

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 8 January 2024 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Reed (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors R Crute, S Deinali, J Griffiths, C Hunt, L Mavin, K Rooney, M Simmons, S Townsend, C Varty, E Waldock, M Walton and D Oliver (substitute for J Cosslett)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Cosslett, C Lines, M McGaun, D Mullholland, J Scurfield, Ms R Evans and Ms A Gunn.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor D Oliver substituted for Councillor J Cosslett.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 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

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

6 Support for Children and Families on the Edge of Care

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided Members with an overview of the support available for Children and Families on the Edge of Care, the programmes and projects to help families, an understanding of the referral process and any opportunities, successes and future plans (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Practice Lead Safeguarding and Strategic Manager were in attendance to deliver the report.

Councillor Walton indicated that there were a lot of services on offer and asked how they were ensuring that there was no duplication. She then referred to the acronym 'ERASE' that was a negative term and asked that the service maybe think about changing this.

The Practice Lead Safeguarding responded that in terms of the groups these were specifically designed to meet the individual family's needs and she took the point with regard to the similarities between the groups. She continued that the groups delivered by the one-point service were regularly reviewed and indicated that she could take this back to the service if more information was required.

Councillor Walton asked if there was a lot of overlap between groups and was there an opportunity to carry out efficiency streaming but still ensuring that the support was still available for children and families.

The Practice Lead Safeguarding responded that the groups that were delivered were regularly under review in terms of efficiency and meeting family needs, if there was any potential for duplication this would be reviewed by the service. In terms of the 'ERASE' service this was co-developed with families and young people and it was their idea to call the service 'ERASE.'

Councillor Varty indicated that her former colleagues who worked for the service were incredibly positive about their work, in particular the support from managers and she wanted to thank officers on their behalf.

Councillor Hunt referred to the fun with food programme and how the eligibility criteria had changed and asked how this had impacted on those families on low incomes who were still struggling.

The Practice Lead Safeguarding advised that she would take this back to the service and provide Councillor Hunt with a response.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

7 Pre-Birth Intervention Update

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided Members with an update on the progress for the Pre-birth Intervention Service (PBIS) (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Manager, Families First East and Pre-Birth Teams was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided details of the pre-birth intervention service criteria; parents needs and children's plans following care proceedings; details of a case study and what others think (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Councillor Varty wished to commend everyone involved in the service.

Councillor Walton referred to the case study of Baby S and asked what involvement the school had in supporting the young mother.

The Strategic Manager responded that in this case the young mother's attendance at school was really good but this was not always the case for young mums. She continued that in this case the school were supportive and accommodating of the young mother and her needs.

Councillor Townsend stated that it was important and refreshing to see the Council carrying out important crucial work that no one sees that keeps families together in difficult circumstances.

In response to a question from Councillor Oliver, the Strategic Manager indicated that the service did engage with Durham University and had worked with them on a project undertaken on safe sleeping. They looked at training events across the board at various levels such as police officers, health visitors and social workers. She continued that all staff in the service were trained on safe sleeping.

The Chair referred to the real care babies that were a vital tool and commented that the service only had three and asked if this was sufficient and asked the cost of the real care babies.

The Strategic Manager responded that the service had bought two real care babies recently that cost around £1,850 per doll. She would look to see if the service required more dolls and commented that they now had 15 families first teams and would have to consider if more dolls were required.

The Chair asked the Officer to come back to her on this as the dolls help families right from the beginning.

Councillor Hunt also asked if the service could ascertain if the resources were available would the dolls be used more.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Quarter 2 2023/24 Performance Management

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive, which provided an overview of progress towards delivery of the key priorities within the Council Plan 2023-27 in line with the Council's corporate performance framework. The report also covered performance in and to the end of quarter two, 2023/24, July to September 2023 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manger was in attendance to deliver the report.

Councillor Crute referred to the Education, Health Care Plans and indicated that this was more of a problem than first anticipated as the figures were not improving despite assurances that plans were in place. He understood that there was a nationwide problem with the recruitment of educational psychologists but this did not appear to impact on other local authorities and asked if there was a reason there was a problem in Durham. He then asked for more details around the graduated approach, he continued by referring to the young people who were currently in the system and asked what was being done to help those young people who need the Education, Health Care Plans in place.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manger responded that within the work programme the Head of Service would be presenting a report that would provide a detailed response to the question. In terms of demand, he could not speak for other local authorities but he did know that the relative increase in demand for Education, Health Care Plans in Durham was bigger than other local authorities. He continued that the graduated approach was getting more support to families and young people in schools without necessarily needing an Education, Health Care Plan such as top up funding without the need to go through the Education, Health Care Plan process that had been endorsed as good practice by the Department for Education. He commented that since COVID a number of families had applied for an Education, Health Care Plan. In terms of the waiting list a number of applicants were received at once that resulted in the number of children and young people waiting for a plan had increased, however, work was in place to ensure anyone on a waiting list was given support while waiting. With regard to progress the agency support took some time to get through the procurement process but this came into place in October/November and were working with the service and had increased capacity now. Up to December the length of time people was waiting for a plan stopped getting longer and they needed to work over the next six months to reduce the number of people on the waiting list to ensure they receive the assessment in a timely manner.

The Head of Education and Skills responded that they were looking at demand issues across schools and had recently undertaken a piece of work with schools in Stanley. He continued by providing an example of a school who have an experienced SENCO teacher who had 12 requests for an Education, Health Care Plan and only two were being progressed. In an alternative school where there was no experienced SENCO, they had received 18 requests for an Education, Health Care Plan that were all being progressed but when the experienced SENCO had looked at these and, in her opinion, only seven of the requests required to be progressed.

Councillor Crute referred to the dashboard and stated that nationally 48% of Education, Health Care Plans requests were dealt with within the 20 weeks. He stated that the national shortage of educational psychologists does not appear to impact on all other local authorities and asked if they could look at statistics and information from other similar local authorities and learn from these local authorities.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manger responded that the statistics from other local authorities was published data but stated that the data was historical and the data was for 2022 and a lot had happened in the last year.

The Head of Education and Skills advised Members that he would ask the Head of Early Help, Inclusion & Vulnerable Children to look into this and report back to Members when he delivers his report to the Committee later in the year.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the special meeting of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 25 January 2024 was to consider SEND and he would refer Members request for the information to the Officer.

Councillor Walton referred to the shortage of educational psychologists and asked if there was an alternative temporary solution.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manger responded that the alternative was the use of agency staff to draw in support externally with the contract running for the next eighteen months to two years.

The Head of Education and Skills advised that some work was being undertaken around the SENCO network to ensure there were not any unnecessary requests for Education, Health Care Plans and indicated that there were other funding options available to schools.

Councillor Hunt referred to social workers and asked what work was being undertaken for retention.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manger responded that this had previously been reported on and advised that the retention allowance had been expanded in terms of pay.

The Practice Lead Safeguarding advised Members that a Sub-Group that she leads on that reported directly to the Corporate Efficiency Board and advised Members that they had students, trainees and people employed from Durham University who move on to become social workers for Durham so that they could future proof social workers. She continued that nationally retention of social workers was a challenge and they had used retention payments in particularly in challenging areas of the service. She reported that there had being some stability in the workforce but this would continue to be a challenge but the care review would see the profile of social workers delivering change over the next few years and that in conjunction with other measures around retention should stabilise that workforce.

The Chair advised Members that an informal meeting would be held on 10 January 2024 via Microsoft Teams regarding efficiency and third-party payments.

Councillor Deinali referred to the graduated approach and asked what was in place in terms of ensuring that any top up funding was used for the child to ensure that they received the support that they needed, particularly when there was a reduction in budgets. She then referred to parents who had elected to home educate their children who have additional needs and asked what was in place to support those families to ensure quality of education.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that this was not his area but they had some concerns around the number of elective home education. They have a proactive team in this area and they were challenging those parents who choose to home school their children and were also challenging the schools who were non-discouraging parents to home school their children. The team had reintegrated around 320 children back into school and their needs were a key part of their assessment. A key priority for his team was to ensure that children with SEN do not drop out of the system and indicated that a challenge was schools who were issuing fixed penalty notices that destroyed relationships with parents.

The Finance Manager advised Members that schools waiting for the Education, Health Care Plan process would still receive funding through some kind of SEN support for that pupil.

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

9 Quarter 2 2023/24 Budget Outturn and Capital Forecast

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources, which provided details of the forecast outturn 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 September 2023 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager was in attendance to present the report and reported that the Department for Education had announced some additional funding for schools who were in deficit and they would be working with those schools, so that they were in a stable financial position.

Councillor Walton referred to Aycliffe Secure Service and asked why there was not as much income as expected.

The Finance Manager explained that post COVID they had difficulty recruiting staff as they are challenging roles and indicated that they also had a lot of staff sickness. He reported that the Council had been working with an agency over the last year, specifically targeting bringing people into these roles. He continued that due to the low staffing, they had not been able to have full occupancy and indicated that without the occupancy you lose money.

Councillor Walton asked if staff vacancies had reduced the staffing costs.

The Finance Manager responded that some of the staffing levels were down due to sick leave and those staff were still paid. Overall, they try to generate money through the service but staffing costs were more than income.

Councillor Walton stated that when Aycliffe Secure Service was discussed at the Corporate Parenting Panel it was always positive and that staff were happy in their role.

The Finance Manager responded that Aycliffe Secure Service was heading in the right direction and he would share a response with Members from the Leader of Aycliffe Secure Service around staffing issues.

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

10 Any Other Business

The Chair reminded Members of the following upcoming diary dates:

Wednesday 10 January 2024 – Informal Information Session on efficiency and third-party payments via Microsoft Teams.

Thursday 25 January 2024 – Special Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to look at special educational needs and disabilities.

She also reported that the usual report for information on CAMHS waiting times had been circulated on 5 January 2024 and members were asked to send any comments they may have on the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer by 19 January 2024.