

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 28 March 2019 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor C Potts (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors H Smith, B Bainbridge, D Bell, P Brookes, J Charlton, J Considine, S Durham, C Hampson, K Hopper, I Jewell, L Kennedy, L Mavin, A Patterson, A Willis and M Wilson

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Simmons, Mr R Patel (Parent Governor Rep) and Mrs C Craig (Faith Rep)

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Crute and Simmons, and Mrs Craig, Ms Evans, Mrs Parkins and Mr Patel.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the Meeting held on 28 February 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that some of the Members were given a tour of the Durham Learning Resource following the meeting where they were given an introduction to the work and purpose of the centre. They encouraged schools and governors to use the venue for meetings and extended the invitation for Members to visit. The Chairman advised that it was a fantastic facility and encouraged Members who were also governors to give feedback to their schools.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from co-opted Members or interested parties.

6 Media Relations

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented Members with recent press articles relating to the remit of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

- Autism Accreditation for Villa Real in Consett
- Heads warn of £5.7bn school funding gap

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

7 Neglect in County Durham

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided an update on Neglect in County Durham and a presentation by the Strategic Manager for the One Point and Think Family Service (for copies see file of minutes).

The Committee received a presentation which highlighted the definition of neglect, the causes, the impact of neglect on children, the link between neglect and poverty, the neglect of older children and lessons learned from the JTAI and progress of actions by the LSCB Neglect sub-group.

The Chairman commented on the high number of cases in Durham which were categorised under neglect and it was established that although the figure for Durham was higher compared to the North East and Nationally, there were questions with regards to the way information was recorded and when combining all categories, the overall figure was similar. Durham had a low emotional harm figure.

Councillor Considine confirmed that as a member of the Fostering Panel, she had undertaken a very informative 1-hour training course with regards to Signs of Safety and suggested that it would be beneficial for Members to participate and especially those of whom were school governors.

Councillor Brookes said that the increase in abuse could not solely be put down to social economics and he suspected the prevalence of neglect had rocketed as services made improvements to the identification process and it was reassuring because it showed staff training was working, however he asked for further information on the way that data was recorded. The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager confirmed that socio-economics had been stable over a number of years, however changes over the past few years there had been changes in employment and welfare reform and the creation of a 'working poor'. Although a small number, people on benefits, with low incomes and essentially little money, were more prone to having children who suffered from neglect.

The Strategic Manager - OP/Think Family Services added that there was a question over how the government defined poverty, as it was no longer unemployed families who were suffering, but working families were under pressure due to increased childcare costs and fuel and rent increases.

With regards to identifying the signs of neglect, the Strategic Manager - OP/Think Family Services confirmed that schools were excellent at identifying signs of neglect and they were not afraid to make referrals if they had concerns about children.

Councillor Kennedy referred to the figures given on the number of children on the rate of neglect by deprived areas and queried whether more area-specific information could be provided. The Strategic Manager - OP/Think Family Services confirmed that a cluster map could be provided, to demonstrate hotspot areas in the County.

Councillor Kennedy confirmed that there were positive relationships between the VCS, schools and One Point in her area and the community centre often provided free food and activities for children who were identified as being in need.

Councillor Bainbridge asked how many people were on the vulnerable parent pathway and the Strategic Manager - OP/Think Family Services confirmed that there were between 2500 families at any one time working with One Point but she couldn't confirm the proportion of those whom were categorised as neglect, although it was high. Within Families First there were between 1000-1500 and they included children in need, those with a child protection plan and those undergoing safeguarding proceedings.

Councillor Jewell asked how confident Children and Young People's Services were that they were picking everyone up and whether services had a proactive or reactive approach. The Strategic Manager - OP/Think Family Services confirmed that she was confident that the approach was more proactive than in the past, the Home Environment Assessment Tool which was undertaken by Midwives and Health Visitors during pregnancy and shortly after birth was able to highlight concerns very early on and schools were also playing a huge role in addressing

concerns. She could never say that every child was picked up as there were still those late night Police referrals, however they were much less common.

Councillor Charlton queried the ability of secondary schools in identifying and referring neglect as children were less open the older they got. The Strategic Manager - OP/Think Family Services confirmed that as children got older, they were identified by risk taking and anti-social behaviour, and mental health issues.

Councillor Kennedy confirmed that she knew from experience working in secondary school that separate pastoral teams would work with children and families, and if they did not attend meetings, a referral to One Point would be made and information would be passed on.

The Operations Manager, First Contact, also added that it was difficult to identify signs and symptoms of neglect in teens as much of the behaviour displayed mimicked normal adolescent behaviour.

Councillor Hopper queried whether adequate measures were in place to monitor the frequent movement of families' from one local authority to another and the Strategic Manger - OP/Think Family Services, confirmed that there were procedures in place and a recent case which had been managed successfully.

Councillor Patterson confirmed that there was a worrying increase with regards to neglect and the National funding formula did not take into account the additional burden on schools to deal with it. She suggested that there was a lack of hard evidence which demonstrated the link between Children and Young People's Services and Public Health and suggested a fact find review may need to take place as children needed better outcomes. The Strategic Manager - OP/Think Family Services, confirmed that the figures were being scrutinised to ensure problem areas were being targeted.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Pre-Birth Intervention Service

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided an update on the work undertaken by the Pre-birth Intervention team to improve pre-birth work across children's services and a presentation was received from the Strategic Manager, Families First North (for copies see file of minutes).

The Committee received a presentation which highlighted the danger of neglect, the affect and the cycle of parents who had children removed into the care system, more likely to have emotional, environmental and mental health difficulties as adults

and therefore were more at risk of having vulnerable children. It highlighted the benefits of a pre-birth intervention service, the service delivery and numbers of referrals, including a number of case studies from pregnancy to birth.

Councillor Brookes queried the proportion of parents who were successful in legally challenging care proceedings and also whether the Council had to take legal control of children who had been placed with parents or relatives. The Strategic Manager, Families First North, confirmed that there was a legal framework but the pre-birth service would expect that unless there was a clear indication that the baby would be able to remain in the care of the parents, that pre-proceedings would take place. Parents were able to receive legal aid and consideration was given very early in the pregnancy which enabled legal advice to be sought and this ensured there was a very clear plan in place when a baby was born. There was an opportunity to use Legal Orders however it was not felt necessary as there was nothing to be gained from such. The relationship in Durham between families' and professionals in the pre-birth service tended to be strong enough for engagement to take place and orders were therefore only necessary and should only be used as a last resort should a child be unable to remain with the family.

Councillor Hopper queried how vulnerable adults who had already had children removed, were supported in making more positive choices in future. The Strategic Manager, Families First North, confirmed that parents were encouraged to engage with multi-agency professionals on a range of issues that may have led to them being unable to care for their children.

Councillor Smith confirmed that there had been some positive changes over the years and as a retired paediatrician she had experienced occasions when the first intervention with vulnerable families were when women were admitted to hospital labour wards. The Strategic Manager, Families First North, confirmed that work from the pre-birth service would be passed to the families first teams if the relevant criteria was demonstrated.

Councillor Kennedy referred to the Pause group which worked with women to prevent repeated pregnancies which would result in children being removed from care. The Strategic Manager, Families First North, confirmed that to be eligible for the programme women had to commit to an 18 month plan which included long-term contraception, but the idea was to work towards a more positive future and make more positive choices.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

9 Supporting Solutions Service

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which outlined the activity and development of the Supporting Solutions Service (SSS) from April – December 2018 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager, Families First North, confirmed that an area which need action was staff foster care, after only one out of six approved foster carers had been retained.

Councillor Kennedy congratulated the team on the success of the 'nest' and asked whether there was any data to link children from certain areas as being more likely to use it. The Strategic Manager, Families First North, confirmed that data had not yet been mapped, but this would be something that could be provided in future.

Councillor Charlton was disappointed at the suggestion in the report that CAHMS had not been more closely involved in the multi-agency steering group and the Strategic Manager, Families First North, confirmed that there was a meeting with senior managers to look at fostering a closer working relationship.

Councillor Brookes confirmed that the SSS was an excellent facility but queried why there was only one bed at the nest and whether families' which had more than one child would be turned away or split up. The Operations Manager, First Contact, confirmed that there was also a staff bed which would always be given up for a young person, however they did not want to encourage it becoming a place for multiple beds due to the emotive nature of use is for. It was also to be used for very short periods, with the view of returning to the family home and to avoid entering the care system.

The Strategic Manager, Families First North, confirmed that it was also registered with Ofsted as the team wanted to ensure it met the relevant standards of an emergency children's home and should Ofsted advise that it did not require registration, it would still be managed to Ofsted standard framework.

In response to a question from Councillor Kennedy the Operations Manager, First Contact, confirmed that this was a one bedroom crash pad as it was only to be used for one night only. It was intended for very specialist care for children in crisis and due to the intensity of the care required, it would not be appropriate to have more than one bed.

In response to a question from Councillor Jewell, the Operations Manager, First Contact, confirmed that intelligence would be shared with the police if a child was suspected of being involved in child sexual exploitation or crime, however the crash pad was used in the context of living arrangements and would be used when relationships at home had become untenable and the police had usually been called to remove the young person. Intervention would assist in the child returning home the next day with a plan and would include services to support the family. Councillor Jewell asked whether the young people tended to know each other and

the Operations Manager, First Contact, confirmed that it was possible due to the fact that usually young people displaying risk taking behaviour would be drawn to one another having experienced similar life experiences. Risk-taking behaviour was found to manifest in young people who had suffered from trauma and this was something to bear in mind when young people were a handful in and out of school.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

10 Quarter 3: Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2018/19

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services, which provided details of the updated forecast outturn for Children and Young People's Services, highlighting any major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position to the end of quarter 3 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Durham referred to the overspend in the LAC service and asked for a breakdown on externally placed children so that Members could monitor any ongoing themes considering this accounted for a large proportion of the budget. The Finance Manager, CYPS, confirmed that further information could be provided and he would formulate how this could be presented to Members for the next quarter.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

11 Quarter Three 2018/19 Performance Management Report

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented the progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council's Corporate Performance Framework for the Altogether Better for Children and Young People priority theme (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

12 Refresh of the Work Programme

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships provided the opportunity to review and refresh the work programme for 2019/20 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Joint CYPS and S&S OSC - Residential Children's Homes Working Group would be attend a final meeting to be presented with the key findings and agree recommendations which would be presented to the Committee in July.

Members were asked to express interest in contributing to the review group for Elective Home Education, which would commence shortly.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.