

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 16 January 2018 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor C Potts (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors H Smith, B Bainbridge, D Bell, J Blakey, J Charlton, J Considine, R Crute, S Durham, C Hampson, K Hopper, I Jewell, A Patterson, M Simmons, A Willis and L Maddison

Faith Community Representative:

Mrs C Johnston

Co-opted Members:

Miss K Ashcroft and Mr J Conlon

In attendance:

Councillor M McKeon

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Brookes, L Kennedy, L Mavin, A Reed, M Wilson, Mr R Patel (Parent Governor Representative) and Mrs C Craig (Faith Rep)

2 Substitute Members

Councillor L Maddison for N Grayson

3 Minutes of the Meetings held on 7 and 21 November 2017

The minutes of the meetings held on the 7 and 21 November 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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.

6 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:-

- Schools could play a vital role to help prevent mental health problems in young people
- £1.75 million playtime investment continues
- Limit children's snacks to 100 calories, health body says

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

7 Neglect in County Durham

The Committee received a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided an introduction to Neglect in County Durham (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Early Help, Assessment & Safeguarding explained that neglect was the biggest single issue facing children's social care and gave a detailed presentation that highlighted the following:-

- Definition of Neglect – The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse
- Neglect may involve parents or carers failing
- Signs of Neglect
- The Toxic Quad – Alcohol & substance misuse, parental mental ill health, domestic abuse & learning difficulties
- Increased risks
- Life long effects of childhood neglect
- Prevalence – 380 children in Durham on a child protection plan, 19 for sexual abuse, 28 for physical abuse and 71 for emotional abuse (although the emotional abuse category tends to be used less in County Durham than in other local authority areas)
- Our response – prevention and early identification – used by all professionals entering the home
- Team around the family
- Care Proceedings
- A typical plan

In summary, Members were informed that neglect was the biggest challenge and was increasing, it had long lasting negative impacts on children, was a priority for the LSCB and was a focus for Ofsted inspections. There were 374 more open cases than last year and there was a fear that with the introduction of universal credit the situation would only

get worse. Prevention and early identification was key to reducing neglect. All professionals going into homes for the first time were required to complete a Home Environment Assessment Tool (HEAT).

Councillor Crute was concerned about cases slipping through the net and asked if the team around the family looked for certain factors when assessing a family, if some factors were masked and why the delays were occurring. The Head of Early Help, Assessment & Safeguarding said that the children and families that were not known were worrying and that there were certain groups that were good at evading the authorities. The new HEAT ensured that all babies received an assessment.

Councillor Crute went on to ask if other agencies had similar performance indicators that could help track certain elements, such as obesity. He was advised that the service were able to track but it did have its challenges. The LSCB were pushing partners to look at ways to measure performance and what impact it had.

Referring to information shared about the impact on a child's brain, Councillor Charlton asked if this damage could be reversed. The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding explained that evidence showed that this could not be reversed once the damage had been done. Councillor Charlton further asked if this risk of neglect was increased the bigger the family and was informed that it was one of the risk factors but would increase further if the mother had anxiety, depression, debt worries, an abusive partner, to name a few.

Councillor Charlton asked what the health services were doing to encourage contraception. The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding explained that the health service colleagues advised about long lasting contraception when visiting after the birth of a child and the pre-birth team would pick this up when working with vulnerable mothers could encourage long lasting contraception to give the mother a chance to deal with her issues.

Referring to the children in care, Councillor Bainbridge enquired as to how many referrals were for new families, as she was aware that a lot of families would already be known to the service. She was advised that the information could be sought but would involve a manual look through the records.

Councillor Jewell said that as a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel and Adoption Panel an unbalanced view was often presented and said that it was important to share the success stories. The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding said that situations were often turned around for many families and that a lot of care plans did not turn into care proceedings. She agreed that the service needed to be able to report on that.

In terms of neglect, Councillor McKeon asked if it was fully understood by all partners. She was informed that there was need to continually remind professionals about neglect and that the LSCB runs a Neglect Training programme. There was also to be a neglect conference in March.

Councillor Maddison asked how staff at Children's Centres encouraged parents to get more involved in care and activities and what controls were in place at independent

centres. The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding explained that high quality early education had been shown to be better for children's development and learning than staying at home but Children's Centres enabled some parents to work and had activities that helped parents to play and interact with their children, and it was about finding the right balance. She explained that all care providers were assessed by Ofsted and that the standard in Durham was very high. All Ofsted reports were shared with the local authority, the organisation and parents.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding for a very interesting presentation and asked for a further update in six months time.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report and presentation be noted.
- (ii) That an update be brought back to Committee in six months.

8 Analysis of the Rise in Looked After Children Numbers

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships that appraised of some analytical work that had been carried out into the increase in numbers of looked after children (LAC) in Durham (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager gave a detailed presentation that highlighted the following:-

- LAC numbers
- Potential causes of growth in LAC
- LAC Rates – Comparisons
- National and Local Policy Drivers
- Throughput, starters and leavers
- LAC – Monthly New Entrants
- Increase by LAC by Area
- 2016/17 LAC Rates by Deprivation Decile
- New Entrants – Summary
- Summary – Population and Deprivation
- LAC rate by Local Authority
- Regional Relative Increases Since 2007
- Relative Increases 2007 – 2017
- The London Effect
- Social Care Management Best Practice

Councillor Hopper said that the success of the family teams reacting to larger groups of parents would impact on the number of children being looked after. The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding said that this also happened when Children's Centres first opened but she added that the HEAT tool would help to find those vulnerable families and that numbers could increase as a result.

With regards to regulation 24 placements, Councillor Durham asked how many there were and if there was a spike. He was advised that there were 50 cases that needed to be reclassified as Looked After Children and there was a further 50 the following month and it

was the cumulative impact of that. The data for a looked after child showed that some older children would stay in care until they felt ready to become independent. So the increase in children who were 18 had increased.

He further asked how many unaccompanied asylum seeking children had been dispersed into the county and was informed that there were 10.

Councillor Patterson asked how much preventative services had had an impact bearing in mind the reduction of frontline services, such as the Children's Centres, Surestart and regulation 24. The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding advised that there was no correlation or evidence that reduced amount of service available affected this and that services now targeted and worked with much more vulnerable families. Dedicated services had been created for this. She believed that this work did make an impact and made a difference.

Referring to statistics and benchmarking, Councillor Jewell asked how reliable and accurate the figures were and if it was possible that different authorities applied less rigour. The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding explained that this Council had a historically low rate of looked after children and that some authorities had an exceptionally high rate to start with so comparing relative increases and decreases should be treated with caution but that they did raise attempts to gain a better understanding of them.

On answering a question from Mr Conlon about the cross over of starters and leavers, the Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding explained that starters were impacted by regulation 24 issues. Some children were in care for a short time but others could be permanent and this was a challenge.

Councillor Bainbridge asked how many brand new cases had contributed to making the statistics high and was advised that it was an aggregated figure and although not worked out fully would account for a lot of the increases.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

9 Quarter 2: 2017/18 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 second quarter of the 2017/18 financial year (for copy see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager presented the performance report and highlighted that attainment 8 results were in line with regional but lower than national averages, under 18 conceptions continued to reduce, an improvement had been seen in completed EHCPs but still below the national target. He went on to report that caseload levels per social worker had improved but that reported casefile quality had deteriorated, the number of looked after children had plateaued but remained high compared to the national average. Breastfeeding prevalence had improved slightly but smoking at the time of delivery for mothers had increased.

Councillor Patterson passed her congratulations to the Stronger Families team as the trend was positive and the adoption and foster placements was positive too. She referred to page 46 of the report and was disappointed that the percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training was not higher. She asked if this was a difficult cycle to get out of in terms of need. The Head of Early Help, Assessment & Safeguarding explained that it was difficult to tell a strong story with the quarter two figures which corresponds with the end of the school year when there would be a spike in young people leaving education. However, we did well compared to other authorities with care leavers. She added that DurhamWorks target those children who struggle and that Durham would not be complacent. Councillor Patterson went on to add that she was concerned about the not knowns and was advised that this figure had reduced to a very small percentage of 2%.

Councillor Durham was interested to understand the quality of cases. The Head of Early Help, Assessment & Safeguarding explained that some teams had been unstable with many agency staff but that the figure on caseloads was improving although it was noted that demand was also increasing. The new restructure would address these issues and ensure the fairer distribution of work, including the workload of managers. Members were advised that there were very few vacancies and that was helping to improve stability in the teams. With regards to looked after children casefiles it had been recognised that Durham were overgrading them. This had been addressed and would improve. The Head of Early Help, Assessment & Safeguarding assured Members that she was confident that the quality was improving.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 Quarter 2: Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2017/18

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 Blakey enquired if the underspend in the education budget would be used for the backlog of school psychology service assessments and she asked if they were hoping to recruit. The Finance Manager would seek clarification from the service and feed back to Councillor Blakey.

Referring to the recent situation with Carillion, Councillor Patterson asked how this would affect the School Capital Budget. The Finance Manager advised that the team were assessing the impact including the proposed maintenance contracts for BSF schools. He confirmed that with regards to the capital budget, Carillion were not undertaking any current work.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

11 Verbal Update on Role of the Social Worker from a Child's Perspective Review

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee of the areas covered by the review group looking into the role of the social worker from a child's perspective.

She advised that two meetings had been held so far, the first discussing referral pathways and the new electronic form used. Discussions covered the slide and scale of need and about how important it was to have the right help by the right service at the right time. Information was also received on the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). At the second meeting members were appraised of the restructure and the re-introduction of the pre-birth teams. A visit to the MASH was attended by the Chairman and Councillor Hopper and the Chairman added that it was well worth visiting and talking to the staff.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer said that the next meeting on 6 February 2018 would look at social work training and development including information on the social worker academy.

Resolved:

That the update be noted.