

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 **Monday 9 January 2023 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Reed (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Cosslett, S Deinali, J Griffiths, B Kellett, L Mavin, D Mulholland, K Rooney, M Simmons, A Sterling, S Townsend, E Waldock and M Walton

Co-opted Members:

Ms R Evans and Mrs A Gunn

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Bell, I Cochrane, M Currah, O Gunn, C Hunt, C Martin, C Varty and Mrs L Vollans.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor B Kellett substituted for Councillor C Varty and Councillor M Simmons substituted for Councillor C Martin.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 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 Relationship Based Social Work Practice

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided an overview of the progress being made within Children's Social Care to embed high quality relationship based social work.

The Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Professional Practice was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided the background and key developments; impact and the next steps (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

As the framework has developed its use among teams has increased including use by partners in educational settings and the North East Ambulance Service. Members were advised that the practice framework was having a positive impact on children and families in County Durham and that it was also a thread running through the recent ILACS and was highlighted that social workers use strong relationship based practice to build trusting and enduring relationships with children and their families.

Councillor Walton asked what percentage of staff overall had taken up the staff training.

The Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Professional Practice responded that he would get back to Councillor Walton with the exact figures but indicated that the majority of staff had attended the two-day training course. The five-day training course was now a six-day advance course that was targeted at managers, social consultants and early practitioners.

Mrs Gunn commented that they were achieving real sustainable change that demonstrated they had high investment and were delivering high value.

The Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Professional Practice indicated that the work practice was delivered across the whole system so that the child and family were empowered and experience continuity.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Sufficiency Strategy

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided information on the purpose of the Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care

Leavers, the current delivery position, ongoing challenges and actions that were taking to improve the sufficiency of living arrangements for children and young people in the Council's care.

The Practice Lead Children in Care was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided local data and intelligence; key achievements; listening to children and young people; providing stability; out of area living arrangements; unregulated arrangements and key development priorities (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

Currently there were a large number of children and young people in care, and this was reflected both regionally and nationally. There was a need to increase the number of foster carers to meet the increasing demand.

The number of unaccompanied asylum seekers has increased too adding to the pressure of an already stretched resource and there were increases in the number of children and young people on the edge of care that require support.

The Practice Lead advised that the service was looking for small homes for children and young people and that large homes did not work as well meeting the needs of children. The service regularly meets with local providers at a forum who were motivated to work with the authority, the forum was well attended and there was a waiting list of providers to join the forum.

Members learned that there were a number of children and young people in out of area placements, but the vast majority of those placements were close to the County boundary. However, for some other children it was right for them to be placed far from the county boundary and some of County Durham's children were in places such as Plymouth and Aberdeen. The Practice Lead highlighted that school was a significant factor in a child's life and that education stability was very important and the service ensured that children and young people who live outside of County Durham boundary but where they remained within travelling distance to their school they would travel to their original school. A very small proportion live outside of these arrangements and reported that there were successes in returning children and young people to regional arrangements.

Members were advised that in relation to unregulated arrangements and since the report was written move on plans had now been developed for 4 of the children with further work ongoing for the remaining 3 children.

Councillor Sterling indicated that she liked the idea of small children's homes and asked about staffing for these homes and if they were upskilling existing staff or looking for new specialist staff and if they were on track for the 35 new foster families by March 2023.

The Practice Lead Children in Care responded that they were not on track for new foster families, but they had gone back to foster carers as a group to ask why they were fostering children and what was special about Durham. They did know that foster carers were the best at recruiting other foster carers.

Members were also advised that they were going to re-launch another mockingbird hub which was successful and used this as a mechanism to recruit more foster carers.

The Practice Lead Children in Care indicated that the service had a range of ideas, but foster carers needed to tell them what works. She then referred to staffing in children's homes and advised that it would be a mixture of experienced staff and recruitment of new staff, they were working on a training offer for staff in children's homes so that staff have an enhanced level of awareness and are able to respond to trauma. Work had also taken place with Full Circle, to ensure that children and young people had a new plan when they go into a children's home.

Councillor Walton asked how close they were on the recruitment of foster carers.

The Practice Lead Children in Care responded that it was a difficult position, they had recruited new foster carers but then some established foster carers had left. The age profile of foster carers was largely those people of middle age onwards and as the foster carers get older, they leave which leaves a net situation of no progress and the service would need to strike a balance, so they needed to constantly recruit.

Councillor Walton then asked for further information on an unregulated setting and how they were balancing keeping children in a stable setting as this was another move for a child.

The Practice Lead Children in Care responded that each decision was based on a child-by-child basis and was taken by the Director of Children's Social Care. In some cases, a child would be placed in an unregulated setting overnight only. The children and young people are presented to other home providers, every child is presented differently and if a placement is not successful the child would bounce out which would be harmful to the child.

There were cases where it was an overnight stay and the child would go back to their substantive home, a child would only move if it was the right place for them.

In response to a further question from Councillor Walton, the Practice Lead Children in Care indicated that unregulated settings were as safe as they were able to make them, and they had a number of mechanisms for assuring safety for children in any such setting.

Mrs Gunn asked if 'sufficiency strategy' was the right term to be used.

The Practice Lead Children in Care indicated that they could ask young people their thoughts, but the term was part of the regulations and the Children Act 1989 that requires local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of children looked after.

Mrs Gunn then referred to the capital spending and asked if consideration had been given to the impact on climate change. The Practice Lead Children in Care confirmed that climate change had been considered.

Mrs Gunn referred to universal short breaks mentioned in the report and asked if consideration had been given to private users outside of children's social care been able to access the facilities such as children with disabilities. The Practice Lead Children in Care indicated that the project was at the early stages so there was no reason why this could not be considered.

In response to a further question from Mrs Gunn, the Practice Lead Children in Care indicated that they had appointed a psychologist so had not faced any problems in recruitment of psychologists they also had access to the Full Circle service. This field of psychology was niche and not the same as educational psychologists.

Mrs Evans thanked the Practice Lead for addressing climate change and giving real examples of how climate change is addressed and commented that she would like to see the details of the impact on climate change contained within more reports.

Councillor Deinali referred to the recruitment of foster carers who were unable to proceed due to lack of bedroom space and unable to move to a bigger property unless they had foster children and asked if there was the ability for foster carers to move to larger properties.

The Practice Lead Children in Care indicated that they worked with housing providers and foster carers to overcome this issue and would continue to do so.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Revenue and Capital Forecast 2022/23 Q2

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided details of the forecast outturn budget position for the 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 September 2022 (for copy, see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) was in attendance to present the report and highlighted the major variances and advised

Members that since writing the report there was additional funding for schools next year.

He emphasised that pressures from the rise in the number of children looked after with complex needs, 981 in quarter one rising to 1028 in quarter two were impacting on the budget.

The Finance Manager CYPS added that schools were in a better position having taken decisions between quarters one and two and had managed reductions in energy contracts, but that significant work would need to be done assuming pay awards stay, and the service was working with schools to set budgets for the next financial year. The additional government funding for schools will not impact on until the next financial year.

In relation to the centrally retained block more special school places were being taken up which was costing more and was impacting on the high needs block which was a deficit balance. The Finance Manager CYPS emphasised that this was a problem nationally and the high needs block deficit at Durham County Council was at the lower end of local authority high needs block deficit balances with others having much higher deficits than Durham County Council. He went on to advise that Durham County Council was part of the Delivering Better Value programme, and it would lead to more efficiencies and would come in later this year.

In response to a question from Councillor Townsend on the pay award for teachers and support staff and the impact on the budget the Children and Young People's Finance Manager indicated that the pay award was for the current financial year and the additional funding from government was for the next financial year.

Mrs Gunn asked for an update on the home to school transport analysis and how much of the higher needs block was to do with third party providers.

The Finance Manager CYPS indicated that a report on the home to school transport would be presented to a future scrutiny committee. He would circulate a response to the committee on third party providers but indicated that it was relatively small.

The Head of Education and Skills advised Members that a small team had been recruited to look at home to school transport and expected a report April 2023.

In response to a question from Councillor Mavin the Children and Young People's Finance Manager indicated that there were some special schools with a deficit budget.

Resolved: That the overall revenue position be noted.

9 Performance Management 2022/23 Q2

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 two, July to September 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Equalities and Strategic Manager was in attendance to present the key points of the report.

Mrs Evans referred to the revised structure of the report and commented that it was much easier to follow but the figures were not helpful to scrutinise. She indicated that she had previously given examples of items that would be helpful such as the number of library memberships for children and young people and the number of young children who could swim.

The Corporate Equalities and Strategic Manager advised Members that he would feed Mrs Evans comments back to the team who develops the report and provided details of how the report and indicators were developed which was around the Council Plan.

Mrs Gunn agreed with Mrs Evans and commented that they required more performance indicators to enable them to better understand the key performance indicators and where they could feed into where priorities should be.

Resolved: That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter two 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.

10 CAMHS Waiting Time Data - For Information

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

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