

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 **County Hall, Durham - County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 23 July 2021** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor C Hood (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Cosslett, C Bell, R Charlton-Lainé, O Gunn, C Hunt, C Martin, L Mavin, J Miller (substitute for S Townsend), D Mulholland, A Reed, K Rooney, C Varty, E Waldock and M Walton

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Currah, J Griffiths and S Townsend and Mrs J Bruton (Faith Rep) and Ms R Evans.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor J Miller substituted for Councillor S Townsend.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 12 April 2021 were agreed as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

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 Introduction to Children and Young People's Services - Overview

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided an introduction to the Children and Young People's Service and an overview presentation (for copies see file of minutes).

The Chair welcomed the Head of Children's Social Care, Helen Fergusson, the Head of Education and Skills, Jim Murray, and the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable People, Martyn Stenton and asked each to give an overview of the work within their areas.

The Head of Education and Skills noted areas of responsibility within his part of the service included providing services to secure standards and improvement in schools and other places of learning, including adult learning. He added that key support services also include school and governor support, school admissions and transport, school capital programme, as well as DurhamWorks. He noted challenges included: mobility, with some children having moved school up to seven times; an increase in home schooling as a consequence of the pandemic; and education moving into recovery, with pupils in County Durham having grades around two-thirds of a grade lower at Key Stage 4, impacted further by the pandemic. He explained as regards Ofsted ratings for schools in the county, with primary schools performing very well with a number greater than the national average with a good or outstanding rating, however, the number of secondary schools with a good or outstanding rating was below the national average. The Head of Education and Skills noted that there had been recent improvements with recent Section 5 inspections being very good. He noted other issues including: Academy Status; difficulty recruiting teachers for some subjects, for example mathematics; Safeguarding; school sustainability; elective home education, including links to colleges to support; and the Virtual School, for Looked After Children.

The Head of Children's Social Care noted areas of responsibility within her part of the service included to support and safeguard children in need of care and protection, as well as those children who were looked after with residential, fostering, adoption and supported living services. She added there was also the provision of services to children with a disability and young people who leave care. She noted that at any one time around 3,800 children in County Durham would have a social worker, with the primary aim being to work to provide support so they could remain safe at home. The Head of Children's Social Care explained as regards the work of Families First Teams within communities, the robust process in terms of Child Protection Plans, the small number of cases that lead to care proceedings, and the Care Leavers' Service. She noted the safeguarding and professional practice, including the Social Work Academy to support newly qualified social workers and noted the responsibility in terms of reviewing all social work plans.

She explained as regards: the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO); the regional adoption agency, Adopt Coast to Coast; and the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. The Head of Children's Social Care noted that there were around 400 new referrals to County Durham social workers each month and noted the partnership arrangements in place and working with the families to build positive relationships. The Head of Children's Social Care explained as regards the inspecting Local Authority services for children (ILACS), with Ofsted as regulator, with full inspections being on a three year cycle. She noted in addition there were focussed visits, annual conversations with Ofsted and joint targeted area inspections (JTAI) from time-to-time.

The Head of Children's Social Care noted priorities included: high quality relationships between social workers and families; embedding the 'Signs of Safety' model across services; an ambition to be the best employer for social workers in the region, in part to help with recruitment; continued support via the Social Work Academy; and development of a Leadership Academy, based on the Social Work Academy to support front-line and middle managers. She noted new innovative services, including working with the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) in relation to complex mental health to help prevent hospitalisations and the new Adolescent Safeguarding and Exploitation Team (ASET).

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable People explained areas of responsibility within his part of the service included: to ensure early help for children and families; helping to tackle child poverty and supporting programmes such as 'Fun with Food'; support for young people who have offended and victims of crime; educational psychology; special educational needs services (SEND) and Aycliffe Secure Children's Unit. He added that the service had four main groupings: Aycliffe Secure Children's Unit, which was also linked to the Corporate Parenting Panel; the County Durham Youth Justice Service, which included links with partners from Police, Health and Probation, and scrutiny via the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and SEND / Inclusion, noting one in seven pupils having SEND, and with around 3,800 having an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). He noted the work in terms of early help, including the One Point service, the Stronger Families Programme and tackling child poverty.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable People explained as regards the inspection frameworks in place, noting for Aycliffe Secure Children's Unit that was by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), with the Unit having retained its 'outstanding' rating at the latest inspection. He noted in respect of the Youth Justice Service, inspections were carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation and for SEND services they were carried out by Ofsted and the CQC, with the last being carried out in 2020, with a new framework expected. He noted that the Early Help work fell under the ILACS inspections, with annual meetings with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of the Supporting Families Programme and annual conversation with Ofsted.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable People explained as regards the work services did in partnership, with county and regional partners, with each service having a dedicated strategic partnership, and he noted work with the community and voluntary sector, colleges, health, probation, Government Departments, and other national agencies, such as the Youth Justice Board. He noted service highlights included Aycliffe Secure Children's Unit's 'outstanding' rating following a recent Ofsted inspection and the Youth Justice Service winning a CYP NOW Family Justice award for its parenting support work. He added that Early Help was one of 14 such services nationally that had obtained 'earned autonomy', enabling more flexibility with funding, including supporting adults into employment. He explained as regards: the adoption of 'signs of safety'; 'Fun with food' providing healthy food and activities and supporting parents over what can be a difficult holiday period for families and in preparing for school in September in terms of the cost of uniform; and significant progress with the partnership work to support children and young people with SEND, strengthened since the last Ofsted/CQC inspection, with a multi-agency action plan. He noted there were concrete plans to address the challenges with funding through the Higher Needs Block.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable People noted that challenges included: how to recover from COVID-19, including poverty within families; supporting children to be safe, happy, and settled in their education, noting the disruption over the last 18 months of the pandemic, with further potential for disruption; and the ongoing challenge with SEND and funding through the Higher Needs Block of the Dedicated School Grants.

The Chair thanked the Heads of Service and asked Members of the Committee for their comments and questions.

Councillor O Gunn thanked all the officers and staff that worked in Children and Young People's Services and asked as regards the flexibility in the timings of Ofsted school inspections as a consequence of the pandemic. The Head of Education and Skills explained that in terms of the inspection schedule, HMI had noted they were around five terms behind. He added that a number of schools were in a difficult position, carrying an 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' rating and explained that inspections would be welcomed by those schools as they had moved forward since those ratings had been given. He noted secondary schools had struggled with the new framework around Progress 8, particularly across the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects. He noted that more recent inspections had been more curriculum than progress driven, and he felt that was a fairer playing field for schools to be successful. He explained that with primary schools there had been a number of focussed reports nationally as regards subjects such as history and geography, and some schools were struggling with that curriculum knowledge and planning. He noted the service was well equipped to support the primary schools in the county, however, some schools with mixed year group classes may find it a challenge.

In response to a question from Councillor O Gunn relating to the challenges for Children's Social Care as a consequence of the pandemic, the Head of Children's Social Care explained that there had been a huge amount of contingency planning, in terms of staff potentially become ill or requiring to isolate, which had been working well. She noted last year as a result of lockdown virtual visits had been carried out with all children in care, with a flexible model being in place. She noted that the last six weeks had been a particular challenge in terms of staff absence due to self-isolation, and while it was hoped to be able to move back to delivering services face-to-face, if that was not possible then some could be delivered virtually. In respect of residential care, Head of Children's Social Care noted that area had the most challenge in terms of workforce, and work was ongoing with the Cabinet Member and Legal Services in terms of potential critical worker exemptions and daily testing regimes.

Following a question from Councillor O Gunn in relation to funding for the Youth Justice Service, nationally and locally, the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable People noted he could share the Youth Justice Plan, which showed an increased grant this year from the Youth Justice Board. He added that the Council had added funding, with the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner (PCVC) and Health providing staffing and support and noted that it was fortunate that in Durham there were strong partners and funding.

Councillor C Bell noted she was surprised at the number of parents that had chosen to educate their children at home asked as regards the support for those parents. The Head of Education and Skills noted that the pandemic had impacted upon the number of parents wishing to educate their children at home and added that a number were now reintegrating, with around 65 over the last six weeks. He noted there was support from colleges in terms of curriculum and the service would look to support and follow-up with parents as regards issues, including safeguarding. He added legislation in terms of a register for those children where parents had elected to home educate would make the process more robust with further information in the coming months. In response to Councillor C Bell, the Head of Education and Skills noted that when speaking with those parents, officers were not allowed to make judgement in terms of quality.

Following a question from Councillor C Bell relating to North Durham Academy, the Head of Education and Skills noted as an Academy it was not a Local Authority maintained school. He added that there was a good relationship with the Academy, and he understood that North Durham Academy had appointed a new management team, from a previously successful school, and the new Head Teacher was making a positive difference.

Councillor M Walton thanked the officers for all the work carried out by their teams, made more difficult by the pandemic on top of existing challenges. She asked as regards the number of children being educated at home and whether there was any statutory inspection in terms of their home schooling.

The Head of Education and Skills explained there were around 930 children being educated at home, noting the 65 that had recently reintegrated, adding there was no statutory inspection. Councillor M Walton asked as regards the challenges for those children that had, as previously mentioned, moved school up to seven times, and whether there were any common themes. The Head of Education and Skills noted there were various issues, and one was where families moved between Local Authority areas, with issues such as Local Authority housing provision. He noted the impact that could be made on picking up on speech and language issues and noted there was a team in place in terms of school transfers for secondary, however, primaries remained the priority as they had the higher number of pupil movements.

In response to a question from Councillor M Walton relating to the number of social workers and caseloads, the Head of Children's Social Care explained that Council policy was for caseloads of around 22 at any one time, not only to be manageable for each social worker, but to also be a manageable level for teams and Team Managers in addition. She noted demand over the last 8-12 weeks had increased, with referrals back to pre-pandemic levels, and also children were staying in the system longer. She added that the situation was monitored very carefully, with the aim being for 60 percent of social workers to have a caseload of 20 or fewer, currently at around 50 percent, and she would provide details as regards the number of social workers. Councillor M Walton noted the importance of retaining social workers and was pleased to hear as regards the Social Work Academy, she asked how long newly qualified social workers (NQSW) could access the academy. The Head of Children's Social Care explained that NQSW would be placed within a team, as well as be in the Social Work Academy, alongside the national scheme of 'assisted and supported year of employment'. She added that they would be within the Academy for one year, have monthly meetings with their Team Manager, as well as monthly meetings via the Academy, effectively fortnightly supervision. She explained that NQSW would have protected caseloads when joining the Authority working up to eight cases, following an induction period, then increasing to 12, and after the year moving to a more standard caseload. She explained that over the year a NQSW would need to produce a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate they met the required competencies.

Councillor M Walton asked as regards ILACS gradings and commended the service and Cabinet Member, T Henderson for the recent briefing note that had been circulated to Councillors relating to children in poverty. The Head of Children's Social Care noted last ILACS assessment was September 2019, and the overall grading was 'requires improvement' with the individual elements being: Children in Care, 'good'; children requiring help and protection, 'requires improvement'; and leadership and management, 'requires improvement'. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable People thanked Councillor M Walton and noted feedback was always welcome and helpful as regards the balance of information or any topics that Councillor may find useful for future briefings.

Councillor L Mavin asked as regards the Ofsted ratings for all the schools and information year on year, and whether an annual report could be provided to the Committee. The Head of Education and Skills noted he would work on an appropriately detailed dashboard for Members, to include a number of the key figures discussed, such as the number electively home educated children.

Councillor A Reed noted her thanks to the officers for their presentation and that it was clear there were very high standards, as evidenced by Aycliffe Secure Children's Unit's 'outstanding' rating. She noted the reference to some children moving schools up to seven times and asked what work was being undertaken in that regard. The Head of Education and Skills noted that Headteachers had bought into the process and were looking at interventions where they were concerned about a child moving. He reminded Members that disadvantaged children were on average two-thirds of a grade behind the national average and noted that those children that moved school five times or more were on average two grades behind the national average. He added that accordingly it was a priority and officers were looking at how to support those transfer meetings.

Councillor A Reed noted the 400 referrals to social workers and asked as regards the impact of the pandemic and how the service would be able to cope. The Head of Children's Social Care noted that 400 referrals for social work assessments did not necessarily generate 400 cases, rather some were signposted to other services as appropriate. She added that referrals were a priority and were assessed as soon as possible to determine the level of risk to that child and what course of action would be required. She noted that agency social workers were utilised during busy periods, though other Local Authorities were also looking to do the same. The Head of Children's Social Care noted that currently there were 302 full-time equivalent social workers and team management on the establishment, across all areas, including the Fostering Service and frontline social workers. Councillor A Reed asked if the average caseload of 22 per social worker was for full-time equivalent, the Head of Children's Social Care confirmed it was, with an accordingly reduced caseload for those working part-time.

Councillor A Reed explained she had previously visited the Aycliffe Secure Children's Unit and had been impressed by the Centre Manager, Selwyn Morgans, and the positive engagement with the young people. She noted the Unit received children from different parts of the country and asked what impact that restrictions due to the pandemic had in terms of when children were ready to move on from the Unit. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable People noted that the pandemic was an ongoing challenge for the Aycliffe Secure Children's Unit and other residential children's homes with young people having to isolate for 10 days upon admission. He added that wellness packs had been produced and provided for the young people and the operation of the school within the Unit was carefully managed with 'bubbles', the only school in the county that had remained open throughout the pandemic.

He noted that there was careful management in terms of when children were ready to leave and move on and added that challenges included visits from social workers, youth offending team and families, with some having to be conducted virtually. He noted that the Unit was working at a reduced capacity in order to be able to operate safely.

Councillor J Miller asked a question on behalf of Councillor S Townsend who had been unable to attend the meeting. He noted that the Government had announced the second round of 50 school building projects and Councillor S Townsend had expressed her frustration that the Shildon Greenfield School site was in a state of disrepair and not been included in that second round for much needed funding. He explained Councillor S Townsend had previously asked officers as regards the schools rebuilding project and it had been confirmed that it was a decision made by Government in terms of which schools were included and that Local Authorities had no say in where the funding was directed. He noted that the question from Councillor S Townsend was whether this was still the case for the second round of funding and if the Local Authority had been involved in choosing schools, how was that determination made. The Head of Education and Skills noted it was still the case that it was a Government decision, with condition surveys having been carried out by the Department for Education in 2015. He reiterated that Local Authorities had no influence over which schools the Government would include.

In response to a question from Councillor R Charlton-Lainé, the Head of Education and Skills noted that teachers within maintained schools were supported by a range of networks across subjects and explained that one of the priorities across all was mental health support. He added that this included sessions for Headteachers and leadership teams, as well as for School Governors. He noted there was a great deal of change in the area of support and development, with an increase in customer driven focus. He noted engagement with Trusts, in particular those with Behaviour Hubs, as those could be a source of stress and mental health, being one of the more challenging areas. The Head of Education and Skills noted there were attempts to influence Ofsted in terms of timings, noting he felt some Section 5 Inspections at the end of the year were at a time when schools had been facing additional constraints. He added that he felt the new inspection schedules were going to be stressful for staff, including languages, and the future of inspections was going to be tough and therefore the network of subject support needed to be strong to help give teachers confidence.

Councillor C Hunt noted the information as regards the impact on children when moving school and asked what provision was made when placing children in short-term foster care in respect of keeping the children in their existing school. The Head of Children's Social Care noted there was a clear policy, and those children would stay in their existing school if feasible, adding that in the vast majority of cases it was feasible. She added that while that may require a period when there is additional travel, it was felt that maintaining relationships with friends and teachers was important.

She noted that when children had a plan of permanence then a careful decision on whether a change of school was appropriate would be made. She added that if children were in an exam-year they would not move school, transport would be provided to ensure the continuity of education provision. The Head of Children's Social Care explained that all of that activity was organised through the Virtual School, with all children in care going to school in addition they had a Virtual Headteacher, working within the Education and Skills Service, who had responsibility for all children in care including looking at which schools were most appropriate for those children.

The Chair noted the number of full-time equivalent social workers and how caseloads may fluctuate, and he noted the aim to be the best Local Authority for social workers to work at in the North East. He asked what was being done in terms of retention and also agency social workers, given the key was to establish relationships with the young people. The Head of Children's Social Care noted that agency social workers were used to cover maternity leave, long term sick, or to temporarily fill a post, and therefore they would be employed for a number of months rather than weeks and accordingly there would be that level of continuity. She noted that there were around 30 agency staff currently and it was a situation that was monitored very carefully. She added that in terms of retention, there had been a significant reduction in the turnover of staff, with incentives including targeted support/interventions and she could provide more details at a future meeting, however the headline was that the situation was very positive.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Children, Young People and Families Partnership Overview

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an overview of the Children, Young People and Families Partnership (for copies see file of minutes). The Chair welcomed the Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning and Deputy Chair of the Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board, Sarah Burns who was in attendance to give Members an overview presentation.

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning thanked the Chair and Members of the Committee and explained that her post was jointly appointed by the NHS and Durham County Council, and that she was responsible for commissioning health and care for children, adults, older people, and those with mental health conditions or learning disabilities. She explained she worked very closely with the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services as part of his Extended Management Team.

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning explained nothing in County Durham was done in isolation with many children and families being in receipt of a multiple services and referred Members to the partnership arrangements in place and structure diagram. She noted she was Deputy Chair, with the Corporate Director of Children and Young People, John Pearce being the Chair. She noted that while the organisations involved had their own statutory responsibilities and governance, the partnership worked together to remove barriers and worked together where budgets were impacted upon to work best for children, young people, and their families. She referred to the Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board and links to the other wider partnership boards and noted the sub-groups included: Growing up in County Durham; Integration; Prevention and Early Help; Best Start in Life; and Supporting Young People into Adulthood (14-25).

The Committee noted the Board sat alongside the Acute Care Partnership Board, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Partnership Board and the Primary, Community and Social Care Partnership Board. The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning noted the strategic priorities were looked at by each of the sub-groups and that in terms of 'Growing up in County Durham' progress included: rapid review on impacts of Covid-19 on Children and Young People informed work of group, the review found that Covid-19 was exacerbating and creating new inequalities; working across all priorities to provide a population health management perspective; the Growing up in County Durham approach was using SEND as a pilot theme to utilise integrated data, understand service performance and 3/4/5-year trends; and statistical work of the group had been included in a regional bid for Children and Young People's Wellbeing funding which was successful.

In relation to Integration, Members were asked to note progress included: to develop a vision for integration across services for children and young People; engagement, co-production journey with children, young people and Families; a 0-6 system redesign workshop; and development of multiagency respiratory pathway. The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning explained that in relation to 'Best Start if Life', there was work relating to Health Impact Assessment on inequalities to inform CYPS, and on continuity of carer in respect of maternity care.

In relation to 'Early Help and Prevention' progress included: a self-assessment to identify key priorities to progress had been completed; a dedicated early help telephone number; and additional priorities for unborn children and babies under one year old included in the action plan. Members noted that for 'Supporting Young People into Adulthood (14-25) progress included: development of 14-25 Navigation Team; supporting the work through TEWV, development of the community mental health framework focusing on young people and transition; development of the Adolescent Safeguarding and Exploitation Team (ASET).

Councillor O Gunn left the meeting at 11.30am

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning explained that cross-cutting issues included: Think Family; co-production, ensuring we listen to the voice of the child / family; empowerment; early intervention / signposting; support for people who need it the most; seamless; workforce; and resources.

The Committee were asked to note an example of service change, continuity of carer through maternity. The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning explained that the current model of maternity care in County Durham was traditional with acute/community split and with around 4,500 deliveries a year and 6,000 community bookings. She added that across the system there was recognition that number of health outcomes could be improved such as smoking at time of delivery and encouraging breastfeeding. It was noted the aim was to support women and partners to have the experience that they want, with personalised care. It was added that continuity of care meant women would have the same very small group of Midwives who care for them from booking in appointment, birth and the Post-natal period, with an aim to improve outcomes for women and babies. Members noted a pilot scheme in the Stanley area had shown positive impacts, including: an increased number of women that breastfeed, a reduction in babies with low birth weight; a reduction in the number of surgical interventions; and a significant reduction in the number of women who smoked while pregnant. The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning explained that the continuity of carer for maternity would be followed by roll out across 18 teams in County Durham. She noted that in terms of integration and partnerships, it may be possible to build upon the transition from Midwives to Health Visitors and to also possible to look at colocation and greater links with GPs.

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning noted in relation to the Children and Young People's Strategy 2022-2025 that the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-25 had been agreed by the Health and Wellbeing Board at its meeting in March 2021. She noted it was supported by the County Durham Place Based Commissioning Plan 2020-25 which had all partners contributing and working together. She reiterated as regards the five priority themes of Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board and noted alignment with the County Durham Vision 2035. She noted that it would reflect existing performance management arrangements, however, with focus on how integration and partnership working could make a difference. She concluded by explaining that the new strategy would be developed in the autumn, to be ready for consultation in the new year.

The Chair thanked the Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning and asked the Committee for their comments and questions.

Councillor R Charlton-Lainé noted her experience in relation to breastfeeding support and asked as regards out-of-hours provision and how that could be more joined up. The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning noted it was a challenge and while there were a number of priorities, there was a finite amount of funding. She added that in some areas the community and voluntary sector was able to provide support where services were not as broad and comprehensive as one would like. She noted it was looking at creative solutions to try to help and she noted that those lived experiences were important and she would take away that information. Councillor R Charlton-Lainé added that she recalled very good support offered by the Sure Start service, when it had been in place.

Councillor J Miller asked if the ASET Team was replicating the work undertaken in Newcastle and Operation Sanctuary or would work alongside it. The Head of Children's Social Care noted it was an integrated service with Police colleagues with a lot of integrated information sharing, noting of cross-border issues and acknowledging the need to sometimes work regionally and nationally. She added that there were good relationships through Police colleagues with other forces across the country and while it was not replicating that specific project referred to, best practice nationally was being taken on board to make a local model to meet the needs of young people in County Durham.

Councillor C Varty noted the positive impact of social workers in County Durham and added she had worked with many wonderful social workers in various previous roles. She asked as regards the frequency of visits by Midwives and Health Visitors and agreed with Councillor R Charlton-Lainé as regards the previous Sure Start support.

Councillor C Hunt also asked as regards the continuity of carer for those opting for home birth if the woman then needed to attend hospital for delivery, and whether it would be the same. The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning noted that was the case and she noted that had helped in demonstrating the improved outcomes. She noted she would speak to Councillor C Varty as regards the issues she had referred to in terms of ante-natal period, though noting demands and being able to look at a situation with the person being at the centre of the process.

Councillor M Walton noted the shortage in terms of Health Visitors and asked if there were any overarching reasons in terms of recruitment. The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning noted that there was not one single issue, with one factor being the amount of time it takes in terms of the training. She added that there would be a look to see why the role was no longer seen as attractive, and also to look at in which ways other roles and professionals could help. She noted it was an issue Health Education England was looking at in terms of attracting more people to the profession. Councillor M Walton noted it may be beneficial to look what attracts and encourages people to consider other nursing specialties.

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning noted the work of colleagues from Public Health and added that there was also the issue of retention as well as recruitment.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Quarter 4 2020/2021 - Performance Management Report

The Chair asked the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager, Tom Gorman to provide the Committee with an update in relation to the Quarter Four, 2020/21 Performance Management Report (for copy see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager thanked the Chair and referred Members to the information as set out within the report pack. He explained as regards the reporting process in terms of Cabinet, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and each of the thematic Overview and Scrutiny Committees. He added that as the report related to Quarter Four it also represented a year-end position which would include any impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted the performance was in the context of the County Durham Vision and that in relation to the first ambition, 'more and better jobs' the proxy measure for child poverty, the number of those eligible for free-school meals was around 20,000, around 28 percent of all pupils in spring 2021. He added that was an increase of around 2,700 pupils, from 24 percent the previous year and also that only around 75 percent of those eligible did access free-school meals.

Councillor J Miller left the meeting at 11.57am

Councillors were asked to note the average education 'Attainment 8' score was 48.8 for County Durham, behind a national average of 53.1 at key stage four and it was explained as regards the 14.4 percent gap for those disadvantaged children, with studies showing that disadvantaged young people had been impacted greater as a result of the pandemic. It was noted that the average A-Level score for pupils from the county was higher than the national average.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager referred to those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and explained that the level had increased from 4.1 to 5.6 percent, albeit with a reduced number of 'not knowns' of only 0.7 percent, less than the national average of 2 percent. He noted issues included the difficulty in engaging with young people during the pandemic and that Job Centre Plus had not mandated job search activity over the pandemic period.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager noted as regards performance in respect of behaviour, exclusions, managed moves and noted that was an area included within the Work Programme. He noted an increase in the number of applications for SEND support and highlighted positive schemes including provision of laptops and wifi routers to children and the 'Fun with Food' programme previously mentioned.

Members noted that 730 families were supported through the Stronger Families programme, that there were a number of schemes to support young people in respect of mental health. It was noted there had been delays in terms of producing EHCPs, however this had improved from 50 percent being produced on time at the year end to now 95 percent being produced on time. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager noted that while the number of referrals to social workers had reduced through the pandemic, possible as a result of many referrals being via schools, however, those numbers had returned to previous levels. He added that while caseloads were high, timescales in respect of initial assessment and other matters were much improved. Members noted that in respect of Looked after Children for County Durham there was 950, however the rate per 10,000 was in line with the region and nearest statistical neighbours. He reiterated the previous comments as regards the impact of the pandemic on how long children remained in care and Ofsted inspection activity. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager concluded by noting a protocol as regards information sharing in respect of pupil movements between Local Authority areas.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager and asked Members for their comments and questions.

Councillor C Hunt asked as regards whether the Council offered any incentives in terms of businesses taking on apprentices, including taking on young people with SEND. The Head of Education and Skills noted that was an aim of the DurhamEnable Project Board, to engage with employers and further education colleges, and that further feedback on the topic would be given to the Committee via the previously mentioned dashboard.

The Chair asked as regards the success of NEETs and DurhamWorks and asked as regards the future funding for DurhamWorks and if the scheme was continuing and what the cohort size would be. The Head of Education and Skill noted a successful bid from the Council had secured funding for a further two years, with staff and capacity to remain at the current level. He added that it had been noted that some young people had attended and benefited more from online, however, for some face-to-face contact was more beneficial to help with their confidence. He noted that therefore capacity would be the same, however, there were more techniques in the blend in order to engage with young people.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

9 Refresh of the Work Programme

The Chairman asked the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Ann Whitton to speak to Members in relation to the refresh of the Work Programme 2021/22 for the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer explained that the report highlighted that the Work Programme was informed by the County Vision, Council Plan, and other key documents. She explained that the proposed Work Programme included areas to be prioritised and areas that had been included in the previous Work Programme. It was noted that there was a need for the Work Programme to be flexible to ensure it can accommodate any emerging issues throughout its term.

Members were asked to note the Work Programme set out those items prioritised by the Chair and the Vice-Chair in terms of items to come to formal Committee and offered flexibility in terms of other items to be delivered as briefing reports, to be circulated electronically to Members of the Committee for comment. It was explained that the Committee had been allocated five meeting dates for the period September 2021 to May 2022.

The Chair thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Officer and noted Members of the Committee agreed the Work Programme as set out within the report.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree the Work Programme 2021/22 and the flexibility it offers to respond to emerging issues.