

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 19 March 2018

PRESENT: Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)
Councillor(s): M Hall, L Caffrey, B Clelland, S Craig,
A Geddes, L Kirton, K McCartney, E McMaster, R Mullen,
S Ronchetti, D Bradford, P Craig and N Weatherley

CO-OPTED MEMBERS Cheryl Lain

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor(s): G Haley

F43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor McHugh, Sasha Ban and Jill Burrell.

F44 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

F45 UPDATE ON HEALTHY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

The Committee received an update report on the work of the Healthy Schools Programme during the 2016/17 academic year.

It was reported that since September 2016 the programme has operated as a traded service and schools could choose whether or not to buy into the programme. In terms of engagement, 41 schools actively engaged with the healthy school programme and 43 chose not to engage. It was acknowledged that the decrease in participation is due to the programme no longer being fully funded. Other factors resulting in non-participation were also identified including; cost, no healthy schools co-ordinator in place, lack of time to devote to the programme and unsupportive leadership with pressures from other areas.

Each school that participated in the programme was offered up to five visits from the healthy schools co-ordinator during the year. The visits included initial consultation, action planning and supportive, moderation, quality assurance visits. As part of action planning schools had to identify their health priority, the JSNA, Child Health Profile and Health survey were used as a focus for schools. In 2016/17 the majority of participating schools chose to focus on healthy weight, a small number of schools

focused on emotional health and wellbeing. During 2016/17 19 schools receive healthy schools certificates.

It was reported that the current healthy schools programme is provided by a private company, Edutainment. However, from September 2018 schools can also choose to sign up to the offer from the Schools Sports Partnership in the services to schools brochure.

It was questioned whether there are alternative programmes available to schools. It was noted that there are, however, these would not receive the support of co-ordinators. It was confirmed that the price for the programme for primary schools is £500 and £750 for secondary schools.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the content of the report.

F46 ANNUAL CONVERSATION WITH HEAD TEACHERS OF SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Committee received a presentation from Michelle Richards, Executive Headteacher as Eslington Primary School and Furrowfield School.

Eslington Primary School provides support for children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, aged 5-11. The school operates over two sittings and has 64 pupils, the school has the capacity for 68 pupils including two permanent excluded emergency places. Furrowfield School has 73 pupils aged 11-16 with SEMH needs, the school is currently two over capacity. The school also has a residential unit with 14 beds for pupils who require 24 hour care and education.

It was noted that pupils with SEMH difficulties often have extremely challenging behaviour. In addition, approximately 98% of pupils have additional needs as well as SEMH, such as; ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ASD, ODD, Muscular Dystrophy, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. A lot of pupils have very complex mental health issues.

Across both schools there are 25 Looked After Children, four pupils adopted from care, 10 pupils on the Child Protection register and seven children in need. Early intervention work is ongoing with 20 pupils. At Eslington school, 43% of pupils are in receipt of free school meals and 41% at Furrowfield. Therefore the schools are dealing with the most deprived, challenging pupils. It was noted that many of the pupils who leave the school return to this specialist provision because their needs are not being met at mainstream schools.

The challenges faced by the schools and its pupils were identified, including the cuts to funding streams with vulnerable pupils in the North East being hit the hardest and access to support services becoming increasingly difficult. Levels of classroom support have been cut due to budget cuts, as well as the change to Universal Credit affecting families of pupils attending the school. There are also difficulties around accessing health services, in particular mental health services, for pupils and parents. The schools are also facing challenges in terms of social problems such as drugs, legal highs, alcohol abuse, smoking which affects pupils coming into school,

particularly Key Stage 4 pupils. Domestic violence and family breakdowns is also negatively impacting on pupils, it was reported that two pupils have slept rough recently due to a family breakdown and running from care. It was acknowledged that, despite the challenges, the schools are meeting targets and results while managing behaviour. Four Ofsted inspections have been carried out over the last year, Furrowfield was judged good and Eslington was outstanding.

In terms of successes it was reported that 44% of pupils attained age related expectations at the end of KS2, 100% of pupils who have the cognitive ability to attain made expected or exceeded levels of progress. Five pupils out of 13 attained at least one grade C or above GCSE, and 10 of the pupils out of 13 are in education, training or employment. It was also noted that three pupils made the successful transition into secondary mainstream schools in year 7. Committee was advised of one young person who lived at the residential provision due to his mother being a heroin addict, he was allowed home at weekends and, due to the positive progress made in all areas, his support was reduced from Child Protection to Child in Need. It was also reported that the school is the only special school to receive the Rights Respecting School Award.

Expertise are being shared across the region as well as outside the region in Lincolnshire, in order to raise funds. Discussions are also ongoing with Special Headteachers around mental health strategies and programmes for staff and pupils. It was noted that at Furrowfield a full time psychotherapist has been appointed to offer intense therapeutic work, there is also a licensed life coach who the school is selling out to other schools, the school is starting to promote a multi-agency team to promote mental health.

The point was made that previously Furrowfield focused on the discipline of its pupils but is now focused more on the education of the pupils, it was felt that this should be encouraged. It was acknowledged that if there is one protective factor in a child's life, for example their home life, the school and the child can succeed.

It was questioned whether there is a waiting list for the schools. It was confirmed that there continues to be demand for SEMH places and more provision is needed. The size of Eslington school has doubled over two sites, however, to increase numbers further would require a further site. It was also noted that a Child Protection Social Worker lead is needed in order to complete the multi-agency approach. Progress of each child is tracked through Connexions and links post 16.

It was queried how many permanently excluded pupils are transferred to Eslington and Furrowfield. It was confirmed that two permanent excluded places are held for pupils with no Education, Health, Care Plan (EHCP). The Behaviour Team are liaised with so the school knows what to expect. It was questioned what happens to those pupils who do not have anywhere to go. It was acknowledged that the High Needs budget is overspent and more young people are not fitting into mainstream schools, therefore mainstream schools are being encouraged to deal with these challenging pupils within their own provision. It was also confirmed that there are not many pupils with EHCP's in the Pupil Referral Unit as if they had a plan base on mental health needs they should be in Furrowfield not the PRU.

The re-inclusion rate was queried and it was confirmed that the number of pupils moving into mainstream school is low and is not necessarily used as a measure of success. It was noted that the schools still deliver mainstream education whilst addressing SEMH needs.

It was questioned who funds residential places. It was confirmed that these places are funded by the Council, per child money is based on where the child is funded, £10,000 plus top up funding. Residential place get more on top and although this is expensive it avoids the need for a child to go into care which would cost more if the provision was not there.

RESOLVED - That the Committee considered the successes of provision for SEMH pupils in the borough and current challenges to maintain high quality provision.

F47 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS - UPDATE

The Committee received a report on the recruitment and retention of Social Workers. Committee was reminded that in April 2017 16 Social Workers were lost to a neighbouring local authority, since then recruitment has been difficult and there has been a struggle to appoint experienced Social Workers. One neighbouring authority offered salary enhancement which Gateshead could not match. In order to resolve the issue Cabinet approved a recruitment and retention package for Children and Families Social Work, this came into force in May 2017 and will be reviewed in May 2018.

It was noted that the policy outlined six outcomes to mitigate the difficulties in retention and recruitment. The policy so far has achieved a reduction of 62.5% in the number of Social Workers leaving. Of the 29 vacancies over the last year, 21 were filled by people from outside the authority, all appointments were of a good quality.

It was reported however that Safeguarding and Care Planning social workers are leaving to go to other teams and services within the Council due to the nature of the work.

Specialist training programmes continue to be developed which can offers career paths and makes Gateshead an attractive place to work.

Caseloads were previously an issue, currently there is an average of 18.6 cases per social worker across all the service. There is no nationally agreed figure in terms of acceptable caseload.

It was noted that the overall package has enabled retention and accreditation as well as a succession plan.

It was questioned whether agency staff are still used. It was confirmed that agency staff are used to cover maternity leave etc, this covers any risk and ensures continued manageable caseloads.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) Committee agreed to continue to champion the work undertaken by the Council's Children's Social Workers.
 - (ii) That Committee noted the content of the report.
 - (iii) That Committee agreed to receive regular reports from the Children's Principal Social Worker regarding the progress of work against the six outcomes articulated in the report.

F48 PERMANENT EXCLUSION 14 POINT ACTION PLAN

The Committee received a report on the position with regards to permanent exclusions in Gateshead. A conference was held with a multi-agency group of professionals to look at how to tackle the number of permanent exclusions. It was noted that there has recently been a 15% drop in exclusions.

Following the conference an action plan was formulated, this was provided to the Committee. In accordance with the plan, a 'Team Around the School' has been established at Whickham School as a pilot. A group of professionals will meet on a monthly basis, this involves public health, education and early help to progress the model. The action plan also outlines plans to strengthen the links between school and GP Practices using GP leads in child health.

It was noted that the provision at Ravensworth Terrace has been completed and so far seems very positive. A number of permanently excluded pupils who are attending this provision are thriving.

It was reported that there are a number of actions underway outside of the plan, for example two new psychologists have been appointed and primary schools have requested further behaviour work. The multi-agency group continues to meet on a regular basis and early signs show a decrease in permanent exclusions and the group will continue to closely monitor the situation.

It was questioned whether all secondary schools are buying into the action plan. It was confirmed that all schools are buying in but that it is early days, in terms of primary schools permanent exclusions are rare and there is a decline in secondary school exclusions. Therefore it is hoped that this direction of travel continues, however a lot of points in the action plan are long term aspirations.

It was queried why exclusion figures vary so much across all schools. It was acknowledged that some schools would suggest that this is down to the intake.

It was questioned what the figures are for those pupils taken on by another school under a managed move. It was confirmed that all schools are part of the Fair Access Protocol with all schools taking their turn as many Headteachers would not look on a school favourably if it did not take its fair share.

It was queried whether there is a mechanism in place to support parents before the make the decision to home educate. It was confirmed that there is an officer in post who supports families in making such a decision.

The point was made that there is a culture of zero tolerance to bad behaviour which stems from the inspectorate, however once this changes it will start to make a difference to the number of pupils being permanently excluded.

It was agreed that this issue would be come back to Committee in the future.

RESOLVED - That Committee noted the report and agreed to receive a further report in the future.

F49 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the work programme for the municipal year 2017/18, which is a standing item on the agenda.

RESOLVED -

- (i) That the work programme be noted.
- (ii) That further reports on the work programme will be brought to the Committee to identify any additional policy issues, which the Committee may be asked to consider.