

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday 14 December 2017** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson

COUNCILLORS

Cessford T
Horncastle C
Nisbet K

Stewart G
Stow K
Wallace R

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Hodgson A
Lennox D

Warner J

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Lyst R
Sanderson J

Woolhouse R

OFFICERS

Aviston S
Johnson A
Little L

Head of School Organisation and Resources
Interim Director of Children's Services
Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor W Daley
Councillor R Dodd
J Guthrie
P Rickeard

Deputy Leader
Business Chair
Unison
Church of England Dioceses of Durham and
Newcastle

Press/Public: 5

64. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed Councillor Horncastle to his first meeting of the Committee. Councillor Horncastle had been appointed to replace Councillor Swinburn during his absence.

65. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from D Campbell, J Lang, ME Richards and S Payne.

66. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr A Hodgson advised that he had been Headteacher of St Joseph's Middle School until 2015 and had been in post during the Ofsted inspection referenced in appendix 2 of the report. During discussion of agenda item 4(b) - National Funding Formula, Mr S Payne advised that he worked in a school which was affected by the figures.

67. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 16 November 2017 at 2.00 p.m., as circulated, were signed by the Chair with the following typographical amendment noted:-

Page 4 - should read holistic.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

68. REPORTS OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

(a) Education in the West of Northumberland

Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Portfolio holder for Children's Services advised that following the removal of Bright Tribe as the preferred sponsor of Haydon Bridge High School (HBHS); informal consultation undertaken by the Hadrian Trust (HT) on Queen Elizabeth High School (QEHS) becoming an 11 - 18 year old academy; and the financial difficulty predicted by smaller schools in the next three years, there was an urgent need to engage with all stakeholders and the community in order to create a sustainable education system in the west of the County which provided good educational outcomes for all children. He further advised of the potential for the creation of a North of Tyne Education Challenge as part of the North of Tyne Devolution to raise educational attainment across the areas of the three authorities involved. He continued by assuring the Committee that he was committed to and would be veriferous in attempting to recover the £1m in government funding paid to Bright Tribe which he considered should have been spent on the education of children in Northumberland.

The Interim Director of Children's Services provided a very detailed introduction to the report (attached as **Appendix A** to the signed minutes) highlighting a number of issues including the following:-

- The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) wrote to the interim Director of Children's Services on November 7th 2017 explaining that *“Section 68 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 enables the Secretary of State to direct a local authority to discontinue a maintained school, where the school is eligible for intervention”*. This letter was in reference to Haydon Bridge High School. The letter also stated that *“Department for Education officials have been working since early 2015 to seek a sponsor for the school. The Bright Tribe Trust was formally approved as sponsor in October 2015”*. The letter asked the county council to provide a detailed viability assessment of Haydon Bridge High School by December 5 2017. The Committee was advised that a reply had been provided which advised that the Local Authority would not be in a position to provide a response until a full consultation had taken place.
- In light of this situation and the recent withdrawal of the Bright Tribe Trust as the sponsor of HBHS, Officers believed it was now necessary to seek the views of all the schools and the wider community in the west of Northumberland. 21 Schools had responded to a letter from the Local Authority expressing their views that a consultation was necessary and 9 schools did not respond within the timescale.
- The report set out a recommendation to Cabinet to approve a two-stage process of informal consultation looking at education in the west of Northumberland. The first phase would begin on 11 January and end on the 26 January to find out the views of the leaders of all the schools and academies in the west on the following issues and devise a proposal for a model for the future:-
 - Withdrawal of Bright Tribe Trust from sponsorship of Haydon Bridge High School and the inability of the DfE to find another sponsor willing to take over the school
 - The Hadrian Trust's proposal for Queen Elizabeth High School to become an 11-18 secondary school
 - The high number of surplus places,
 - The weak financial position of many schools
 - Capital investment in schools in the west
 - The current model of provision
 - Alternative options for secondary-age students in the Haydon Bridge Partnership;
 - Whether the Council should work towards establishing a Trust that would enable it to become a multi-academy sponsor for schools.
 - Special Educational needs and disabilities, social mobility and inclusion
- The consensus would form the basis for the second part of the consultation that would take place with all stakeholders, subject to delegated approval from the Chief Executive in consultation with the Member for Children's

Services/Deputy Leader. The second phase was envisaged to begin on 5 February for six school weeks to 9 April and would include all involved in the schools; parents, staff and the wider community. The outcomes of any wider consultation would be presented to Cabinet at a later stage, where Cabinet might be recommended to permit the publication of a Statutory Proposal.

- A second stage of comprehensive consultation would enable the Council to respond to the request from the Regional School's Commissioner to determine the long term viability of Haydon Bridge High School. As a result of this wider informal consultation, Cabinet might be requested to permit the publication of Statutory Proposals and further formal consultation on a particular model.
- HBHS remained in special measures two years after an Ofsted inspection and had built up a financial deficit of circa £1million over the last 5 years. Previously this would have been carefully managed by the Local Authority however since the imposition of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) appointed by the Secretary of State (SoS) this had not been possible. There was a lack of clarity regarding the situation and it was advised that the SoS would be requested to allow an IEB to be appointed by the Local Authority if the decision to consult was made by Cabinet.
- In respect of surplus places it was clarified that this figure was based on the original number of pupils to be accommodated when schools were originally built. The data in appendix 2 was a snapshot as pupil numbers constantly changed.

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

- If Cabinet agreed that a consultation be undertaken then a request would be made immediately that the IEB step down and be replaced with a Local Authority appointed IEB. However it could not be assumed that the SoS would agree to this request and even it was agreed, there was a statutory procedure to be followed.
- A previous survey had shown that there were insufficient 11-18 year olds in the west of the County to justify the retention of two high schools of this size unless pupils were shared across the two sites. The Local Authority's suggested plan to work across both schools had been dismissed by the SoS.
- There had been a drift of pupils from HBHS to Queen Elizabeth High School (QEHS) in Hexham with a small number of children choosing to attend a school in Brampton, however even five years previously HBHS had a small pupil roll and difficulty in balancing their finances. HBHS had been placed in special measures since 2015 and as the school was run by the IEB, the Local Authority had no influence in trying to improve the school.

- It was confirmed that Bright Tribe Trust, as sponsors of Haltwhistle High School, would be involved in all consultations undertaken and had responded to the original letter.
- Due to the democratic and statutory processes involved any reorganisation would take until 2019 to implement however it was hoped that schools would work together much earlier to allow a smoother transition for pupils. Any reorganisation would need the agreement of all parties in order to progress.
- At the current time QEHS did not have the capacity/facilities on site to take all pupils from HBHS in 2019 and if this was the outcome of consultations then it might be that significant investment would be required.
- The Government had allowed bidding for funding in Identified areas which had been difficult to academise and where they were keen for this to happen. Bright Tribe were awarded funding along with money to upgrade the facilities and manage HBHS. The Local Authority were not able to bid for this money.
- The failure at HBHS was not the fault of teaching staff who had undertaken a huge amount of work however the educational model had constantly changed. There was now a better relationship between the Local Authority and the Regional School Commissioner (RSC) and dialogue had already commenced in order to try and provide a solution.
- There would be a need for a very large financial commitment if the consultation allowed for any reorganisation to go ahead from both the Government and the North of Tyne Combined Authority.

The Committee welcomed and supported the report and thanked the officers and Councillor Daley for their work in getting to this point. There was a recognised need to improve the educational outcomes for all pupils.

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

(b) Schools National Funding Formula Consultation

The Interim Director of Children's Services introduced the report (attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes) to the Committee. He advised that following 2020/21 the Local Authority would have no discretion in the values of the individual factors used to distribute funding to schools.

The Committee was advised that a lengthy and difficult discussion had taken place at Schools Forum in respect of the funding with a recommendation to implement a phased introduction the outcome. The revised funding was based on a two tier system with a switch in funding from KS4 to KS3. This would have an impact on High Schools in the three tier system and would make balancing their finances extremely difficult.

Funding went directly to Multi Academy Trusts and it was their decision how to distribute this across their schools, although it was noted that they could not have a deficit and there was a requirement to prove that they were financially viable. Local Authorities would be liable for sponsored schools which closed with a deficit however this would be funded from the Council's budget and would not impact on schools directly.

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

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

69. WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT

The Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme and monitoring report was attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORTS

70. POLICY DIGEST

This report, available on the Council's website, provided details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which might be of interest to Members. Any Member who would like a printed copy should contact the Democratic Services Officer.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____