

## **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 18 November 2019 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor H Smith (Chair)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors C Potts, P Atkinson, B Bainbridge, A Batey, D Bell, J Blakey, J Charlton, B Coult, R Crute, C Hampson, I Jewell, L Mavin, A Willis and M Wilson

**Co-opted Members:**

Mrs P Parkins

#### **1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brookes, Charlton, Simmons and Ms R Evans.

#### **2 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

#### **3 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 26 September and the special meeting on 14 October 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **5 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

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

#### **6 Social Worker Academy Progress**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided Members with information on the progress and achievements of the Social Work Academy (for copy see file of minutes).

Chris Ring, Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Professional Practice, referred to paragraph 10 of the report and confirmed that since 2016, 47 Social Workers had been supported by the Academy and not 44 as reported. He confirmed that retention rates had improved and that in 2016/17 some had left to pursue agency work as at the time financial incentives were being offered. Of the 6 employees who had went to other authorities, he confirmed that these were people who had moved from out of the area and had moved not to neighbouring authorities, but back to their home areas. He confirmed that since the report had been published, an additional Enhanced Social Worker Practitioner (ESWP) post had been filled (paragraph 12). Members were advised that Skills for Care would undertake a visit of the Academy and that Ofsted had commented that the Academy was well supported.

Councillor Jewell suggested that the Councils great work with the Social Work Academy could be exploited by people with no intention to continue with employment in Durham County Council Children's Social Care and asked if there was a minimum contract to retain employees and a financial penalty if they were to leave before the end of this period. Rachel Harris, Service Improvement Manager, confirmed that on successful completion of the Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), the Social Worker remained on a permanent contract, only if they did not pass the ASYE could their contract be terminated. In the first cohort people were taking advantage of the model due to its success, however two people who had left to pursue agency work, had returned and therefore had brought the retention rate up to 70%.

Councillor Jewell asked about funding and said he would have concerns if the Council were proactively training people from other LA's. The Service Improvement Manager confirmed that it was challenging to continue to provide funding but the results ensured people wanted to stay.

Councillor Crute confirmed that it was important to ensure the sustainability of the model and asked how the service would continue the quality of work whilst also reducing caseloads, and he asked whether there were any barriers Members should be aware of. The Service Improvement Manager confirmed that there would always be a need for a SW Academy as people were naturally coming to the end of their career through retirement, however it may reduce in scale. The average career in social work was now only seven years and it used to be much longer, naturally resulting in a less experienced workforce than twenty years prior, therefore the resource would continue to be used as in subsequent years. Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Professional Practice added that with regards to building on sustainability. The structure of the Academy was sustainable and was managed to provide greater quality on social work practice. The Academy

would remain within the service and there would be a management restructure in 2020, but the principal remained to continue improving the service.

Councillor Crute noted that there were similar issues in other areas and asked if the model was promoted as this would benefit other LA's. The Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Professional Practice confirmed that it was used in marketing material at national events and conferences.

Councillor Bainbridge asked whether targets set in 2016 in relation to recruitment had been met and whether all positions had been filled. the Council was. The Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Professional Practice confirmed the management of caseloads for social workers had reduced to the following;

- 52% = 0-19
- 34% = 20-24
- 11% = 25-29
- 3% = 30+

With regards to vacancies, most posts were retained, but there were vacancies as a result of promotion and at the time of the meeting there was only one post with no active recruitment, six were at the recruitment stage and two at interview stage.

Councillor Jewell asked if other LA's were using the model and the Service Improvement Manager confirmed that the Council were liaising with two other LA's which had started similar models in the previous six months.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **7 Update on the Progress of the Recommendations of the Role of the Social Worker from a Child's Perspective Review**

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which updated Members on the progress made against the recommendations from the review, Role of a Social Worker from a Child's Perspective (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice reiterated the offer for any Member of the Committee to attend the MASH and confirmed that this was an open offer to all Members.

In relation to recommendation no. 7, the Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice confirmed Jen Norman had been appointed as an Engagement and Participation Worker to ensure communication between social workers and children and young people.

Councillor Potts confirmed that this was a positive report overall but asked for information with regards to sickness levels and whether they had reduced since the implementation of recommendation no. 5. The Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice confirmed that he would ensure the information was circulated to Members following the meeting.

Councillor Crute commented that it was important to continue the work to assist in prevention and to reinforce how important and valued a social workers role was. Many were unable to comprehend the trauma social workers were often exposed to, child death was not an experience that you could expect someone to recover from quickly. He referred to the review which took place 'the role of a social worker from a child's perspective' and confirmed that it was important to track the progress and outcomes of children.

The Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice, confirmed that he continued to support the development of the overarching quality assurance framework and the voice of the child was critical in addition to data tracking. The service would continue to engage and remained focused in improving the outcomes of children and families.

Councillor Batey asked whether welcome packs were provided in a digital format as for most young people, technology was essential and it was also more discreet. The Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice, confirmed that it would take more time to develop but there was a fantastic video which had been produced.

Councillor Jewell commented on his experience as a member of the Fostering Panel and although it was positive that 40% of babies had been placed in their permanent home within 3 months, he queried the permanency of children who were subject to court proceedings as this could take months and would also mean they were not technically placed in their permanent home. The Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised that assessments were robustly undertaken before birth and the placements had not been ratified in court but there was a focus on a permanent plan.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **8 Verbal Update on Review Activity**

The Elective Home Education review group had concluded their evidence gathering at their meeting on 11 November. The review group had held five evidence gathering sessions that had included safeguarding, information sharing, exclusions, costings, analysis of survey results and meeting with parents. The next meeting will be held on 9 December for members to consider their key finds and formulate their recommendations. It is expected that the review group will have a report ready to go to Cabinet in April.

**Resolved:**

That the update be noted.