

## **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 7 October 2022 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

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

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors S Deinali, O Gunn, C Hunt, A Reed, K Rooney, S Townsend, C Varty and M Walton

**Co-opted Member:**

Ms A Gunn

**Also Present:**

Councillor P Jopling

#### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Bell, I Cochrane, C Martin, A Sterling, E Waldock and Ms Evans.

#### **2 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

#### **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **4 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

There were no items from Co-opted Members or interested parties.

## **5 Annual 0-25 Family Health Service Update**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Public Health that updated Members on the 0-25 Family Health Service workforce and service delivery across County Durham (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The General Manager 0-25 Family Health Service was in attendance to present the report and advised Members that they had just been notified that they had received a silver award for their wellbeing priority and were now aiming for gold.

Councillor Hunt congratulated the service on their silver award. She then asked what the main issue was with the recruitment of health visitors. She then asked for the wait times for an appointment at the centres given that they were no longer a drop-in facility and how were they dealing with the issues surrounding dental care for children.

The General Manager responded that there were not enough health visitors trained nationally, the funding for the health visitor training came from Health Education North East. The service always asked for as many students as they could but there was limited funding. This year the Trust submitted funding for 60 places, but they only managed to recruit 42 places. They were trying to encourage Band 5 nurses to work in the community and become health visitors but, it was a very challenging role. She highlighted, that last week the Institute of Health Visitors were filming some of the health visitors delivering more complex work in the East of Durham to show elements of their profession and the rewards. There was a national shortage of health visitors with many suffering burn out and retiring as soon as possible. With regard to wait times for an appointment the Officer advised that sessions were held most days so the wait time for an appointment should be a week at the most. They did not provide dental services, but they would assist any families that were struggling to register with a dentist.

Councillor Walton commented that the recruitment of health visitors was alarming, but she was encouraged that some work had been carried out. She indicated that staff undertaking a Band 4/5 experience was good and achieving the silver award was brilliant then asked if there was anything that members could do to support and promote the work of the service. She then referred to the virtual delivery of services and asked if this was still an option and if they could still get opticians to go into schools to offer an "outreach service".

The General Manager responded that they did continue to deliver some elements by virtual appointments, but they needed to carry out face to face visits in particular as part of the child health programme as they needed to see and interact with the child and commented that families wanted face to face visits. With regard to opticians in schools this was a commissioning decision and advised that there was currently a scheme running in special schools.

Councillor Gunn referred to dental services and how this service had deteriorated and commented that dentists used to go into schools, but that seemed to have gone and asked if they could put on any pressure to support dental inspections in schools.

The Consultant in Public Health responded that the oral health strategy was currently out for consultation, and she would share the link to the consultation with members of the committee and commented that dental services were a great challenge and the pandemic had impacted on the service. She would take back members comments to the Director of Public Health and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Councillor Deinali referred to SEND and that it was encouraging to see focus on early intervention and asked what welfare support was offered to 19–25-year-olds who were in education and what support was offered to their families when the family benefits stopped when a child turned 19 years. She also pointed out that children with SEND could stay in education until the age of 25 years and unless you knew how to navigate the benefits system claiming support was difficult. She asked that they ensure relevant and robust information was provided for children with SEND, otherwise children were going into education without access to that support which impacted on their health and wellbeing. She asked what relevant support was in place.

The Consultant in Public Health responded that she would ask the SEND Lead to provide an example and circulate this to members of the committee.

Councillor Varty commented that it was sad that there were not as many health visitors and there was no continuity with health visitors and records needed to be kept of conversations that had taken place to alleviate the need to have to repeat to each health visitor as this was discouraging engagement with the service.

Mrs Gunn raised concerns about the vulnerable cohort of children not being reached, she acknowledged that there were school nurses in County Durham schools but what about children who resided in County Durham but had to attend schools outside of the county.

The General Manager responded that in relation to reach 100% of families were offered the service but not everyone would receive the same contact.

In relation to those children who attended school outside of the area the General Manager advised that there was reciprocal help from school nurses who work together with no boundaries. Mrs Gunn advised that there was a gap, and it was important to ensure that high risk families did not fall through it.

Councillor Gunn referred to paragraph 58 of the report and noted that five members of the team were trained to work with groups of children around emotional

regulation and indicated that there were more challenging children in schools now than before and asked if the service were reaching all schools in the county and if there was the opportunity to increase the number of staff.

The General Manager indicated that there was an expansion of the training of staff planned. They currently reached 35 of the targeted schools but she did not think they could reach the 214 primary schools in County Durham.

Councillor Gunn commented that without something in place when pupil behaviour became so challenging this could lead to an exclusion for the pupil.

The Consultant in Public Health advised that she co-chaired the Children and Young People's Mental Health Partnership and that there was an annual report and all partners worked to help build resilience. Members were advised that a report was planned for May 2023 around Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing.

Councillor Reed referred to staffing in relation to 5000 health visitor shortage and that although 15 appointments were made only 10 had stayed and asked if there were support mechanisms in place for health visitors and staff who dealt with complex issues especially around safeguarding.

The General Manager responded that there was a single point of contact for any safeguarding concerns where they could talk to a Specialist Safeguarding nurse for advice and supervision. They also had one to one supervision with line managers on a monthly basis and had a supervision model in place and the facility to talk to a manager until 8.00 pm, they also had planned wellbeing activities.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the report be noted.

*Councillor C Varty left the meeting at 10.30 am*

## **6 Best Start in Life Update**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Public Health that provided Members with an update of the progress made in addressing the Best Start in Life priorities and highlighted the importance of early intervention and prevention in the first 1001 critical days.

The report provided a brief update on the work undertaken to address some of the key priorities progress and challenges. It also outlined some of the next steps for improving the actions as outlined in the Best Starts in Life work plan (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Consultant in Public Health was in attendance to present the report. She advised that it was a multi agency report and the challenges faced in County Durham were common to all North East local authorities.

Mrs Gunn referred to breastfeeding take up and asked if there was a certain demographic where low or high take up could be identified and asked how common tongue tie was among newborns as it was not talked about. Mrs Gunn then referred to health visitors supporting breast feeding and asked if they were trained in this area and if they made assumptions or if there was an unconscious bias towards breastfeeding. She then referred to speech and language and asked if hearing was part of the assessment. Mrs Gunn then referred to the National Child Measurement Programme and commented that she was concerned of the impact on young girls who may gain puppy fat throughout their adolescence and may develop eating disorders and how this was managed.

The Consultant in Public Health confirmed there was variation in the initiation of breastfeeding and that it was higher in affluent areas and lower in more deprived areas and this was seen regionally and nationally. Members were advised that there was detailed information on breastfeeding available on the County Durham Insight website, but the reasons for the variation were complex.

The General Manager 0-25 Family Health Service indicated that staff were trained to deal with tongue tie and commented that not all tongue tie cases required a release, but the health visitor would discuss the case with the specialist nurse. Severe tongue tie would be dealt with by County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust, however tongue tie doesn't always require a procedure but when it does this is a simple one.

She then indicated that staff undertake a lot of training on breastfeeding and worked to the UNICEF standards. Staff did not promote formula milk but did support those who were bottle feeding and advised members that staff were audited.

With regard to hearing screening the General Manager 0-25 Family Health Service advised that the newborn screening programme had been running for a number of years, the school age screening was last run in 2021 and a minimal number of children were identified with hearing loss due to the success of the newborn programme. Development reviews took place that did not carry out tests, but discussion took place and referrals made to specialists if necessary. If picked up in the speech and language checks the child would be referred to audiology.

The Consultant in Public Health referred to the national child measurement programme and advised that the programme measured children's weight and height. Parents would receive a letter advising of their child's weight and height and offering support and advice if required. She added that County Durham was

participating in MAP2, which was a web-based research pilot programme that provided support and information to parents and carers.

Councillor Jopling commented that the aftercare now received following the birth of a child had reduced over the years and new mothers were not receiving the care to encourage you to breastfeed.

Councillor Hunt agreed with Councillor Jopling that more aftercare was needed as the encouragement to breastfeed was not there.

Councillor Gunn referred to Family Hubs and asked if government funding was for 3 years and commented that the figures sounded good overall. She then asked how much funding would County Durham receive if the application to be a trailblazer was successful and would the Family Hubs be extended. Councillor Gunn then referred to paragraphs 56 – 58 of the report and highlighted the poor availability and take up of the healthy start vitamins and asked for further information and suggested that the service work with the voluntary sector as they were often at the heart of supporting children and families in communities, such as with childcare facilities. With regard to breastfeeding, Councillor Gunn suggested that there may be cultural aspects and there was not enough focus on support, she added that those who had children during COVID who did breastfeed, support was provided by friends and family and peer support was crucial.

The Consultant in Public Health responded that in relation to Family Hubs there had been significant support and members had recently received a briefing on Family Hubs and that she would ensure this was shared with members. If County Durham became a trail blazer it would attract a small amount of additional funding, but no figures were yet available. With regard to healthy start vitamins and vouchers they were developing a communications plan for eligible families, and she would feedback the member's comments regarding the voluntary sector. In relation to breastfeeding there was lots of discussion, which was positive, but the issue was complex and multi-faceted, there was support for women and there was work planned to understand cultural norms including womens perceptions of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding was better for the child and the mother and cheaper.

Councillor Walton referred to unintentional injuries and that the figures for County Durham were higher than the national figures, but they did seem to come down prior to COVID and asked what the main driver was for those figures to come down.

The Consultant in Public Health indicated that these were quite complex and there was different factors at work, but the recent trend was narrowing the gap, their systematic approach to awareness training of staff was one of the impacting factors but was not definitive but it was encouraging that work was going in the right direction.

Councillor Reed referred to Family Hubs and asked if there was support available for those who spoke a different language.

The Consultant in Public Health indicated that educational services provided a lot of support in schools, she would take the question back in relation to family hubs.

**Resolved:** (i) That the contents of the report be noted.

(ii) That the opportunities to work collaboratively and further explore opportunities to meet the needs of children and young people as early as possible be promoted.

*Councillor P Jopling left the meeting at 11.08 am*

## **7 Child Poverty**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided Members on the progress of the Child Poverty Working Group (CPWG) in addressing the impact of poverty on children, young people and their families in County Durham since the last update in January 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Social Inclusion Operations Manager and Research and Consultation Officer were in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The presentation provided Members with details of the vision for the Child Poverty Working Group and a demonstration of the Durham Insight web site that provided access to information, data and research about what it is like to live in County Durham. Members were also provided with details of the priorities, additional support and next steps.

The Research and Consultation Officer provided members with a demonstration of the data held on Durham insights website. The poverty dashboard provided information relating to child poverty, free school meals eligibility, universal credit, household income and deprivation 2019. Members were advised that the current cost of living crisis would not be captured until March 2023 and not be reflected in the data until spring 2024. Members learned that free school meals eligibility linked to the deprivation data and indicated that 29.6% of pupils in County Durham were eligible for free school meals but only 75% of those eligible were actually taking a free school meal.

Councillor Gunn thanked officers for a detailed report and made a number of comments on the child poverty situation and congratulated staff on the work done to enhance the lives of children and families across County Durham. She applauded the partnership work with the voluntary sector and indicated the levelling up was not just about infrastructure but was also about children and families and

creating situations where they can have aspirations. She suggested that grants be provided to children and provided details of a child that was part of the British Team for Taekwondo, but he had to subsidise this himself and a grant would be helpful.

Councillor Townsend referred the data around the cost of living crisis that would not be shown until 2024 and the statistics were getting worse. She stated that child poverty had increased by 3% across County Durham from 2019 to 2021 and it was clear from the data that more children were living in child poverty than in previous years and some areas of the county had consistently higher levels of child poverty. Children with special educational needs and disabilities were representative in those child poverty measures, and it was important that all members knew and heard those facts and tried to do what they could and asked if there was a message that councillors could give to MPs.

The Member was advised that the Officer would get back to her with regard to lobbying on poverty. She then advised that the Department of Education did not want to fund holiday activities during half term holidays, but she would take this away and have a broader conversation.

In response to a question from Councillor Walton on why there was a lag in the data, the Officer indicated that it was a national data set that needed to be processed and was not the Council's data.

Councillor Hunt indicated that the cost of childcare swallowed up any additional income, the current childcare offer was for thirty hours and if parents wanted to be proactive and work longer could Durham County Council look at increasing the childcare offer for families who wanted to work full time but found it difficult to fund.

The Officer responded that she would take Councillor Hunt's comments back.

Mrs Gunn commented that some parents could and may wish to contribute to some of the activities provided.

The Officer responded that the facilities were fully inclusive, and they used the data to target areas where free school meals were provided but every child had access to the fun with food programme activities.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the report be noted.

*Councillors O Gunn and S Townsend left the meeting at 11.55 am*

## **8 Corporate Parenting Annual Report**

The Committee considered the report of the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel that presented the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-22, a copy of which had been circulated (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Annual Report 2021-22 was endorsed by Cabinet at its meeting on 14 September 2022 and was presented to Council on 21 September for information.

Councillor Walton, Vice-Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel was in attendance to present the report and thanked officers from the Corporate Parenting Panel along with all of the young people who made the Annual Report possible.

There's was a wide range of work taking place across the board to support the children and young people in the county's care, as well as care leavers.

She alluded to some of the 2021-22 achievements, and were particularly proud of, including college bus pass deductions no longer being taken from care experienced young people's bursaries at New College Durham.

In addition, all care experienced young people in County Durham who were in years 12 and 13 had been awarded an 'all time top up bus pass' to use anytime, not just when they're going to college. Further discussions around access to public transport were continuing into 2022/23, as this continued to be a challenge for care leavers.

Although the recent Ofsted inspection fell outside of the Annual Report timeframes, Ofsted noted the Corporate Parenting Strategy as ambitious.

Work was continuing to address the 2022-23 priorities identified in the annual report, which included personalised care, staff in Children's Homes and Foster Carers, and Family Time and she looked forward to providing a progress update in the next annual report. Throughout the year they continued to meet with young people from the children in care council, who hold the council to account on the progress they were making against these priorities.

Luke, one of the young people from the Children in Care Council attended Council on 21 September to present the Annual Report, and he did a fantastic job. It made her very proud to see young people's confidence and knowledge grow, and to see them go from strength to strength.

The quote on the front of this year's Annual Report 'children are like boats and just need a little bit of guidance to go down the right path' and the Corporate Parenting Panel helped to promote that the county's young people were more than 'children in care' they were young people with a range of skills, abilities and talents.

She thanked everyone involved in the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel and presented the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report for 2021-22.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report be noted.