

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 22 September 2023 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Reed (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Cosslett, B Coult (substitute for M Simmons), R Crute, J Griffiths, L Mavin, D Mulholland, K Rooney, J Scurfield, C Varty and M Walton

Also Present:

Councillors A Shield and M Stead

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chair announced with regret the sad passing of Councillor L Kennedy who represented the Dawdon division. Members stood and observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect to Councillor L Kennedy.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Bell, S Deinali, M McGaun, M Simmons, S Townsend, E Waldock and Ms R Evans and Ms A Gunn.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor B Coult substituted for Councillor M Simmons.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023 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

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised Members that he had been informed that due to her absence at the meeting today, Ms Gunn would be submitting some comments and questions in respect of the agenda items that would be referred to the relevant service for a response upon their receipt.

6 Child Poverty in County Durham

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided Members with 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 October 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager, One Point Service, Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation.

The presentation provided Members with details of the aim and four key priorities for the Child Poverty Working Group. Members were also provided with details of additional support and next steps (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Councillor Coult indicated that parents did not always know where to obtain information and it was key to get this done. She then asked if the Family Hubs would accept school uniform donations from schools.

In response, the Strategic Manager confirmed that the Family Hubs would accept donations from schools and provided details of a little boy who obtained a pair of school shoes from the Hub and was thrilled and stated how the donations make a real difference.

Councillor Scurfield referred to the number of families who were eligible for free school meals that were not registered and to those families that were not aware of the other areas of support available to families eligible for free school meals. She asked what schools do to promote the assistance available.

The Strategic Manager responded that this had been discussed at the Child Poverty Working Group and indicated that they needed to do more around communications and marketing as those children in years 1 and 2 automatically receive free school meals and parents don't think that they need to apply and if eligible should be registering.

Councillor Scurfield indicated that if schools were distributing the healthy start vouchers, they would know the eligible families.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that they needed to go back to schools and ask the family support networks where the gaps were with free school meal take up but not voucher take up and stated that he would take this back to the next DASH meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Scurfield, the Strategic Manager indicated that pre-school children would receive their vouchers from Nurseries or Health Visitors and commented that the take up of the vouchers was really good. The uptake would reduce once the children attended college and indicated that they needed to do something and getting families on the Healthy Start voucher in the beginning and help them gain access to free school meals.

Councillor Scurfield responded that automatic enrolment would solve a number of issues.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that he would take this to the forums.

Councillor Mulholland asked if there was any further data as to what the main causes were of poverty.

The Strategic Manager responded that they know that three quarters of the families in poverty at least one parent worked so it was low wages and zero-hour contracts as well as the cost of childcare. It was difficult for some families to return to work due to the cost of childcare, there was also the transition to universal credit and child benefit care it was multi layered. She indicated that the Northeast was suffering due to the lower wages within the region.

Councillor Varty referred to transport issues that prevented some people from going to work.

Councillor Mavin indicated that if parents were not claiming free school meals, they were not included in the census data and schools would not receive the pupil premium, so schools needed to chase this to obtain the pupil premium.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that they were confident in moving forward with enrolment due to the systems they had in place and the work done around sharing data.

The Strategic Manager indicated that this was going to be one of the main priorities this year for the Working Group.

Councillor Crute referred to the MTFP report and the reasons behind cuts and pressures was government austerity. He stated that one in four children in Durham

were living in poverty and should never have been allowed to happen and he was worried about pressures on this budget. He stated that auto enrolment for free school meals had to be the way forward and his concern was the stigma around free school meals and removing this stigma and the solution was to give every child a free school meal. He congratulated the team on the work they were doing.

The Strategic Manager responded that the National Working Group may recommend at the end of their pilot work for the Department for Work and Pensions to enrol.

Councillor Reed referred to free school meals and the use of biometrics that would flash up on the screen that the child received free school meals.

The Head of Education and Skills responded that if they alleviated all these issues, you still have the monetary allocation and not purchasing anything on a morning breaks signals that you are on free school meals. He commented that schools were thinking about carrying forward money and meal options where you could purchase food at break and lunchtime.

Councillor Reed indicated that there were positives in the biometric system and you could monitor what the child was eating and indicated that auto enrolment for free school meals was the way forward.

Councillor Crute indicated that it was important that children were eating and if not eating properly could not concentrate and needed to eat regularly during the day.

Resolved: That the contents of the report and presentation be noted.

7 Home to School Transport Outcomes

The Committee considered the joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth and Corporate Director of Resources that provided Members with the outcomes of the public consultation in relation to Durham County Council's Home to School Transport Service (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided the background to the consultation, process and areas of consultation. The presentation also provided a summary of feedback received and details of the proposed recommendations (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Councillor Walton commented that 324 responses out of 9000 users which equated to 3.6% was a very low data source and those who had responded were more likely to experience a greater impact. She asked what could be done to encourage more people to respond.

The Strategic Manager responded that in terms of the home to school transport consultation a broad range of channels were used to promote the consultation including attending face to face meeting with key groups. He commented that he would take back the comments about consultation response rates to the Councils Consultation team.

Councillor Crute referred to the flexibility of the proposed scheme and that £2.00 flat rate for concessionary fares. If that offer was then withdrawn those concessionary fares would then be aligned to commercial fares and this would impact on families. He then referred to unsafe walking routes to school and his argument was always that the routes should be made safe and asked about the impact on the Council to make these routes up to a safe standard. He stated that if the routes were not made safe more children would be on the concessionary seat scheme. He asked about the feasibility of making routes safe and a commitment to make the routes safe.

The Strategic Manager responded that any child on a route assessed as unsafe would be provided with free transport to school. He indicated that they would not be addressing every unsafe route due to the cost viability but there were 5-6 routes that had been identified and would be reviewed to ascertain the cost of improvement such as installing a streetlight or crossing. They would analyse each route to understand where there was an appropriate business case to carry out the work. If there was not a business case it was unlikely that the council would spend a large amount of capital to generate improvement, for example where there was only a small number of journeys on the route.

In response to a question from Councillor Crute on concessionary fares and the alignment with commercial fares the Strategic Manager clarified that the Council's decision was to align it to the business service improvement plan rate for the current year, after which it would be revisited in light of any changes to this.

Councillor Crute referred to the bus service improvement plan offer and routes between villages where commercial transport was not provided and asked if the proposals were changed would they come back to this Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that concessionary fares would be reviewed on a year-by-year basis. He stated that some people were not happy about the concessionary scheme as it was thought to be based upon historic reasons including school amalgamations. He gave an example of Durham Johnson school that was on two sites and they ran a concessionary scheme for those children who needed to be moved over to the new site. There was also an inequality in what people paid, as St. Leonards pupils could pay £3.50 per day for transport, whereas some other schools provide their own service which made it free to parents. He then referred to safe walking routes to school and explained the focus was on current safe routes that needed some work on them. He gave an

example of where a current route was deemed as being unsafe and the alternative cost of transport would be over £780,000 per year. This would need to be evaluated alongside the capital costs of something like a pedestrian crossing to make it safe which maybe expensive in the short term but have longer term savings.

Councillor Scurfield asked if there was any monitoring on the impact of children getting to school with some of these proposals in particular children with SEND.

The Strategic Manager responded that there were a range of factors around child attendance at schools that are monitored, transport could contribute to this but the proposals would not impact on entitled children getting transport to school. He stated that anyone who was eligible for transport would continue to be provided with it and the programme of work was more about the options for how transport is provided and also doing it more efficiently.

Resolved: That the contents of the report and presentation be noted.

8 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2022

The Committee considered the joint report of the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services and the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel that presented the draft Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report April 2022- March 23 for comment.

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

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

She alluded to some of the achievements and were particularly proud of, including:

- The focus on personalised care, ensuring each young person had an individual care plan detailing how they need to be looked after to help them get the best from their lives.
- The awareness raising work remind staff and carers how young people like to be treated. Young people are now on the interview panels for all foster carers and children's home staff to ensure they help appoint the best people to the jobs.
- The updates that had been made to Family Time rooms to help young people have the best possible experiences with their family members, in more natural surroundings.

- Development of the care leavers scrutiny committee and the care experienced young inspectors programme to help the Council explore how services are received by young people.
- Commitment to continue to support young people with their transport arrangements.
- Implementation of the Mockingbird Foster care model which helps support foster families in a way similar to other family networks.

The Ofsted inspection results earlier in the year were certainly an achievement, with the Council being graded as 'good' overall with the impact of leaders on social work practice being 'outstanding'. In addition, Ofsted noted the Corporate Parenting Strategy as ambitious.

Work was continuing to address the 2023-24 priorities, which included savings and life skills, and she looked forward to providing a progress update next year. Across the year they met with young people from the children in care council, who hold the Council to account on the progress they were making.

She was extremely proud of the work of the Panel, and the commitment within the service to ensure the best possible experiences and outcomes for the young people in the Council's care.

She presented the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2022-23 for information.

Resolved: That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2022-23 be noted.

9 Quarter Four: Revenue and Capital Outturn 2022/23 and Quarter One: Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2023/24

The Committee considered reports of the Corporate Director of Resources, the first provided details of the final outturn budget position for Children and Young People's Services 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 2023 (for copy of reports, see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager was in attendance to present the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Crute, the Finance Manager indicated that the financial position for Aycliffe Secure Centre would still be reported to this Committee and stated that there was an injection of funding into the centre.

Resolved: That the Children and Young People's Services overall revenue position be noted.

10 Quarter One 2023/24 Performance Management Report

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive, which provided an overview of progress towards achieving the key priorities within the Council Plan 2023-27 in line with the Council's corporate performance framework. The report covered performance in and to the end of quarter one, April to June 2023. (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided a performance summary for Quarter one, 2023/24; provided details of the developing performance management and items that were going well and issues that they were addressing (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Councillor Crute referred to the performance indicator in relation to the percentage of mothers smoking at the time of delivery and asked if there were any reasons why this was increasing and if there was specific target action taken to address this.

The Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager responded that this was part of the joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and there was a work programme with some actions to address some of this. He advised of some work around a midwifery programme around collective carer where you would have the same midwife and stated that the pilot programme achieved some successes in reducing the number of mothers smoking at the time of delivery and was piloted in one area in Durham and they were looking to roll out region wide. He stated that the Performance Indicator was in the Council Plan but the reporting on that would go to the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Mulholland referred to social workers and their increasing workload and stated that it was promising to see that vacancies were been filled and asked what had been done to mitigate pressures on current social workers.

The Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager responded that there were some programmes in place within the service around supporting wellbeing and commented that the service does this well and received employer of the year as part of the national social worker awards.

Councillor Scurfield referred to the timescales for assessments and stated the delays were impacting on children and asked how far out of timescales were these and how were the service ensuring that children were getting the assessments.

The Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager responded that it was a marginal drop and stated where the assessment was delayed it was only a few days out of timescale that was a capacity issue. He stated that a number of assessments were now in range.

The Head of Education and Skills advised Members that a session on this would be held in January 2024 to talk through some of the challenging issues and the recruitment priorities.

In conclusion, the Committee generally supported the move to the new report format, particularly welcoming the increased use of performance dashboards, charts and data.

Resolved: (i) That the overall strong position and direction of travel in relation to quarter one performance, and the actions being taken to address areas of challenge be noted.

(ii) That the changes and improvements to the new format performance report which will be used exclusively from quarter two 2023/24 be noted.

11 CAMHS Waiting Times - Report for Information

Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust provided a report on Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services waiting times for Member's information.

Members were advised to forward any questions they may have to the Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer or the Overview and Scrutiny Officer who would liaise with CAMHS and circulate their response.