

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 Meeting Space - Block 1, Floor 2 - County Hall on Thursday, 2 December 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

W Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

C Ball
L Dunn

R Dodd

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson

D Lennox

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

L Houghton

J Sanderson

OFFICERS

C Angus
N Dorward

Scrutiny Officer
Senior Manager - Education Development
& Collaborative Projects
Service Director - Education and Skills
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Service Director - Children's Social Care
Deputy Director of Education

A Kingham
L Little
G Reiter
D Street

ALSO PRESENT

G Renner-Thompson

Cabinet Member

Press/Public : 1

36 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair wished to recognise and acknowledge the hard work and speedy response provided by staff, Councillors and volunteers in supporting their communities following Storm Arwen. He offered his gratitude and thanks to all those who had been involved.

Ch.'s Initials.....

37 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillors Carr, Dunbar, Scott, Swinburn, Taylor Thorne and from Mr Rickeard.

38 **DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Daley advised that he had an interest in item 4 – Opportunity for expansion of Northumberland Health Education England (HEE) Project Choice as he had undertaken work with NHS England and Project Choice and would leave the meeting whilst this item was being discussed. Councillor Dodd, Vice Chair would take the Chair for this item.

39 **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

The Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions for December 2021 to March 2022 had been shared with Members for information.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Councillor Daley left the room at this point and Councillor Dodd took the Chair.

40 **OPPORTUNITY FOR EXPANSION OF NORTHUMBERLAND HEALTH EDUCATION ENGLAND (HEE) PROJECT CHOICE**

The Cabinet report provided information on the opportunity to develop a wider scope of delivery for Health Education England's Project Choice within Northumberland in order to more rapidly deliver on Northumberland County Council's (NCC) education priorities and SEND priorities. N Dorward, Senior Manager - Education Development & Collaborative Projects provided a comprehensive introduction to the report with the aid of a power point presentation. Members were advised that the pilot programme launched in September 2021 with apprenticeship being the intended progression route following internship thereby creating a sustainable career for young people with SEND. There would be an opportunity for Northumberland Health Care Trust (NHCT) interns to attend 12 week placements within NCC in 2022 with a further opportunity to deliver NCC cohorts from September 2022 on a 36 week programme and in time for NCC to work with Project Choice to widen participation across partner employers in Northumberland.

Councillor Renner-Thompson advised that this was part of the overall strategy to improve outcomes for children & young people with SEND and would enhance the schemes already in place. Councillor Dunn advised that this had previously been the subject of discussions at Corporate Parenting and it was fabulous to see it come to fruition.

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

41 **NORTHUMBERLAND STRATEGIC SKILLS PLAN 2021-25 (MARCH 2021, UPDATED OCTOBER 2021)**

Ch.'s Initials.....

The Cabinet report provided details of the Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan 2021-25 which had been designed to guide skills planning and the approach in designing impactful vocational skills provision within the County to yield greatest impact for residents and the local economy. An introduction to the report was provided by N Dorward, Senior Manager - Education Development & Collaborative Projects with the aid of a power point presentation. The Plan provided a clear presentation of the vocational education ambition for Northumberland and would be a powerful tool to communicate the County vision to inward investors and how workforce building could be supported.

The Chair suggested that this could be used as a template for schools at an early stage so that the world of work was embedded from primary levels right through to post 16. A Kingham, Service Director – Education and Skills advised that the link between education and industry had been undeveloped and the challenge was how to improve this. The approach would allow the link to start at a much younger age and would assist to raise the ambitions and aspirations of children in the County and to engage industry.

Councillor Renner-Thompson advised that this was a priority of the Administration and would enable students to progress and support some of the organisations which were making huge investments in Northumberland, showed forward thinking in the educational offer and would contribute to the wider north east economy.

In response to questions, Members were advised that this was a vocational skills based plan, would allow technical progression and allow students to be apprenticeship ready. Work would be undertaken in conjunction with Northumberland College to develop opportunities for 14-16 year olds and a fabricating/welding training facility within the Port of Blyth was part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Members highlighted the need for different skill sets required for important roles which had previously been seen as unpopular choices and the need to ensure that these were seen as career pathways. In response to a request to include the “arts” so that STEM became STEAM in order to be more inclusive, Members were advised that the whole strategy around the plan was inclusion at every level and to make sure that there were opportunities for all. Work had been undertaken with both NTCA and NECA to look at opportunities collectively around inclusion and looking at the most disadvantaged areas and reach into these areas and engage with industries to do this. Assurance was provided that it had not been missed and was included in all approaches.

The Chair advised that the document was part of wider system changes which were required to be acted upon. It formed part of the holistic approach to get a mobilised workforce which was fit for the future. Members were reminded that this was an action from the Education Report from the previous year and would be delivered in conjunction with wider partners and whilst it was a NCC document it was for the whole of Northumberland.

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

Ch.'s Initials.....

The report shared a sample of content and findings from a suite of reports resulting from a range of internal and externally commissioned skills and employment based research activities conducted on the subject of curriculum development priorities within Northumberland. The content and findings underpinned the Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan 2021-25 which was designed to inform skills planning and the approach in designing impactful vocational skills provision. An introduction to the report was provided by N Dorward, Senior Manager - Education Development & Collaborative Projects with the aid of a power point presentation. The appendices to the report were available for viewing on the Council's website. Mrs Kingham stated that all the reports presented at the Committee today would be a catalyst for change in the future. Work would be undertaken with Senior Officers in the first instance to get this embedded within the Council and this would also be done with all schools across the County via partnerships. It was a long piece of work but it had already started.

A skills audit had been discussed at Corporate Parenting for members of that Group and it was suggested that this should be undertaken in a broader sense for all Councillors and Officers of the Council and the different career paths they have had and use this free resource to take into schools for young people to understand and know the different roles and jobs which were available and to which they could aspire to.

Mr Hodgson highlighted the work which he had previously undertaken with schools in the EU and the common theme of which had been the effective links they had with industries which gave young people aged 13/14 the opportunity to sample a wide range of industries which we could learn from. In some instances transport had also been provided to able the young people to access these chances.

Councillor Daley commented that schools were often too focussed on achieving Ofsted approval that they had lost sight of the importance of links with business. There was an opportunity for a rethink and to look at linking learning with earning and the huge benefit of vocational, business and industry led training and he questioned if Ofsted was still fit for purpose following Covid. A Kingham agreed that some education systems in other countries were phenomenal in terms of their business/industry links and whilst we were at an early stage there were some opportunities for us to link with industry training units in Germany and Denmark, where some links had already been established. There were some opportunities on a regional and national level for the work the Council was doing to be shared, but it would take more than this to change things. Industry would have a much larger voice and we needed to get them on board to take forward and there was an opportunity to start to change.

In response to a question on how as a body the Committee could change the focus of Ofsted to include vocational studies and embrace different ways of learning, the Chair advised that a letter could be sent to the Regional Ofsted Inspector, however, to achieve any change would require a collective voice including politicians, government and industry and senior officers throughout the Country. The work undertaken recently in connection with Looked After Children

by the Directors of Children's Services in the LA7 was highlighted and it was recognised that a collaborative approach building up nationally would be the best way forward. Mrs Kingham advised that she worked closely with the Regional Ofsted office and these views would be shared with them and once the outlined plans were in place and we could provide evidence to say that these were providing a bigger difference than the current framework then the route to change would be through lobby groups which would include industry voices.

Mr Hodgson highlighted the work he had witnessed in Latvia and Lithuania in relation to the heavy investment in the development of IT skills within schools some 25 years ago and they now led the world in this field, this was something that could be replicated within our schools.

The Chair advised that he did not wish to lose sight of the discussion in relation to Ofsted and an additional recommendation should be included to request that Officers talk to other Directors of Education within the LA7 or wider field on putting something to Government on how there could be more flexibility within Ofsted. Mr Street advised that there was currently scope within the Ofsted framework to cover a lot of the areas discussed. A broad and balanced curriculum designed to meet the needs of the local community rather than a one size fits all for the whole Country allowed schools to be deemed to be outstanding because they met the needs of their learners and residents. It would be great if this could be made clearer in the national framework, however there was a need to give Head Teachers the confidence that working this way could help their schools to become outstanding. The Chair advised that it was vital that this knowledge become embedded in schools and that schools and colleges understood that they could be part of the wider solution and requested an additional recommendation be included to reflect that.

RESOLVED that:

1. the content and general approach of the Northumberland Skills Pathfinder Curriculum Research be noted;
2. the use of the document with internal NCC stakeholder groups be authorised; and
3. that work be undertaken with schools and colleges to embed the knowledge of the Ofsted framework which included the use of a broad and balanced curriculum which was designed to meet the needs of their learners and residents.

43 FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

A copy of the work programme had been circulated for information. The Scrutiny Officer advised that it had been agreed that an additional meeting be held on 13 January 2022 in order to manage the number of items on the agenda for the 6 January 2022 meeting.

Members were advised that an item that had been requested on School Transport would be provided at the May or June meeting, however details of the terms of reference could be provided in advance to provide assurance to members that it was being taken forward.

Ch.'s Initials.....

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....