

## **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 Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 26 April 2023 at 9.30 am**

#### **Present:**

**Councillor A Reed (Chair)**

#### **Members of the Committee:**

Councillors J Cosslett, R Charlton-Lainé, M Currah, S Deinali, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hunt, B Kellett, C Martin, L Mavin, D Mulholland, K Rooney, A Sterling, C Varty and E Waldock

#### **Faith Community Representative:**

Mrs L Vollans

#### **Co-opted Members:**

Ms R Evans and Ms A Gunn

#### **Also Present:**

Councillors P Jopling and M Simmons

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Bell, I Cochrane, S Townsend and M Walton.

### **2 Substitute Members**

Councillor B Kellett substituted for Councillor S Townsend.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 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.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that responses to the questions from the last meeting had been circulated to Ms Evans and to Members of the Scrutiny Committee for information.

#### **6 Draft Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy 2023-2028**

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services that presented the draft refresh of the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JLHWS) for comment. A copy of the draft strategy was circulated with the agenda (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships was in attendance to deliver a presentation that provided details of the draft Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JLHWS). This noted the focus of the work of the County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board's; four priority areas: Making smoking history; Enabling healthy weight for all; Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing; Reducing alcohol harms, as well as concentrating on the impact of Inequalities and the wider determinants of health which contribute to our overall health and wellbeing. The Role of Health & Wellbeing Board and how it influences resources across the system was also noted. (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Mrs A Gunn referred to the vision statement and what stood out was tackle unfair difference in the health of wider contributor factors that she misunderstood when read in isolation compared to some of the information later in the report and asked the Officer when producing the strategy to look at the wording carefully and provided details of some of the wording used. She then referred to engagement and consultation and asked how much coverage they were achieving of the population and was there a statistical representation. She referred to tobacco and alcohol and asked if there were any emerging issues with illegal substances, healthy weight focus on food and was a big drive on movement and tying this in, quality of school meals that can have a significant impact on children's health in particular in deprived areas where they rely on that food for nutrition. She asked for further information on suicide and the dynamics.

The Interim Strategic Manager – Partnerships responded that they had worked with the community champions around the wording used so it was easy to understand, and that wording had already been amended as part of consultation feedback. With

regard to the representation for the consultation, she advised that they had shared with a number of partners, for comment, including, Area Action Partnerships, VCS Organisations, the Poverty Action Steering Group, Youth Council and Investing in Children but she did not have statistical figures on the consultation responses but when they were developing the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, they took the views of those representatives who had been involved throughout the process. She then referred to the four areas and their detailed plans that had been developed through sub-groups of the Health and Wellbeing Board such as the tobacco control alliance and the healthy weight alliance. With regard to suicide more detail was in the partnership plan that supported the strategy and stated that more detailed work was in the action plans.

Ms R Evans indicated that what was said was more adult based rather than children and young people based, and they wanted to look to the future and have a healthy population in the future. She then referred to smoking and that there was no mention of vaping and indicated that there was a lot in the press about young people taking up vaping and were becoming hooked and was becoming a mental health issue. In the older population people who had been smoking a long-time vaping improved their health, but she was not sure this was the case for a young person. The healthy weight was more about what you eat than activity and there were opportunities to get people moving such as access to swimming through schools that had been impacted due to COVID, she commented that schools were key to get children moving and were a key partner.

The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships responded that the sub-groups were established, and a lot of work was underway and gave an example of the tobacco control alliance where vaping was included as one of their actions and that the focus of healthy weight was through the life course. She commented that the groups had action plans in place and the strategy was an opportunity to review those and add anything extra or add value. She stated that she would ensure that the comments were picked up.

Councillor C Hunt asked how long the waiting times were for alcohol services and how they were moving forward and commented that they required more information on vaping as children have started smoking after vaping as a means of being trendy and should be high on the agenda.

The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships stated that she would find out the waiting times for alcohol services and feed this back to the committee. She indicated that at the end of March the Health & Wellbeing Board had a development session on vaping and she could share this information with the committee.

Councillor A Sterling indicated that she would like to see a bigger commitment into looking into vaping properly as huge numbers of children were taking up vaping that was socially acceptable and normal. The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships responded that she would take this back to Public Health Colleagues.

Councillor P Jopling referred to the difference between the success they have had with smoking and non-success with alcohol and obesity and commented that the increase in alcohol and obesity run in line with the increase in takeaways and the abandonment of alcohol regulations. She stated that the legislation needed to be changed where you cannot buy drink at every shop, but she was worried how successful the Council were going to be with the easy access and temptation available. She continued that obesity and alcohol were linked to mental health and was not sure if they could make a significant difference.

The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships responded that they were working closely with colleagues in spatial development and the County Durham Plan with regard to hot food takeaways to ensure they had planning restrictions on takeaways, particularly in more deprived areas and near schools. There was also work progressing to restrict the advertising of foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar on Durham County Council platforms.

Councillor R Charlton-Laine indicated that she would like to see more emphasis on energy drinks, and in her school, they confiscated more energy drinks than vapes. She continued that children were spending their lunch money on energy drinks and when confiscated were not eating or drinking anything and would like to see energy drinks included in the strategy.

The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships responded that she would take this back to colleagues.

Councillor O Gunn indicated that Mrs Gunn had mentioned in a previous meeting about the use of the word unfair which she supported and would again as many other words could be used such as inequitable. She then referred to page 30 of the pack in relation to the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age have a greater impact on health outcomes and stated that there should be an addition of government policies, government action and government funding which had a great impact on the conditions described in the report and had a huge impact on health outcomes. She agreed that the strategy was adult based, there was mention of access to a good education and she thought they were moving more forward in terms of the inclusion of children and young people in all the issues in relation to good healthy outcomes but access to a good education was the only thing she could see. With regard to consultation and that sectors of communities do not engage with consultations and if they wanted to reach those sectors then they needed to include voluntary organisations, town and parish councils, schools and family hubs and if they did not include these, they were ignoring a sector of communities which are important and who health and inequalities impact on the most.

The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships indicated that she would take back the comments on the wording of the strategy and stated that when they spoke to

the community champions, they did not like the word inequitable and thought it was not plain English but could look at this again. With regard to consultation, the town and parish councils were included in the consultation exercise. The development of the action plans that support the delivery of the strategy would also be subject to consultation and coproduction with service users in those particular areas.

Councillor O Gunn responded that it was communities where voluntary organisations take the role and support communities where those sectors of the community do not engage in consultation.

In response to questions on advertising vaping products and hitting adults who were purchasing alcohol for children the Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships responded that she would speak to Public Health Colleagues and the Lead Officer for drugs and alcohol.

Councillor S Deinali asked if any work had been done promoting a positive healthy weight and positive mental health and asked what work had been done to ensure that promoting a positive healthy weight does not impact on mental health in terms of body image.

The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships responded that healthy weight and mental health colleagues worked closely together to ensure that there would be no detrimental impact in another area.

Mrs A Gunn referred to the impact the Council could make through school meals and how providers got around this by saying that they offered a healthy meal option and asked what the uptake was of the healthy food and asked if this was monitored.

The Interim Strategic Manager - Partnerships responded that she would feed this back to colleagues.

**Resolved:** (i) That the report and presentation be noted.

(ii) That Members comments be incorporated into a formal response to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

## **7 Response to The Children's Social Care Review**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided Members with an overview of the Government's response to the Children's Social Care Review, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's review into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Competition and Markets Authority review in relation to the provision of children's homes (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services was in attendance to deliver a presentation on Children's Social Care National Framework; Child and Family Social Worker Workforce and the current position (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services referenced the government's children social care reform consultation "stable homes, built on love" and advised members of the six pillars around which this strategy had been written including reference to the 12 Families First for Children pathfinders and the associated £45 million funding stream. In respect of the children social care national framework, members were advised that much of the detail within the framework was awaited and further information was anticipated upon the associated performance management arrangements within which this would operate.

In terms of the development of the child and family social worker workforce mechanism members were advised of the proposed 8 national rules which would be applied.

Councillor C Martin indicated that there were positive things contained in the strategy such as taking action before a person ends up in care and commented that numbers of people in care was not sustainable and cost the council a lot of money. He continued in relation to the use of agencies and asked if there was any risk or fear of hammering the agency sector or increasing costs dramatically by enforcing more regulations on them. He indicated that they still needed an agency sector as there were gaps but was glad that this was referenced and the government solution of having social workers who work for the Council and asked if there was any risk of killing the agency sector.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that there was always a need for an agency sector but at the minute this was dysfunctional and the lowest it had even been due to being unable to get workers to fill the gaps. He indicated that they needed a different model and moving some of the profiteering that was happening and put some price caps and rules around it. There would always be staff who wanted to work for an agency and have the flexibility and what was needed was a level playing field and some rules to regulate. One of the recommendations in the care review was having a regional bank of staff and commented that this was not possible at the minute as staff could get paid three times as much going into a project team so they could not look at other models. They were not saying there was not a need for agency workers they just needed a set of rules around it.

Mrs A Gunn referred to the impact of courts and the case where the court overruled the advice of social workers and asked if this was a significant factor in County Durham and what degree of influence the Courts had over cases.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that they work within a legal framework and decisions to take a child into care was made by judges and they needed to work with Cafcass and the family guardians and judiciary to ensure consistency of the decision making and the application of risk was appropriate. Over the last few years, they had seen an increase in the use of independent expert social work assessment that varies. They would like a system and the strategy does cover the judiciary and the court system and would like to see consistency within the courts and they had trust in the credibility of social worker assessments and recommendations and take them on board and are not dependent on independent views.

Councillor O Gunn indicated that the Josh MacAlister review had a number of good points in it and commented that the Ofsted outcome was evidence of good work of the Council. She stated that the issues were national and affecting all local authorities not just affecting Durham. One of the major issues was the increase in the number of children looked after and the issues around finding accommodation for challenging children that was costly. There were lots of good things in the review, particularly around looking at issues relating to kinship carers that needed to be addressed. She then referred to page 56 of the report, the last bullet point that was a crucial issue and the authority had been under pressure for a considerable time in terms of been able to implement services in children's social care. She then referred to the conclusion and they required significant investment from central government to affectively implement and stated in the words of Sam help and please listen.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded in terms of resources that they were in a much better position than they had been in recent times in making the case for financial investment. The financial modelling that sat alongside the Josh MacAlister review was detailed and compelling, the case was very well built and the need for investment to make this work.

Mrs A Gunn asked if the Corporate Director could provide an update on the recruitment of social workers.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services responded that they were challenged on a local level particularly in recruiting experienced social workers and indicated that over the last eighteen months the turnover and rate of vacancies had started to decrease again and was on trend. They have some strong routes into social work such as the academy and they were hoping to have 35 starting in September. They were also part of the step up to social work programme that was a targeted fast track programme. They were having a major expansion of apprenticeships and were taken a minimum of 12 apprenticeships this year and commented that they had won the supportive employer of the year at the national social work awards last year and was good recognition of the work of the team.

Councillor O Gunn referred to the social work apprenticeship scheme that sounds interesting and asked who could access that route and the age range and experience required.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services indicated that there was a national standard, and a lot of staff would come through this route based on their experience and staff who would not meet the qualification requirements through the academic route. He continued that you were more likely to get people applying who were already embedded in place and committed to Durham which was a positive in terms of retention. They were working with Durham University which takes away a lot of the barriers in relation to access requirements and opens up a different route for people and commented that the applications were currently out, and the applications so far have been fantastic.

Councillor C Hunt commented that she had been part of the full review and had a good input into this. She stated that the new strategy for support work around social work was fantastic, and she welcomed the review on kinship caring. One of the things discussed was how it should all be done as a whole instead of stages as you would have a better chance of achieving the outcomes and obtaining the funding. She then referred to Children In Care Council (CICC) and stated that they should be creating their own panel so that children have their own voice in this review. She stated that a better package for social workers would go a long way for the retention of staff.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services indicated that they were continually looking at packages for social workers and the wrap around support. He referred to the voice of children and young people and the children in care council was huge and the video of the story of Sam was powerful. He stated that the pathfinders were going to be limited to three chosen by government that would go live in September and commented that Durham would unlikely be one of the three but there would be an open competition for the other nine. He stated that a number of the pathfinder requirements had already been done and even if Durham were not a pathfinder this was not going to slow the authority down, the limiting factor was the resources barrier.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services for his presentation.

**Resolved:** That the report and presentation be noted.

*Councillor A Sterling left the meeting at 11.20 am*



## 8 The Pause Programme

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

The Strategic Manager, Children and Families First was in attendance to deliver a presentation that provided the Strategic Priority; Durham Pause Journey; Previous and current cohort; One Woman's Story and Pause Graduation – July 2022 (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Councillor P Jopling referred to the Pause Graduation video and indicated that there were irresponsible fathers who do not know how to treat women or their children. She asked if the authority look at fathers and stated that the women who have joined the programme were amazing and what the programme had achieved was amazing and congratulated the service. She then referred to alcohol and drug abuse and asked if they worked with the police about the availability of drugs in local communities.

The Strategic Manager indicated that they did carry out a lot of joint working with the police and agencies in relation to substance misuse and there were a number of forums. In terms of fathers, they did work with fathers during the assessment and intervention, including care proceedings and offered them the same intervention as they would do mothers. The Pause programme worked with mothers' pro proceedings to try and give them a break to look after their needs and address those needs, she would love to offer this service to fathers, but their current focus was on mothers.

Councillor O Gunn indicated that she was a huge supporter of the Pause programme and praised the project. She indicated that the service was putting women's lives back together saving their lives and asked the Officer to pass on her comments.

Councillor C Martin referred to the criteria changing from one child to two children and asked who would not qualify for the programme.

The Strategic Manager indicated that the criteria were any women that had lost a child through care proceedings on a permanent basis, but the women had to agree to contraception for 18 months to give them a break but not all women were in the right place in terms of addressing some of their issues. Loosing one child is too much, therefore we have changed the criteria to loosing one child rather than two children or more. This means we can hopefully support change to prevent removals. They were looking at a referral route to make it easier so that they could start conversations prior to concluding care proceedings to get the intervention early. They were working with Barnardo's who are delivering the Start Well programme and the criteria for that programme was working with women who had

lost one child and were on a second set of proceedings. Start Well worked with women during the early stages of the pregnancy and support them to make those changes or move to the Pause programme following that. She advised Members that they had three Practitioners, a Pause Manager and the maximum they could work with was around 22 women, but they were looking at this as not all women required the 18 months and they had supported women who had moved to the other side of the country to get away from the perpetrator. They were also looking at having a more rolling programme so that they could target more women, but they were currently limited in the numbers they could work with.

The Chair referred to drugs in communities and indicated that she had read the government's policy 'from harm to hope' that was a 10-year programme to drop crime that was worth a read.

Councillor C Hunt congratulated the team, and the work of Pause could not be underestimated, and she personally knew someone who had used the service and it had turned her life around which had also saved the authority money. She commented that she would like to see the programme rolled out to more people.

The Strategic Manager referred to the cost savings but was about women themselves.

Mrs L Vollans asked about the referral process and those people who had left care and the trauma this caused which was in their DNA and asked if there was anything in place to stop this trauma.

The Strategic Manager indicated that anyone could make a referral for the Pause programme, and they were looking into more specifics as the majority of referrals would come through a social worker, permanent team or care leavers team but they were looking at how they could ensure they were working with the right women. She then indicated that they have the care leavers service who work with young people up to the age of 25 who have left care, the Pause Team work closely with this service in relation to the pathways such as sexual health and were looking at a route into mental health. They were always looking at how they can improve the services for children who have left care.

The Chair thanked the Officer and indicated that the programme was very successful, and they had not just helped the women but also the children and asked the Officer to pass on her congratulations to the team.

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

*Councillor O Gunn, P Jopling and D Mulholland left the meeting at 11.32 am*

## 9 Quarter 3 2022/2023 Performance Management Report

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources, which provided progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council's corporate performance framework and highlighted key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes. The report covered performance in and to the end of quarter three, October to December 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager was in attendance to present the report.

Councillor R Charlton-Laine referred to paragraph 18(b) of the report and asked why those three areas were considered and if other schools could be incorporated next time.

The Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager responded that he was not sure of the criteria and would obtain this information from the service.

Mrs A Gunn referred to educational psychologists and asked if there had been any progress in recruitment and the ability for schools to tap into these services beyond statutory points. She then referred to the increase in SEND numbers that would have a significant impact financially and commented that if they needed specialist provisions this would impact financially and stated that there was already an overspend this year and additional costs can be extremely high and asked what work had been done around this.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion & Vulnerable Children responded that there was a small pool of Educational Psychologists in the system, and stated that there was a national training programme, but they were not enough new Educational Psychologists coming through the regionally and nationally so was a continued challenge to recruit Educational Psychologists. They had some success with recruitment, but they still had some gaps that had impacted their ability to provide timely educational psychology advice. They wanted a model where quality was important and still had contact with schools and Educational Psychologists were going into schools to do some direct work with young people. They were not happy with virtual assessments, but this had impacted on the waiting list, but quality advice was more important. They had issues with getting advice from social or health care and they had continued to see an increase in the number of people requiring SEND support, but this was less than other parts of the region. They were carrying out a lot of work to support children without the need for a Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) but a lot of schools and parents preferred to go through the formal process. A lot of young people were supported before the ECHP was put into place, sometimes there was no difference in costs as they had a strong graduated offer in County Durham. They were carrying out some work alongside 55 other local authorities regarding higher needs spend and a survey was going out shortly.

**Resolved:** That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter three performance, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic recovery and the external international factors driving inflation and cost-of-living on the council's performance, and the actions being taken to address areas of underperformance including the significant economic and well-being challenges because of the pandemic be noted.

*Mrs L Vollans left the meeting at 11.45 am*

## **10 Quarter 3 Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2022/23**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources that 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 three December 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager was in attendance to present the report.

Mrs A Gunn referred to special schools' provision and asked how much a placement cost and how many children the £1.2 million related to.

The Finance Manager responded that an average special school place cost between £20,000-£23,000 per place and they had around 1600 children in special schools within Durham. Whilst they had an overspend in terms of the higher needs budget, they had prevented costs in terms of out of County Durham placements which would be £60,000-£70,000 if they were an independent school. By providing more places within County Durham at a lower cost they were spending more money than in the grant allocation but were preventing spending more on those independent places outside of County Durham.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion & Vulnerable Children indicated that the growth in demand was adding pressures in terms of spends but the special schools were on track for that period and the biggest area of spending was top up funding for children in mainstream schools.

Councillor L Mavin asked for confirmation that a special school placement was still £10,000 base rate plus top ups or if the base rate had increased.

The Finance Manager responded that the base rate was still £10,000 but there was an addition to the base rate of £660 but this was to cover teachers' pay award.

Councillor C Hunt asked what measures were being taken to reduce the home to school transport costs.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion & Vulnerable Children indicated that a report went to Cabinet a couple of months ago and stated that the consultation had just concluded, and a further report would be submitted to Cabinet June or July with a number of proposals based on the consultation to help control costs of home to school transport.

Mrs A Gunn stated that it would be helpful to know the engagement for that consultation and how they were reaching those groups and if it reached all those groups of children who were receiving those services.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion & Vulnerable Children responded that this could be something to consider as part of the work plan of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor R Charlton-Laing stated that she had attended a meeting where they talked about the Council's digital strategy and in that meeting, she mentioned that surveys and consultation were hard to access and the website was hard to navigate and that it should only take you two clicks to reach your destination, so there should use this strategy for consultations.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion & Vulnerable Children advised Members that he would pass on the comments to consultation colleagues.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the work programme would be considered at the next meeting, where Members would be invited to agree the work programme for the coming year and as part of that process, they would incorporate the request for feedback from home to school transport consultation as part of that process.

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