

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, 5 May 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

W. Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

C Ball
R Dodd
Fairless-Aitken

A Dale
C Dunbar
A Watson

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson
P Rickeard

D Lennox

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

J Sanderson

ALSO PRESENT

G Renner-Thompson

Cabinet Member

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors Dunn, Swinburn and Thorne.

2 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 7 April 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and be signed by the Chair.

3 FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Scrutiny Officer advised there were no additional items on the Forward Plan for this Committee other than the Informal Consultation for the Coquet Partnership report being considered at this meeting.

Councillors stated their disappointment that Cabinet had made a decision on the Pegasus Centre even though this Committee had stated that not enough

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information had been provided and they had asked for a report to come back. Advice was provided that Cabinet had made their decision based on the information contained in the report and that the users of the centre were at the heart of that decision. A report would be provided to this Committee in July giving details of the timeline and where possible the discussions undertaken. The Chair requested that Councillor Renner-Thompson advise Cabinet of the Committee's concerns.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

4 **INFORMAL CONSULTATION ON SCHOOL ORGANISATION FOR THE COQUET PARTNERSHIP**

S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources provided a detailed introduction to the report advising that the Council had approved the allocation of £25.5m of capital investment in schools in the Coquet Partnership. Before committing such investment to relevant school capital projects, Officers had met with school leaders collectively and individually in the partnership to discuss what structure of organisation of schools would be, in their view, the most effective in improving outcomes for pupils in all phases and for the long-term sustainability of the partnership. The report set out the findings of those meetings, and as a result of feedback received by each Governing Body of the partnership schools to the Council, Cabinet was being asked to approve a six week consultation on proposals for a 2-tier structure in the Coquet Partnership with effect from 13 May 2022.

It was stressed by both the Chair and the Cabinet Member that, if Cabinet approval was provided, this was the start of the informal consultation, however there had been a great deal of work already undertaken with Schools and the review was not about school closures.

Members welcomed the investment in the Coquet Partnership, however questioned the support and challenge currently being offered to the schools in order to raise attainment levels, Members were advised that a number of packages had been put in place both within the partnership and in particular James Calvert Spence College (JCSC) following the Ofsted judgements of it requiring improvement. Recent Ofsted monitoring visits had judged that effective action was being taken and first schools were judged as being good. It was difficult to make any prediction of results for this year, following the pandemic with STATs results expected the following week.

In response to a question regarding the potential for 450 pupils moving back into the Coquet partnership and possible consequences of falling numbers at other schools outside the partnership, Members were advised that discussions with these schools had already taken place and whilst it was thought they were supportive the results of any consultation would be waited. At the current time there was a 23% surplus of places in the partnership and monitoring of both birth rates and housing development was undertaken yearly to feed into the School Organisation Plan.

Work on developing costs and models for both Model A and Model B scenarios

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would be undertaken as part of any agreed information consultation and an outline business case would come to Committee if any changes were needed to budgets. Council Officers would also broker a staff protocol agreement during this period. It was clarified that there was no role for the Regional Schools Commissioner in this process as JCSC was a maintained school and it would be a Cabinet decision. The Local Authority would facilitate the consultation on behalf of the Head Teacher.

In response to a question regarding the destination of post 16 pupils from JCSC it was confirmed that a key priority of the skills strategy was ensuring that pupils made the right choices at different key stages and the Local Authority's role was to support school with their vocational offers. The Educational Strategy Board and School Improvement Partnership reports which were scheduled for the next meeting would provide more detail. Provision for pupils with SEND would also form part of the consultation process and a report would be coming to this Committee in September regarding provision in the whole of the County.

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

5 **UPDATE ON FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DELIVERY OF EARLY HELP LOCALITY SERVICES IN NORTHUMBERLAND**

M Connor, Head of Early Help, Prevention and Support, provided an introduction to the report advising that it built on the report on Family Hubs which was provided at the meeting on 7 April and advised of the proposed delivery route for early help locality services going forward and changes to the current commissioning arrangements given the need for greater flexibility.

In response to concerns regarding the future of the Blyth West Children's Centre, reassurance was provided all services which were currently offered in that building would continue to be offered in Blyth, however until proposals had been agreed no formal conversation could be held with Barnardo's who owned the building. It was further clarified no announcement had yet been made on allocated funding from central government.

In recognising and thanking both Action for Children (AFC) and Barnardo's for their work, particularly in the Ashington area, clarification was sought on how the same level of service could be provided without additional funding which community and voluntary organisations could access and staff TUPED across. Assurance was provided that links were being developed with smaller more local community organisations to support their added value to the community and partnership arrangements with AFC or Barnardo's would not be excluded in the future for the delivery of specific services. The paper today was focussed on the overall management and delivery of the current early help services. Staff from Barnardo's and Action for Children already worked with NCC under one model and the change would allow more flexibility. The Family Hubs would not just be building based and services would be provided in other ways, especially in more rural areas, working with schools and community venues to ensure the range of services were delivered from different places and in different ways, including digitally.

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Members welcomed the report and noted the detail in the recommendations.

RESOLVED that:

1. The proposed changes to the current commissioning arrangements be agreed; and
2. The temporary increase in expenditure during 2022/23, 2223/24 and 2024/25, which would be covered by the additional grant funding to be received over the same period from the Supporting Families programme and the Family Hub and Start for life Programmes be noted.

6 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. Members were informed that due to the remit being widened for the review of the school transport governance arrangements, this report would now be provided at the October meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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