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Family Friendly Sub-committee

Thursday, 6 July 2023

Present: Councillor E Parker-Leonard (Chair)
Councillors I Grayson, V Jamieson, C Johnston,
M Murphy, R O'Keefe, P Oliver, B Pickard and
J Wallace

In attendance:
Miss F Burton – Parent Governor Representative
Rev M Vine – Church Representative

Apologies: Councillors S Burtenshaw and S Day

FF1/23 Appointment of Substitute Members

There were no substitutions reported.

FF2/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations or dispensations reported.

FF3/23 Directorate Services and Strategic Priorities for 2023/24

The sub-committee received a presentation from the Director of Children's Services which set out an overview of the Children, Young People and Learning Directorate and the strategic priorities for 2023/24.

Members were informed that the directorate supports a number of families and children through children's social care. 678 families are supported through an Early Help Plan, ensuring that not just the needs of individual children but the whole family are met. Within children's social care there are 1,669 children who are supported as children in need. The directorate also supports over 6000 North Tyneside children and young people that have identified special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This includes 2,147 children with an Education,

Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 4,021 children with a special educational needs support plan.

The presentation set out a number of priorities for the directorate during 2023/24. These include:

- The recruitment and retention of staff – to improve timely recruitment to vacancies and to develop the support offer to help drive retention rates.
- Development of Family Hubs – to implement a system-wide model providing high-quality, whole family support services which will make a positive difference to parents, carers and their children.
- Care review – further understanding of the impact and implementation preparation of the national care review.
- Delivery of the SEND improvement plan – delivery of Safety Valve programme to achieve year 1 forecasted savings and to reach a positive in-year balance of the Dedicated Schools Grant account by the end of 2026-27 and in each subsequent year.
- Refresh of the children and young people plan and partnership priorities.
- Ambition for education – complete the education review to address secondary structural deficits and deliver the Working Together to Improve Attendance Guidance.

The sub-committee was made aware of a number of pressures and risks associated with the services provided in the Children, Young People and Learning Directorate. This included a significant increase in demand, complexity and needs of young people and families, driving up caseloads and associated costs. Recruitment and retention also continue to be significant issues across children's social services and SEND. Sufficiency in relation to children in care placements continues to be extremely challenging.

Members were informed of some developments and achievements that had been made in children's social services. This included:

- the registration with Ofsted of Oak and Maple, two new in-house children's homes, both now operational and fully refurbished.
- An extended Early Help offer with family health and wellbeing partners based in GP surgeries.
- The launch of Mocking Bird in the fostering service, with very positive and encouraging early feedback.

Developments and achievement in relation to education, inclusion and skills included:

- The establishment of a working group to develop an Attendance Strategy to address persistent school absence.
- The delivery of Ofsted preparation sessions to schools.
- Work underway on the expansion of Beacon Hill school, which will create an additional 35 places.

Members of the sub-committee asked questions about the service delivered and the priorities for the year ahead. In relation to the Attendance Strategy, members asked who had been involved in the drafting of the strategy. It was noted that representatives from education, health, social care and school support have been involved, along with Headteachers. The consultation had not been wider in terms of involving communities but this was something that could be considered once the strategy is launched, ahead of future refreshes. It was noted that school attendance has declined since the Covid 19 pandemic and that the Attendance Strategy, due to be in place in September 2023, will set out how various partners will work together to improve school attendance.

In relation to residential care homes, it was noted that there were 2 in the local authority area that had been inspected as requires improvement and it was asked what steps had been taken to ensure that improvements were made and sustained. It was explained that 1 of the homes was now rated good and that this had been turned around in 6 months. Work was ongoing to make improvements to the other home; the challenges related to staffing and recruitment.

It was **agreed** to note the information presented.

FF4/23 Work Programme 2023/24

The sub-committee received a report which set out a proposed approach to work planning for the Family Friendly Sub-committee for 2023-24, together with an initial information base which the sub-committee could utilise in considering and deciding on its outline work programme for 2023-24.

Members were informed that the Authority's scrutiny arrangements had recently

been evaluated and restructured, following an external review undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). The CfGS report was considered by the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee on 21st March 2023.

Following consideration of the report the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee proposed that the number and remit of scrutiny committees in North Tyneside should be restructured. A new structure was agreed by Annual Council on 18 May 2023. This was therefore the first meeting of the newly created Family Friendly Sub-committee.

In its review the CfGS made several 'good practice' suggestions around scrutiny work planning. These included:

- A clearer focus on democratic accountability of the Executive
- Involvement of all Committee members in work planning
- Sufficient flexibility
- Senior Officer Support
- 'Less' is more

The Chair of the Family Friendly Sub-committee had sought the views of Committee members, in addition to receiving information from the lead Senior Leadership Team Director and Cabinet members about potential policy areas. The terms of reference for the committee was appended to the report. It was emphasised that it was for the committee to determine its work programme. A list of work programme ideas was appended to the report and the Chair of the committee circulated a proposed work programme based on the dates of future meetings.

The sub-committee discussed a number of areas including:

- The role of the Corporate Parenting Committee, to which all Elected Members are invited to serve on. The membership of this was due to be refreshed soon. It was suggested that the sub-committee could receive an annual update from the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to Looked After Children;
- The development of information dashboards that could be shared with the sub-committee in relation to school attendance, exclusions and looked after children, to allow members to identify trends and any emerging issues;

- School attendance and educational attainment;
- Post pandemic wellbeing

Involvement in the development/refresh of the following plans and strategies was also suggested as a potential area of work for the sub-committee:

- Children and Young People Plan
- Attendance Strategy
- Sufficiency Strategy
- Employment and Skills Strategy
- Ambition for Education Strategy
- Youth Justice Plan
- Regional Pathfinder for Fostering Hubs
- Mental Health – Children and Young People

Post pandemic wellbeing and educational attainment was identified as a priority area and it was suggested, via the circulated draft work programme, that this could be the theme for an in-depth investigation. Councillors Oliver, Grayson, Pickard and Wallace and Rev M Vine volunteered to be part of a sub-group to undertake this work. It was acknowledged that some scoping work would need to take place in order to narrow down the subject area and set some objectives for the piece of work.

It was **agreed** to (1) note the information in the report (2) approve the draft work programme as circulated and (3) establish a sub-group in relation to post pandemic social wellbeing and educational attainment.

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