
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee has undertaken :-

Kids and Co

2. At a Special Meeting on 31 January 2013 we considered the Call In request by three Members of this Scrutiny Committee to the decision taken by Cabinet at its meeting held on 7 January 2013 to close the Kids and Co nurseries at Borough Road and Northwood and the Flexi Childcare service.
3. The call in was requested as the relevant Members felt that the decision to close the service was disproportionate because of the failure to undertake a thorough options appraisal and full consideration of the costs to implement the recommendations. Concerns were also expressed that incomplete and inadequate information was submitted to Cabinet especially regarding an audit of nursery places and an Equality Impact Assessment. Officers responded to the comments and concerns raised.
4. A representative of parents who had children attending Kids and Co, addressed the Scrutiny Committee and requested that further consideration be given to the proposals by parents which indicated that the Nurseries could be operated without a Council subsidy.
5. A representative of UNISON, also addressed the Committee and stated that it was felt that Cabinet did not have enough detailed information to make its decision to close the Nurseries, Kids, UNISON believed that neither Northwood or Borough Road wanted Kids and Co on its site, that a full audit of child places available in the Borough had not been undertaken and that a complete review of the Service had not been undertaken prior to making the decision to close.
6. We acknowledged the concerns put forward in respect of the closure of Kids and Co but felt assured by Officers that Cabinet had had enough information to make the decision to close Kids and Co and therefore agreed that no further action should be taken.

Oral Health

7. We received a presentation from Dr. Richard Holmes, Department of Public Health, NHS County Durham and Darlington on Oral Health and Health Services in Darlington with the main focus on children's oral health and access to dental services and how NHS initiatives were improving access for children 0-7 years.

8. Through the gathering of local and national data on oral health and undertaking regular surveys it was noted that children's oral health in Darlington was slightly below average compared to the North East and the overall figure for England at 39 per cent decay experience in 5 year olds for 2007/08.
9. The percentage of children with decayed teeth at 12 years old for 2008/09 showed that Darlington was approximately at 45 per cent on average with local authorities in the North East except Hartlepool and Gateshead which showed a lower percentage which was because those areas have either natural or added fluoride in the water supply.
10. The key to reducing decayed teeth in children is to address the issue at a very early age and this is where the NHS are targeting their services. NHS dental services are free to all children, including orthodontic treatment and there are ten practices out of a total of 18 in Darlington accepting new NHS patients.
11. The number of residents of Darlington who attend an NHS Dentist in the North East in 2010/11 was good at early years and this could be contributed to a lot of health promotion pilots in the community to educate that even the very young with or without tooth growth needs to see a dentist or dental hygienist as it is important to build confidence in young children in accessing dental care.
12. It was also acknowledged that children's fear of the dentist can also come from their parents fear and that parents need to be continually educated to ensure their children access dental care as early as possible.
13. Members were particularly interested to note that a chart showing the correlation between deprivation and access to dental care showed that the poorest dental access was in the most deprived areas of Darlington and as such we will be monitoring this closer when we undertake our Review of child poverty.
14. Under the new commissioning arrangements from 1 April 2013 local authorities will have a key role to play through their Health and Well Being Boards and this Scrutiny Committee will continue to monitor the situation regarding access to dental services for our children and young people.

Safeguarding Children and Young People

15. Members received an update on the role of the Darlington Safeguarding Children Board which is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in Darlington.
16. The scope of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) includes safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in three broad areas of activity: activity that affects all children and aims to identify and prevent maltreatment or impairment of health or development; proactive work to target particular vulnerable groups; and responsive work to protect children who are suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm including abuse and neglect.

17. We examined what the LSCB is responsible for; it's accountability for operational work; the role of lay members and the Lead Member; the relationship between the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Collective and also its relationship with the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Health and Wellbeing Board; the priorities for 2012/13 which are Neglect, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Exploitation and the suggested priorities for 2013/14; and also the number of Sub Groups which contribute to the overall work of the Board.

Ethnic Groups Interaction with Children and Young People Services

18. We received an overview of the interaction of children, young people and families from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities with a range of children/young people services.
19. A snapshot analysis of interaction against core provision did show evidence and examples of positive engagement by BME communities and many positive examples of individual and group activities and intervention and positive relationships with community leaders and demonstrable evidence of enabling positive outcomes for children, young people and families.
20. Members were satisfied that no specific review work was required and that there were no particular areas of concern presently, however Members would continue to keep this under review to ensure services continue to meet specific cultural needs.

Academies Governance Arrangements and the Role of the Local Authority

21. With the ever increasing number of schools converting to academies within the borough, Members requested an update to provide us with information on academies to date and the issues associated with academy status.
22. Under the Academies Act 2010 the majority of primary and secondary schools in the Borough have or are in the process of converting to academy status.
23. The key driver for academy status is autonomy at school level however local authorities still have a duty to intervene if a school begins to cause concern and the governance arrangements for academies remains essentially the same as for local authority schools.
24. A radically changing educational system does mean a change in relationship with schools and the local authority however in Darlington we were reassured to learn that all schools have pledged to support the principles of schools@onedarlington, a model of all schools committing to supporting each other and running services for each other unique to Darlington. This has attracted national interest as 'a good example of a structured approach to collaboration with a clear aim of improving standards'.
25. There was some concern expressed by our Members that although the schools were working together well a present with each other and the local authority, this could change with a change of leadership at the school and that we were very much in 'early days' with academies. Scrutiny Members will continue to monitor

developments with academies in Darlington very closely as the local authority still has the responsibility to ensure academies are providing a good standard to education to our children and young people.

Work Programme

26. We continue to give consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee and taking into account the ambitious programme of change across the Council and the key role of Scrutiny in ensuring that the programme is able to deliver the service improvements and the budget savings necessary.
27. Since the last meeting of Council I have attended various meeting with Officers.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee