

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 Remotely on Thursday, 1 April 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

M Swinburn (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

T Cessford
L Dunn
K Stow

W Daley
J Lang

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson

D Lennox

OFFICERS

C Angus

Scrutiny Officer

L Dixon
A Kingham
L Little
C McEvoy-Carr

Democratic Services Assistant
Service Director - Education and Skills
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Adults and Children's
Services

N Taylor

Head of Inclusive Education Services

ALSO PRESENT

R Dodd

G Renner-Thompson

H Bowyer

CYP Operational Commissioning Manager,
Northumberland CCG

139 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr D Campbell, P Rickeard and L Houghton.

140 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Dunn advised that she was a Member of the North of Tyne Scrutiny Committee.

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141 **FORWARD PLAN**

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan of key decisions for April to July 2021 be noted.

142 **EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY PORTFOLIO NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY**

The report provided an overview of the ongoing projects and work in the Inclusive Economy Portfolio within the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) with a comprehensive introduction and overview provided by the Service Director, Education and Skills. Councillor Dodd as the Portfolio Holder was also in attendance and commended the report to the Committee.

During discussion of the report, the following information was noted:

- A lead support officer from the NTCA who undertook all the development work was now working with the Directors of the three constituent local authorities to accelerate the school improvement timetable. There was now a 12 month calendar of work to be achieved as a team and this was the first phase which nested within the school improvement agenda.
- The biggest challenge within Northumberland was the secondary schools performance, as the first and primary schools performances had improved significantly. Unfortunately this was being hampered at the current time as no judgements were being changed, however work was continuing on delivering improvements. Eleven very brief focussed inspections had just taken place and all eleven schools were deemed to be taking effective action. It might be useful to have School Improvement Plan update report presented to the Committee which would provide assurance that work was still ongoing in Northumberland.
- In terms of a cost analysis, it was at a very high level as the Education Challenge was planned around £10m for 10 years and there had been confidence that this would make a significant difference. Existing funding was targeted to where it would have the greatest impact.
- There was a strand of both the Joint School Improvement Strategy and the Education Challenge which was around retention and recruitment across leaders at all levels and some suggestions for the way in which these could work were provided.
- There was already an education outcome deficit within NTCA and Northumberland with a challenge to address even prior to Covid, which potentially could impact on life chances for young people. With Covid the focus was even more important after the struggles being encountered during the previous year with home schooling and children and young people not being able to attend schools.
- The NTCA Education Challenge funding was written into Parliamentary Statute and it was very clear that NTCA should continue to push Government to make sure this happened, following the success of this in London and the improvements it achieved.

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- The possibility of changing term time and holidays was raised as there was always a deficit when children and young people returned to school following the 6 weeks summer break, and whilst the 13 weeks holiday in total could be retained, these could be more spread out. This was an area that DfE were currently looking at.
- The importance of training, sharing good teaching practices and support for teachers across subject networks was highlighted, especially in relation to maths, physics and computer science and a greater focus on the STEM subjects would see improvements being made in these areas.

The Executive Director stated that there were a lot of exciting opportunities regarding skills development coming forward to attract those with the skills to drive improvements. She confirmed that Northumberland and also NTCA had not lost sight of the fact that the Education Challenge money had not been forthcoming, but both would continue to lobby Government for this and keep the agenda live and ensure that their voices continued to be heard.

The Chair suggested that more reports be brought to this Committee which provided Northumberland's view so that Members were aware of what was happening.

RESOLVED that:

1. The key themes and workstreams in the Inclusive Economy portfolio and the progress to date be noted;
2. The plan for the Joint School Improvement Strategy be noted; and
3. The work of the Northumberland Officers Group developing projects for submission to meet the needs of Northumberland be noted.

143 **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS**

The report informed the Committee about the current offer of mental health support available to students and staff in schools across Northumberland. It had been written in conjunction with Helen Bowyer, CYP Operational Commissioning Manager, Northumberland CCG, with contributions from Yvonne Hush, Public Health Manager and Kay Vincent, Professional Lead and Clinical Manager within Northumbria Healthcare Trust responsible for School Health. The report offered a comprehensive overview of support provided across NCC and partner agencies and summarised the position with regard to services usually available, and the additional offer in place to support during the COVID 19 pandemic. A comprehensive introduction to the report was provided by the Head of Inclusive Education Services with the aid of a Power Point presentation. Councillor Renner-Thompson, Cabinet Member was in attendance and commended the report to the Committee.

Members welcomed the comprehensive report and the significant reduction in the waiting times for access to help.

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In respect of early identification of behaviour patterns in pre-schools, and private settings it was explained that a lot of work had been done on the interaction with early years family teams and the incorporation of mental health workers in family centres to work with pre-school children and families. However due to Covid it had not been physically possible to access the buildings, but a lot work had been undertaken in the background so that this could be driven forward quickly when they were able to do so. It was also confirmed that early identification was pushed all the time from the Early Years Teams, who were very responsive to queries. In terms of work within private settings this had not been undertaken but it was on the radar to do and it would possibly be undertaken using a stepped approach. In terms of support for parents and carers, there was a lot of self-help information on the BeYou portal for parents and as part of the Trailblazer funding money was provided to Cygnus to develop parent/carer support. This work had been started before Covid and it had slowed during this time, however some work had been done digitally and would be able to move quickly when circumstances allowed.

In respect of the suggestion of a Governor at each school being responsible for mental health and it being on all Governing Body agendas, this would be picked up with the Education and Skills Governing Body Team to see if it could be taken forward.

In response to the suggestion from the Chair that the report should be shared with all Members of Council to assist them to be able to respond to queries from residents, the Executive Director stated that a briefing note had previously been provided, but this could be updated and circulated to Members as a refresher.

RESOLVED that:

1. The contents of the report be noted; and
2. The Committee recognised the support on offer to staff and students in Northumberland Schools.

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

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

145 **CHAIR'S CLOSING COMMENTS**

The Chair advised that the role of this committee was to monitor, review and make recommendations about education, social care, training, safeguarding, youth, family, and children's services – to name just a few things. Also to oversee and monitor school improvement. It was not always easy, but the Committee was prepared to tackle and address those issues that did arise and work towards improvement. He recognised the hard work and efforts of the officers, and all staff and partners involved to deal with changes that were required and it was their efforts and flexibility that had helped Northumberland rise from near bottom of the table up to 79th in the education results in the last few years, and to the top of the tables in the North East; to set up its own Social Worker Academy, producing 44 'home grown' qualified Social Workers for Northumberland, with another 12 due to start; the huge achievement of apprenticeships in this last year at 19% above the National average; a significant reduction in the level of

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exclusions; and being the top authority in the country for offering school placement.

He offered his thanks first to the officers and their teams for the hard work for this committee and the work that they did for Northumberland. He also thanked all of those involved in all areas of the Council and Schools, including support staff, for helping the people in Northumberland every day. He also thanked Ken Stow, Vice-Chair; Chris Angus, Lesley Little and all of Democratic Services; and all committee members for their input to this scrutiny committee, which was one of the few that met on a monthly basis due to the volume of work it was required to undertake.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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