

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 **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday 6 December 2018** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor G Renner-Thompson
(in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| Campbell D | Stewart G |
| Cessford T | Stow K |
| Lang J | Swinburn M |
| Richards ME | Wallace R |

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

| | |
|-----------|----------|
| Hodgson A | Warner J |
| Lennox D | |

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

| | |
|---------|-------------|
| Lyst, R | Woolhouse R |
| Payne S | |

OFFICERS

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Connor M | Head of Early Help, Prevention and Support |
| Jackson D | Service Director - Education and Skills |
| Little L | Democratic Services Officer |
| McEvoy-Carr C | Executive Director of Children's Services |
| Spaven L | Senior Manager, Specialist Services |

ALSO PRESENT

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Daley W | Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services |
| Pidcock B | |

Press/Public: 2

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor K Nisbet and J Sanderson

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 8 November 2018, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

39. FORWARD PLAN

The published Forward Plan of key decisions for November 2018 to February 2019 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

40. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

41.1 Youth Service Review

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**) provided an update on the work undertaken on implementing the recommendations of the Youth Service Review. It contained details of the proposed delivery model moving forward, the effect this would have on staff employed in the youth service and the work which was being undertaken to work with communities who might be affected by the proposed changes. It provided a rationale for the changes and the benefits of the proposed model and advised which communities and target populations of young people would benefit from the proposed changes.

The Executive Director of Children's Services introduced the report and Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services advised that this was a detailed piece of work and he thanked the youth workers and staff for their efforts. He advised that unlike other Local Authorities, Northumberland was retaining their youth service and targeting it to areas of greatest need. There would be no frontline staff redundancies with savings to be achieved through reductions in management costs. The proposal was to work with Communities to help grow and enhance their own services. The service would be flexible with staff able to be mobilised to go to hotspots in other areas as and when required.

Members recognised that there had been challenges in the Ashington, Blyth and Bedlington area for a long time with the link between anti-social behaviour, poverty and high levels of school exclusions highlighted. The youth service would look to become involved with families at an earlier stage to understand the impact and improve the parenting of young people. The existing work undertaken by groups within different communities was highlighted with the need for their continued core funding and it was confirmed that the service would work closely with these groups to ensure there was no impact on front line services. Services procured through the Council would have background checks undertaken to ensure their long term viability and all charitable organisations required safeguarding protocols.

A baseline audit to assess where services were most in demand had been undertaken and this could be shared with Members if required. The provision would be overlaid on provision already within areas and would target prevention and early help. Multi-agency work would be undertaken for as long as required in each area where challenges had been identified. A review would be undertaken after three months and then a formal review after a year to see how the service was working and an effective management information system introduced to monitor outcomes. Communities would be encouraged to come forward with sustainable plans to support young people.

In respect of a question related to the cuts to the annual National Citizenship Scheme it was reported that funding received had not covered all the costs, had been labour intensive and had not always been accessed by the children it was targeted at. The scheme also took youth workers away from communities at a time of high need.

RESOLVED that the the proposed changes to the youth service be supported.

41.2 Peer Review for Care Leavers Service

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**) provided an overview of the recent Peer Challenge undertaken focussed on the services to care leavers including the context of Peer Challenges, how it was undertaken, the findings and the next steps.

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised that a great amount of work had been undertaken following the feedback about the service by OFSTED in 2016 and the Peer Challenge offered an external review of changes that had been implemented since that time. The report highlighted that leaders knew the service well and what further work was required. Young people were positive about their workers and the service they received. An action plan to take forward the recommendations had been drawn up and was being worked through.

The Chair welcomed the honest report and some of the positive steps made. It was clarified that young people remain in care until they are 18 years of age if they are subject to a Court Order unless they apply to the Court for this decision to be revoked. Young people can choose to remain involved with the service until they are aged 25 and progress is tracked until they are 21 years of age. The young people can no longer be fostered at this age but "staying put placements" a different legal agreement, were being used in increasing numbers. Figures on those young people accessing further education, apprenticeships or gaining employment would be provided in the next update to the Committee. The creation of gradual apprenticeships was being explored for those who were not quite ready to move onto a more formal apprenticeships.

RESOLVED that:

1. The purpose of the peer challenge and the outcomes be noted; and

2. A report on progress against the actions identified in the action plan, including data on young people accessing further education, apprenticeships or gaining employment be brought back to the Committee in June 2019.

41.3 The Annual Report of Northumberland County Council Fostering Service 2017-18

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) provided an overview of the Fostering Service in 2017/18. In line with statutory guidance and regulation, all Fostering Services must provide a report on the outcomes of the service.

Liz Spaven, the Senior Manager, Specialist Services advised that the data showed there had been a slight reduction in foster carers and explained there were a number of reasons for this. Recruitment of foster carers continued, with good training provided. Support groups were well attended and continued training programmes were offered. The challenges in placing sibling groups was highlighted, however there were a number of long time placements which were continuing to work well. Councillor Daley acknowledged, celebrated and welcomed those people who chose to become foster carers and provide stability to the children in their care.

A suggestion was made that the recruitment and retention of foster carers could be an agenda item for the Local Area Councils as part of a media campaign to increase numbers. It was confirmed that targeted campaigns were undertaken in specific areas where there was a shortage of foster carers i.e. Hexham and Berwick and an outdoor campaign which would cross over the County's borders was scheduled for the new year. Foster caring was a vocation and those coming forward to be considered had generally thought very carefully and for a long time before doing so. Whilst the assessment process for becoming a foster carer was intensive and intrusive the outcomes were very rewarding.

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised that the team worked extremely hard to maintain sibling groups and that foster carers dealt with the most challenging children. Most children were placed with Northumberland foster carers rather than those who were employed through an agency.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and the Committee acknowledged the report and performance information for 2017-2018.

41.4 The Annual Report of Northumberland County Council Adoption Service 2017-2018

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix E**) provided an overview of the Adoption Service in 2017/18. In line with statutory guidance and regulation, all Adoption Services must provide a report on the outcomes of the service.

The Committee was advised that this would be the last time the Committee received this report in its current form due the creation of the Regional Adoption Agency which had gone live from 1 December 2018. The report provided a lot of statistical information however Members were reminded that behind each number was a child with a story. Councillor Daley in commending the report to the Committee recognised and thanked those people who adopted some of the most challenging of young people.

Some context was provided on the complexity of some cases to provide an understanding of some of the figures and the slippage which occurred. This was welcomed and it was recognised that the correct approach and outcome for each child was the crucial factor. In respect of inter-country adoptions it was clarified that the Local Authority must be made aware of children being brought into the country and ensure that all necessary safeguarding checks were undertaken.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and the Committee acknowledged the report and performance information for 2017-2018.

42. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Learning and Skills Service - Draft Self Assessment for 2017/2018

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**) provided an overview of the draft Learning and Skills Service (LSS) Self-Assessment Report for 2017/18. The report was an early indication of the service performance in the academic year 2017/18, and was subject to a second and final report based on the nationally validated data which would be released in early 2019.

The Director of Education and Skills introduced the detailed report advising that the service had an OFSTED inspection in June 2018 and had retained it's 'Good' status. He thanked and highlighted the outstanding leadership of the service by Caroline Tulett and her team. Following on from this the service had also been successful in maintaining its accreditation for the Matrix standard on Information, Advice and Guidance.

Councillor Daley echoed the comments regarding the leadership of the service advising that the service targeted and provided support in order to allow those accessing it the chance to transform their lives by providing them with the skills to do this.

The Committee welcomed the excellent report and In response to questions regarding below average achievements in GCSE Maths English and Science the Committee were reminded of the cohort of students which accessed the service and that vocational studies were often more appropriate. The service were also looking at the possible provision of more vocational study for excluded children with a split between vocational and school based study each week.

RESOLVED that the information in the report be noted.

43. REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Monitoring Report 2018/19

The Work Programme and Monitoring Report was attached as **Appendix F** to the signed minutes. Members were advised further items for inclusion in the work programme were a presentation on the SEND OFSTED inspection outcomes, a report on the OFSTED inspection at Haydon Bridge High School and a report on Opportunity North East as Northumberland had been identified as an area to receive support for schools.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORTS

44. 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 _____