

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 in the Council Chamber - County Hall on Tuesday, 18 July 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

W Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

C Ball
S Fairless-Aitken
T Thorne

R Dodd
M Swinburn

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson
P Rickeard (Virtual)

D Lennox

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

J Sanderson

OFFICERS

C Angus
S Aviston
S Gerrard

A Kingham

L Little
D Street

Scrutiny Officer
Head of School Organisation and Resources
Director of Law and Governance/Monitoring
Officer
Executive Director - Children, Young People
and Education
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Director of Education, SEND and Skills

ALSO PRESENT

G Renner-Thompson

Cabinet Member

Around 5 members of the press and public were present.

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors Seymour, Waddell and Watson.

Ch.'s Initials.....

9 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 1 June 2023, as circulated, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

10 **CABINET REPORT - OUTCOMES OF STATUTORY CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE BERWICK 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, which commenced on 11 May and closed on 8 June 2023, in relation to proposals for schools in the Berwick Partnership.

Cabinet was being asked to make a final decision on whether or not to approve the proposals, including school closures, set out in the statutory proposal. At the same time, Cabinet was being requested to make a final decision on whether or not to approve the non-statutory proposals relating to the voluntary schools within the Berwick Partnership. The decision of the DfE's Advisory Board in relation to the proposed changes to St Cuthbert's Catholic First School and Berwick Academy, which formed an integral part of the overall proposed reorganisation, was also to be noted by Cabinet.

S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources provided a comprehensive and detailed introduction to the report advising that the background papers for the report were available on the Council's website as part of the Cabinet papers. The Chair advised that as Cannon P Rickeard, the representative of the Church of England Diocese, had been unable to attend the meeting in person he had joined virtually and whilst he would be unable to take part in any vote he could however comment or ask questions on the report.

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

- Assurance was provided that the ethos and standards of the good and outstanding schools which were to close would be preserved and carried through to the new systems. The Local Authority had been working with Headteachers regarding the staffing protocol with consultation undertaken on the new staffing structure so that good and outstanding teaching staff were not lost. Protecting the ongoing employment of existing staff was paramount and fundamental in order to manage the transition and provide continuity for pupils. In view of the low participation process by residents, schools with support from the Local Authority would provide reassurance to parents on such issues as pastoral care for pupils. The Headteachers were all in support of the changes to the partnership and wished to ensure that the transition was as smooth as possible for all involved.
- The Local Authority with the agreement of Schools Forum had set a contingency budget through the DSG to support some of the additional pastoral staff that would be required and any personal development identified as part of the training needs analysis.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- If agreed by Cabinet, an Implementation Group would be set up, which would be chaired by S Aviston, and would bring all together to ensure that wrap around support was in place to support the transition. The School Improvement team would provide continuous monitoring ensuring standards were maintained and changes were in the best interests of all the young people within the partnerships, and close working would continue with Berwick Academy to continue the trajectory of improvements. The possible need for additional resources for School Improvement as highlighted by Members would be fed back to Cabinet.
- It was clarified that the need for improvements in facilities at St Cuthbert's had not been raised by the school itself and had only been raised by the Diocese. There was some flexibility in relation to funds and further consultation and assessments would need to be undertaken.
- The School Organisation Plan which was produced on an annual basis took into account house building along with birth rates and these had been built into predictions for the partnership. A review of data was underway and figures would be submitted to the Department for Education within the next few weeks.
- In relation to the social value guarantees that could be included in the procurement process, including apprenticeships, it was advised that any contract awarded by the Council had social value conditions embedded, and any tendered work carried out would be no different. Officers provided their assurance that contractors would be held accountable for fulfilling these requirements.
- Assurance was provided that there would be no loss of playing fields or play provision and if Cabinet approved the proposals, as part of the business case for Berwick Academy there may be an element of enhancement.
- It was clarified that all school buildings currently met the DfE standards for air quality and ventilation and this would continue going forward.

Members in recognising the huge amount of work that had been undertaken in getting to this position thanked Officers and welcomed the investment into education within the Berwick Partnership. Headteachers and Governing Bodies were also thanked for their work in supporting the process and the number of challenges during such a large number of consultations was recognised.

A vote was taken and it was unanimously:-

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

11 **REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER**

C Angus, Scrutiny Officer advised that following the Scrutiny Review and revisions to the Constitution that the Cabinet Forward Plan and Scrutiny Work Programmes would now be presented together. The Forward Plan would now reflect decisions that had already been taken to allow monitoring of those decisions to be undertaken by scrutiny. It would also allow future items to be viewed further in advance in order to allow scrutiny to have some influence on decisions when required.

Ch.'s Initials.....

The first meeting of the SEND Task and Finish Working Group would take place after this meeting and the date of the next meeting was noted as Thursday 7 September 2023.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....