

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, 8 September 2022 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

R Dodd (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

C Ball
M Richardson
T Thorne

C Dunbar
M Swinburn
A Watson

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson
P Rickeard

D Lennox

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

J Sanderson

OFFICERS

C Angus
S Aviston

S Barron

M Connor
A Hartwell

A Kingham
L Little
G Reiter
K Willis

Scrutiny Officer
Head of School Organisation and
Resources
Strategic Lead for SEND & Designated
Clinical Officer
Head of Service, Children's Social Care
Senior Manager - Performance and
Systems Support
Joint Interim Director of Children's Services
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Joint Interim Director of Children's Services
Complaints Manager - Children and
Education

ALSO PRESENT

G Renner-Thompson
S May

Cabinet Member
NE & NC ICB

Ch.'s Initials.....

Around 2 members of the press and public were present.

22 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillors Dale, Daley and Fairless-Aitken. Apologies were also received from L Houghton.

23 **MINUTES**

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

Councillor Swinbank requested clarification be provided for the reason looked after children were placed outside of Northumberland following reports in the media. G Reiter confirmed that the media coverage had been in respect of a Freedom of Information request which provided figures for the previous 10 years and that information had been provided along with a great deal of other information. He confirmed that children were only placed outside of the Authority's area when it was the right place for a particular child and that could be for a number of reasons including the safety of a child, or that a child was placed with a family member who lived outside of the area.

24 **FORWARD PLAN**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

25 **PERFORMANCE & FINANCE REPORT (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)**

An introduction to the report was provided by A Hartwell, Senior Manager - Performance and Systems Support with the headlines outlined.

In response to questions the following information was provided:-

- The projected overspend for Education and Skills was entirely related to home to school transport. Backdated payments of an 8.9% increase had been made to providers in order to secure travel for students and ensure that there was no drop-off of contractors. The overspend had been secured through the budget and the overspend would be built into next year's budget.
- The percentage of pupils in secondary schools in schools judged to be good or outstanding equated to 16,600 to 16,800 students as figures fluctuated out of a school population of 22,600. It was a key priority to reduce the number of pupils in schools judged to be less than good, however it was highlighted that whilst a school may need to improve that some students within those schools continue to perform well.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- It was clarified that the split in pupil numbers in academies or maintained schools judged to be good or outstanding was 79.9% pupils for academies and 80.5% for maintained school as judged at their last inspection, however some of these inspections were some time ago. These figures equated to approximately 36,000 pupils which meant that approximately 8,000 students were in schools which were currently not judged to be good or outstanding.

RESOLVED that the current performance and how it compared to benchmarks was noted.

26 **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE COQUET PARTNERSHIP - UPDATED REPORT**

S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources provided a comprehensive introduction to the report advising that the response to the consultation had been low which was usual when they were in agreement with the proposals. She highlighted the positive responses to the proposals for additional SEND places within the partnership, which Councillor Renner-Thompson, Portfolio holder for Children's Services, highlighted was a key priority for the Administration.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the following information was noted:-

- In consultation with the Headteachers and Governing bodies of schools within the partnership it had been agreed that one consultation event should be held in Amble. Transport had been provided from other areas but had not been utilised by parents.
- The reduction of £2m from the Astley budget had been made due to the original proposals being for three schools to be provided on the one site, however this was changed following the consultation within that partnership and the decision to retain Seaton Sluice Middle School on its current site. Officers were confident that the plans were affordable and deliverable within the revised budget. As previously highlighted to the Committee, Seaton Sluice Middle School was not in poor condition and should any repairs be required then these costs would be met from separate grant funding.
- The timescale had been proposed to ensure that the transition was as smooth as possible with time allowed to ensure that necessary refurbishment work to the existing middle school was carried out prior to the relocation on the site of Amble First School.
- The budget costs had inflation predictions built in and was based on recent experience of delivering new school building projects.

Councillor Renner-Thompson highlighted that James Calvert Spence College had just been judged to be good in the recently published Ofsted report, which had been down to the hard work of the Headteacher and staff.

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

Ch.'s Initials.....

P. Rickeard joined the meeting at this point.

27 **CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANNUAL REPRESENTATIONS 2021-2022**

K Willis, Complaints Manager for Children's Services provided an introduction to the report with the aid of a power point presentation. In response to a question it was clarified that the Complaints Manager regularly attended the Regional Complaints Managers Forum which fed into the National Forum, and there were often webinars regarding learning and good practice and also training offered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Unfortunately due to the way in which data had been provided by the LGSCO this year, it was difficult to provide benchmarking specifically related to Children's Services against other authorities, however it was hoped this could be done through the Regional Forum going forward.

Members welcomed the positive report.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

28 **CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE - ANNUAL SELF ASSESSMENT**

The report which shared the content and findings of the children's social care self-assessment was required to be provided by Ofsted and would form the basis of the annual conversation with them. An introduction was provided by G Reiter, Joint Interim Director of Children's Services with the aid of a power point presentation. Continuing improvements in the quality of practice were evidenced despite key ongoing challenges of workforce retention and increasing demand. The areas for further improvement were highlighted along with the priorities for the continuous improvement plan for 2022/23.

Members welcomed the report and recognised the continuing difficulties encountered in the recruitment of experienced social workers across the country as a whole. They particularly highlighted the continuing success of the AYSE academy and that staff stated that training was good and that they felt supported in what was recognised as an extremely challenging role.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

The Chair advised that he would re-order the agenda from this point to provide a more coherent approach.

29 **URGENT BUSINESS - OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT TO NORTHUMBERLAND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

G Reiter advised that a letter summarising the findings of a focussed visit to Northumberland Children's services on 26 and 27 July 2022 had been published after the agenda had been published, however he felt that it would be timely for this to be brought to the attention of Members. A copy of the letter had been

Ch.'s Initials.....

circulated in advance of the meeting and would be uploaded to the Council's website. The focussed visit had been in relation to the local authority's arrangements for planning and achieving permanence with a range of evidence interrogated. The comments set out in the headline findings were highlighted and were very much welcomed by Officers and Members and the two areas identified for improvement would be addressed, however it was noted that these were more in relation to information recording and not the impact of the service on children.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

30 **FAMILY HUB DEVELOPMENT**

M. Connor, Head of Service, Children's Social Care provided an introduction to the report which gave an update in relation to the DfE funding for the Family Hub developments within Northumberland, advising that Northumberland had been selected as one of the 75 local authorities who could receive additional funding to develop the offer. The expectations were outlined and it was confirmed that feedback from engagement work undertaken had been positive.

In response to questions from Members the following information was noted:-

- It was clarified that two Family Hub buildings would be provided in Blyth for the south east locality, however outreach work would be provided across the whole locality, including Cramlington working with other organisations.
- Following the reopening of buildings following covid new partners and services had moved into buildings over the last twelve months, such as midwifery into Ashington and Blyth West buildings offering clinics. Primary mental health services had also been moved into some buildings along with some health visitors, however the services were not all office based and the shared space offered the opportunity of hot desking for other services and would able a better use of the available space. VCS organisations could also use buildings on evenings/ weekends it was more about the co-location of services providing a wrap-around offer. Outreach work would also be undertaken and there would be other community venues used.
- The 15 Children's Centres within the County were morphing into the new Hubs and rebranding etc would happen and work would be undertaken with other partners regarding the use of other spaces.
- Different ways of working would be trialled and any impact evidenced to ensure the best use of resources to provide a system transformation.
- In respect of the Blyth west building there was agreement to rent until at least the end of March and negotiations were underway with Barnardo's going forward.

Whilst Members welcomed the development of the Family Hubs, there was some concern regarding the conflicting uses of the buildings and if they would become more formal spaces rather than being informal spaces that could be used by families. It was stated that Members were welcome to visit any of the Hubs to see how they were being used by families.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

1. Agree to proceed with the funding for the Family Hub offer; and
2. Support the development of the governance and wider processes to underpin this as outlined in the report.

31 **PROPOSAL IN RELATION TO FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE YOUTH SERVICE**

M Connor, Head of Service, Children's Social Care provided an introduction to the report which provided an overview of a recent review of the activity and impact of the Youth Service and proposal for the future needs of the service linked to the development of the Family Hub model. The report outlined the two options for the future of the service with a recommendation that Option 1 be agreed as the best option and fit within the corporate priorities.

It was clarified that there were outreach workers, the exact number was not known in the meeting but could be made available for anyone interested and their use varied in different areas working with VCS to make the best use of resources in the County. In Blyth they worked closely with Silx.

In response to a concern that this would impact young people; put more pressure on already stretched organisations who relied on volunteers; not provide help to identify issues at an early stage and only respond when intervention was necessary, it was stated that this would join up a range of provision in an integrated way and build on work already being undertaken with families and other professionals within the Family Hubs, allowing earlier identification of where help was needed. The proposals would reduce duplication of services and provide the most effective use of the resources available to maximise effectiveness.

RESOLVED that :-

- The activity undertaken during the review be noted; and
- Option 1, as outlined in the report, be agreed as the way forward.

32 **MEETING THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTHUMBERLAND**

An introduction to the report, which gave a current overview of support for children and young people with mental health needs and detailed future plans, was provided by S Barron, SEND Strategic Lead and Designated Clinical Officer with the aid of a power point presentation. S May, CYP Operational Commissioning Manager from NE & NC ICB) was also in attendance.

In response to an earlier question regarding ADHD, 3-5% of the childhood population had a diagnoses of ADHD in Northumberland the diagnostic service was provided by the Children and Young Peoples Service in CNTW.

Ch.'s Initials.....

RESOLVED that the contents of the report and the future plans be noted and the support now on offer for children and young people in Northumberland be recognised.

33 **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.

Councillor Ball asked that the issue of school uniforms be raised as a matter of urgency as there had been a number of problems within schools since the beginning of the new school year. A Kingham provided assurance that this would be reinforced with Headteachers at meetings, however the responsibility for the setting of uniform rules was with individual schools. The issue would be brought to the attention of Councillor Daley, Chair.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....