

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 **Friday 7 February 2020 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor H Smith (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Bainbridge, A Batey, D Bell, B Coult, R Crute, D Hall, C Hampson, I Jewell, L Kennedy, L Mavin, M Simmons, M Wilson and J Turnbull (substitute for K Hopper)

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Potts, P Atkinson, J Blakey, J Charlton, Ms R Evans and Mrs P Parkins

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Potts.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor J Turnbull substituted for Councillor K Hopper.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

5 Children's Social Care response to ILACS inspection

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services and a presentation from C Ring, Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice (for copies see file of minutes) which

provided an overview of the activity and strategic planning that had been undertaken since the ILACS inspection of Children and Young Peoples Services in October 2019.

Members were advised that Ofsted had informed the service that there were areas of good practice and there were firm foundations in place to drive improvement but there were also inconsistencies.

The Committee learned there were two strategic priorities of improving the quality and consistency of care planning and reflective discussions that are targeted at improving outcomes for children and making a difference to them.

Members learned that the service was committed to encouraging the participation and engagement of children and young people and had recently appointed a member of staff to ensure this remained a priority and that the voice of children and young people was heard throughout all CYPs work.

Councillor Jewell described the judgement as disappointing and asked if the Management Team were expecting it. The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that Ofsted had visited in January 2019 and several issues had been highlighted as needing a quick response. The visit nine months later had shown that significant progress had been made, however there was more to do to receive a good judgement overall although the services for Children looked after and care leavers was good, but she was confident that they would for the next inspection.

The Head of Children's Social Care added that the framework is wide ranging and within each area of the framework there are a large number of indicators that are assessed to inform the overall judgement meaning that there can be a significant number of strengths within an area but the judgement still requires improvement.

Verbal feedback from inspectors had confirmed that those areas were sitting at the top end of the requires improvement judgment. There would be focused visits before the next Ofsted inspection in three years. Ofsted had changed their approach in that they had more regular contact and worked alongside to offer constructive feedback to support improvement.

Councillor Crute asked if there would be a particular area in focus at the next inspection, and whether there was a particular function which required improvement. The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that the focused visits between now and the next full inspection would be over two days and Ofsted chose an area of the service to carry out a shorter assessment. They had access to a lot of intelligence and data which may lead them to focus on specific areas of practice, but no assumptions could be made on which of the themes they would choose.

There was evidence of good practice in all parts of the service, but consistency was needed to ensure that each individual child was receiving the best outcome possible.

In response to a question from Councillor Kennedy, the Strategic Manager confirmed that Ofsted were focused on the quality of social work practice and one of the things that was most important was whether Social Workers could demonstrate that what they were doing was making a difference and changing the lives of children.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

6 Signs of Safety Implementation

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services and received a presentation from C Ring, Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice (for copies see file of minutes) which provided a summary of the progress made in the first year of the implementation of the Signs of Safety Practice Framework in Durham.

In addition to the key milestones outlined in the presentation, the Strategic Manager confirmed that another 5-day training course had been commissioned to deliver training to 60 practitioners and another 2-day Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) training course for 25 partners which would take place the following week. He also updated the figures to confirm that the 1-year Conference had been attended by 130 staff and partners. A regional judiciary briefing had taken place in July 2019 and it was hoped that a whole system event would lead to a national conference in the future.

In response to a question from Councillor Bainbridge, the Strategic Manager confirmed that Signs of Safety had made it possible for a child to be kept with her mother, through safety planning with 15 family members and that was due to the social worker finding out how many people were in the family network.

Councillor Jewell said the number of staff who had undertaken the training was remarkable and queried how it was being received and whether staff were buying in to it. The Strategic Manager confirmed that he was pleasantly surprised by the response and positivity. One of the barriers to overcome was that as with anything new, people assumed it was going to take time but this was something that only required a different approach. The Head of Children's Social Care added that this could not be implemented superficially, it needed depth and integrity – some staff had worked in their role for over 20 years and implementing a new practice was challenging, but it would be phased over 2-3 years.

In response to a question from Councillor Hall on whether the new practice would see any changes to the figures for Children in Care and Looked After Children, the Strategic Manager confirmed that the long term vision would be that risk is managed differently and the number of children in care would reduce.

The Chair noted the emphasis was moving away from talking about risk and was a benefit to children and families, but she queried whether staff would have more job satisfaction with a more positive approach and whether it could also have a positive impact on retention rates. The Head of Children's Social Care agreed it was more rewarding, and other critical issues for social worker retention rates included quality support from Managers, excellent caseload management and terms and conditions of employment.

In response to a question from Councillor Hall about partnership working and information sharing, the Strategic Manager confirmed that a challenge was making sure Social Workers were aware of, and able help families navigate through services. The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that DSCP and the Troubled Families Programme were key parts of the partnership structure and there had always been a focus to ensure a robust early help offer, in addition to building a preventative service to ensure issues did not escalate for children and families.

Councillor Kennedy commented on the success of One Point and the Head of Children's Care confirmed it was operated jointly with early help and Signs of Safety.

Resolved

That the report and presentation be noted and an update to be provided in 12 months.

7 Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services and received a presentation from C Ring, Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice (for copies see file of minutes) which provided an overview of the Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework.

Members were informed that the quality assurance framework was an integrated performance management framework, providing the quantitative information and audit framework providing the qualitative information.

The Committee heard that implementation of Liquidlogic had led to 'transformational' changes to the performance management framework and provided real time results to assist with audits.

Councillor Jewell advised that the QA framework came across as an audit driven model and the Strategic Manager confirmed that there was a whole system approach which included the flexibility to include other areas as well as audits and data.

Councillor Kennedy asked if the new way of recording data made it easier to collate data and carry out audits and the Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that Liquid Logic improved case management, however the audit was an activity which took place on an individual child's case file. It had improved and streamlined the process because prior to the new system, the case notes would have been stored on a Microsoft Word document. The Strategic Manager added the new system prompted practitioners to ask a series of questions and therefore was linked into Signs of Safety and Quality Assurance.

Councillor Hall referred to proportionate data and whether a higher number of audited cases gave a more accurate breakdown of information and asked if the numbers were given significant weight or whether they were used as an early warning system. The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that 5/6 years prior there was a larger number of cases audited, but the previous system did not provide a breakdown of the quality of practice required. A balance was needed between the quantity of audits and the quality and learning from them.

Resolved

That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Pre-Birth Service Update

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services and received a presentation from J Tyler, Strategic Manager, Children and Families South and East (for copies see file of minutes) which provided update on the work which was being undertaken within the Pre-birth Intervention Team.

The Strategic Manager confirmed that since the team had been re-established in May 2018, 9 children had returned home to live with their parents on CP/CIN plan without legal intervention, 10 children had a plan of adoption and had been made subject to Placement Orders, 8 children had been securely placed with family or friends via Special Guardianship Orders, 2 children had been adopted having been placed in foster to adopt placement, 1 child was in a foster to adopt placement and 11 children had been removed from parental care at birth and placed with possible long-term carers within 2 months of their birth.

In response to a question from Councillor Kennedy with regards to the transfer of information to other authorities when families moved out of area, the Strategic Manager confirmed that information was shared without delay.

Councillor Hall queried the trigger for referrals and queried whether all children were being identified. The Strategic Manager confirmed that the Midwifery Service would make the referral to First Contact following the mother booking in. The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that the midwife would know from medical records if a mother had given birth to a child before and would ask a series of questions to identify where the child lived. The programme was approximately 20 weeks so as long as the mother was seen by week 20 of her pregnancy, the team would be able to offer full support. The unborn child would be referred to the relevant Families First team if the pregnancy was beyond 20 weeks.

Councillor Hall queried care proceedings around children who were at risk and the Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that care proceedings could not be instigated until a child was born and this was the fundamental reason this service was so important – there needed to be a robust plan in place prior to birth.

Councillor Hall queried what would happen if a mother had not engaged with the service at all and hidden their pregnancy and the Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that the vast majority of mothers presented to hospital to give birth and if for some reason, a pregnancy had been hidden, intervention and support would be triggered following a delivery.

Councillor Kennedy commented that the Midwifery Service were not always hitting targets for the first appointment and scans and asked if this could have an impact on the programme. The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that as soon as an agency identified a concern, they would progress the referral to First Contact. If either parent had had a previous child permanently removed through care proceedings and the pregnancy was 20 weeks or less, the referral would progress to the Pre-Birth team. Otherwise the referral would progress to the relevant Families First team.

Councillor Kennedy asked if there was any possibility of a multi-agency database and the Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that a shared information system across all agencies would not be feasible and therefore the service had to ensure partnerships and joint working with health services were strong.

Councillor Hall queried the work with Barnardo's and asked if it could be incorporated into the service plan. The Strategic Manager explained that this was commissioned and funded through Adult services. The work required mothers of multiple children who had been permanently removed or adopted, to be willing to engage with the service post birth and confirmed that an update would be provided in 12 months. There had been noted benefits of the Pause Programme and there was exploration of how this support could be embedded into the Pre-Birth Service in the future.

Resolved

That the report and presentation be noted and an update be provided in a further 12 months.

9 Such other business

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred to the previous discussion on 13 January 2020 with regards to a review topic to present to Cabinet in early 2021.

Performance information in quarter 1 and 2 had shown that the number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) completed in the allotted timescale had not met the target of 90%. Members had raised concerns about this and suggested EHCPs as a review topic.

A review of EHCPs would focus on understanding the demand and the reasons driving demand and the proposed objectives of the review would be to examine:

- the criteria and process for EHCPs
- the increased demand and the reasons for this
- how DCC and partners were addressing the demand
- the plans in place to meet future targets and demand

The Chair hoped to bring a scoping report to the meeting in March or April 2020 with a view to starting the review May/June 2020. There would be approximately 4 review group meetings as the review activity needed to be completed and a report presented to Cabinet by early 2021.

Councillor Coult confirmed that EHCPs not being completed in time had a huge impact of families and schools.

Councillor Hall queried whether the scope could be widened to children who fell short of qualifying for an EHCP. The Chair confirmed that the review could not delve into the requirements for an EHCP as this was a matter which would be subject to professional scrutiny.

Councillor Batey confirmed that this would build on the Elective Home Education review group work which had been undertaken and noted that most Councillors had constituents who they knew were struggling with children due to assessments not being completed in a timely manner.