the quality of practice and development needs of frontline social workers.

Councillor Renner-Thompson advised of the excellent work undertaken in relation

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to the Social Worker Academy which other Local Authorities were now looking to copy. He highlighted the difficulties in recruitment within Northumberland due in part to differing qualifications in Scotland which prevent cross-border recruitment.

C McEvoy-Carr advised that social work was a hidden crisis service and didn't often get the recognition it deserved but was quite often blamed if something went wrong. She highlighted the work undertaken to help make the lives of children better and thanked all staff for the work they undertook to help vulnerable residents in the County. This was echoed by Members of the Committee who highlighted that the Academy was testament to the Local Authority and had become a Centre of Excellence for the North East. The way social workers had adapted very quickly and their work through the pandemic was also highlighted. It was confirmed that all staff had been able to return to the office in order to allow support to be provided by their peer group.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and the work completed over the year acknowledged.

86 **NCC DIGITAL WORKFORCE & DIGITAL WORK-BASED SKILLS**

An introduction to the report which advised of plans to accelerate the delivery of digital work-based skills within the Council was provided by N Dorward. The proposal had internal and external facing objectives in development digital work-based skills across Northumberland to the advantage of residents and businesses but also provided the mechanism for the Council to build and sustain its own digital workforce within the area of Information Services and other areas with growing volumes of digital functions.

The report was endorsed and welcomed by both the Committee and Councillor Renner-Thompson who advised that due to the digital roll out to rural parts of the County the ability to undertake this type of employment opportunity was no longer confined to the urban area, enabling residents to earn a decent salary whilst working from home.

RESOLVED that:

1. The proposal to appoint a specialist digital apprenticeship provider to partner with Northumberland County Council, enhancing the apprenticeship function of Northumberland Skills and delivering objectives within Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan 2021-2025 (funded by Levy and ESFA apprenticeship funding) be noted;
2. The proposal for NCC Education Directorate to appoint a Digital Development Lead (2 year FT) to accelerate digital skills and education advancements (within the existing staffing budget) be noted; and
3. The links between this proposal and the proposal of HR&OD to recruit a cohort of circa 10/12 digital apprentices to join Information Services on a pilot programme (funded by HR&OD apprenticeship wage support budget) be noted.

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**FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT 2021/22**

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.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Councillor Dodd took the opportunity to thank very much C McEvoy-Carr for her work and its impact on the Council during her time at Northumberland and wished her well for her future.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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