

## **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 23 September 2022 at 9.30 am**

#### **Present:**

**Councillor J Cosslett (in the Chair)**

#### **Members of the Committee:**

Councillors V Andrews, I Cochrane, B Coult, M Currah, S Deinali, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hunt, L Mavin, D Mulholland, A Reed, M Simmons, A Sterling, S Townsend, C Varty and M Walton

#### **Faith Community Representative:**

Mrs L Vollans

#### **Co-opted Members:**

Ms A Gunn

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Bell, R Charlton-Laine, C Martin, K Rooney, E Waldock and Mrs R Evans.

### **2 Substitute Members**

Councillor M Simmons substituted for Councillor C Martin, Councillor B Coult substituted for Councillor K Rooney and Councillor V Andrews substituted for Councillor E Waldock.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 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 Growing up in County Durham - Children, Young People and Families Strategy**

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and Chair of Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board that provided members with a draft Growing Up in County Durham (GUICD) 2023-25 Strategy for comments (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership and Joint Head of Integrated Commissioning and Strategic Manager Partnerships were in attendance to present the report.

Members were advised that the consultation had been in three stages and that following the Partnership presenting to members at stage two of the consultation process at a previous meeting their comments had been analysed and incorporated into the draft strategy before members. Members were informed that stage three of the consultation was live and would run until 12 October.

Councillor Varty asked how often the strategy would be reassessed in the future.

The Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership and Joint Head of Integrated Commissioning responded that the initial priorities would run until 2025. However, during the lifetime of delivery they would be involving people in how they deliver and monitor the effectiveness. They would also be ensuring that they had something new to take its place in 2025 so in 18 months of the life of the strategy they would be starting the cycle again to develop a new strategy.

Councillor Sterling indicated that the consultation and engagement was critical to the strategy, and she asked how this would be monitored and what percentage return was seen as being successful. If the engagement was low would the consultation be extended and how would improvements be made in the engagement.

The Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership and Joint Head of Integrated Commissioning responded that they had carried out a lot of work to encourage people to respond to the consultation. Throughout the stages of the process with the dedicated sessions that had taken place they had targeted stake holder groups to ensure that people in hard-to-reach groups were involved in the

development that helped to ensure that they did not have any of those gaps. This was something that was always looked to build on and improve and find different ways of engaging with people and working with some of the voluntary sector partners who often had a better reach to groups than the Council. In an ideal world they would like to receive feedback from a large percentage of the population, but they had to be realistic in what they could achieve. They did not set themselves a percentage target, but they knew what was comparable from other surveys. They would not know how many responses they had received until the end of the consultation, but they would look at this closely to see if any specific additional work was required and feed this back to the committee as a briefing note.

In response to a further question from Councillor Sterling the Strategic Manager Partnerships advised that comparisons could be made with previous strategies as lots of engagement had taken place in relation to health and care consultations. The Strategic Manager Partnerships added that work was always done with hard-to-reach groups and indicated that they carried out a regular student voice survey and the response so far was 10,000 as well as the AAP survey where the information could be utilised. However, performance would manage success as it was not all about numbers but outcomes and people telling their stories about how their lives had been impacted and improved.

Councillor Coult stated that consultation was critical, she then referred to page 41 of the report that referenced mutual trust and respect that was vital, and that it was critical that they got that right. She commented that there was an immense number of challenges and a short time scale and asked if this was achievable.

The Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership and Joint Head of Integrated Commissioning responded that a number of the issues were societal and generational and making those changes was not possible in two years. If they set themselves impossible targets, they would be demotivated in terms of not meeting them and the detail was in the action plan, they wanted to be stretching and challenging but also, they needed to be realistic about what they could deliver. They could bring the action plan back to committee for further scrutiny and discussion. They wanted to make a real difference as a result of the strategy.

In response to a question from Mrs Gunn, the Strategic Manager Partnerships confirmed that an Educational Psychologists was part of the strategy development group who had been involved throughout the process.

Mrs Gunn commented on COVID not being a theme itself in the strategy but impacted on all the themes. She stated that the positive impact of COVID was missing from the strategy, such as people spending more time with their families. She then referred to the term fairer opportunities and what this was trying to achieve and felt the word fairer was very subjective and this would be hard to measure. There were a lot of opportunities, but the problems were the barriers to reach opportunities. She then referred to the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model

that would fit well into the model to visually show how people had their basic needs met and then how opportunities were reflected.

The Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership and Joint Head of Integrated Commissioning responded that when they first looked to develop the strategy, the internal stakeholder group put forward all the things that were linked to their professions around education, social care and vulnerable children. Some within the stakeholder group asked about the broader determinants such as jobs, homes and families. The group decided at that point to take a co-production approach using what children, young people and families had said to them. They needed to deliver all the statutory duties but what was most important were the basic things around people's wellbeing and their lives. They were looking at the action plan to see how they manage and measure deliverables. With regard to COVID, initially they thought they needed a section on COVID and a group working on COVID as this had a big impact on lives, but COVID was threaded through everything, and it needed to be considered in everything they did. When reviewing support or delivery they were thinking about the impact of COVID and what they might need to change or services or support to develop to take into account the impact COVID had had on communities.

Councillor Gunn indicated that there was nothing wrong with being ambitious it was whether it was achievable, she could see where they were going with the strategy and that they wanted to have ambition for children and young people and families in County Durham. She indicated that poverty was a thread and there was not enough in the strategy on the impacts of being in poverty. She agreed with Mrs Gunn with regard to the term fairer opportunities, as what was considered fair by one person was not by another. Everyone lived in different circumstances, but all knew that circumstances for a lot of children and families across the County were difficult and were getting worse. She referred to the recent report from the North East Child Poverty Commission and that one in three children in the North East were living in poverty. She then referred to the report sent out yesterday by the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children to Councillors around poverty issues and what the council were doing and indicated that she found it difficult to criticise and be negative, but she believed that the impact of poverty should come out more and what had been said was relevant but not made strong enough in the Strategy. Councillor Gunn commented that she liked the idea of using the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model and would be good visually.

Mrs Gunn indicated that the poverty context could also be used in the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model.

The Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership and Joint Head of Integrated Commissioning responded that Councillor Gunn did highlight poverty last time and they had strengthened it in the strategy but would take on board her comments that it should be potentially stronger. They were aware of the issues and

added it was about developing actions in response to this and how they could ensure poverty proofing against actions and services.

Officers referred to the fairer opportunities that was a difficult debate and the word opportunities came through from this committee. There was lots of poverty impact and was a real issue that people were worried about, and they would take on board and indicated that the poverty action plan was being consulted on and there was a planned session with the Head of Transactional and Customer Services with Committee and they were working across the different partnerships and would make sure that the information from the consultation was provided to the Head of Transactional and Customer Services. There was a role for the Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board, and they would ensure that this was reflected.

Councillor Gunn commented that it was an ambitious plan but so many things could impact on delivering the plan, funding was the main one and where that funding came from. She asked that her thanks be passed onto everyone involved in the strategy.

Councillor Hunt commented that she did not see anything in the plan with regard to bullying and mental health. She had done some work on this in her ward and bullying in schools was on the increase and had a massive impact on lots of other matters and stated that she would like to see something included on how to tackle this issue.

The Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership and Joint Head of Integrated Commissioning thanked Councillor Hunt for her helpful comments.

Councillor Deinali asked if there would be anything to look at the impact on barriers to opportunities in terms of poor working families who did not have any opportunities as they did not have any additional income.

The Deputy Chair Children, Young People and Families Partnership and Joint Head of Integrated Commissioning responded that they did not want to replicate the work of the poverty action groups and the Children and Young Peoples' Partnership Board were looking at the impact on children and young people's health and wellbeing. In terms of specific actions, they would be looked at when the action plan is developed but it was important to get information out to families and carers on what was available for them.

Councillor Walton asked when measuring success could they ask young people what they thought of the results. She then advised members that the link to the consultation would be circulated by the scrutiny officer to ensure members had an opportunity to provide individual comments too.

Officers responded that the aim was to involve the groups and networks on the impact on an ongoing basis.

**Resolved:** That the draft GUiCD Strategy be received.

## **7 Ofsted ILACS Inspection Durham - May 2022**

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided an overview of the outcomes of the recent Ofsted Standards ILACS Inspection of Children's Services.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services was in attendance to deliver a presentation that provided details of the outcome of the inspection; key headlines and themes; areas of improvement; children in need of help and protection feedback; children in care feedback; care leavers; impact of leaders on social work practice and next steps (for copy of the report and presentation, see file of minutes).

Members were informed that in May 2022 Ofsted carried out a three-week inspection of children's services. Seven inspectors considered evidence which included hundreds of children and young people's records, they spoke with staff, foster carers, CAFFCASS, the regional Judge and some young people who had experienced Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Services.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services advised Members that the overall judgement was rated good with one area outstanding, so they were heading in the right direction.

Councillor Hunt referred to care leavers and commented that she had personally seen a massive difference in the provision that was going in the right direction and if judged now could be outstanding. She then referred to the retention of social workers as children were saying that they were seeing a range of social workers in a short period of time. She was aware that they were looking at apprenticeships that was good and would like more information on this. She then referred to respite care and she was aware that a lot of work was to be done and they needed to be focusing on this as there was a huge need.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that care leavers were a long debate with the inspectors and was borderline for outstanding as they could see what they were doing but couldn't see the impact as yet. With regard to recruitment there were a number of challenges, and an agency workforce was now operating so a number of teams were seeing staff leaving to move to work for agencies, so the vacancy rate had nearly doubled in the last year. There were not enough social workers in the system as the agencies were poaching staff then selling them back to the council for two or three times the cost. They could revisit the workforce strategy and look at what they could do differently

and that was where apprenticeships came in. They were talking to the regulator on how they could support, as new qualified social workers were going to work in agencies, there needed to be some part of the process that supported those workers, and they should have experience before moving into this area. Respite work they had some pieces of work going on, but it was not a short-term fix as those specialist staff do not exist in the system and was more nursing staff was the issue rather than social workers. A number of providers were offering services to adults but not children.

Councillor Gunn congratulated the service and commented that an inspection was a serious level of scrutiny and there was a lot of pressure placed on the service during the course of the inspection. The aim over the years was ambitious for outstanding, and she was sure that they were nearly there. One of the key areas was implementation of the social work academy in reducing the number of cases for social workers. She referred to respite care and asked if during COVID that some providers closed down and there was simply a shortage of providers now and was this across the country. Moving forward the challenges were going to be keeping the number of social workers that the council had.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that it was a challenge keeping social workers and that a recruitment strategy was important. In relation to respite care, it was a regional issue in particular the number of providers. During COVID due to the risks, children did not go into respite care and a number of providers closed down, struggled to get the workforce or were working with restricted services. There were regional discussions going on to address and manage this, but the situation was worse in the North East region, services were originally limited pre pandemic and work is carried out using a regional footprint. The Corporate Director indicated that the social workers academy was a victim of its own success as it was the first in the region and other local authorities had copied so they needed to move onto the next thing to allow them to catch up.

Councillor Gunn asked if the recruitment of social workers was recognised by government as it was a national issue and if anything was in place nationally.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that this year he was Vice-President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and would be President in April and had been involved in lots of conversations with Senior Civil Servants and Ministers. Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted recognised and understood the challenges and were conscious of the need to make some national changes and would expect over the next six months some national activity to start to address the problems.

Mrs Gunn commented that you could see that the number of children in care was increasing and asked if this was a result of the good work and that more children were identified as needing care.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that there was an element of that due to identification and the work that they were doing with families meant that they were able to be clearer about long term sustainability and change and some children did come into care sooner. Across the country the number of children in care was increasing and research showed that this was directly linked to poverty. COVID had also had an impact but that was not seen fully yet. Some groups like respite care had seen an immediate impact, but the majority of the impact was just starting to show now, he would expect to see an increase in numbers of children in care as a result and generally the number of children in care tended to rise during economic pressures, but overwhelming research links the rise to poverty.

Mrs Gunn commented that employee costs were low and asked if this was that due to using more third parties.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services indicated that most of the workforce spend was down as they currently had their lowest number of agency social workers not because they don't need them but because they could not get them, and the cost would be double if they could get the workers.

In response to a further question from Mrs Gunn, the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services indicated that the spend on external placements was significant. However, increases in demand had not been followed by an increase in the supply of spaces. In a normal functioning market, you would see an increase in services as demand increased but that had not happened.

Councillor Coult thanked the team and commented that it was a fantastic result. The areas that were identified by Ofsted you were already aware of and were taking steps to address and led by example with some fantastic things and some of which had been replicated throughout the country. Services were continuing to grow. This was why it was critical that they got the Growing up in County Durham Strategy right so that they could get support for children, young people and families as quickly as possible to stop them needing to come through the system.

Councillor Reed indicated that it was a brilliant result and commented that they should have received outstanding in every area. She was pleased that they had managed to increase the number of foster homes and outlined her concerns about an area of improvement identified in the report - in respect of children going missing and the requirement to wait 30 minutes after the agreed return home time before reporting to the police and asked if they were looking at quicker response times.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that children would have a safety plan individual to them if they were to go missing the plan would set out the response times. There were a range of different challenges, but they had a great partnership with the police and worked closely with the



specialist ERASE team who ensure those at particular risk are identified and addressed. He assured Councillor Reed that when there was a specific risk there was flexibility. They had protocols in place for children's homes for children who were potentially missing, and the Philomena Protocol is used to work with children at risk.

Councillor Hunt referred to the increase in numbers of children in care and asked if that attributed to the work they were doing with early intervention.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that early intervention was been preventative, but it identified the need earlier. There was a balance there and an element of that, but they needed to look at the long-term trend in terms of increased care. Children's care covered a vast array and they had become better at identifying extended family and family networks through early intervention work. Children come into care in a different way and high-end care accounted for 85-90 of over 1000 children in care.

Councillor Hunt commented that even though the numbers had risen children were getting early intervention to limit the long-term damage.

The Chair asked for an update report on the Inspection Action Plan and Service Improvement Plan be brought back to the committee in 6 months to a year.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services agreed to a further report and indicated how proud he was of all the staff who had worked through COVID with some exceptional challenges and continued to be ambitious for our children and did some amazing things.

**Resolved:** That the report and presentation be noted, and a further report brought back to a future meeting of the committee.

*Councillor J Griffiths left the meeting at 11.30 am*

## **8 Revenue and Capital Outturn Quarter 4 2021/2022 and Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn Quarter 1 2022/2023**

The Committee considered reports of the Corporate Director of Resources, the first provided details of the outturn budget position at the end of quarter four 2021/2022 highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget for the year. The second report provided details of the forecast 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 quarter one June 2022 (for copy of reports, see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager was in attendance to present the report.

Councillor Coult referred to page 75, paragraph 24 of the quarter four outturn report referencing the underspend on grant funding and asked if this was linked to COVID and that activities were not able to take place. She then referred to point K in relation to £489,632 contribution to Holiday Activities with Food Reserve from grant income which would be repaid to the Department for Education and asked why some of the grants reported were being paid into reserves. She then asked that given financial pressures on schools was there any schools that were close to going into a deficit position.

The Finance Manager responded that if a grant was received and not spent by the end of the financial year it was put into reserves and spent the next financial year.

The Head of Education and Skills commented that a number of the grants were received late.

The Finance Manager then indicated that the grant awarded from the DfE for holiday activities had been affected by COVID and they were unable to deliver the service, so the grant was given back but funding would be received.

The Head of Education and Skills stated that a meeting would be held on 4 October 2022 with wider education staff to look at current school budgets around the energy situation and if there was no more money or payments then they may have 40 or 50 schools that were going to be in a deficit position. They were trying to go out to schools earlier than they would, at the minute they were very nervous in particularly concerning the impacts of the pay award.

Councillor Gunn referred to the dedicated school's budget and highlighted her concerns about schools and the possibility of 40 or 50 schools in a deficit position converting to academies and asked about what happened to the deficit. The Finance Manager advised that if this were to happen then Durham County Council would carry the deficit and added that this was the worst known pressures on schools which adds pressure to Durham County Council reserves.

In response to a question from Mrs Gunn, the Finance Manager indicated that the vast majority of the £24 million shown in Appendix 2 was home to school transport.

Mrs Gunn sought clarification on the £1.9 million dedicated school grant.

The Finance Manager confirmed that it was individual school transport needs.

In response to a further question from Mrs Gunn, the Head of Education and Skills advised that a piece of work going on around the breakdown of the school transport budget and this would be shared with members.

Members discussed the Dedicated Schools Grant Centrally Retained Block in particular the High Needs and the lack of educational psychologist and

occupational therapists and that schools in Durham had been asked not to refer pupils to educational therapists as there was already too many on the waiting list.

Mrs Gunn suggested that local authorities should be employing education psychologists in years 2 or 3 of their training and look into supporting sensory processing which could have a massive impact on behaviour.

Members were advised that the council were struggling to appoint educational psychologists as there was a national limit on the number that were recruited each year and academy trusts were appointing their own.

Councillor Walton referred to schools not using the service level agreements that had resulted in the authority losing that income and asked if they were looking to stop service level agreements if they were no longer been used.

The Head of Education and Skills responded that they still sold a number of service level agreements, and 170 were income was still strong. The School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant was removed which was £800,000 and its withdrawal resulted in the loss of 22 posts within education, this meant that the service were having to deliver service level agreements differently and the feedback from Head Teachers was good.

**Resolved:** That the overall revenue position be noted.

As Members had now considered the budget reports the Chair asked Members if they wanted to carry out task and finish work on the Medium-Term Financial Plan 13 and if so, what areas of the Children and Young People's service budget did they feel warranted further considerations.

Councillor Gunn indicated that she would not be participating in any recommendations to Cabinet on savings as shown in the minutes at the last meeting.

Councillors Andrews, Deinali and Mullholland agreed with Councillor Gunn and would also not be participating.

It was proposed that the item be considered at the end of the meeting and those who did not wish to participate could leave the meeting.

*Councillors V Andrews and D Mullholland left the meeting at 11.50 am*

## **9 Performance Management Quarter One 2022/2023**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources, which provided progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council's corporate performance framework and highlighted key messages to inform strategic

priorities and work programmes. The report covered performance in and to the end of quarter one, April to June 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager was in attendance to present the report.

**Resolved:** That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter one performance, the continuing impact of COVID-19 and the increased cost of living on the Council's performance, and the actions being taken to address areas of underperformance including the significant economic and well-being challenges because of the pandemic be noted.

*Councillor C Varty left the meeting at 12.00 Noon*

## **10 CAMHS Waiting Times Data**

Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust provided a report on CAMHS waiting times for Member's information.

Members noted that due to IT issues affecting the NHS the information only gave figures up to July 2022. CAMS had indicated that the data provided in January 2023 would give a fuller picture.

Members were advised to forward any questions they may have to the Scrutiny Officer who would liaise with CAMHS for a response.

*Councillors I Cochrane, S Deinali, O Gunn and S Townsend left the meeting at 12.05 pm*

## **11 Any Other Business**

Members wished to convey to Councillor Hood the former Chair of the Committee their very best wishes in his new appointment as Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services.

Councillor I Cochrane, S Deinali, O Gunn and S Townsend left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on the task and finish work.

Members discussed the finish and task work, and the consensus was that they wanted to undertake the task and some of the areas suggested were home to school transport and income generation by the use of school buildings. After consideration of the issues the group would pull together some recommendations that would fall into the overarching submission from the Corporate and Overview Scrutiny Management Board.

Councillor Simmons asked if she could be involved in the task group.

**Resolved:** The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake the Task and Finish MTFP activity and that the areas to be considered include Home to School Transport and the potential to generate income through out of hours school buildings use.