

## **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, 4 May 2023 at 10.00 am.

#### **PRESENT**

W Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

#### **COUNCILLORS**

C Ball  
R Dodd  
M Richardson  
T Thorne

A Dale  
S Fairless-Aitken  
M Swinburn  
A Watson

#### **CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES**

D Lennox

P Rickeard

#### **TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

L Houghton

J Sanderson

#### **OFFICERS**

S Aviston

Head of School Organisation and  
Resources

A Kingham

Executive Director - Children, Young  
People and Education

L Little

Senior Democratic Services Officer

D Street

Director of Education

#### **ALSO PRESENT**

G Renner-Thompson

Cabinet Member

Around 2 members of the press and public were present.

#### **80 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor C Dunbar, A Hodgson and C Angus.

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81 **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Family and Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Meeting held on Thursday 2 March 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

82 **DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

P Rickeard advised that he was both the Director of Education for the Diocese who had responded to the consultation and the Church Representative on this Committee.

83 **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

84 **OUTCOMES OF THE CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE BERWICK PARTNERSHIP**

A comprehensive introduction to the report was provided by S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources with the recommendations for the next steps outlined. Councillor Renner-Thompson, Portfolio holder for Children’s Services spoke on the background and reasoning behind the consultations for the Berwick Partnership and advised that the proposals had cross-party support going forward.

Members thanked officers for the detailed report and sought clarification and reassurance on a number of areas. The Committee sought a plan for supporting smaller, rural schools to ensure their sustainability in light of the recommendations of this report. Officers explained that many small schools worked in mutual partnership with larger schools to ensure they could deliver high quality education. Members were also advised that the opportunity would be taken to do any programmed maintenance work whilst on site as part of any works to be undertaken as part of these proposals should they be agreed. Detailed plans for leisure and community use would need to be discussed with partners.

Members expressed concerns that some students might be moved from schools rated as ‘Good’ to schools rated as ‘requires improvement’ however, they were assured that the schools in the Berwick Partnership had been evolving and improving over recent years. Officers reiterated to the Committee that the Council worked closely with the Regional Schools Director to offer strong support networks to these schools and that staff would be protected throughout the process with them moving with the pupils. Members were also informed that the Berwick Partnership had requested the Schools Improvement Team to be their significant partner over the next year. P Rickeard advised that he had recently spent time in Berwick Academy and had been impressed with the changes and the engagement between pupils and staff and the work being undertaken with the

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Local Authority. In relation to the previous drift of pupils out of the Partnership no one reason for this had been identified, however there were indications that some pupils were now returning.

In response to a question regarding the possibility of expanding the existing setting for SEND pupils or opening a new SEND school, it was highlighted that an expansion had not been supported either by the Governors or staff at the existing school, it was not possible for the Local Authority to open a school themselves and the timeline for a free school to be provided was too extensive.

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

85 **FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The work programme would be discussed at the next meeting.

**CHAIR**.....

**DATE**.....

Ch.'s Initials.....