

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 January 2016

PRESENT – Councillor Lister (in the Chair); Councillors Crumbie, Curry, Mrs. D. Jones, KE Kelly, Mills, Storr, C. Taylor and Wright. (9)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Crudass and L. Hughes; Ms. Regan and Mr. T. Fisher. (4)

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None (0)

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Mrs. G. Harrison and Ms. J. Woodcock (2)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors C. Hughes; Mr. Durham, Member of the Public. (2)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Suzanne Joyner, Director of Children and Adults Services; Alison Murphy, Interim Director – Children’s Services; Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director Finance and Human Resources; David Mason, Head of LAC, Youth Offending and Edge of Care Services; Calvin Kipling, Virtual School Head; Nicola Davies, Commissioning Projects Officer; Linda O’Neill, Project Leader, Darlington Young Carers Service; Lisa Holdsworth, Service Development Officer; Hillary Tillotson, Family Placement Service Manager and Allison Hill, Democratic Support.

CYP23. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CYP24. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 2 November 2015.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

CYP25. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – Submitted – A report (previously circulated) which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 1 December 2015 in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The submitted report outlined the background to the two-stage approach to revising the MTFP and the Assistant Director Finance and Human Resources referred to the first stage which was currently being consulted on in relation to the setting of the Council Tax for 2016/17 together with the fees and charges.

Members gave consideration to the report and the schedule of charges and noted that there were no specific charges relating to Children’s Services.

RESOLVED – That Members of this Scrutiny Committee recommend to Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee that the charges within the MTFP to be appropriate.

CYP26. YOUNG CARERS REVIEW UPDATE – The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update on the progress made in respect of the Young Carers' Action Plan 2013/16 following the final report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Review Group established by this Scrutiny which was submitted to Cabinet in March 2015.

The Action Plan for 2013 to 2016 set out the actions designed to improve the identification and provision of support to young carers in Darlington by DISC, the contracted Young Carers Service provider.

The submitted report outlined the progress of all the outcome areas identified with particular reference to awareness raising in schools and highlighted the schools that had been awarded the Young Carers' Charter.

Progress against the Action Plan is monitored by the Young Carers' Strategic Partnership which meets bi-monthly with members from a range of organisations including statutory health and social care services and third sector organisations, including DISC Young Carers Service.

Members expressed their satisfaction with the successful awareness raising that had been undertaken within the schools and those that had been awarded the Young Carer's Charter or were in the process of receiving the Charter; however were concerned at the number of schools that had chosen not to pursue the Charter.

It was proposed that all Members of this Scrutiny encourage schools within their role as Ward Councillors or as School Governors towards the Young Carer's Charter.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP27. EXTENSION OF FUNDING TO AGE 21 FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE - The Interim Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide information regarding the cost of funding to age 21 for young people in foster care placements.

The submitted report outlined the legal framework that requires Local Authorities to provide Staying Put Arrangements for young people who are in foster care until they reach the age of 21; detailed the number of current Staying Put Arrangements including the most recent costs for the period 1 April to 30 September 2015 and the projected expenditure for the period 1 October 2015 to 31 March 2016; outlined the planning process for implementing Staying Put Arrangements which is ideally undertaken with the young person before they reach the age of 16; how regular monitoring of the arrangements are undertaken; the potential benefits of the Staying Put Arrangements on foster placements; and detailed the priorities for the coming six months.

General discussion ensued on the Staying Put arrangements and the support that local authorities currently receive to implement the arrangements and the grant paid to the authority which will cease after March 2016.

Members agreed that this was a valuable service and a statutory responsibility and that the increasing cost to the Council with no future funding for Staying Put provision was a budget pressure although Members fully supported this high priority provision.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP28 – CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY REVIEW 2015 – The Director of Commissioning submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform members of the findings of the 2015 Childcare Sufficiency Review and to set out the authority's 2015-16 Action Plan.

Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Children and Families Act 2014 to ensure sufficient childcare as far as is reasonably practicable and to report annually to elected Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents.

The Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan contains targets aimed at improving access to out of school and holiday childcare/activities, particularly for children aged 5 to 14 years or 18 years for disabled young people and to ensure that all childcare/activities are inclusive.

The submitted report outlined the factors which affect childcare demand; the supply data for childcare provision in Darlington; and gave feedback from the childcare demand questionnaire that had been distributed via the People and Families' Information Support.

It was reported that Supply data for 2014/15 shows that the education and childcare market in Darlington is fairly stable; however parental feedback had shown that there was an unmet demand for affordable, after-school and holiday childcare provision for all age groups and older children (8 years and over) and an unmet demand for affordable and accessible and appropriate childcare for children and young people with disabilities (up to the age of 18 years). The cost and flexibility of childcare had also been highlighted as a significant barrier for parents in Darlington.

Members referred to the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken with parents and questioned how the demand for the childcare spaces is monitored and need assessed and referred in particular to responses from parents of disabled children being able to access suitable provision for their child or young person with a disability.

The Commissioning Projects Officer advised Members that the Early Years Team were assisting childcare providers to ensure activities they provide are sustainable; undertaking work with settings and other interested stakeholders to continually improve the quality of care; and to continue to provide parents with up-to-date information about financial assistance towards childcare costs, including any available tax credits that they may be entitled to. These entitlements are also included on the Council's website to advise parents on what financial assistance they may be entitled to.

RESOLVED – (a) That the findings of the 2015 Childcare Sufficiency Review be noted.

(b) That the 2015-16 Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan be noted and that Members continue to monitor on an annual basis.

CYP29. VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – The Interim Director of Children’s Services submitted a report to advise Members of the performance of the Virtual School for Looked After Children (LAC) and the progress of key performance measures such as examination performance, attendance, exclusion and post-16 destinations.

The submitted report outlined the aim of the Virtual School which exists to promote the academic achievement of Looked After Children including the detailed action plans to address the concerns that had been raised in the Summer 2015 Ofsted Inspection; details the current cohort of the 111 pupils currently on roll at the Virtual School from Reception to Year 11; outlined the pupil outcomes for 2014/15; advised Members that 50 pupils had 100 per cent attendance, seven had below 80 per cent attendance however the overall attendance of 95.12 per cent for all pupils remains fractionally above the target for the year.

The submitted report summarised the numbers of exclusions to date and advised that there had been no permanent exclusions for LAC for three years; outlined the quality of the provision for LAC; the development of the Virtual School and that the Virtual School Head had now commenced a full time role and two lead designated teachers, one from Primary phase and one from Secondary Phase had been identified to help design and quality assure the new Personal Education Plan (PEP) process.

The Virtual School Head advised Members that there had been positive progress since the Ofsted Inspection towards improved monitoring of educational progress of children looked after and improved consistency and quality of personal education plans (PEPs) and also to ensure that the pupil premium is effectively utilised to improve educational outcomes.

Members also noted that there had been no permanent exclusions to date and no permanent exclusions for Looked After Children for three years; overall attendance was improving; and 90 per cent of pupils were attending provision rated by Ofsted as good or better.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CYP30. WORK PROGRAMME – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) to give consideration to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee and to consider any additional areas which Members suggest should be added to the previously approved work programme.

Following the last meeting of Scrutiny Members met on 14 December 2015 to give further consideration to the existing work programme as a result of the Ofsted

Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers and the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and taking into account the recommendations of the Ofsted Inspectors agreed future areas of scrutiny to be included in the work programme.

Members will continue to monitor progress and provide challenge where needed in order to achieve the desired outcomes to improve the services to children and young people in the borough.

Members made a request that they receive a fuller understanding of the day-to-day work of social workers, an outline of the various services and structure of the department and also a process map to help them understand in more detail the journey of a young person once they come into the system and how they progress along that system.

It was also suggested that Members receive an update at each meeting from a Senior Officer on the Improvement Plan and also the work of the Improvement Board.

RESOLVED –That the current status of the work programme be noted and any additional items be programmed for future meetings.