

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 Remote Meeting - This meeting is being held remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Monday 11 January 2021 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor H Smith (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors C Potts, P Atkinson, B Bainbridge, D Bell, J Charlton, B Coult, R Crute, C Hampson, K Hopper, I Jewell, L Kennedy, M Simmons, A Willis and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Ms R Evans

1 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 October 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record to be signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendment.

Councillors Brown, Crathorne, Huntington, Jopling and Robinson were present as Members of the Adult Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Matters arising

Co-opted Member R Evans asked for an update regarding the number of laptops supplied to children via the DfE scheme and whether there was any information to compare the figures to other local authorities.

The Head of Education and Skills confirmed that during the first phase of the scheme, in June 2020, Durham received 1700 devices and 710 were issued to children with a social worker or disadvantaged children and the Council were able

to support the vast majority. The overall National allocation at this time was 220000 devices.

With regards to the second phase, Durham maintained schools were issued with 1888 devices, however Academies received laptops direct and the overall allocation was 4600-4700 devices, meaning there was still more to distribute – mainly to Primary Schools as Secondary Schools had been the main priority. In total the DfE had issued 342000 laptops to maintained schools and academies.

Schools had recently issued a survey to ensure that all children in Durham had sufficient equipment to access remote learning and the closing date was 22 January.

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 Best Start in Life: 0-25 Healthy Child Programme

The Committee received a report of the Director of Public Health which provided details on the mobilisation of the new 0-25 Family Health Service for County Durham and delivery the healthy child programme, and the Best Start in Life (BSIL) programme of work (for copy see file of minutes).

Members received a joint presentation of the Public Health Strategic Manager – Starting Well, Harrogate District Foundation Trust (HDFT) General Manager County Durham 0-25 service and the Strategic Commissioning Manager –Public Health (for copy see file of minutes).

Members were informed that the service had expanded the age range from 19 years to 25 years to explicitly recognise the statutory responsibility to vulnerable young people. When developing the 0-25 service it had been recognised that there needed to be a proportionate universal service together with targeted services to reduce known health inequalities.

The service had moved from a traditional model of service to a more varied workforce model, still encompassing traditional professionals and it was much more people focussed than topic focussed. One of the key changes to the new contract was the more proactive use of digital technology, as requested by young people.

Members were advised that mobilisation of the new service was restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic and that there had been an extension of the timeline to the 1

April 2021. A comprehensive training programme had begun in November 2020 and this would increase overtime.

The Strategic Manager – Starting Well, in relation to the Best Start in Life (BSIF) highlighted the plan for health impact assessments, using a robust framework that would bring partners together to provide evidence and reassurance of their effect. This information would be monitored by the Children’s Integration Board.

Councillor Jewell asked what additional challenges had been placed on the system and asked whether the additional services which had been introduced had generated additional work and was there any extra capacity in terms of staffing.

The Strategic Manager – Starting Well, confirmed that the service planned to reduce some of the pressure in certain areas whilst recognising additional challenges. The COVID-19 impact had restricted the ability to deliver some of the services due to loss of face to face contact, some of which had already reduced, such as the historical health promotion work which was still being done by working with partners as an integrated service.

The HDFT General manager County Durham 0-25 service advised that one of the key changes was that the integrated team included qualified school nurses, health visitors and practitioners which therefore meant they had the ability to deliver on the face to face intervention, giving more scope for the assessment of vulnerable families. There was a concern with regards to babies under 12 months, during lockdown as there had been an increase in unintentional injuries and there was increased concern regarding perinatal mental health. There had been a recruitment process which had not been straightforward during lockdown – there were some colleagues who were reluctant to change roles during a pandemic.

An example of where there was a more challenging demand on workforce was due to schools being closed for the majority of children. Due to the Think Family approach health visitors went into family homes and looked at every child in the home environment and now they included school age children and therefore a visit for a regular check was turning into a whole family assessment.

The Chair was concerned with regards to children’s dental health as no routine checks were being carried out during the restrictions and she asked whether there were any plans to catch up on the huge backlog of patients. The Strategic Manager – Starting Well confirmed that there were a lot of areas that would require a catch up, oral health was one of these key areas. It was recognised there was a lot of inequality around oral health in County Durham, the service would be working closely with early years providers and health visitors to ensure that dental check-ups were caught up and encourage work with dental practices to ensure they were considering the safeguarding agenda when routine dental work resumed.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Neglect in County Durham

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

The Strategic Manager for One Point and Think Family Services informed the Committee of the work of the Neglect Working Group that has established a vision 'to reduce neglect, to reduce the impact of neglect by providing effective help and support at the earliest opportunity. The service had worked with colleagues in Public Health Data Intelligence and Performance to get a better understanding of what neglect looked like in County Durham.

Members learned that 22% of all referrals into Children's Social Care was due to neglect. There were more children on a Child Protection Plan (CPP) than the previous year and more CPPs were due to neglect. This was higher than both Regional, Statistical neighbours and national figures. Most children with a CPP were from deprived areas, but it not all children living in deprived areas were on a CPP or suffered from neglect.

Early help conversations with professionals had enabled better help for families, these conversations had been successful in sharing concerns about a child. Guidance in relation to missed appointments had been embedded across dental and health services in the County to ensure there was a pathway to follow up on any missed appointments to ensure the child received the treatment required.

The Neglect Learning and Development was being reviewed and updated to include new evidence-based resources and tools. Thematic audits were also carried out with particular focus on re referrals and cumulative harm. A range of financial support packages were available to struggling families.

The service was hoping to launch the Neglect toolkit in March 21, which would sit within the Children and Families toolkit. The graded care profile was a specific tool that looked at the key priorities for a particular child and went into precise detail of where there was neglect. The tool highlighted where parents were working well and where they could do better, which assisted them to engage. The service was also working with health colleagues to deliver integrated parent support.

Councillor Coult advised that many families were struggling for a variety of reasons and she recognised the phenomenal work that was being done by teachers across the County who were not just teaching and she hoped that the Council would continue to provide them with advice and support quickly.. The Strategic Manager

– One Point and Think Family Services agreed that in addition to teaching, schools were relied upon to identify signs of neglect and during the COVID-19 pandemic if a particular concern about a child was raised, the service had agreed that welfare checks would be carried out.

Councillor Coult praised the holiday activity fund, advising that it was very beneficial to some groups of children and she acknowledged that some brilliant work had been done on support tools for people in the profession and asked how it would be communicated to parents. The Strategic Manager – One Point and Think Family Services confirmed that work was progressing with the parent update and would be circulated electronically. In relation to schools the Strategic Manager advised that schools knew their children well and the service did rely on them to raise concerns and works with them very closely. During the pandemic if a school has raised a concern about a child then a welfare visit would be arranged.

Councillor Jewell confirmed that as a Member of the adoption panel he saw the end result of the safeguarding process and noted the objectives were to reduce neglect, reduce the impact of neglect and to provide support. With regards to the ‘toxic quad’ which were contributing factors of neglect he asked how successful the service could be at changing this cycle or whether there was a process to mitigate it.

The Strategic Manager – One Point and Think Family Services confirmed that the service had to identify risk and intervene early to change behaviours before they became entrenched. The new approach with regards to Signs of Safety had created a culture where social workers were open, honest and direct with families about their concerns. They were more confident and worked with children to explain the reasoning behind their situation and parents were becoming more aware of the behaviours that impacted on their children.

The Strategic Manager – Families First East, Prebirth and Adoption agreed and advised that language had also been adapted to use less jargon in order for families to understand. It was hoped that the introduction of the graded profile tool would assist social workers to identify signs of neglect at an earlier stage and help families understand the future impact of their behaviours on their children. When considering the most complex teenagers, had some of the behaviours been identified a lot earlier, some of the outcomes may have been different.

The Strategic Manager – Families First East, Prebirth and Adoption, confirmed that there had been some children subject to a repeat child protection plan or referral. The service had made improvements to identify the risks and concerns which reduced the need for a second or subsequent plan or referrals. The service had also made improvements to identify when a child could not remain with a family which enabled their plans to progress within minimum delay, particularly for parents with previous children placed up for adoption.

With regards to next steps, the Strategic Manager Families First East, Prebirth and Adoption confirmed that the Service would continue good links with partners, such as substance misuse teams mental health teams, particularly for young people. Reducing re referrals was a key priority and the service needed to work with partners in education, health and early years settings to identify risks in order to speed up appropriate referrals.

Councillor Charlton advised that funding for holiday activities had been utilised well in her area and a group that she volunteered for had distributed packs which included fresh fruit to extremely grateful families during the Christmas period.

In response to a question from Councillor Bainbridge on whether neglect would always be an ongoing project, the Strategic Manager – One Point and Think Family Services confirmed that as systems became more sophisticated, the service were getting a better understanding of the demographics, for example, having four or more children was a red flag and knowing how to identify the risks that impacted on parenting would assist the service in investigating sooner.

Councillor Bainbridge asked whether COVID-19 had increased deprivation in areas of already high levels of deprivation and the Strategic Manger – One Point and Think Family Service confirmed that families were struggling more due to a range of issues including redundancy, furlough and childcare as the data showed an increase in financial services offered and free school meals eligibility. It was correct to assume that the most deprived areas in the County had the highest rate of take up.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager advised that neglect and deprivation were related it was clear that there were long term structural deprivation issues in County Durham as parts of the County that had remained deprived for longer than 20 years. The measures had remained the same with similar communities with similar issues, the extent of deprivation changing, but not the geographical spread. It was difficult to make a direct link with neglect and poverty as not all cases of neglect were in areas of deprivation and low income did not always equate to neglect.

With regards the increase in free school meals, the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager confirmed that there had already been an increase in the proportion of children eligible prior to COVID-19, and the latest information from the Autumn census indicated a further increase. There were also further increases in child poverty using free school meals as an indicator and this was disproportionate in areas that already had a high take up and therefore it could be assumed that there was a growing inequality in areas of deprivation.

The Strategic Manager – Children & Families South & East confirmed that the service were improving at identifying signs of neglect from the performance

information and this information was constantly reviewed. They were currently looking at the link between private housing and neglect and poverty.

Councillor Crute stated there was an inarguable link between deprivation, poverty and neglect and confirmed that a recent report on the impact of poverty had been considered by Cabinet in November and would be considered by COSMB later in January. He referred to the Performance Management Report which confirmed that 4000 children were eligible for free school meals and yet did not take up the offer. He confirmed that a piece of work had been undertaken by scrutiny in 2016 and a whole range of reasons had been found that may need exploring again in future. Free school meals were vital to those children eligible and the lack of take up impacted on child nutrition, attainability at school and linked with pupil premium which impacted on school budgets.

Finally Councillor Crute confirmed that the Council needed to get the message out to those families who were eligible to make a claim.

The Strategic Manager – One Point and Think Family Services confirmed that there was a clear gap between those eligible and those that were taking up free school meals and perhaps the service needed to ask parents directly through some of the other work done such as holiday activities and healthy food. They needed to find out what the barriers were and she would take this up with colleagues in education.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Quarter 2 - Performance Management Report 2020/21

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Corporate Director of Resources, which provided progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council's corporate performance framework (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Coult referred to the low rate of Education, Care and Health Plan (EHCP) referrals and asked whether a spike was anticipated following COVID-19 and if so, whether the service had the capacity to deal with additional requests. The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager confirmed that historically there was a spike around Easter however the service had been working to try and smooth it out over the year. This had been successful over the school year 19/20 however at the end of the last academic year there had been a small reduction. This could indicate some additional referrals would come through however the workload would only revert back to previous years 17/18 and 16/17, so the service would be able to cope with the increased demand over a short period.

The Chair confirmed that the Committee had planned to scrutinise the response times for the completion of an EHCP however this had been delayed due to COVID-19.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Quarter 2 - Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2020/21

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Corporate Director of Resources which provided details of the forecast outturn budget position for the Children and Young Peoples Services service grouping, highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget for the year, based on the position at the end of September (for copy see file of minutes).

R Evans confirmed that despite raising in the past, children and families needing additional support were not aware of the deficit to the HNB and she felt very strongly that it should be communicated to families, despite the information being difficult to understand. The Finance Manager – CYP confirmed that all of the information was available to the public through various reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees, however with regards to direct consultation with families, there was no requirement to do so and he was not aware of any other local authorities doing so. Councillor Bainbridge suggested this could be something for AAP's to consider communicating through their public consultation.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.