
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.

Medium Term Financial Plan

3. A Special Meeting of this Scrutiny was held on 6 December 2014 when we received a presentation from the Service Director for Children, Families and Learning on the 2014/15 Medium Term Financial Plan which included a financial overview of the current situation including government grant losses and anticipated further savings required by 2020 over and above the current savings planned.
4. It was highlighted that so far £13.752m savings had been identified with £3.635m achieved to date and savings of £12.8m had been identified by 2019/20 although there may be some difficulties in realising some of these savings in some services.
5. With regard to Children's Services it was reported that the proposed savings are reliant on a continued decrease in numbers and cost of looked after placements as a result of targeted family support. Individual cost of external fostering placement is now subject to a Tees Valley Fostering Framework which provides a reduced cost with specific named providers and this approach is also being finalised for residential placements.
6. It was also reported that within Children's Services the majority of services are statutory which equates to £14.4m spending. Discretionary services amount to £406,000 spending and Business Case spending i.e. Early Intervention amounts to £1.4m.
7. We discussed in particular the increase in the number of looked after children and the reasons behind this increase i.e. recent legal judgements increasing the number of children now deemed looked after, including a remand placement and children awaiting final adoption orders. An additional factor affecting the savings was the requirement for a secure placement for a complex young person costing the authority £23,680 per month. Another young person who was recently subject to a secure order and has very complex needs is currently costing the authority

£25,600 per month in an independent placement and it was therefore anticipated that the forecast savings of £1m for 2015/16 will be difficult to achieve, despite reduction in other areas.

8. Cabinet is aware of the issues around looked after children and placements and the limited options available to this authority to make savings in this area however we agreed to examine the costs of placements, including independent costs and regulations affecting placement of looked after children.
9. At our meeting on 5 January 2015 the Service Director for Children, Families and Learning updated Members on the costs of 'In-House' residential, external residential (including Education), expensive residential and secure residential. Expensive residential care is currently being used for one young person as an alternative to secure placement at a cost of £4,700 a week including social care. 'In-House' residential costs the authority £2,067 per week.
10. It is clear that the nature and complexity of the needs of the young person determines what placement is required and the costs involved can fluctuate with each young person. More complex young people can incur higher costs for repair and maintenance also and all placements are reviewed on a regular basis.
11. We questioned the charges for in-house placement compared to external residential providers and concluded that the Council's charges were comparable.
12. The position with regard to the cost of placements for Looked After Children has been noted and we request that Commissioners continue to work across authorities to ensure value for money.

Child Sexual Exploitation

13. We received a presentation from the Safeguarding Children Board Business Manager on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and the position in Darlington bearing in mind the Rotherham situation where approximately 1400 children were sexually exploited over the full inquiry period 1997 to 2013.
14. The presentation gave the definition of CSE; highlighted the indicators of risk, including social network and e-safety which is a priority for 2015; and outlined the findings relating to young people who display risk factors associated with exploitation (not confirmed victims).
15. The local authority work very closely with the police and public health through the multi agency Missing and Exploited Group (MEG) and this authority is a gold member of the National Working Group providing us with a valuable source to access key information.
16. Members were particularly pleased to learn that there are no known organised crime gangs in Darlington and Durham and sharing of information and intelligence remains essential and also the joint work being undertaken with Durham on a communications strategy to emphasis the message of awareness to parents and carers, especially with regard to e-safety.

Review Groups

17. We received updates on the Child Poverty and STEM Applications and Apprenticeships Review Groups which are currently being undertaken by this Scrutiny Committee.
18. The Child Poverty Review Group was established to examine child poverty and vulnerable children in Darlington and the next meeting of the Child Poverty Review Group has been arranged for 24 February 2015 to apply other data to the 'hot spot' areas and see if there is any correlation for those living in poverty and to also analyse the data to see the impact and outcomes for young people living in poverty.
19. The STEM Applications and Apprenticeships Review Group was established to examine 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. A further meeting is to be arranged and this will include inviting in a representative from Barclays Bank to outline to Members its education programmes/apprenticeships for young people.

Year One and Reception Attendance Update

20. This Scrutiny Committee undertook a review of Year One and Reception Attendance in 2012 and agreed to continue to monitor the action plan therefrom.
21. It was reported the actions taken to raise awareness in child care settings and primary schools had shown an improvement and evidence shows that the strategies adopted have made a positive impact on attitudes and the importance of good attendance and there are less children taking unauthorised absence. However, childhood illnesses tend to impact on reception and year one more than on other year groups.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee