

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 **Thursday 6 July 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, S Deinali, J Griffiths, L Mavin, M McGaun, D Mulholland, K Robson (substitute for C Lines), K Rooney, J Scurfield, E Waldock and M Walton

Co-opted Member:

Ms A Gunn

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Bell, K Fantarrow, C Hunt, C Lines, M Simmons, S Townsend and Ms R Evans.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor K Robson substituted for Councillor C Lines and Councillor B Coult substituted for Councillor M Simmons.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2023 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

Councillors S Deinali and J Griffiths declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 6 – Holiday Activities with Healthy Food Programme as both were part of an organisation that benefited from the programme.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

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

6 Holiday Activities with Healthy Food Programme (Fun with Food) in County Durham)

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's services that provided Members on the progress of Durham's Fun and Food programme during 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Child Poverty Operations Manager was in attendance to deliver a presentation that provided details of the funding; the County Durham delivery model; the number of projects funded and the number of children engaged; other developments; challenges, communications and marketing (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Councillor Crute commented that the scheme does make a difference and the point was reinforced by some of the comments by the children in the video and the report. He stated that the scheme was locality based around the AAP structure and depending on a report going to Cabinet next week there was potential to change the structure to local networks and asked the Officer if they foresee any problems transferring the project from one structure to another. He commented that any scheme was only as good as its weakest link and one of the challenges was non attendance by children who had been booked onto activities. Whilst asking how this could be prevented, he stated that overall, it was a positive scheme.

The Child Poverty Operations Manager responded that only part of the funding was through the AAP, and they did not foresee any problems with regard to the AAP areas as they had coverage across all areas. They had incidents where organisations had wanted to deliver across more than one AAP area, and they had supported them to co-ordinate that. They were in year three of the DfE funding and stated that all the AAPs work well together and there was an element of flexibility as families could cross over boundaries. In terms of the no shows, this was an issue nationally and the DfE were aware of it but left it up to each local authority to manage bookings. In Durham they allowed people to make their own bookings.

In response to a question from Councillor Walton, the Child Poverty Operations Manager indicated that some families were only engaging for the trips out and did not take part in centre-based activities which was against the ethos of the programme. In view of this, they shifted the criteria in what groups could apply for to ensure that it delivered enriching activities. In order to be eligible for funding an application should have centre-based activity and on the back of that could offer a maximum of three trips over the six-week holidays.

Councillor Walton commented that at her local centre when children get dropped off or picked up, they coordinate with local support networks to provide information and give out leaflets.

The Child Poverty Operations Manager indicated that they were working with credit union to conduct some focus campaign over the holidays to talk to parents and families.

Councillor Coult referred to the half term fun and food that had funding until February 2024 and asked what steps were taken to ensure that the programme continued and if AAPs were oversubscribed, do they prioritise the next time.

The Child Poverty Operations Manager responded that she was preparing a report to feedback to the steering group to look for guidance for additional funding or if they needed to go to external funders. Each AAP was allocated funding based on children eligible for free school meals and were required to apply each holiday time so there was no preference, each application would be looked at on face value.

Councillor Scurfield stated that the funding regime focused on children who were eligible for free school meals and asked what targets and expectations they placed on providers to be focused on how they were engaging young people and was the programme looking to ensure they were getting to the right children and families more effectively.

The Child Poverty Operations Manager indicated that as part of the application process they had to identify how they were going to target and engage with those who were eligible for free school meals and those who were vulnerable. They worked with groups to support them to reach the right groups, they did not have a set target they wanted groups to aspire to 50% free school meal eligible children. She continued by stating that they encourage groups to engage with more children who are vulnerable and eligible for free school meals. The DfE do allow a 15% slippage to engage with children who are not eligible for free school meals. She stated that a lot of voluntary sector partners brought matched funding so they could offer to children who were not eligible for free school meals. At the end of each holiday period, they provided data to each group on the number of children expected to be on the system and the number of children who were eligible.

Councillor Scurfield asked if 50% of children eligible for free school meals was the target for the programme.

The Child Poverty Operations Manager responded that this was the target for Durham.

Mrs Gunn asked what the actual engagement was for people eligible for free school meals.

The Child Poverty Operations Manager indicated that last year 40% of children engaged who were eligible for free school meals.

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

Councillor J Griffiths left the meeting at 10.26 am

7 Update of the Starting Well Partnership

The Committee considered the report of the Chair of the Starting Well Partnership and Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that update Members on the work of the Starting Well Partnership (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Commissioning Manager for Children's Services, County Durham Integrated Commissioning Team was in attendance to deliver a presentation that highlighted the following (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes):

- What the partnership does and who is part of it
- Updates from the previous annual presentation
- Projects and programmes delivered in 2022/23
- Partnership priorities for 2023/2024
- Ongoing projects and programmes
- Overview of the challenges faced within the Partnership

Councillor Deinali asked for further information on the integrated therapies in schools, in particular what this would look like in schools.

The Commissioning Manager responded that they were going for a fully integrated service that was embedded in the classroom by upskilling the education staff in the classroom.

Councillor Deinali asked if the impact of the pilot scheme could be shared with Members. This was agreed by the Commissioning Manager.

Councillor Robson asked what career guidance was provided to those who were about to leave care.

The Commissioning Manager indicated that this came under the preparation for adulthood work stream that they had not planned yet but in the annual update next year they would be able to share their findings.

Councillor Mavin asked how the pilot differed to what was already happening in schools.

The Commissioning Manager indicated that currently it was not always a therapist that was working with the child and a number of children go out of school for their therapy appointment and they were trying to minimise this.

Councillor Walton referred to the priorities for 2023/24 and that she had not heard of 'Know Your Place' and asked for feedback on the top 10 challenges faced by practitioners. The Commissioning Manager agreed to bring these back to Members.

Mrs Gunn referred to the integrated therapies and was surprised to hear that this was not happening already in schools. She continued by asking how the council compared to other local authorities who were currently offering integrated therapies in schools. She commented that it was only aspirational to roll it out to mainstream schools as it impacts on other areas such as mental health. She stated that children do not have access to Educational Psychologists as schools only received 2 days per year which is 2 children which is only scratching the surface.

The Commissioning Manager stated that the aspiration to roll out integrated therapy in mainstream schools was aspirational as they currently did not have fully staffed teams in the Trust. They were focusing on special schools and if they could fully staff the therapy team then they should be able to roll out to mainstream schools. She commented that they needed Educational Psychologists, but they were not there to recruit.

Mrs Gunn asked if Educational Psychologists were moving to the private sector for better pay.

The Commissioning Manager responded that the work in the NHS is very pressured as they did not have enough staff, so people leave to go to the private sector that creates more pressure on the NHS. She stated that it was difficult to encourage people to come back to the NHS. She referred to identifying needs and advised that they have a system that was needed that they were doing around neurodiversity work.

Councillor Scurfield commented that she was pleased to see that NHS dentistry was a priority as it was becoming a national crisis and asked if the early years group were aware of the state of oral health and what was the group doing to address these issues. She also asked if the groups were looking at children's readiness for school.

The Commissioning Manager responded that readiness for school had not been identified as an issue, but she could suggest this to the partnership. With regard to dentistry a colleague had provided some information that dental commissioning had moved from NHS England into the North East and North Cumbria ICB in July which gave more control going forward. A number of actions had been implemented including additional funding to extend practice opening hours for emergency care and to improve one to one triage and out of hours treatment. There had also provided a lot of support to practices to recruit overseas dentists and an incentive payment to target areas where it had been difficult to recruit. Three dentists had been secured through this scheme over the last couple of years. There had been a service redesign and dental therapists could now undertake fillings, they were awaiting a national dental recovery plan and the NHS workforce plan that came out last week included dentistry based upon increasing the number of apprenticeships and expanding the training and have a tie in period after qualification.

Councillor Scurfield asked what the groups know of the impact of the current situation on children's oral health.

The Commissioning Manager indicated that the partnership did have a discussion around this and have the oral health strategy partnership and part of that discussion was around water fluoridation but was a national question and not for the public health team anymore.

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

8 Performance Management Quarter 4 2022/23

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which provided an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework and highlight key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes. The report covered performance in and to the end of quarter four, 2022/23, January to March 2023 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

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

Mrs Gunn referred to the statistics for Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP) that had dropped off the report and asked why this was the case.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager indicated that the global EHCP in place was a headline indicator and is in relation to the level of demand. He indicated that Durham had the graduated approach and provided more support through top up funding to schools which should result in a lower level of EHCP as they were providing earlier help in schools. Monitoring the overall number gave an indicator of the wider system pressures. They had a number of processing indicators around every service in the Council and escalate the issues through different levels of process and Members may only see certain indicators, but they did have a lot of statistics for every service. He commented that there were some challenges in the EHCP processes that was largely due to high demand.

Mrs Gunn clarified that ideally EHCP should be going down but the number of SEN plans going up and indicated that it was important that the percentages and targets were shared with the committee.

Councillor Crute referred to EHCP and indicated that the report stated that the rise in request for assessments was impacting on the ability to carry them out in the statutory time scales. However, the performance indicator tracker suggested that the number of children on a EHCP was on an upward trend and had been for the last four quarters. He asked if the failure to carry out those initial assessments in time was impacting on figures.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager indicated that the number of EHCP assessments was going up, it was not necessarily a performance target but was getting better. He stated that the global number of EHCP were across all age groups up to the age of 25, so you have a moving target with plans being issued all the time. The number of plans being worked on was getting bigger and more requests were coming in, there more open assessments being worked on in the service which would have normally been processed and included another indicator.

Councillor Crute indicated that the future impact of these assessment was a concern.

Councillor Waldock asked if those who were applying for an assessment were aware that the council were not meeting the 20-week deadline. The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager indicated that he would take this back to the service and feed this back to the committee.

Councillor Waldock asked of the 197 who were over the 20 weeks, how far over were they and how near were they to completion.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager responded that it was a range but he did not have the figures to hand but the issue was that it was taking longer due to the increasing number of caseloads. They had a small number of cases where it was taking a long time since the request had been received but was due to the case complexities. These were relatively small numbers and was less than 10.

Councillor Waldock asked how the authority compared to other local authorities and whether they had they seen an increase in demand and were not hitting the 20-week target also.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager responded that historically they had performed well in this indicator and the last couple of years had seen a dramatic decline. The last published figure was 27%, the previous year was 4% that were within the 20 weeks. He commented that the national average was 40% but largely there were a number of local authorities with a relatively low performance for the 20 weeks, but others performed very well.

Councillor Waldock asked if the council could have conversations with those authorities that were doing well and commented that she knew it may be a demand issue.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager indicated that those conversations were ongoing and stated that there was a regional network and the benchmarking data had indicated an increase in requests of around 4% but the increase in Durham was above this.

Councillor Deinali referred to EHCP and asked if any analysis had been carried out to look at any correlation between factors that could impact on children's needs and the increase in EHCP. She continued if any work had been carried out to address early support from centres and their locations and any support given to schools due to the increase in workloads from the demand of the EHCP and what support was available for families who were waiting for an assessment.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager indicated that he would pass this onto the relevant service for a response.

Councillor Mulholland referred to case load pressures and that it was reported that two thirds of social workers leave to due to the impact of the workload and asked what support was provided to alleviate these pressures.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager responded that he would take this back to the service for a response.

In response to a question from Mrs Gunn, the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager indicated that they provide some indicators as an exception when a one-off topic was been considered, the report was to flag up certain issues not necessarily every one.

Councillor Deinali asked for a more detailed report specifically around EHCP to this committee so that it can be discussed in more details.

Councillor Crute suggested that this could be raised as an item for the work programme.

Resolved: That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter four performance, the continuing 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 and other external factors be noted.

9 Refresh of the Work Programme 2023/2024

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources that provided Members with an updated work programme for 2023/24 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer was in attendance to present the report and advised Members that he had received notification from Ms Evans, Co-opted Member who had identified three areas of work for additional consideration. The first was early intervention in young people's mental health. He advised that the service had indicated that this would be included as part of the Mental Health, Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience item to be considered at the 26 April 2024 meeting and was discussed at the iThrive workshop in May earlier this year. The second item was universal youth work and the service had confirmed that this was provided by colleagues in the voluntary and community service and suggest a briefing paper to members for circulation. The third item was around pastoral care in schools. The service had advised that this was an individualised service for each educational establishment so was not something that the local authority had any control, influence or oversight in the ability to look at this was therefore severely restricted.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred to the conversations today around EHCP and the desire of members to get a lot more detail and an item included in the work programme. If members were minded to include this, he was happy to take that forward as an addition to the work programme but indicated that this may already be included as part of a topic already identified in the programme and would advise members if this was the case.

Councillor Crute indicated that he was happy to take the advice of the Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer with regard to the capacity of the Committee to take on the workload as presented. He continued that they needed to look closely at EHCP as there was an upward trend of delay where they could not meet the 20-week deadline for an initial assessment.

In response to a question from Mrs Gunn on the support offered to Educational Psychologists, the Chair responded that the iThrive workshop contained a lot of helpful information around this area.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer indicated that the Council have a corporate basket of indicators that are routinely reported but where they want to look at specific areas of activity and issues, they receive more detail from the service. He indicated that wherever possible when they do bring specific services areas to committee for consideration, they would look to ensure that they have appropriate performance information and data included within those updates.

Councillor Crute indicated that the performance indicators were moving all the time and the data could be deceptive and asked if there could be a review of the performance indicators.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer responded that the Quarter 4 Performance Report was the last version in the current format due to some changes to the corporate performance reporting framework.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager advised that the format of the performance report would be changing in accordance with the structure contained in the Council Plan.

In response to questions on the process of changing the performance indicators reporting structure the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager explained the process.

The Chair indicated that the process included the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Resolved: (i) That the work programme for 2023/2024 be agreed.

(ii) That clarification be sought on the Educational Healthcare Plans and if not already featured in the issues already identified it be included in the work programme.