

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 April 2016

PRESENT – Councillor Lister (in the Chair); Councillors Crudass, Crumbie, Curry, Storr, C. Taylor (8)

APOLOGIES – Councillors KE Kelly, Mills, L. Hughes, Tostevin and Wright; M Regan, M Frank. (5)

ABSENT – Mr. Richeard and Ms Miah. (2)

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None. (0)

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Mr. T. Fisher, Mrs. Harrison and Ms Woodcock. (3)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor C. Hughes. (1)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Alison Murphy, Interim Director – Children’s Services; Paul Richardson, Head of 16-19 Learning and Skills; Pixley Clarke, Head of Review and Development; Helen Ellison, Lead Officer – Learning and Skills; Rachel Kershaw, Head of school and Pupil Support Services; Chris Archer, Head of Early Years; and Allison Hill, Democratic Support.

CYP40. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CYP41. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 22 February 2016.

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

CYP42. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN DARLINGTON – The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update on the local authority’s school improvement strategy and to provide a summary of educational performance in Darlington, including the contribution made by the Council’s Learning and Skills Service.

In July 2014 a new strategy for school improvement was approved by Cabinet to take into account that almost 80 per cent of Darlington schools were academies or Free Schools. The new strategy included a guarantee that Ofsted trained inspectors would review schools’ data and work with them and the local authority officers to agree improvement priorities.

The School Improvement Annual Report for September 2014 to August 2015 was submitted outlining the impact of the school improvement strategy and highlighted how educational performance and standards are measured, the two main points of

reference being the Department for Education (DFE) performance data and OfSTED reports.

It was reported that as the vast majority of Darlington schools have converted to academies the amount of funding available to the local authority through the Education Support Grant (ESG) has reduced significantly. It was also reported that the government are consulting on the statutory duties of local authorities with a view to ceasing the Education Support Grant and removing the local authority's responsibility for school improvement.

The local authority currently holds the overall responsibility for the education of all children within its remit and bears the moral and legal responsibility for ensuring that all children are well-educated; and overseeing the analysis of the performance of every school, including academies.

The submitted report outlined how the local authority monitor and improve schools and locally 85 per cent of schools were judged to be 'good' or better by Ofsted which was higher than the national figure of 82 per cent.

The submitted report also gave a summary of the educational performance for the academic year 2014/15 compared to the England average and the North East and statistical neighbours.

Discussion ensued on the likelihood of school improvement ceasing to be a local authority responsibility and how the local authority will receive information on schools that may be struggling in future; whether the authority will have access to the financial position of schools that are not under their control; and the work of the Learning and Skills Service in promoting post 16 year olds to encourage positive outcomes.

Members also discussed the position with regard to those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and the work of the Learning and Skills Service to support young people into employment and training.

Members did express some concern that the statistics contained in the submitted report did not provide the Committee with enough information to identify what needs to be done to improve attainment and there were particular gaps, also Members were concerned that poor progress was being made in English and Mathematics and that this was more pronounced in particular schools.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That this Scrutiny Committee receive a further report on the decline in performance for English and mathematics and what action was being taken to improve.

CYP43. PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING UP TO 18 YEARS –

The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on the move to full participation in

education and training up to the age of 18, in line with the requirements of the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA).

The submitted report outlined the requirements of RPA and the duty placed on all young people from the Education and Skills Act (2008) to participate in education and training until their 18th birthday. This can be by way of full-time education such as school and college; an apprenticeship; or part-time education or training if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering for 20 hours or more a week.

The submitted report also gave details of the Department for Education data to show local authority participation levels and the latest data (June 2015) showed that in Darlington 93.9 per cent of 16 year olds participated in education or training which was above the North East average of 93.8 per cent; and 86.6 per cent of 17 year olds participated in education or training, which was below the North East Average of 88 per cent. Provisional data for January 2016 has the Darlington figure for 16 year olds at 95.2 per cent and for 17 year olds at 92.4 per cent.

Members were advised that the promotion of RPA sits alongside existing work to increase participation and skills levels being undertaken by the local authority, schools, post 16 providers and other partners including the work of the council's 11-19 Learning and Skills Team who lead on RPA; the Early Intervention Team who have responsibility for engaging those at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training); the Economic Regeneration Team and their work around the skills and employment agenda; providers to facilitate early identification of young people at risk of disengaging; and schools to promote the participation in education and training post 16.

Discussion ensued on the December 2015 NEET data that showed 73 per cent of NEET were male and 58 per cent were 18 years old and limited employment opportunities in the local area; Members expressed their concerns over the number of care leavers that are NEET and questioned how this was being addressed; questioned what action can be taken where employers fail to ensure that the young people they employ are participating in part-time education or training; the reasons why levels of engagement were becoming more difficult due to the levels of support required and the absence of any sanctions on young people to engage; and the reduction of a number of training providers in Darlington.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That the performance target for Looked After Children who become NEET be reviewed with the aim to improve performance.

CYP44. AUDIT OF SECTION 20 VOLUNTARY ACCOMMODATION ARRANGEMENTS – The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members of the outcome of the recent audit of children's cases where the child or young person is looked after by the Council under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

The purpose of the Audit resulted from a recommendation by Inspectors during the Ofsted in June 2015 that a thorough review of all cases of children subject to Section

20 accommodation be completed to ensure that use of Section 20 by the Local Authority was legitimate and appropriate in all cases following the judgement by Lord Justice Munby in February 2015.

Section 20 of the Children Act allows a child to be accommodated by the local authority, by a voluntary arrangement but it must be agreed to by a person(s) with parental responsibility and the child should be returned to the parent(s) immediately after parental consent is withdrawn.

It was reported that in recent years there has been an increase in the use of Section 20 and a greater focus on this issue through the publication of case law on local council's children's services department's use/misuse of Section 20, leading to a focus by Ofsted on this aspect of social work practice.

The audit was conducted during November and December 2015 and three auditors examined the records of 64 children who were subject to Section 20 arrangements. Following the audit an overview report was produced which set out the findings and recommendations for senior managers.

The reasons why children became accommodated; the key findings from the audit; and the ten recommendations made from the audit, of which some were already included in the Children's Services Improvement plan 2015-2017 were detailed in the submitted report.

Recommendations for further work to better understand and prevent children's placements breaking down and how the supply of foster carers can be further improved were also included in the submitted report.

Discussion ensued on the monitoring of the recommendations through the Improvement Plan and whether it would be beneficial for Members of this Scrutiny Committee to have regular sight of the Improvement Plan, although it was acknowledged that the Improvement Plan is available on the Council's website.

A question was also raised regarding legal implications of the Audit and Members were advised by the Interim Director, Children's Services that she has had recent discussions with Legal Services in relation to the Audit to examine how the Head of Legal Services and the Heads of Service can work together in relation to any future placements and to strengthen how cases are monitored and tracked prior to proceedings.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That a Special Meeting of this Scrutiny Committee be arranged to consider the Improvement Plan and information on the key performance indicators and to consider the results of the follow up Audit to be carried out in June 2016.

CYP45. 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.

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.

It was reported that due to the number of reports to be considered at this meeting, it was agreed that Performance Framework; Workforce Sufficiency; Procurement, mobilisation and Transformation of the 0-19 Service; and the School Organisation Plan be moved to the next ordinary meeting of Scrutiny.

It was also reported that two special meetings of this Scrutiny Committee had been arranged for 7 and 20 April, 2016 to give consideration to the Core Offer Budget and Impact Assessment Forms for services under the remit of this Scrutiny committee. Any comments will be forwarded to Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee for their consideration at the meeting scheduled for 26 May 2016 when a co-ordinated single response will be collated for Cabinet.

The Chair requested Members give consideration to a revised approach to the work programme of this Scrutiny Committee to enable it to adopt a more focussed approach to scrutinising each of the topic areas, aligning each of them to the eight outcomes and three conditions of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the relevant performance indicators from the Performance Management Framework.

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

(b) That Members agree to a revised approach to this Scrutiny's Work Programme and that a report be submitted for consideration to the next meeting.

(c) That the decline in performance for English and mathematics and what action was being taken to improve be included in the work programme.