

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, 10 November 2022 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

W Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

C Ball
R Dodd
M Richardson
A Watson

A Dale
C Dunbar
M Swinburn

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

D Lennox

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

J Sanderson

OFFICERS

C Angus
S Aviston

A Kingham
L Little
D Street

Scrutiny Officer
Head of School Organisation and
Resources
Joint Interim Director of Children's Services
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Deputy Director of Education

Around 9 members of the press and public were present.

44 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Fairless-Aitken and G Renner-Thompson along with A Hodgson, L Houghton, G Reiter and P Rickeard.

45 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 8 September 2022, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and be signed by the Chair with the following amendment noted:

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Minute number 41 - the beginning of paragraph 5, should read Councillor Swinburn

46 **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

47 **CABINET REPORT - OUTCOMES OF STATUTORY CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE COQUET PARTNERSHIP**

The Cabinet report set out an analysis of the representations and responses received from interested parties and stakeholders during the four week statutory consultation in relation to the proposals for the Coquet Partnership. The report also set out an analysis of the responses received to the four week statutory consultation in relation to proposals for Barndale House Special School. Cabinet was being asked to make a final decision on the proposed prescribed changes to the schools within the Coquet Partnership and to Barndale House Special School to which Cabinet which were also set out in the report. A comprehensive introduction to the report was provided by S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources, with A Kingham, Joint Interim Director of Children's Services advising of the huge amount of hard work and support by everyone involved in bringing the proposals forward.

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

- There was already additional capacity in Grange View CoE First School and a spare classroom which was currently being used for staff. The extension would include one additional classroom and some provision for the staff.
- Officers were confident that the budgets were robust and the report made it clear that Cabinet were not only being asked to make a decision to change the organisation of the partnership, but to confirm that funding was also in place.
- It was assumed that every child in year 4 would stay to year 5 and therefore additional revenue funding would go into the school for the maximum number of pupils. There were other partnerships with small primary schools that were very successful and remained in budget.
- There would be pressure on all school budgets within the current financial climate however additional children would bring more revenue into the school as the National Funding Formula (NFF) was based on the number of children in a school. Modelling would be undertaken at Schools Forum in advance of any revenue budget settlement being announced and a report would be provided to this Committee in January on this.
- In terms of staff, it was not being proposed that any schools would close and the principle would be that staff and resources would follow the children with some redeployment opportunities.
- Part of the carbon neutral proposals for the new build for James Calvert Spence College would be the provision of solar panels and a separate programme regarding the retrofitting of solar panels on schools and their suitability was ongoing. However it was confirmed that some schools already had solar panels fitted.

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- The proposals for all schools would be fully funded by the Local Authority.
- Officers had met with Governors from Barndale House Special School who had been pleasantly surprised by the plans and space which would be available on the JCSC site and were reassured that a transition plan would be introduced to ensure that expansion growth was undertaken in a phased and managed way.
- The additional £2m funding identified for the Coquet Partnership was from the Cabinet decision on the Seaton Valley Partnership not to include the relocation of Seaton Sluice Middle School.

Members were pleased to see the proposals were supported by the Governing Bodies and Headteachers within the partnership and particularly welcomed the additional places at Barndale House Special School.

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

48 **CABINET REPORT - SEND CAPACITY AND PLACE PLANNING STRATEGY**

The Cabinet report advised of the development of a 5 year SEND Capacity and Place Planning Strategy which outlined the approach for growth in order to increase capacity in line with predicted demand across Northumberland to meet the needs of children and young people as close to their home communities as possible. An introduction to the report was provided by S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources. A Kingham, Joint Interim Director of Children's Services along with the Committee acknowledged and thanked the team of staff involved for their excellent work.

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

- Increased demand within Northumberland reflected growth nationally and was due in the main to better identification of need along with parental choice and expectations.
- It was clarified that an EHCP was only required when additional needs to those which were being met within mainstream schools was required to be provided. Members were reassured by Officers that the needs of a number of pupils with higher SEND were being met within their current mainstream school.
- There was less demand for specialist provision in the west of the County as needs were often met within Hexham, however workshops would still be undertaken in the area to ascertain demand and the plan updated annually.
- There was a separate piece of work in relation to employability and future pathways with more work being undertaken with industries to support this and a report would be provided when more details were known.

Whilst Members welcomed the strategy and the improvement in schools over the years, they sought to gain an understanding of what had driven a 78% increase in children and young people with an EHCP from 2013 to 2022. The Committee were minded to commission a report; however, after further discussion the members were in favour of establishing a task and finish group to examine the

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factors leading to the need for EHCPs, review of the curriculum, and how needs were being met outside the County. The scoping report for the task and finish group would be circulated for agreement at the next meeting of this Committee in December.

RESOLVED that

1. Cabinet be advised that this Committee unanimously supported the recommendations as outlined in the report; and
2. A Task and Finish Working Group be established as outlined above.

49 **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 date of the next meeting was Thursday 1 December 2022 at 10.00 am.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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