
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.

Work Programme

2. 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.
3. Approval has been given by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group to examine Child Exploitation and the Rotherham Report at our next meeting.

School Organisation Plan

4. We received a presentation from the Head of School and Pupil Support Services on the School Organisation Plan for 2012-17 and the projections for primary and secondary school places in Darlington up to 2025, taking into account the potential fall in birth rate due to the economic situation and housing developments that are planned in the future.
5. Members were encouraged to hear that there was currently enough capacity available for pupils in Darlington and secondary schools in particular had sufficient places as they had more capacity and flexibility within their accommodation.
6. We were particularly interested to hear how the Council had met parental preference in primary and secondary schools and highlighted the difficulty in accurately forecasting school places in light of expected large housing developments.
7. The Head of School and Pupil Support Services assured us that officers are working closely with larger housing developments on the Local Plan, Making and Growing Places and that there was a process of ongoing consultation with the developers and planners to ensure that funding for school places was made available before any new houses are built.
8. It was also reported that sites had been reserved for potential educational sites, although there was no commitment to build, but funding was the biggest risk factor as currently the Council receive £1.5m a year from the government for places however on average a primary school costs £4.5m to build.

9. The School Organisation Plan is reviewed annually and this Scrutiny will be continue to monitor the progress of the Plan for 2012-17 and future school place planning.

Special Educational Needs and Disability – 0-25 Years

10. We receive an update on the implementation of the national reforms associated with the 0-25 Special Education Needs (SEN) System.
11. The Children and Families Act came into force on 1 September 2014 and provided the legislation for organisations who work with and support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.
12. As a national pathfinder, Darlington has been testing the reforms and identifying new ways of working since early 2012.
13. Particular reference was made to The Code of Practice issued jointly by the Department for Education and the Department for Health which provides the framework for how the reforms must be implemented; the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) which are automatically offered to all newly identified children with additional needs in place of the historical Statement of Educational Needs; new legislation which has been introduced providing the ability for families/young people to request a Personal Budget as a way of managing the funding aligned to an EHCP; changes to the schools funding formula and School Based High Needs Funding; and the Multi-Agency working which has been carried out across the professions of Education, Health and Social Care in the development of individual EHCP's.
14. Since March, 2014 Darlington has been supporting the role of the Regional Champion for the North East as a way of disseminating good practice and sharing ways of working with the other 12 Local Authorities in the region.
15. It was highlighted that significant consultation and engagement has been undertaken throughout all stages of the pathfinder programme and families, children and young people had been instrumental in developing all elements of the new process and were fully supported to be involved through the close working relationship with Darlington Association on Disability.
16. We were particularly interested to know how it is intended to continue to meet the needs of children in times of financial constraints and the Head of School and Pupil Support Services referred to the Dedicated Schools Grant which sets aside funding for special needs. She also advised us that the EHCP's will also help with the process of defining need and provision in consultation with the parents. We also raised our concerns at the tight deadlines that have been set by central government for transferring the statements of each child or young person to an EHCP.
17. We will continue to provide support and appropriate challenge in the development of the new 0-25 special needs system across Darlington.

Childcare Sufficiency Review 2014

18. Members gave consideration to the findings of the 2014 Childcare Sufficiency Review and the Local Authority's 2014-15 Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan.
19. The Children and Families' Act, 2014 changed the local authority's statutory duty regarding childcare sufficiency. Local authorities still have a duty to ensure sufficient childcare, as far as is reasonably practicable; however, instead of conducting a large scale sufficiency assessment every three years with annual reviews in the intermediate years, local authorities now have a statutory duty to report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and make this report available and accessible to parents.
20. We also examined some of the social issues during 2013-14 which affected child care demand in the Borough which is also dependent upon local employment opportunities and the availability of appropriate housing. The recession clearly having had a significant impact on Darlington's economy; the various regeneration projects throughout the Borough; and also changes to income support for lone parents and Housing Benefit having an effect too.
21. Supply data shows that in 2013-14, the education and childcare market in Darlington which consists of maintained nursery schools, academy and maintained nursery units, private day nurseries, playgroups, child minders, breakfast, after school and holiday clubs was fairly stable.
22. In 2014 there was no budget available for childcare sufficiency so it was not possible to conduct valid, reliable parental demand research as in 2008 and 2011. However, a more simplified childcare demand questionnaire has been distributed via People and Families' Information Support (PFIS) and the PFIS unmet demand list has also been utilised. Parental feedback from the 73 questionnaires returned showed that, as in 2008 and 2011 there was an unmet demand for affordable, after-school and holiday childcare/activities for all age groups and older children (over 8 years) in particular; and an unmet demand for affordable, accessible and appropriate childcare for children and young people with disabilities (up to the age of 18 years).
23. Members discussed this point in particular including the cost of childminders in Darlington compared to other parts of the region and the general shortage of childminders and that it was a difficult market to plan for and the fact that rates are set individually by each provider and the Council have no input into this, however, as part of the Action Plan officers will be meeting with the providers to establish any barriers preventing them extending their provision.
24. We will continue to monitor the Action Plan annually.

Parenting Programme

25. We received a report on the current parenting programme offer in Darlington and the main target audience for the programmes.
26. Parenting Programmes are an essential tool in engaging families in improving parenting and have an impact on the future outcomes for their children. The four parenting programmes on offer in Darlington including Mellow Parenting; Incredible Years; Strengthening Families; and Parenting Factor. A further course, Family Foundations was offered as a pilot aimed at fathers in 2012.
27. We were very encouraged to learn that there has been an increase in the number of parents on the various parenting programmes and discussed the potential reasons why some programmes were not being completed.
28. We also considered the vulnerability of the Early Intervention Team being a non - statutory service and that it may be again be subject to future budget pressures and also the financial pressures brought about by legal judgements re-defining Looked After Children (LAC) which will increase the numbers of LAC in the borough and bring about increased costs.

Child Poverty Review Group

29. Members met on 28th October, 2014 to consider Ward level data for child poverty for 2006 and 2011. The maps showed each ward with the level of child poverty, and each ward was also broken down by super output areas within wards. The Map clearly showed the highest areas of child poverty and there were 7 clear 'hot spots'.
30. At our next meeting we have requested an update on on the results of the Government Consultation and any changes to the national measures of child poverty; application of other data to the 'hot spot' areas to see any correlation; and what other policies are in place targeting specifically these 'hot spot' areas.

STEM Applications and Apprenticeships Review Group

31. Members met on 4th November, 2014 to consider what is being done to enable young people to understand the applications of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects and the opportunities that are available for apprenticeships and careers.
32. We met with Dr. Mike Leddra, the STEM Enrichment and Enhancement Co-ordinator, Durham and Tees Valley who gave Members an overview of his work with STEMNET, which is a national network which seeks to stimulate the interests of young people in STEM subjects and in pursuing careers related to them.
33. Also attending the meeting was Paul Richardson, Head of 11-19 (Learning and Skills) who provided us with data in relation to the uptake of STEM subjects; Owen McAteer, Foundation for Jobs Co-ordinator; and Calvin Kipling, Chair of the 11-19 Partnership and Head of Darlington School of Mathematics and Science.

34. It was a very interesting meeting and from discussing the issues with those attending it gave us a good idea of what is being done to increase young people's understanding of how to access careers in STEM and how they can be guided along the best route to their chose career.
35. A further meeting will be arranged to examine the help and support available for smaller SME's and the creation of apprenticeship places for young people; and the link between education and employment away from the University route, including NEET.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee