

## **Family Friendly Sub-committee**

**Thursday, 11 January 2024**

**Present:** Councillor E Parker-Leonard (Chair)  
Councillors S Day, J Mudzingwa, M Murphy, P Oliver,  
B Pickard and J Wallace

**Apologies:** Councillors S Burtenshaw, I Grayson, V Jamieson,  
C Johnston and R O'Keefe

### **FF18 Appointment of Substitute Members**

There were no substitute members reported.

### **FF19 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Martin Murphy declared a registerable personal interest in Item 5, Home to School Transport, as his wife works for North Tyneside Council in an education role.

### **FF20 Minutes**

**RESOLVED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November be confirmed as a correct record.

### **FF21 Home to School Transport Consultation**

The Sub-Committee received a presentation on the current consultation which is taking place with regards to Home to School Transport.

The Sub-Committee were advised that currently the authority provides transport over and above statutory requirements and that this is not financially sustainable. On 27 November 2023, Cabinet approved that the Authority consults on a draft Home to School Transport Policy and Post 16 statement proposing that the Authority revert back to providing statutory provision only.

The Home to School Transport Policy has a pressure of £2.9m due to:

- High than expected number of children with complex needs, linked to the number with EHCPs
- Inflationary pressures on transport contracts
- Provision provided over and above statutory requirements

The team has a statutory duty to provide free travel assistance to eligible students, this does not include post 16, this does include;

- Nearly 1000 children and young people (C&YP)
- 900 C&YP are transported by way of taxi or minibus
- 100 C&YP are supported with Personal Travel Budgets
- In addition, 619 bus permits are provided, of which 252 are for denominational travel.

The team so far have reviewed the current level of provision versus the statutory requirements, they have compared provision across all other NE authorities. They have evaluated the possible savings, produced a draft revised policy, produced a draft revised annual statement. A report was taken to Cabinet on 27 November 2023 to request approval to consult on the proposals and an 8 week consultation process started on 14 December 2023.

The options which have been consulted on are:

- To cease denominational bus passes (exemptions apply)
- Review to statutory mileage limits for Alternative Provision and Special Schools
- Cease post 16 assistance
- Cease post 16 50% refund
- Review travel arrangements for part time timetables

Other considerations to take account of are a budget growth of £1.5m, look to increase the number of independent travel trainers, review options for schools to support with travel arrangements, offer bus permits to those students who can travel independently rather than taxi provision, work with families to increase Personal Transport Budgets and clarify the position with regards to parental preference.

The consultation on the proposed changes closes on 8 February 2024. A report will be taken to Cabinet in March 2024. Implementation of the changes will be from September 2025 and there will be protection in places for the current phase of education.

It was queried whether the changes for Post 16 included children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. It was noted that there would be exemptions in place and each case would be looked at on an individual basis.

It was questioned whether there was some unconscious bias in the suggested changes if someone post 16 were to chose a provider outside of North Tyneside then they may not get the assistance with travel. It was noted that there are bursaries available based on a national criteria.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED:** 1) to note the Draft Revised Home to School Transport Policy and the Draft Revised Annual Post 16 Transport Statement and 2) agreed to receive a further report on the outcome of the public consultation and to receive the final Home to School Transport Policy and Annual Post 16 Transport Statement when presented to Cabinet.

## **FF22 Childrens Services Safeguarding Update**

The Committee received a report to provide an update on the current position in relation to children open to children's social care over Quarter 1 and Quarter 2.

It was noted that Quarter 1 saw an increase in the number of referrals received month on month and reached 210 in June. There was a slight reduction in referrals in the middle part of Quart 2 to 142 in August, this is normal in school summer holidays, the numbers picked up again in September to 200. North Tyneside's rate of referrals per 10,000 in Quarter 2 is below the North East average at 523.4 per 10,000 and has reduced by 3.9% on 22/23 numbers.

The number of children on a child protection plan has remained consistently lower than in 2022/23. In Quarter 2 North Tyneside has the lowest rate of children on a child protection plan at 40.6 per 10,000 in region and there was a 20.9% reduction on the rate at the same time in 22/23. The main reasons for children becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan remain emotional abuse and

neglect.

A number of inspections and monitoring visits have taken place to our internal residential children's homes provisions in Quarter 1 and 2. Riverdale and Sycamore were both rated Good. Beech had a monitoring visit as a result of a previous inspection finding of "requires improvement" and was deemed to be making appropriate progress.

A key area for development continues to be the recruitment and retention of staff in key service areas in social care, primarily social workers, early help staff and residential workers. This is a regional and national challenge with all local authorities. Officers are working with the recruitment and communications teams to develop approaches to make us stand out from other authorities and are reviewing our current wellbeing offer to staff to ensure it continues to meet needs.

A range of management development support is being provided to managers across the service through a number of different ways recognising the important role that our first line managers play in ensuring the quality of practice with children and families.

Monitoring of the amount and types of homes needed for the children in our care is continuing. North Tyneside is also part of a Regional Fostering Pilot which has been developed as part of the 'Stable Homes Built on Love'. Work is also ongoing to review and develop our own internal group living accommodation. Positively our support accommodation provision for 16/17 year olds, Starting Point, is now registered with Ofsted.

North Tyneside have led on a DfE funded piece of work 'Childrens Voices' which has involved jointly working with Northumberland Professors Eileen Munro and Andrew Turnell to test out way in which practitioners can use different approaches to gathering childrens' voices and using feedback to inform their work.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** – that the information contained within the report be noted.

**FF23                   Ambition for Education Refresh 2024-2028**

The Sub-committee received a report and presentation on the proposals for the re-fresh of the Ambition for Education Strategy.

The strategy was first launched in March 2020. The dynamically changing needs both in the borough and nationally shaped the development and delivery of this strategy with Covid recovery. The refresh will allow for the refinement of approaches as we strive to improve outcomes for children and young people in North Tyneside.

The Sub-committee were advised that the changing landscape for education nationally has required a new approach for Local authorities to address local priorities with support and challenge from school improvement officers.

Education North Tyneside has changed its offer to schools working closely with Ofsted and the DfE to maximise opportunities for support and challenge. Officers have worked with settings and schools collaboratively to tackle the barriers to learning which were exacerbated by the pandemic.

The presentation highlighted the following areas which are working well:

- School improvement services have been refocussed to meet need and budget
- Attainment is above or in line with the national average
- Innovative approach to supporting Careers Education Information and Guidance
- Healthy Schools award, support for Mental Health in Schools and increasing levels of physical activity
- Support for school leaders
- Early years multi agency approach, targeting Language development, SEND and closing the disadvantaged gap

The following areas have been identified as needing some work:

- Challenge and support schools and settings to improve outcomes and close the attainment gap for different groups of children and young people
- Improve Post 16 pathways and the quality of Careers Education

Information and Guidance

- Improve the quality of Early childhood education and care and increase effective early intervention
- Inspire school leaders to raise standards via high quality professional engagements
- Tackle the health inequalities for children and young people in North Tyneside
- Address the national issues of Attendance and Inclusion

Five key priorities have been identified for the focus of the 2024-2028 refresh.

1. Early Childhood Education and Childcare
2. Achievement for All
3. Careers and Employability
4. Health and Wellbeing
5. Leadership and Retention

The Local Authority has delivered many significant achievements in recent years there remain many challenges that the Authority continues to be focused on. Alongside the changing need and demand, including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Authority's understanding on its challenges and what is important to children and young people have informed the priorities and actions set out in the strategy to meet those different needs and help all children and young people thrive.

Delivery against the priorities and objectives and data will be tracked and will allow us to evidence the outcomes achieved for children and young people in North Tyneside.

As well as this Sub-committee consultation has taken place with the Senior Management Team in Children and Young People, the Education Partnership Board and the Youth Forum.

It was queried whether there had been an impact in relation to speech and language due to children having a lack of exposure to their peers during the pandemic. It was noted that we do very well in this regard. It was also noted that

we do commission a language and communication team to work in schools.

It was queried whether the early years situation has improved or are we seeing more children coming into school setting in need of additional support. It was noted that there had been an improvement, however, the pandemic did set this work back but in April / May there will be the launch of the Early Years Inclusion Service, this will be for every child under 5 who may have any Special Educational Need and or Disability to be identified and make sure the right support is in place.

It was suggested that the 0-19 service be invited to update the Sub-Committee on the current position in the borough from the Health Visitors and School Nurses perspective including information how parents are supported who don't necessarily have skills and information on a programme which is being piloted to work with nursery children and their families on readiness for school.

The Sub-committee **RESOLVED** – 1) that the proposals for the refresh be noted and that consultation with young people is planned as part of the next steps to further shape and inform the priorities, 2) that the final version of the refreshed Plan will be submitted to Cabinet for approval in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules contained with the Authority's constitution.

## **FF24            Work Programme Update**

Following the discussion on the Ambition for Education the sub-committee requested that the receive a presentation from the 0-19 service on