

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

At a Joint Special Meeting of the **Safer and Stronger Communities and Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committees** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 25 July 2016** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Boyes and C Potts (Joint-Chair)

Members of the Joint Committee:

Councillors J Armstrong, J Charlton, C Hampson, M Hodgson, G Holland, T Nearney, K Shaw, P Stradling, J Turnbull, C Wilson, O Gunn, D Hicks, K Hopper, P Lawton, S Morrison, M Nicholls, C Potts, L Pounder and H Smith

Co-opted Members:

Mr R Patel

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Fire Officer S Errington

Also Present:

Councillors J Allen

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bell, J Cordon, J Gray, H Liddle, J Maitland, F Tinsley, Mr J Welch, D Bell, K Corrigan and M Simmons and F Tinsley and Mr J Welch.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

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 ERASE Team - Update

The Chairman, Councillor D Boyes introduced the Safeguarding Manager, Durham Constabulary, Helen Murphy, and the Team Manager, Children and Adults Services (CAS), Sheila Purvis who were in attendance to give an update presentation to Members in respect of the ERASE Team (for copy see file of minutes).

The Safeguarding Manager referred Members to the report circulated with the agenda papers, and the slides provided. It was explained that the current profile in terms of child sexual exploitation (CSE) for County Durham was young people most commonly aged 13-16, with those who are reported missing being especially at risk. Members noted that the vast majority of CSE began online, however, other locations could include takeaways, house parties, and youth hang out areas. Members learned of the work undertaken by Neighbourhood Wardens (NWs), Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), and local Beat Officers in identifying areas where young people hang out and making them safe. Councillors noted that while boys were affected, the majority of victims were female and there were also links in terms of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people and CSE. It was added that offenders tended to be lone offenders, rather than operating in groups and most offenders within County Durham were White British.

Members learned that the aims of the ERASE team were to reduce the risk of CSE through:

- Multi-agency working, prevention and disruption plans
- Intelligence development
- Engaging with young people at risk
- Raise awareness about CSE

It was noted there were different target audiences, including professionals, people within communities/parents, and young people themselves. It was reiterated that there was an aim to reduce the risk and demand associated with missing children. Councillors noted that the Team Manager, CAS attended all the CSE meetings with the Detective Sergeant chairing the meetings. Members were given an example, highlighting how the range of agencies shared their information, how issues would be identified and prevention and disruption plans would be put in place. The Team Manager, CAS noted how well various agencies worked together, for example bus companies, colleges, charities in being able to identify potential warning signs such as young people receiving gifts or money and changes in use of mobile phones. The Safeguarding Manager added that all information was vital in being able to help prevent and disrupt CSE, with the Team being able to build upon intelligence received.

The Team Manager, CAS noted that the ERASE Team had noted a number of young people from other Local Authority areas were placed in accommodation within County Durham and if this is determined within interviews with Social Workers or CSE interviews, then the ERASE Team would speak to the other Local Authority as regards how they could then support the young person, noting in some cases the Local Authority may not be nearby. The Safeguarding Manager noted the vast majority were from nearby Local Authorities and a meeting had taken place with the Chief Constable and Chief Executive from another Local Authority to discuss protocols for information sharing in terms of CSE risk.

The Safeguarding Manager explained that CSE profile was looked at annually, to improve the intelligence development and tasking around perpetrators, with a dedicated researcher looking all information received and providing research for CSE meetings to help task other teams and including innovative tactics to intervene to protect a child. Members noted examples of how suspected vehicles could be added to the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system and that ERASE Caseworkers could liaise with the analyst as required. It was noted that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) also helped in terms of information gathering and filling in any gaps, and that the big task was in raising awareness. Councillors noted that there was number awareness raising activities including: the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) delivering briefings to Area Action Partnerships (AAPs); two half-day conferences to over 300 professionals; single agency training; team briefings; and media and marketing plan around target audiences. Councillors also noted that there would also be social media activity, bus stop adverts from mid-September as well as feeding into national campaign days. The Team Leader, CAS noted that further to presentations for young people, Headteachers from secondary schools had received training last year and this year would also include Headteachers from primary schools.

The Safeguarding Manager explained that in terms of reducing the risk and demand associated with missing children and supporting young people at risk, activities included: two missing coordinators: a youth worker engaging with young people, carrying out return to home interviews and carrying out a risk matrix in terms of CSE; a community support team; accountability of all repeat missing; contact with children homes; and demand analysis. The Team Manager, CAS noted that it was important to be able to have these early interventions and to assess and refer accordingly.

The Committee noted there had been some real successes and that the next steps would include an interim review, carried out by Professor S Hackett of Durham University, and multi-agency audit findings. Members noted emerging issues such as the need to get it right in “sexting” cases, as some could include CSE issues, and in terms of a new child advocacy model pilot. It was added that it was important to continue to engage with young people and parents to be able to explain the importance of being safe while using social media and messaging applications. Members noted that young people should not be criminalised where there is no CSE issue; however, it was vital to communicate to young people the dangers in such messaging and sharing of pictures. The Team Leader, CAS added that it was also important to help parents understand and be aware of the relevant privacy settings for their children’s social media, keeping the whole family safe.

The Safeguarding Manager explained that funding of £750,000 had been obtained in terms of a pilot programme to help support victims, with updates on this being reported back to the LSCB.

Councillors noted that the ways that they could help would be by: “see something, say something”, meaning to pass any information to the Police for them to make a judgement as regards the situation and then to respond in a proportional manner; to help raise awareness and share information and look at events where training could be provided; and to keep CSE on the agenda, fostering a supportive culture for all victims and providing a message of zero tolerance to abusers.

The Chairman, Councillor D Boyes thanked the Safeguarding Manager and the Team Manager, CAS and asked Members for their questions on the report and presentation.

Councillor M Nicholls noted the presentation and report were very in-depth and thanked the Officers for their work, as well as all associated agencies and organisations, such as DISC, and also asked if there was a number that Members could use to give information. The Safeguarding Manager explained that Members could use the non-emergency 101 telephone number if they had some information, however, it may also be possible to bring forward information via the First Contact service.

Councillor O Gunn noted that it was good that information was being shared via AAPs and within Primary Schools, however added that she felt it may also be appropriate for School Governors to also receive training. Councillor O Gunn asked whether there was any impact in terms of the school holiday period and also whether information leaflets could be made available for parents, for example at Police and Communities Together (PACT) Meetings. The Safeguarding Manager noted that some messages were brought forward at PACT meetings as appropriate, and the Team Leader, CAS added that there were awareness session within school with Governors, and this linked in with the LSCB and their training. It was noted that there was work carried out in the school holidays with the Family First and One Point Services, working closely with communities. The Team Leader, CAS explained that with the ERASE Team being based within One Point allowed for face-to-face interaction which was a better working relationship and helped ensure a speed of response. The Safeguarding Manager added that summer project were designed to help engage with young people and included fishing events, drama events and courses in relation to emotional resilience.

Councillor T Nearney asked as regards multi-agency working and the increased training and how investigation and enforcement were carried out. Councillor T Nearney also asked as regards the role of the community and voluntary sector (CVS) in terms of helping with education on the issues, noting there were a lot of good materials available from charities. The Team Leader, CAS noted that there had been meetings with colleagues from the Education department and materials were chosen to ensure all primary schools were using the same series of presentations on the issue, ensuring a consistent approach. The Safeguarding Manager noted issues such as alcohol would be looked at by the Harm Reduction Unit (HRU) and they would look to confiscate any alcohol from underage drinkers. It was added that the HRU would also share information in terms of any vulnerable young people.

Councillor H Smith noted that getting the message across at a young age was vital, and agreed with the issue being brought to attention at primary school. Councillor H Smith noted there were a lot of very good materials available from the NSPCC and asked whether the materials being used were bespoke Durham County Council (DCC) materials. The Team Leader, CAS noted those materials were very good, as were a number from other organisations such as Barnardos, and the National Crime Agency's (NCA) CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) website and that those developed for use in schools would bring together the best of what was available.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Councillor J Allen noted she had visited the ERASE project approximately a year ago in the early stages of its development. Councillor J Allen noted the issues in terms of children's homes and missing children, and welcomed the involvement of the Chief Constable and also the Council's Head of Children's Services, Carol Payne in the work undertaken. Councillor J Allen referred Members to the impact and success of the "Dying to be Cool" campaign in relation to cold water shock and added that a campaign akin to that may be useful.

Councillor J Turnbull asked if there were any mechanisms in place to alert Authorities offenders being placed in properties close to schools. The Safeguarding Manager explained that if they were convicted offenders, there would be a multi-agency approach which would include housing providers. It was added that should there be information as regards a situation that was not working, then the Public Protection Unit should be informed accordingly. The Team Leader, CAS added that should Members have any information, no matter how trivial it may seem, they should bring it to the attention of the Police as they can investigate the matter further and that sometimes one piece can be the key to “completing the jigsaw”.

The Chairman, Councillor D Boyes thanked the Safeguarding Manager, the Team Manager, CAS and Members for their questions.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

6 Children's Services - Update

The Chairman, Councillor C Potts introduced the Council's Head of Children's Services, Carol Payne who was in attendance to give an update presentation to Members in respect of the Children's Services (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Children's Services noted that the Council's Children's Services had been subject to a Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (SIF) Inspection, carried out between 22 February and 16 March 2016, with the report within the agenda papers having originally having been presented to Cabinet at its meeting held on 13 July 2016. It was explained that a SIF Inspection focuses upon: children in need of help and protection; services for looked after children, including care leavers and those within fostering and adoption; leadership and governance; and the LSCB.

Members were reminded the inspection took place over 4 weeks, and that the experience was very intense and with 10 Inspectors, a Senior Data Analyst, 2 Quality Assurance Managers and a Regional Director from Ofsted being involved. It was explained that Inspectors had originally looked at 20 cases files to audit, however, this expanded to samples from many other files to approximately 200 files in total. Members noted that issues that were reviewed included: decision making; supervision; managerial oversight; written plans; and recording at all stages of a child's journey. It was explained that Inspectors were provided with 535 documents, including strategic reports, minutes of meetings, performance data and case file data. The Head of Children's Services referred Members to a slide depicting a word cloud generated from the view of those staff that had experienced the inspection, with examples including: thorough, intense, relentless and exhausting.

The Committee noted that the overall Ofsted judgement was “requires improvement”, with a breakdown of across the SIF focus areas being:

Children who need help and protection	-	Requires improvement
Children Looked After and Achieving Permanence	-	Requires improvement
- Adoption performance	-	Good
- Experience and progress of Care Leavers	-	Good
Leadership, management and governance	-	Requires improvement
LSCB	-	Good

The Head of Children’s Services noted that there had been many strengths highlighted within the inspection and these had included good early help services and good multi-agency working that was well established. Members noted that other positives had been noted included: the high levels of Children’s Centre registrations; appropriate referrals via First Contact; the MASH working well where there was risk of significant harm; and with placements for looked after children being at least good. The Committee noted that the inspection had shown other areas that were working well, such as the services for disabled children being good and well-managed, adoption was good, and the services, support and range of accommodation for care leavers was also good. It was added that another strength mentioned was that political and senior leaders, as corporate parents, demonstrated passion and commitment to children and young people.

Members learned that other areas also found to be good and working well included: staff training and development, consultation with children and young people, including care leavers; accommodation choices; and work in terms of combating CSE and children who go missing. It was added that other positives had included the Youth Offending Service being well integrated and the education support for looked after children being good. The Inspectors had noted that the performance information was extensive and that the Children and Young People’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee had demonstrated passion and commitment to improve the lives of young people. Another strength highlighted was the processes that were in place in order to be able to learn from serious case reviews.

The Head of Children’s Services explained that the inspection had noted that the Council’s Corporate Parenting Panel provided good feedback, however, added that Members were not given enough performance information in order to be able to provide challenge and influence improvement in terms of frontline practice. It was reiterated that the inspection had highlighted the positive role of Overview and Scrutiny and in providing effective challenge of performance.

Members were reminded of the context in which the review of Children’s Services was undertaken, including the significant changes over recent years such as restructuring of teams in 2014, the single assessment process coming into effect, the formation of the MASH, and the innovation programme with 10 Families First Teams. It was added that as result of these changes, improvements had been seen in some areas, however the impact had other changes had not yet been seen. Members were reminded of the pressures placed upon social workers, including that of their caseloads.

The Head of Children's Services noted that the review had 14 recommendations in terms of areas for improvement, noting issues such as: social worker caseloads being too high, in the region of 30-40 per social worker at the time of the inspection, compared 8-12 in the only 3 Local Authorities that were Ofsted rated "outstanding"; reports to politicians and senior leaders need more focus on quality of practice; case auditing needed to be more robust; and social work assessment, planning and recording needs to improve. Members noted that areas for improvement in connection with compliance with regulations and legislation had included: private fostering; voluntary accommodation (Section 20 of the Children Act); temporary assessment of Foster Carers; advocacy and independent visitors for Looked After Children; staying put regulations for care leavers; the quality of return to home interviews; and analysis on adoption recruitment. The electronic case management system was found to be unfit for purpose.

The Committee noted several of the issues were already in the process of being addressed prior to the inspection; however, several issues had been highlighted through the process. It was noted that a number of actions were being taken to remediate issues and that also an Improvement Plan had been developed, with actions to be overseen by the Quality Improvement Board. Councillors noted actions already underway included: a recruitment strategy in place, though noting the difficulty in recruiting experienced social workers; an additional team being recruited; the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Academy set up to help grow and nurture our own staff in-house; a revised structure being implemented; and the focus of the Families First programme. It was added that other actions included: Social Work Consultants being in place; Learning Communities being piloted; and a Quality Improvement Framework, including a revised audit process. Members noted the Social Services Information Database (SSID) review that was underway with a procurement process to be undertaken in November as regards this. Councillors noted that Family Friendly Care Plans had been developed and guidance had been reissued in terms of Section 47, Section 20 and Regulation 24 matters. Members noted improved tracking of the Public Law Outline (PLO) process and that the numbers of young people "staying put" had already improved. It was added that improvement clinics were in operation within teams.

The Head of Children's Services concluded by highlighting national inspection outcomes, which showed that the majority of Local Authorities and LSCBs fell within the "requires improvement" category, 52% and 50% respectively.

The Chairman, Councillor C Potts thanked the Head of Children's Services and asked Members for their questions on the report and presentation.

Councillor H Smith noted the NQSW set up was a good idea and asked if there could be any way to include within contracts that they would remain at the Council, else once experienced they could be tempted to leave and go elsewhere. The Head of Children's Services noted that although clauses were in place, it is not possible to hold staff to the agreement. However, it was important to ensure that employees felt valued and would want to stay at Durham County Council and it was noted that major factors in ensuring this were: making social workers feel supported; provide good training; help social workers feel that they were "making a difference"; and to have manageable caseloads.

Councillor O Gunn noted the Ofsted inspection and added that the context of budget cuts and the creativity of DCC had not been taken into account. Councillor O Gunn asked if there was a national shortage of social workers and whether this was being addressed.

The Head of Children's Services noted that some Local Authorities in London and one in the North East had agency worker levels of around 40-50%, with DCC having less than 10%. However, it was added that if more agency workers were available this would be welcomed as indeed there was a shortage locally and nationally. It was added that there were drives to try and improve the profile of social workers, akin to how teaching as a profession had its profile raised through the 1980s, with Isabelle Trowler having been appointed as Chief Social Worker for Children and Families by Government.

The Head of Children's Services noted that "golden handshakes" were not recommended in order to attract experienced social workers, as this could result in costs spiralling, and that the best way would be to provide a good professional experience that would attract those people to want to work in Durham.

Councillor M Hodgson asked as regards any pressures on foster families if the number of young people "staying put" was increasing and as regards the service moving forward. The Head of Children's Services reported that payments to carers for Staying Put are less than for under-18s, but that rates are increasing.

It was added that a draft Improvement Plan would be submitted to Ofsted in August, and that areas for improvement would be tackled head-on. It was added that the level of support in Durham for the service was good and that the appointment of a Corporate Director of Children's Services would also be a good step in moving forward.

The Chairman, Councillor C Potts noted that a further update at Committee in a further 6 months would be useful in terms of demonstrating progress being made. The Head of Children's Services noted that reporting back to Members via Committee was an area highlighted by Ofsted.

Councillor J Armstrong noted that the Inspectors had not taken into account the context the budget savings the Council had been required to make and added that the action plan was the right thing to do.

Councillor G Holland noted that the commitment of staff had not been in question; however, there was the issue of caseloads had been mentioned. Councillor G Holland added that the Government could not "have something for nothing" and that if caseloads were to reduce then there was a need for Government pay for the necessary training to ensure the resources necessary. The Head of Children's Services noted that the inspection was carried out "resource blind", however, it was to be noted that during austerity DCC had not lost a single social worker. It was explained that in terms of caseloads, 40 was not a usual figure, however the inspection had taken place during a particularly busy period. It was added that 20-25 was more usual and that goalposts nationally and regionally had shifted with an aim for around 16-20, though Members noted that before asking funds it must be ensured that we were working as efficiently as possible in the first instance.

The Head of Planning and Service Strategy, Peter Appleton added that he had been party to the 4 weeks of the inspection and reiterated the comments of the Head of Children's Services as regards the intensity of the process. It was added that DCC was learning, however, some of the standards being applied, for example in recording, were not based on the resources actually available and that DCC had focus on good outcomes for young people, not just paperwork.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their presentation and comments, noting that Members recognised the commitment of the Council Officers to provide a quality service and Members supported and thanked Officers for this.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report and presentation be noted.
- (ii) That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive further updates in relation to the transformation of Children's Services on a six month basis.