

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 7 March 2019** at **10.00 am**

PRESENT

Councillor M Swinburn
(Vice-Chair in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Cessford T
Lang J
Stewart G

Stow K
Wallace R

TEACHER UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Lyst R
Payne S

Woolhouse R

OFFICERS

Hartwell A
Jackson D
Johnson A
Little L
McEvoy-Carr C

Senior Manager Performance: Education & Safeguarding
Service Director - Education and Skills
Project Director
Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

ALSO PRESENT

Press/Public: 2

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from D Campbell, W Daley, G Renner-Thompson, D Lennox, A Hodgson, J Sanderson and J Warner

62. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 11 February 2019, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

63. FORWARD PLAN

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

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

64. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

64.1 Finance and Performance Six Monthly Report

The report (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**) provided information on the performance and budgetary position for services within Education and Skills and Children's Social Care. Members were also directed to the Director of Education's Annual Report and Children's Social Care Annual Self Assessment Report both recently considered by this Committee for additional context. Members were advised that the figure of 76 against indicator 14 of Appendix A reflected the position at the same time last year and was not the full year figure.

The recruitment of experienced Social Workers remained a challenge and whilst the use of Agency staff had reduced significantly in the last three years they were still used to assist with heavy caseloads in teams and residential agency staff were also employed to cover holidays and sickness in children's homes and Kyo House. It was reported that the transfer of funds from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block had been an area of significant discussion at Schools' Forum with consideration of whether the transfer of funds was appropriate or not.

In respect of the reduced level of exclusions in the current year compared to that previously, it was reported that two intervention workers had been employed since September and early help intervention had been offered to the two highest excluding schools. The Exclusion Task and Finish Working Group would report back to Committee on their findings following input from a wide range of representatives. The level of exclusions had been recognised as a nationwide issue and was something that Ofsted also wished to address.

The shortage of special school places had been helped with the expansion of The Priory School in Hexham and The Dales school with its new Ashdale Centre in Ashington and a bid had been submitted for a Special Free School for older children. There was a need to develop in-house residential placements and to provide more therapeutic services within schools to replicate external models to reduce costs for expensive out of county placements.

RESOLVED that the current performance be noted.

64.2 Schools Resilience Programme in the west of Northumberland - update

The report (attached as **Appendix C** to the signed minutes) and introduced by the Project Director provided a detailed update on the progress being made in delivering a resilience advice programme in partnership with schools and academies across the west of Northumberland. Whilst the number of responses from schools had been a little disappointing to a recent questionnaire with no formal response from 16 out of 33 by the 28th February deadline, a number had been received since the submission of this report and the Committee were given a verbal summary as follows on key challenges being faced:-

- Corbridge Middle School - Pupil numbers were declining and whilst the school was projecting a financial surplus this was also predicted to decline over the next three years. The school was waiting for accurate information regarding funding to plan staffing levels with pupil numbers difficult to forecast as many pupils came from out of catchment. The school was considering joining a hard federation or MAT and would update the LA after further discussions.
- Allendale Primary School - Whilst the school expected to balance its budget efficiencies would have to be made potentially over the coming years which may impact on pupils and staff. Retaining pupils was difficult due to the situation at Haydon Bridge High School with parents stating their preferred option as Queen Elizabeth High School and either considering or had moved their children to Hexham schools. Costs of repairs and an antiquated heating system were also highlighted.
- Chollerton CE First School - There were only two teachers at the school with one of them due to retire. The difficulty of recruiting a suitable candidate with knowledge of managing mixed age classes was seen as a challenge but also an opportunity to work in collaboration with other church schools.
- Corbridge CE First School - Governor recruitment was highlighted as a challenge.
- Greenhaugh School - Ensuring good delivery of the years 5 and 6 curriculum and working with other schools to achieve the best outcomes for children. Securing good training and development opportunities for staff and how this could be funded. There was also an issue with the uncertainty of choices to be made by families for the future schooling of their children.
- Haltwhistle First Academy - The transition from First/Middle to Primary model and the quality and physical accommodation available for teaching was being explored.
- Haltwhistle Middle Academy - The potential closure of the Middle Academy and extension of the First Academy to Primary. Staffing continuity and consistency following several years of continual change.
- Haydon Bridge High School - Improving teaching and learning to improve outcomes and the removal of special measures. The balancing of the budget was being addressed through support from the Local Authority. Trying to increase the pupil roll.
- Humshaugh CE First School - Making the right decisions for the school about options for the future put forward so far.
- Kielder First School - The Headteacher teaching across Years 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

- Newbrough Primary School - The school was losing a high proportion of children in Year 4 (60% - 70% each year since becoming a primary) to the middle school in Hexham, as parents saw this as the natural route into Queen Elizabeth High School which was their preferred choice of school. These pupils also tended to be the more able learners with 50% of the school's children with SEND being in Years 5 and 6.
- Slaley First School - The Governing Body would continue to work with external agencies to ensure the current bespoke provision for SEND pupils could be secured over the longer term and therefore impact positively on the progress of these pupils; continue to further explore and share opportunities for financial savings across the partnership; continue to offer relevant professional development for staff through sharing expertise across the partnership and release the Headteacher to attend essential meetings that kept the school fully involved in partnership developments. The aim as a Governing Body was to ensure that Pupil numbers remained robust through providing 'Good' educational provision which served the local community (including accessible support for working families through extended provision: 7.30am - 6.00pm)
- Wark CE First School - Finding the right path through the options put forward by the LA and by the diocese. The school were exploring all the options available but had not come to any firm conclusion.
- Whitley Chapel CE First School - Succession planning would be an important of the School Improvement Planning for the next three years. They were also looking to strengthen partnerships with schools of similar size and character in order to share good practice and resources.

Whilst all schools had been contacted no direction could be given by the Local Authority for schools to become part of a hard federation or Multi Academy Trust (MAT) as this would be a decision for each Governing Body, with some seeming reluctant to do so. The Local Authority had always tried to work with MATs and had a good relationship with most. No decision had yet been made by the WISE trust in respect of the proposed closure of Haltwhistle Middle School and its conversion to Primary, although consultation has taken place. In respect of the Bellingham federation, children were transferring from the Primary at the end of Year 4 to start Year 5 in the Middle School as normal, therefore the new Primary cohort was an empty set at Year 5. The implications of this situation were being considered by the governors who had been asked to speak again to the LA to explain what the future strategy would be.

It was clarified that initial work was being undertaken with individuals and groups to see if it was feasible or necessary to establish a Northumberland MAT. This would not be a Northumberland County Council MAT, the Local Authority was only encouraging like-minded individuals and organisations to become involved. A meeting was being held the next day with potential members of a potential trust to ascertain if there was any support for the proposal. No schools were involved at the present time, but if the proposal were to progress then there would be a discussion and consultation with schools to see if there was any appetite amongst them to get involved.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The progress made so far in enabling schools and academies in the west of Northumberland to become more resilient and the support provided from the Local Authority be noted; and
2. Notwithstanding the progress made, it should be noted that some schools and academies in the west of Northumberland continued to need significant support to secure their sustainability in the long term.

65. 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 D** to the signed minutes.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

66. MEETING DATES FOR 2019/20

RESOLVED that the dates be noted.

INFORMATION REPORTS

67. 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 _____