

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 28 September 2017 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor C Potts (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Bainbridge, P Brookes, J Considine, S Durham, C Hampson, K Hopper, I Jewell, L Kennedy, A Patterson, M Simmons and A Willis

Faith Community Representative:

Mrs A Swift

Co-opted Members:

Miss K Ashcroft

Also Present:

Councillors J Atkinson, M Clarke, M Davinson and P Jopling

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bell, J Blakey, J Clare, R Crute, N Grayson, P Howell, A Reed, H Smith, M Wilson, Mr J Conlon and Mrs C Craig.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Declarations of Interest

Following the presentation on Child Poverty, Councillor Hopper declared an interest as a member of the Credit Union and Durham Savers Scheme.

4 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

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

5 Media Relations

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to recent press articles relating to the remit of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The articles were:-

- North East students praised for handling tougher exams – this headline was from Tyne Tees News and reported that schools in the North East had praised the GCSE results of the region's students in what had been one of the biggest shake ups in the UK's education history.
- New nursery in Sedgefield will meet high demand for places – this headline from the Northern Echo advised that Sedgefield primary school had opened its new nursery unit to help meet the high demand for places in the area and all 28 places had been filled.
- Children and Families Partnership had been honoured with a visit from the Children's Commissioner – On 8 September the Children's Commissioner visited County Durham, which included a visit to the Children and Families Partnership meeting. The Children and Families Partnership received the Commissioner's Gold Award for their work with the Take Over Challenge.
- 'Historic@schools funding change confirmed – the BBC report indicated that the Education Secretary had confirmed the new funding formula for schools would be introduced 2018/19 and 2019/20. Arrangements were being made for an item on school funding to come to a future Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny meeting.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

6 Child Poverty

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which presented progress of the Child Poverty Working Group and aims to develop and implement a single coherent and coordinated approach to addressing and mitigating child poverty across County Durham. The Interim Strategic Manager, One Point Service and Think Family provided members with a presentation which looked at how child poverty was being tackled in County Durham (for copy of report and slides, see file of minutes).

It was highlighted that child poverty was set to soar to 5.1 million children by 2022, which would be a 42% increase in ten years and many of the children come from working families.

Members were advised of the government's new measures for child poverty:-

- The proportion of children living in workless households as well as long-term worklessness households.
- The educational attainment of children and disadvantaged children in England at the end of KS4.

In County Durham in 2007, 14.6% of children under the age of 16 were living in workless households, this figure had risen to 19.3% in 2015. It was therefore estimated that there was approximately 18,000 children in County Durham living in a workless household.

Over half of children living in poverty have a working parent, however, this would not be reported in the new government measure of child poverty. It was identified that the highest levels of looked after children live in the most deprived wards.

The Child Poverty Working Group was formed in March 2017 by Durham County Council and partner organisations which was supported by Dr Deborah Harrison from the North East Child Poverty Commission. The Child Poverty Action Group had implemented a range of projects and approaches.

Members were shown a short video on Roots out of Poverty which focused on how agencies were working together to help families and included information on the Durham Savers scheme.

Councillor Brookes was extremely concerned that the statistics provided indicated a 42% rise in child poverty over 10 years which was a huge issue.

It was felt that in some cases there were issues of unfair generalisation and even low level support such as building confidence would help towards changing that trajectory.

In relation to the language and values associated with child poverty being a consideration of the Child Poverty Working Group, Councillor Kennedy agreed that care was needed with the language used to avoid stigma and asked about the referral procedure for families being referred onto the Stronger Families Programme. The Interim Strategic Manager advised of the criteria and added that a family would not be refused support, even if they had been on the programme previously. The same help and support would be available, however this would be from an alternative route as the programme was payment by results, the same family could not be counted twice. Work had taken place with Area Action Partnerships across the County to provide Holiday Hunger play schemes. Councillor Kennedy added that two national play days had taken place in her electoral division that had fed over 900 children.

Councillor Bainbridge asked what was considered as low income and how the local authority identified working families who were on low income. The Interim Strategic Manager advised that 60% below the national average was considered as low income and the average was £25,000 per annum which would be in the region of £15,000. She added that schools were the eyes and ears and they relied on schools considerably to notify of any families that may require help.

Councillor Davinson referred to the Durham Savers scheme and asked if they were predominantly concentrating on primary and secondary schools and if academies were also included. He was advised that this would be taken up and the information would be reported back to him. Councillor Davinson also asked how aspirations of children and young people could be raised. The Interim Strategic Manager advised that raising children's aspirations should start at the earliest opportunity and this was why early help in children's centres worked with young parents with short steps to build confidence. She advised that work had also taken place with Job Centre Plus to provide advice.

Councillor Durham pointed out that the statistics were a great concern and suggested that it would be easier to understand if they were provided year on year so that comparisons could be made and an understanding of what other factors were involved.

Councillor Hopper commented that there was a lot of good work done by Area Action Partnerships in helping people back into work and there was a multi-agency approach to making communities more resilient to the changing economy. The Interim Strategic Manager added that families were signposted to working with the voluntary sector to help build confidence and there was a more joined up approach.

In response to a query from Councillor Considine, the Interim Strategic Manager confirmed that the local authority works with all childcare providers and the child-minding network was a point of contact.

Miss Ashcroft asked when the next set of statistics would be available. She was informed that it was unknown when the next statistics would be released, however, the free school meals data was used as a measure.

The Chairman asked if the service was prepared for the roll out of Universal Credit and was advised that a number of training sessions had been arranged for Children's Services staff on universal credit and smarter budgeting.

The Chairman thanked the Interim Strategic Manager for her presentation and asked to keep the committee updated with the work of the Child Poverty Working Group.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and the committee receive a further progress update on the Child Poverty Working Group Action Plan.

7 Children's Services Update - Quality Improvement Board (QIB) One Year On

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided an analysis of the progress to date against the improvement activity across Children and Young People's Services following the Ofsted inspection which took place between February and March 2016. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers provided members with a presentation detailing the progress made on the action plan to address Ofsted's recommendations to the County Council following their inspection in March 2016 (for copy of report and slides, see file of minutes).

The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers advised members that the recommendations had been grouped into four key themes, Strengthening Management and Staffing Capacity, Strengthening Political and Management Oversight, Improving the Quality of Practice and Compliance with Regulations. While it had been demonstrated that there had been good overall progress across the four themes there were priorities and future work still to be done.

Councillor Bainbridge was delighted that support for looked after children 'staying put' was being amended. In relation to the results of the casefile audit information, Councillor Bainbridge was pleased to see 61% of case files being audited as good or better, however, was concerned at the 39% which required improvement or were inadequate and enquired if this was because of high vacancies. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers indicated that most of the 39% were in the requires improvement category and a very small fraction were judged to be inadequate. Work still needed to be done,

however, a number of those that were classified as requires improvement just needed a little more to be in the good category. The Head of Service advised that staffing pressures were a major factor but not the only reason for those in the requires improvement and inadequate category. Staff training and development on management of casefiles was being arranged.

Councillor Kennedy asked if newly qualified social workers were buddied up with existing social workers to ensure trainees were familiar with the process. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers agreed that this was a definite focus to ensure there was a good skill mix and a buddy up system would be in place for 12 to 18 months to support newly qualified social workers.

Councillor Brookes commented on the great progress that had been made on the political oversight theme and the positive changes to Corporate Parenting Panel which was now better joined up with Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Brookes asked why Liquid Logic was a better casefile management system than SIDD. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers advised that SIDD was 20 years old and was an in-house system which was not fit for purpose anymore as it was in-efficient and extremely time consuming. From a social worker perspective, Liquid Logic was a quicker system as all the information could be input without reverting to paper files. With the SIDD system, children's records were in different places and records were scanned in but with Liquid Logic system, all children's records would be in one place. The implementation for the Liquid Logic system was September 2018.

Councillor Jewell mentioned that in the past Durham County Council social workers had taken up positions at other local authorities after being offered lucrative incentives and asked if this was the reason for the creation of new posts. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers advised that there had been a number of new posts established, the senior leadership team had been strengthened and there had been the establishment of an 11th Families First Social Work Team in the Easington Area. Four social worker posts in Child Protection service and six additional social work posts in the Looked After Service and six team co-ordinator posts had been created to support the additional Families First team, Child Protection teams and Looked After teams. There was now increased capacity in legal services to manage the increased volume in care proceedings and there was also an additional independent reviewing officer. Additionally to the increased resource there was now a regional agreement in place to regulate the pay of agency worker staff.

Mrs Swift enquired about the wellbeing and health of social workers and was informed that staff welfare was very high on the service's agenda. A survey on quality of support and supervision was carried out annually and the analysis of results indicate that staff feel they receive good support and the general feedback for Durham County Council was also good.

Councillor Hopper commented that good news stories about social workers are never reported and it is only when things go wrong that it makes the headlines. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers agreed and said that the service had decided to acknowledge the good work of social workers and hold an event to celebrate their work to raise their profile. The Head of Service informed the committee that the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services had received fantastic feedback.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers for her presentation.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

8 Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2016/2017

The Committee considered a report of the Independent Chair of Local Safeguarding Children's Board that presented to Members the Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report for 2016/17. The Business Manager for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board provided members with a presentation which highlighted their achievements and set out their strategic priorities for 2017 – 2020 (for copy of report and slides, see file of minutes).

The Business Manager for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board informed members that Durham LSCB held a development day in February 2017 to review progress on the priorities, consider key challenges, and to set the following strategic priorities:

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Neglect
- Empowering Young People
- Working together.

Councillor Kennedy asked what had been done with schools to help address self-harm issues. The Business Manager for LSCB advised that this had been a priority for the LSCB last year and had been taken forward by the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Business Manager indicated that there was information available to schools at different levels such as universal package and a tiered package for safeguarding. It was also advised that Durham County Council's Educational Psychologists also provide a tool kit to help schools with self-harm issues. Councillor Kennedy went on to ask if there was information for schools to circulate to parents. The Business Manager for LSCB informed that there was information on the website and schools could provide the tool kit to parents. She added that work was being developed for a minded package of support for parents.

Councillor Kennedy then asked about the equipment used by social workers to access information. She was advised that Durham County Council provide equipment that was heavily firewalled. The LSCB involves multi agencies and it was up to individual agencies what types of equipment their staff use.

In response to a question about Matrix, the Business Manager advised that there was web based training, face to face training and e-learning and Board members were expected to disseminate information. Information was also available via the schools extranet and the Board worked with safeguarding leads within schools.

In relation to Empowering Young People, Councillor Bainbridge asked what was available in schools. She was advised that booklets were available and that the Board was developing a new programme which covers all aspects. The programme was due to be

launched within the next few weeks and schools would be encouraged to share the information.

Councillor Brookes enquired if there was a parallel process giving information such as serious case reviews. The Business Manager indicated that this information was included in the 60 page annual report and was available on the website. Councillor Brookes asked if the report could be forwarded to all members of the committee.

The Business Manager confirmed that the Board worked with primary schools on self-harm and child sexual exploitation following a question from Mrs Swift.

Councillor Jewell referred to taxi driver training and asked if the initial expectations had been met. The Business Manager advised that expectations had been met and initially it was a voluntary awareness session asking taxi drivers to report anything that seemed odd to the police. 1500 taxi drivers had participated in this voluntary training and now it was included as part of the licensing conditions for taxi drivers. The Board has issued fact sheets for taxi drivers, fast food restaurants, hotels and was now working with bus stations.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

9 Quarter One 2017/2018 Performance Management Report

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented progress against the council's corporate performance framework for the Altogether Better for Children and Young People priority theme for the first quarter of the 2017/18 financial year (for copy see file of minutes).

The Team Leader for Performance, Co-ordination and Development reported that more children aged 0-2 years in deprived areas (88%) were registered with a Children's Centre and are having contact compared to last year (86%). Children's Centres play a vital role in early intervention, reaching those whose needs might otherwise escalate into more serious problems. Significant progress was made on the processing rate for statutory referrals within one working day despite an increase in the number of children in need.

Councillor Brookes sought clarification in relation to the national figure for looked after children as it appeared to be static on the graph included in the report. The Team Leader for Performance advised that the national figure for looked after children was 60 per 10,000 population under 18, however in County Durham there had been a much more significant increase.

Councillor Kennedy commented that there could be a connection between domestic violence, the rise in child poverty and the increase in the number of Child Protection Plans.

Councillor Durham asked about the increase in the number of dental checks for looked after children. He was advised that work was ongoing which was looking at the accuracy of information recorded.

Councillor Patterson expressed concern in relation to health checks for looked after children and asked if this could be compared against other children as there were less health checks in school and parents may have difficulty attending appointments. The Team Leader advised that health visiting service information could be included, and added that the health visiting was good, however, as a child gets older contact is reduced.

Councillor Kennedy advised the committee that in her experience, dental practices had taken clients who were children off their books if they had missed a single appointment, resulting in them having to register elsewhere. The Chairman advised that this would be raised with Adults, Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Councillor Hopper advised that Dentists follow similar procedures to GP surgeries regarding appointments. She indicated that tooth decay was preventable and there should be promotion of dental health.

Councillor Jopling enquired about under performing schools and procedures for those schools who had been identified as inadequate and required improvement. The Team Leader advised that School Improvement officers work with schools to improve standards and some of those identified were making progress to come off the list.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

10 Quarter 4 Revenue and Capital Outturn 2016/2017

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Financial Services which provided the Committee with details of the 2016/17 revenue and capital outturn position for Children and Young People's Service grouping, highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget for the year (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Durham commented on the greater number of agency staff and the high number of looked after children and asked how this was impacting on the budget. He was advised that primarily the increased demand on placement provision has not kept pace with demand and when there is no capacity the service has had to go out.

Councillor Jopling sought clarification in relation to paragraph 16 of the report with regards to deficit budgets in schools. The Finance Manager advised that this was dealt with by a specific team as deficits in school budgets would impact on the schools ability to purchase.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

11 Quarter 1 Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2017/2018

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Financial Services which provided the Committee with details of the forecast outturn budget position for the Children and Young People's service grouping, highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget for the year, based on the position to the end of June 2017 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Kennedy raised an issue in connection with school transport costs, advising the committee that in her electoral division, local primary schools were oversubscribed and children were being transported to schools several miles away. She suggested that it would be more prudent if additional classrooms were added to the schools, as there were also a number of housing developments in the area.

The Chairman added that she had experienced similar and Section 106 monies had been used to provide additional classrooms. It was suggested that Councillor Kennedy take up the matter with the Planning Team to feed the information through to masterplans.

Councillor Durham asked for clarification in relation to employee costs increasing by 16% and asked which areas had increased. The Finance Manager advised that there had been extra investment, with an additional family's first team in the Easington area and a business support team had been brought into the service too.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

12 Summary of Minutes from the Children and Families Partnership

The Committee considered the minutes of the Children and Families Partnership on 16 June 2017 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the minutes be noted.