

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 5 May 2022 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor C Hood (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Cosslett, C Bell, O Gunn, C Hunt, B Kellett, L Kennedy, C Martin, D Mulholland, A Reed, K Rooney, M Stead, S Townsend, C Varty, E Waldock and M Walton

Faith Community Representative:

Mrs L Vollans

Co-opted Members:

Ms R Evans

Also Present:

Councillors M Simmons

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Deinali, J Griffiths, L Mavin and Mrs L Keenan.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor B Kellett substituted for Councillor J Griffiths and Councillor M Stead substituted for Councillor L Mavin.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record and were 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 Developing a new County Durham Children, Young People and Families Strategy

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Service and the Chair of Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board (CYP&F) that provided an update on the development of the new County Durham Children, Young People and Families Strategy – Growing Up in County Durham (GUICD) 2022-25 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning and Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board and the Strategic Manager, Partnerships were in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The presentation provided the aims of the strategy, what the Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board had been focussing on, Coproduction – working with the whole family, what's important to young people, families and carers and timeline and next steps.

Members were advised that the new strategy would run from 2022 to 2025 and was aligned to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The new strategy underpinned the work carried out by the service and with partners including the voluntary sector.

In refreshing the strategy, the Children, Young People and Families partnership had obtained the views of children and young people via the Youth Council, Investing in Children, One Point service and schools.

The main focus of the strategy was in four areas; Best Start in Life to promote support from the earliest stage; Prevention and early help to reduce reliance on services and to develop family hubs; Transformation that includes a maternity pathway and continuity of care; and Transitions where there are gaps in support for families.

Members were advised of the process in developing the strategy and for their input in providing answers to a series of questions:

- What words and phrases do you think should be included in a new vision for children, young people and their families?

- What aspirations should we have for our children and young people?
- What things are important as young people get older and become adults?
- What challenges do children, young people and families face?
- What can families and communities do?

The Strategic Manager Partnerships offered to come back to committee with a developed strategy at a later date.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and reminded members that comments on the new strategy would be recorded and collated and sent back to the service as a formal response of the committee, but that did not prevent any members who wished to comment individually.

Councillor Gunn commented that she was pleased to see that the Youth Council were involved in the development of the new strategy and that voluntary organisations were seen as part of the partnership. She indicated that it was crucial for school staff to be involved in the strategy as they were the first port of call to identify children and families in need, supported children and were part of the community. She then referred to words and phrases and a key word was opportunities and they needed to look at a succession of opportunities, it was about going forward while children and young people were developing.

The Strategic Manager, Partnerships responded that she would take on board Councillor Gunn's comments in the development of the strategy. She would reach out to schools and link with the Head of Education and Skills and schoolteachers and take account of what she said in relation to key words.

Councillor Walton commented that she was thrilled at the involvement of children in the strategy who had a powerful voice and opinion that was heard at the Corporate Parenting Panel and the children felt that they were listening, and it was important that this continued. She then suggested there should be a specific focus on teenagers as they were often negatively portrayed by the media and there could be issues with maturity of some teenagers. She was thrilled that voluntary groups and community groups were recognised and indicated that there was an issue around people saying that there was nothing for children to do but in her ward that was not the case but finding enough volunteers to run events such as youth clubs was the issue and they needed to impress on adults that they needed to be involved and be part of the solution. She suggested that a key word was connectivity and that using other avenues for promotion such as schools, doctors' surgeries and community groups and encouraged councillors to promote the work too. She would like to see the draft report and indicated that consideration needed to be given to the language and words and phrases used so that it was not negative and that positive words be used.

The Strategic Manager, Partnerships responded that she would take on board her comments and thanked the Councillor for her suggestion of asking councillors to support the work of the strategy.

Ms Evans commented that she would like to see the implications of climate change embedded into the report. She then referred to co-production and County Durham did well in talking and engaging with communities, but this was not true co-production as the parameters were set, it was not starting from the bottom, but she could see a lot of work with groups within the community. She then referred to the end of the universal youth work provided by the council and that relying on the voluntary sector to run events was fine but if you did not get volunteers the event would not happen; equally funding was problematic too. She also referred to distances and access to services, especially in the Teesdale area and commented that there was not a lot of information on this in the strategy and should be included.

The Strategic Manager, Partnerships indicated that she would take on board the comment on climate change. She acknowledged Ms Evans' comment with regard to co-production, and stated they were on a journey which was heading in the right direction. In terms of access to services this was something that young people had brought forward and would be considered as part of the development of the strategy.

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning and Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board responded that in terms of the voluntary sector she agreed with all the comments and that more of the NHS budget went into mainstream services than the voluntary sector and they needed to change their approach to this. They had set up a voluntary sector development fund in health which was designed to do that and look at how the voluntary sector could add to that pathway and deliver part of the service and shift some of the funding into the voluntary sector if they could better deliver that pathway.

Ms Evans referred to social prescribing and that she was not sure how much it did for young people.

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic Commissioning and Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board indicated that there was a social prescriber for children in the Chester-Le-Street area and she thought that more would follow in future years.

Councillor Varty commented that people don't get to see the same person due to changes in personnel and that continuity was needed to be included into the strategy.

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic, Commissioning and Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board agreed that continuity was important

as the practitioner would know the back story without the person having to repeat the details of why they needed an appointment. She commented that the partnership were working with Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust to improve staffing within the service and were working together with family hubs. The comment on continuity would be reflected into the strategy.

Councillor Townsend commented that her area had two Sure Start Centres that were now gone and had resulted in difficulty contacting the Health Visitor as they were now located in the Church Hall, and this was not publicised. She then referred to the creation of play groups, there were residents who had ideas and knowledge but did not have support in governance or finance, but she was glad to hear about the voluntary sector development fund. She commented that a number of voluntary sector organisations were no longer able to be fully non-commercial due to the funding which was seen as negative from the users.

Councillor Townsend suggested that if the partnership had engaged with children who had special educational needs and disabilities and children in the care system it was important, they were able to read the strategy and the words they have used.

The Joint Head of Integrated Strategic, Commissioning and Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board responded that they had looked to increase funding for Durham Community Action who work as an infrastructure organisation across County Durham and looked to stabilise them by giving a longer-term guarantee of funding and would encourage voluntary sector organisations to link in with Durham Community Action.

Councillor Gunn commented that the funding was not there for a universal youth service and was lost some time ago. She then commented that one in four children were living in poverty and she did not know what words or phrases could be put other than how to lift children out of poverty. She asked how often when talking to young people in the groups identified did the issue of poverty come up. This was an area that was cloaked for a variety of issues such as free school meals. She wanted to stress that the issue of child poverty was important and crucial and would like to know if it was on the agenda.

The Strategic Manager, Partnerships responded that it had come up in their initial findings from young people in terms of the consultation and engagement done so far. Finances and the cost of living was on their agenda and were concerned about.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the comments on the new strategy be recorded and submitted as the formal response of the committee.

7 Quarter 3 2021/22 Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources, that provided details of the outturn budget position for Children and Young People's Services highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget for the year, based on the position at the end of December 2021 (for copies see file of minutes).

The Children and Young People's Finance Manger was in attendance to present the report and highlighted the major variances. Specific reference was made to the three schools operating a licensed deficit position and that they were operating at levels below the agreed deficit.

Councillor Walton referred to the underspend due to vacant posts and was concerned the impact the vacancies would have on future plans and asked what the authority were doing to address this.

The Finance Manager responded that they were focusing on the issues of attracting staff which was a priority and several working groups had been established. A full response would be provided in writing to Councillor Walton.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

8 Impact of the Education White Paper: Opportunity for all; Strong Schools with Great Teachers

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided Members with information on Education White Papers and its impact upon the system and strategic planning around education within the council (for copy or report, see file of minutes).

The Head of Education and Skills was in attendance to present the report and explained the implications of each chapter of the White Paper in particular Chapter 4.

The Head of Education and Skills advised members of the content of the white paper highlighting concerns regarding attainment at key stage 2 and key stage 4, especially in relation to English and Maths. White Paper also identified issues with teaching pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and highlighted the Green Paper in relation to SEND had recently been published.

The Head of Service advised that there were gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their less disadvantaged peers and COVID had increased these gaps further.

Examinations were going ahead for the first time in two years, and it was a worry because within the county some pupils had greater access to schools than in others. County Durham had a mixed system with maintained schools, academy

trusts with one school or more and single academies. There were 168 maintained schools that required support and were committed to being part of the local authority, but this would reduce as the service was aware of the Church of England school's options to move to academies in the coming three to four years.

The Head of Service referred to chapter one of the White Paper which considered recruitment of teachers, incentives to fill positions and improvements to the system and to improve the quality, experience and network of special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs). Members were advised that there was intense pressure to recruit leaders as many were leaving the profession after three to four years.

Chapter two of the White Paper focused on curriculum, behaviour and attendance. Members were advised that Ofsted had changed focus to measuring quality provided and how to network and share information. In relation to County Durham networking was good, attendance was tough and difficult to assess as there was a time lag but probably matched national levels. Schools share attendance data, this was developed through the pandemic this data indicates that secondary school attendance in the county was 70%, but it should be at 97%. This was very important as it impacted on a young person's life chances. The White paper did not identify how this would be improved although it did refer to elective home education. However, County Durham does have provision in place for elective home education and getting young people back into school.

Chapter three of the white paper focuses on SEND and targeted support for all children who need it and suggests a national tutor programme if a child was not attending school.

Chapter four looked to introduce a fairer stronger system and that by 2030 all children would be taught in a strong Multi Academy Trust (MAT) or in a school planning to become part of a MAT, this would be a 10-year scheme to give consistency in the system. Members were advised that a strong MAT would consist of 7000 students or 10 schools or more. However, the service had requested more information on this as the narrative for County Durham was different for them to get to a MAT of this size. Local authorities would be involved in the setting up of trusts but not in running them and this was happening now. There were concerns of national trusts taking over schools in the county.

The Head of Service advised that if this white paper was mentioned in the Queen's speech, then there was a possibility that it would receive Royal Assent more quickly. There was a need to understand the timeline, which was not given, and more information was required in relation to how the Department for Education view the region.

Councillor Townsend referred to the provision of tutoring courses by 2024 and commented that available tutors were London based as tutors were not available during the pandemic and suggested that the government should flesh out the paper

more. She was concerned about the academisation of the whole education system and that a number of primary schools were still Local Authority maintained and commented that those secondary schools that were still under the Local Authority was due to multi academy trusts not finding them attractive. She asked if the authority set up multi academy trusts what would happen if those multi academy trusts came into trouble.

The Head of Education and Skills advised that Ofsted were strengthening requirements for MATs in relation to finance and were monitored by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). He continued that there were currently an outstanding secondary and a strong good secondary school that were local authority maintained and that it maybe the case that they were waiting for the best option.

Councillor Townsend referred to the SEND green paper 'Right Support, Right Place, Right Time and would welcome a discussion of the paper.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that the green paper was published the day after the report was pulled together so they would get some more consistency. The green paper was a two-to-three-year plan around SEND and did not have much detail yet.

Councillor Martin referred to the report and strengthening community engagement and one of his concerns as the report indicated was that multi academy trusts be bigger in size. He asked if there was a fear that there would be less community engagement and less feeling that the community would have a stake in their local schools.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that he would have that fear if the Department for Education (DfE) view was that there was enough trusts already in the system, but Durham have some good and really strong Durham based trusts and regional trusts that were involved with Durham schools and were committed to Durham's ethos. He was less confident about larger national trusts and whether they would understand some of the community issues. One of the key priorities would be how they best serve the needs of those communities.

Ms Evans referred to the establishment of a register for children not in school that was positive. She then referred to the parent pledge for any child falling behind and indicated that any parent with a child with SEND would look at this pledge and say that it was unlikely to happen. She then referred to the community and indicated that she always knew the name of the Headteacher at her local school, but this was no longer the case as it was now a trust and not embedded into the community.

The Head of Education and Skills referred to the register of children not in school and the authority had a strong ambition for this for a longer time. They were trying to get an attendance system in place a year in advance of the DfE expectations and

were asking schools to sign up to the attendance data that was shared on a weekly basis. He commented that they were ahead on some of these ambitions and was confident around the infrastructure and praised the schools and trusts who were happy to buy into this. He advised members that there were 27 academies within trusts in the secondary sector out of 31 secondary schools, and that something was needed around the system to join them up in a much better way.

Councillor Hunt commented that there was not enough SEND provision for children transitioning from primary to secondary education and asked what the strategy was going forward given there were not enough places for these children.

The Head of Education and Skills responded that the green paper was very much about SEND education support in primary schools then the drop off of the support in secondary schools and have huge numbers that went to specialist schools. The system was saying that the drop off was too significant and there were real challenges around secondary provision. There was a different strategy around enhanced mainstream provision that ran in secondary schools and advised members they had some schools who were targeted as having skills to support children so they could do more mainstream integration. Nationally, more spaces were needed in special schools to address the lack of mainstream integration at secondary level. Work was going on with special schools in relation to post 16 provision to allow more key stage 3 into special schools.

Councillor Gunn commented that there was little information in the terms of the amount of funding and a lot of the information required more clarification. More information was required of what it meant to be a multi academy trust due to the white paper. In relation to MATs she stressed anxiety for school staff, governors and parents and suggested that governing bodies needed more information before decisions could be taken. Councillor Gunn asked how much information was allowed to be given to provide support to governing bodies into moving to MATs. She asked if there was any support the local authority could provide to governing bodies?

The Head of Education and Skills advised that understanding the due diligence activities by governing bodies was needed before considering trusts as this was much more than just the financial provision. The expectation of the DfE was that the trusts were large and that tied in a lot of capital. They would need to provide help with how the scheme of delegations works within trusts, how the board works and the CEO and how independent the schools could be in terms of uniform and behaviour policies etc. and what was dictated at a central level or local government body level. The authority had a strong education governance support system which they funded as it was crucial for governors and their understanding. If the white paper came into legislation in the next five to ten years governors would have a crucial job. He advised that school improvement was a huge part of what the local authority does, and Leadership Advisers were available to support governance and would provide support should this process move forward.

Resolved: That the report be noted.