

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 Remote Meeting on Thursday, 4 February 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

M Swinburn (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

D Campbell
S Dickinson
R Wallace

T Cessford
K Stow

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

L Houghton

OFFICERS

C Angus
S Aviston
L Dixon
A Kingham
L Little
C McEvoy-Carr

Scrutiny Officer
Head of School Organisation and Resources
Democratic Services Apprentice
Service Director - Education and Skills
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services

ALSO PRESENT

G Renner-Thompson

Cabinet Member

121 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors W Daley and L Dunn; P Rickeard and J Sanderson

122 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 7 January 2021 were agreed as a true

Ch.'s Initials.....

record and signed by the Chair.

123 **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

The Scrutiny Officer advised that all Scrutiny Members were invited to attend the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on 8 February when the budget would be considered. Anyone wishing to attend should advise the Chair, Councillor Bawn or the Scrutiny Officer. Questions should be submitted to the Scrutiny Coordinator or Scrutiny Officer by the end of Thursday 4 February if Members were unable to attend.

The School Organisation Report would now only be reported to this Committee and would not be considered by Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan of key decisions for February to May 2021 attached as Appendix A to the signed minutes be noted.

124 **SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS FOR THE 2022/2023 ACADEMIC YEAR**

The report attached as **Appendix B** informed Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation on School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2022/23 Academic Year as required by the School Admissions Code 2014. Approval (determination) of those admission arrangements was also being sought.

A comprehensive introduction to the report was provided by S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources and Councillor Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member was in attendance. Members were advised that no changes had been proposed and no comments had been received from interested parties during the six week consultation period.

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

125 **ANNUAL REPORT FOR LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE 2019/20**

The annual report attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes provided information on the performance against the Education Inspection Framework; presented the work of the Careers Guidance Team and information to understand the role and impact of the Employability and Skills Team within the wider service. A Kingham, Service Director, Education and Skills, provided a detailed introduction to the report. It was noted that the last sentence in paragraph 2.1.1 had not been completed and she advised that there was further work to do to ensure the service was able to meet all of the new post 16 priorities and the brand new skills reform, lifelong learning and learning guarantee and to be able to meet the economic priorities of Northumberland. In terms of funding, there was now a need to deliver programmes to enable residents to get into employment, which was a significant change as previously this had been more community based. She highlighted the effect of Covid and the support which had been put in place for learners during the pandemic with funding being accessed from the North of

Ch.'s Initials.....

Tyne for devices to enable students to be able to continue to learn virtually. Members were advised that the Careers Guidance Team were aware of where all those “not known” NEET 16 – 18 year olds were and she had every confidence that all the individual support that was being provided.

The Chair advised that it was pleasing to see the area performing well and had adapted well to provide these services in very difficult circumstances. It was particularly pleasing that all NEET were known. He questioned what planning was being undertaken in order to ensure that the appropriate skills and training was provided for future roles within BritishVolt. Members were advised that discussions were already underway to understand the skills strategy and significant work had been done to future proof and map future hotspots and key industries such as the Northumberland Line etc with an economic pathfinder created to understand what would be required to be delivered in each area.

Councillor Dickinson in recognising that the key was to ensure residents had the necessary skills for the future, questioned how this would be achieved when there was to be a cut of £0.5m being made to the budget for the forthcoming year some within the key areas highlighted in this report. It was clarified that some savings were in relation to actual revenue operations with some new income streams being developed and being more focussed on where the need for provision was rather than the broader remit. There would also be a reduction in senior management posts. The Cabinet Member did not consider that there would be a negative impact on the service.

Members welcomed and congratulated the teams on their work and fantastic achievements. The Service Director advised that at the start of lockdown all teams met weekly and identified the learners who they felt were at risk of disengaging. A wrap around service was provided to keep them on track with 84% of students on programmes remaining active and making progress.

RESOLVED that:

1. The contents of the report be noted;
2. The performance, given the significant challenges of the global pandemic against operating circumstances and the valuable support provided to all learners within the Learning and Skills Service, Careers Guidance Team and Employability and Skills Service be recognised; and
3. To note the key areas for improvement and the focussed work programme as follows:
 - o Skills strategy required which met Northumberland and North of Tyne priorities.
 - o More young people (16-18) access the right programme and support to be able to achieve well with good opportunities for employment.
 - o More adult learners enrol to improve their chance to gain employment through a curriculum offer which supported this approach.
 - o A coherent approach working with businesses, building relationships which benefit industry, skills schools and our residents.

Ch.'s Initials.....

126 WINTER SUPPORT GRANT (FREE SCHOOL MEALS)

S Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources introduced the report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) which provided an update on the delivery of the Winter Support Grant which included the provision of Free School Meals (FSM) over the Christmas school holidays.

She advised that 9,168 children had been supported with the use of the Hugg voucher system which had been a very successful and well appreciated way of assisting families. Northumberland had a very high take up of the Hugg voucher system and where complaints had been received regarding the quality of food from schools not using the voucher system, residents had been provided with vouchers as well. All schools would be encouraged to use the Hugg system during the next half term holiday. The Communities Together Hub had provided a wrap service also providing additional support to parents with food, utilities and clothing.

The Committee were informed that Northumberland had committed to doubling the fund for those in receipt of FSM and the value of vouchers for each child would be £30 per week.

Members welcomed the positive report and the efforts made to support families in need across the County. They particularly welcomed the increase to £30. The feedback from both parents and schools had been positive on the use of the vouchers and Headteachers had advised that a significant amount of work had been taken from them allowing them to concentrate on educating pupils.

L Houghton, NASUWT Representative thanked the Team for their work on this and advised that teaching staff were still seeing the impact of the vouchers being provided. She also highlighted that she had been involved in "Operation Elf" and the support provided by local communities and businesses had been fantastic.

It was confirmed that Communities Together intended to roll out the pilot scheme which had taken place within Berwick to the whole County using local suppliers once lockdown ended with funding also being provided for other activities.

RESOLVED that:

1. The contents of the report and the successful implementation of the initiatives undertaken with the funding from the Winter Support Grant be noted; and
2. An update report on the remaining allocation of Winter Support Grant to FSM following February and Easter half-term holidays, and including an update on the allocation of FSM during the current lockdown period be provided.

127 SCHOOLS FORUM ROLE AND DECISION MAKING POWERS

S Aviston introduced the report (attached as **Appendix E** to the signed minutes) which provided the Committee with further information about the role of the Schools Forum. The Membership of the Board was outlined in the report and the Committee was further advised that Membership was split between maintained

Ch.'s Initials.....

and academy schools as well as primary and secondary schools. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services also attended meetings and officers of the Council provided technical advice and support to the Forum. It was confirmed that the Schools Forum provided an effective level of challenge and support to officers when determining funding priorities in the best interests of all Northumberland children and young people.

The Chair in welcoming the report requested that an annual summary be provided to this Committee of the decisions made by Schools Forum to allow Members to be kept informed.

RESOLVED that:

1. The contents of the reported be noted; and
2. An annual summary of decisions made by Schools Forum be provided to this Committee.

128 **FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT 2019/20**

The work programme and monitoring report was attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix G**. The Scrutiny Officer advised that as stated previously the Update on School Reorganisation Plan would no longer be reported to Cabinet. The update on the School Exclusions Action Plan would now be reported at the March Committee and reports on the Winter Support Grant and annual summary of Schools Forum decisions would be added to the programme. Any further requests for items to be added to the work programme should be forwarded to the Chair or Scrutiny Officer.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....