

# Meeting: Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

**Date:** 9 November 2020

**Title:** Scrutiny Update Report

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**Author:** Democratic Services

Tel: 0191 643 5318

**Service:** Law & Governance

**Wards affected:** All

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## 1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to provide an update to the work undertaken by the scrutiny sub-committees since the last report of the 5 August 2020.

## 2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to

- (1) note the work carried out by its sub-committees and
- (2) agree that going forward all sub-committees meet in line with Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee and Finance Sub-committee by holding its meetings virtually and live streamed to YouTube.

## 3. Details

Scrutiny has continued throughout the year although in different way than we are used to. It is hoped that this report will provide information to the work that has been undertaken by Members and officers with regards to the important role of scrutiny.

The Chair updated the situation, position and how scrutiny would be conducted during the period of Covid-19 at the meeting 5 August.

The meeting 9 November will be the third meeting Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee will formal virtually and live streamed to YouTube.

Finance Sub Committee is also a sub-committee that has held virtually and live streamed to YouTube and will hold its third meeting on the 17 November 2020.

All other sub-committees have continued to do their work by holding meetings informally and this report updates the work undertaken:

### **Adult social care, Health and wellbeing Sub-committee**

The Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee have met virtually on an informal basis via Teams on two occasions.

In July the Sub-committee received a comprehensive report from Council officers on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and plans for the recovery period. The report covered public health and infection control, support for vulnerable people, and Adult Social Care and support for the adult social care sector. The sub-committee will continue to receive updates on public health and adult social care on a regular basis.

The Sub-committee met on 1 October and received a presentation from the Chief Executive of Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust on the response to the pandemic, plans for recovery and information on admission numbers throughout the period.

The Sub-committee also received information from North Tyneside CCG on a contract with LIVI to provide additional GP resource to patients of North Tyneside surgeries via video consultations. Members had an opportunity to raise questions and concerns on behalf of residents directly with officers from the CCG.

### **Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee**

#### *1. An overview of the Council's role in supporting schools, returning to school strategy and plans for the immediate future and long-term future for education in North Tyneside*

In September 2020, the Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director, Children, Young People and Learning on the extent of Local Authority support available to schools in managing their response to COVID 19 and the plethora of government guidance. The Report examined the challenges faced by schools as they identified and tackled the impact of extended school closure on pupils' wellbeing and academic achievement.

On 23 March 2020, all schools were closed for educational purposes as a national response to controlling the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Schools were asked to remain open and offer childcare for the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils to support the national response to the virus. School Improvement Advisors created five daily activities and posted them on the service website. Activities covered each school phase from early years through to key stage 4. All schools in North Tyneside remained open throughout this period, with most staying open during holiday periods.

Throughout the spring and summer terms, Local Authority officers from Public Health, School Improvement, Health and Safety, and Human Resources delivered over 50 virtual briefings to school leaders offering extensive support and guidance to manage their response to COVID 19, and associated government guidance. A series of weekly meetings were organised for pastoral leaders and SENCO's to discuss emerging issues and to reflect on the impact of changes in guidance. School leaders, including governors, were signposted to wellbeing support, advice and guidance for themselves, their staff and their pupils. In the summer term, officers housed this advice in a new mental health and wellbeing one stop website. New Education Psychology training materials and teaching and learning resources for leaders and all staff were produced. Such materials focused on building resilient schools and mental and physical wellbeing following COVID-19.

On 1 June 2020, the government instructed schools to open more widely for pupils in Y1 and Y6, and to offer some face to face learning for pupils in Y10 and Y12. Health and safety teams offered to support schools individually to manage the risk assessment process in preparation for wider re-opening.

In addition, steering groups were established to work alongside school colleagues to create policy documentation, and written curriculum guidance for blended learning (a term which refers to the mix of distance learning with face to face learning).

The Local Authority Communications team had offered continuous support to schools throughout the period of school closure and wider re-opening in their messaging to parents and the community. They would continue to do so as schools fully re-opened.

The Director of Public Health had provided detailed advice to schools summarising the system of controls needed to reduce risks and create safer school environments and clear instructions in response to any reported infection in schools.

The Committee also considered information on the opening of schools at the beginning of September 2020, Managing local outbreaks of Covid, Blended Learning, Achievement, Reading, Careers advice and guidance, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Safeguarding and the Education Strategy – Ambition for Education

It was reported that ongoing discussion with schools had focused on supporting teachers to identify the gaps in pupils' learning as a result of lock down measures. Curriculum schemes produced by officers had been designed to help schools to identify gaps in pupils' learning. There would be a continued focus in the Autumn term visits where officers would discuss the impact on pupils' achievement and compare this to previous gaps in performance. This would form part of Ofsted's Assurance visits in the Autumn term.

It was noted that the Education Strategy - Ambition for Education would provide the strategic direction for Local Authority Officers. Priorities within this document would reflect the need to support schools manage their recovery from COVID 19 and support pupils to overcome any barriers to learning and a consultation would be undertaken with Headteachers on the Strategy.

The Committee thanked Officers and staff for all the work undertaken during the pandemic and acknowledged the extent of the challenges going forward.

## *2. Safeguarding Children and Young People in the Covid-19 Pandemic*

In September 2020, the Committee considered a report from the Senior Manager for Quality Assurance on the response of North Tyneside Council Children's Services Early Help and Social Care services to the need to work differently during the Covid-19 pandemic whilst maintaining the highest standards of safeguarding practice.

In the week immediately preceding the national decision to 'lock down' in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, North Tyneside Council Children's Social Care were subject to statutory Inspection by the national regulator, the Office for Standards in Education and Social Care (Ofsted). This Inspection concluded that services to help, care and protect children and young people in the Borough were 'Outstanding'. The Council was therefore in a very strong position to meet the considerable challenges posed to services by the pandemic.

Unlike a number of Council services, because of the statutory nature of Early Help and Social Care services to help, care and protect vulnerable children, almost all services have continued to be delivered throughout the pandemic. Huge efforts have been made by the whole staff group to continue their work whilst complying

with national guidance about the need to reduce the amount of direct face-to-face with children, parents and carers to protect both staff and service users from transmission of the disease.

The Council has continued to maintain services to children and young people requiring residential care and supported accommodation. Children's Home staff in particular should be credited for keeping children and young people safe and well-cared for despite the additional risks associated with Covid-19. Where staff members were unable to continue in their role due to shielding or specific vulnerabilities, other staff were identified to assist.

The only reduction in provision related to the Council's residential Short Break service. Rather than close the service a more targeted offer was adopted in which only children and young people with particularly high levels of need were afforded Short Breaks.

In North Tyneside, services were actually increased to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Care leavers. Contact increased to a minimum of fortnightly and, where required, specific support was given around ICT. The support of Care Leavers was identified as good practice by the national advocacy service, Coram Voice.

No Foster Carers have decided to end their care of children as a result of the pandemic. This evidenced the absolute commitment of the foster carers to children in care. Emergency placements have continued to have been made throughout the pandemic, with the safety of children as the paramount consideration.

Critical to safeguarding children and young people within the Borough was the continued effective operation of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the out-of-hours response provided by the Emergency Duty Team. The Council's robust Business Continuity Planning has met the challenge of the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. Timely, safe and proportionate decision-making and Social Work responses have continued throughout the pandemic and by so doing, the Local Authority did not see significant changes in its referral rates, as have many other Local Authorities. The Council worked particularly closely with schools following the lockdown, to ensure the right help, care and protection was available for vulnerable children when they were no longer accessing education. This close and effective working relationship directly resulted from the mature safeguarding partnerships within the Borough and the child-centred focus of professionals.

Staff within both the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Emergency Duty Team (EDT) should be particularly commended for their resilience and commitment. Even during the peak period of the pandemic, staff regularly visited children and young people within their homes to ensure their safety.

The Covid-19 pandemic has required new ways of working for Social Work and Early Help work with children, young people, parents and carers. Practitioners have adapted quickly and professionally to the need to reduce direct contact to where absolutely necessary by working a blend of socially distanced but still face-to-face meetings, social media messaging and virtual meetings. This has been a challenge but the strength of ICT provision across Children's Services including laptops, tablets and smart phones has meant that innovative practice have evolved rapidly, including Child Protection Conferences, Fostering and Adoption Panels and 'virtual assessments.' When it has been determined that a

safeguarding visit to a home was absolutely necessary, such a visit has taken place with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment available to the practitioner.

The Report also provided information on Nursery Provision, Family Time, the use of the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 and the Monitoring of the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Services

Members congratulated Officers and Staff on achieving an Outstanding Ofsted Inspection and thanked them for all the work undertaken during the pandemic in maintaining safe services.

### *3. Work Programme*

The Work Programme Items identified for 2020/2021:

- Support for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disability in the Covid-19 Pandemic to incorporate support for Children/Young People living at home and the process of transition for Children with Special Needs/Disabilities to Adult Services
- An Overview of Corporate Parenting in the Covid-19 Pandemic
- The impact on staff and support for staff as key workers during the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Work being undertaken to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation in the Covid -19 Pandemic
- Safeguarding Children and Young People in the Covid-19 Pandemic
- The Council's role in supporting schools in the Covid-19 Pandemic

### **Culture and Leisure Sub Committee**

1. Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee met informally via Teams on the 6 October 2020 - with an excellent participation of 11 Members. The business for discussion included reports and presentations covering:
  - An overview of the impact of the pandemic upon Cultural Services and the challenges for service recovery (jointly with sport & leisure below) – in line with government guidance as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cultural Services facilities closed for public use from the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020.
  - An overview of the impact of the pandemic upon Sport and Leisure Services and the challenges for service recovery (jointly with cultural services above) – in line with government guidance as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sport and Leisure facilities and activities closed for public use from the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020.
  - North Tyneside Draft Allotment Strategy 2020-2030: Members were invited to provide comments on the management and investment into the allotment service - the Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to allotment gardening and outlines our ambition and objectives for the allotment service in North Tyneside.
2. In terms of future meetings of the sub-committee – the Chair is considering potential dates for a meeting (formal/informal & live-streaming to be determined) in late November or early December 2020, for the consideration of the following items - i) Culture, Sport and Leisure Recovery update; and ii) North of Tyne Culture and Tourism programme.

## **Economic Prosperity Sub Committee**

In early September members of the sub-committee met with officers to receive a briefing on the “Our Economy” theme within the Council’s Covid-19 Recovery Plan and to formulate a work programme which would complement the plan. Members examined the challenges, the activities undertaken to date and the future plans in relation to the following areas contained within the “Our Economy” theme of the plan:

- Town Centres
- Business Support
- Employment & Skills
- Inclusive Economy Strategy
- Supply Chain
- Transport

In considering these areas of work members identified a range of potential topics for inclusion in its work programme, including:

- a) monitoring data and research to provide a picture of how the pandemic was affecting the economy in North Tyneside;
- c) the Council’s emerging Inclusive Economy Strategy;
- d) the transport theme of the recovery plan including the Council’s activities to re-allocate road space for use by pedestrians and cyclists and its impact on the local economy;
- e) the regeneration of the Swan Hunters site;
- f) the North Shields town centre draft masterplan;
- g) the potential restructuring of the commercial property market in view of social distancing and different ways of working.

Subsequently members met on 29 September to examine in more detail the transport theme of the Covid-19 Recovery Plan including:

- a) the Council’s activities to date to re-allocate road space for use by pedestrians and cyclists and its impact on the local economy;
- b) the proposed projects to be funded by Tranche 2 of the Emergency Active Travel Fund; and
- c) the impact of Covid-19 on public transport services.

Members considered the initial impact of the Coronavirus lockdown in terms of a substantial drop in daily motorised traffic flows, reductions in public transport patronage and increased cycling and walking activity.

New legislation had enabled the Council to introduce a pavement licencing system to permit hospitality businesses to operate with tables and chairs on adopted highways. Members examined how this had been implemented and how the diverse needs of different businesses had been considered.

The Council had received £427,000 from Tranche 1 of the Emergency Active Travel Fund to promote sustainable transport and social distancing. Consequently road space had been re-allocated for use by pedestrians and cyclists along the coast, the Fish Quay, North Shields and Park View, Whitley Bay and High Street

West, Wallsend. Members examined the rationale for temporarily re-allocating the southbound carriageway along the coast for cycles, how its use was being monitored and when its allocation would be reviewed. Members raised their concerns regarding the style and colour of the materials used to segregate the cycleway from vehicles and the measures taken to protect road users at the vehicular entrances to Cullercoats Harbour.

Tranche 2 funding was now being sought as part of a regional bid to promote sustainable transport and social distancing on public transport routes. A selection of schemes had been identified which aimed to enhance connections between existing cycling and walking routes. Members scrutinised the selection criteria which was based on an analysis of commuting patterns and distances, car ownership rates and the impact of Covid restrictions on public transport capacity.

Members considered the longer term challenges associated with the changes in travelling patterns, including the financial challenges for transport operators and local authorities if patronage was not restored and the importance of national and international connections to the region's recovery.

The charging Clean Air Zone scheme covering Newcastle city centre, affecting buses, coaches, HGVs, vans and taxis that do not meet minimum emissions standards would continue to be implemented in 2021. Members heard how bus and taxi operators in the borough had been supported to ensure their vehicles were compliant with the standards.

### **Housing Sub Committee**

In July the sub-committee met with housing officers to receive a briefing on the initial response from the Housing Service to the Covid-19 pandemic, the stages of recovery, the current position and the impact on specific areas of the service. Members were informed of the level of repairs and gas safety checks that were completed during lockdown and new working practices adopted that focussed on tenant and staff safety. Discussions were held around the work undertaken to identify rough sleepers and securing accommodation.

At future meetings the Housing Sub-committee will look to hold more detailed discussions with officers around homelessness and the provision for future support. Members will also look closely at the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Housing Service and the support that has been offered to tenants.

The Housing Sub-committee will also continue its role in looking at issues related to crime and disorder.

## **4 Moving Forward**

It was agreed in early summer that meetings of the sub-committee would continue to meet informally to allow officers and Members to acclimatise to the new environment of remote virtual meetings.

It can be demonstrated by the work undertaken that Members and officers rose to the challenging situation and successfully carried out their scrutiny responsibility.

With the successful adjustment to the way meetings have been conducted it is recommended that all sub-committees be conducted in line with Overview,

Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee and Finance Sub-committee and hold meetings virtually and live streamed to YouTube.

**4. Background Information**

N/A.