
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.

Pupil Premium

2. We received a report on Pupil Premium Funding and its implementation and how it aims to improve the life chances of specific groups where evidence shows life chances are limited.
3. The Pupil Premium was introduced in April 2011 as additional targeted funding for schools and was allocated to schools to work with pupils who have registered for Free Schools Meals at any point in the last six years and to children 'looked after' continuously for six months.
4. Funding has increased since its introduction and for 2013/14 amounts to £900 per eligible pupil.
5. There has also been additional funding cohorts announced in November 2013 including Service Pupil Premium for service personnel; and Pupil Premium Plus for eligible 'looked after' children.
6. The increased funding for children 'looked after' is welcomed and will provide opportunities to fund needs identified in the Personal Education Plan of all 'looked after children'. The role of the Virtual Head Teacher will be vital in ensuring that the funding is spent supporting the young people.
7. Members had been concerned that there had been a lack of take up for Free School Meals and were encouraged to learn that schools are actively encouraging parents to take up Free Schools Meals in order to increase the overall school funding.
8. We also discussed the effectiveness of Pupil Premium and its varying uses within Darlington schools and the potential positive impact of funding on pupil performance.

Co-opted Members Review Group

9. We gave approval to the findings and recommendations of the Review Group established to examine the position with regard to the statutory and non-statutory representatives.

10. In view of the current changes and requirements of co-opted Members on Scrutiny it was felt that the changes proposed to the membership would be appropriate to meet legal requirements and also continue to include representatives from interested outside organisations.
11. We acknowledged the importance of the involvement of co-optees in task and finish and review group work dealing with issues that have an impact on children and young people, however agreed to reduce the role of the 'formal' co-optee input at Scrutiny Committee meetings. We will also be actively seeking to fill the vacant positions.

Extending Children in Foster Care to 21

12. We received a verbal update on the position with regard to a change in the legal duty to provide support to enable, if needed, children to remain in foster care until the age of 21 years. This authority does operate a 'staying put' policy and currently offers a supported lodgings arrangement to those children who desire it.
13. We will be looking at this further to ensure that funding arrangements are in place to support those children wishing to remain in foster care until the age of 21 years and that foster carers are in a position to do so.
14. There are currently 30 Looked After Children who will fall into this category over the next two years.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2014/15 to 2019/20

15. At a Special meeting held on 6 January, 2014 consideration was given to the Medium Term Financial Plan which will put in place a two year sustainable plan together with proposals to significantly contribute to bridging the budget gaps in years three and beyond and would give the Council, its partners and the public, the opportunity to test out new approaches and build learning and capacity to deliver financial sustainability beyond 2016/17.
16. Children's Services is the second largest spend of this Council but much of the service is statutory and therefore there is less scope to make the necessary savings. A business case was submitted around the potentially adverse impact of any reduction in discretionary services and it was agreed to recommend maintaining discretionary services that would reduce the number of children who would require care or protection and so ultimately making a saving in children's social care.
17. The spend in children's social care is largely determined by the number of children looked after at any one time. As the number increases (average of £50,000 per child per year) then so do other costs such as legal costs, travel etc. There are currently 189 young people looked after and there have been 210 in the past. The proposal is to continue to provide an effective preventative service, closely aligned to partners and to social work teams, to provide early support for families where there is a risk the child may come into care.

18. Work will also be undertaken to reduce the cost of placements, through reviewing the fostering service and making greater use of brokerage of placements.
19. We discussed the work being carried out across the Tees Valley on the Fostering Framework; the recent success in increasing In-house fostering and also increased numbers of adoptions and special guardianships; model work being undertaken with schools to fund family support roles based in schools and the intention to roll out to other schools if successful; schools committing funding to the Educational Psychology Service; continued multi-agency working through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for better outcomes for young people; public health funding for commissioning school nurses and health visitors; and the extension of troubled families funding.
20. We also gave consideration to the increase nationally in the number of children looked after and the need to monitor closely the increased case loads and the additional pressures on the social workers. Members also considered the role of the social workers and ways in which they could be assisted by better use of technology and intend to investigate this further.

Work Programme

21. 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.
22. Members have requested that the Work Programme include reports on available funding in schools in relation to Anti Racism and also to look at the current position in schools in accessing funding for Music and Performing Arts.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee