

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 April 2016

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

APOLOGIES – Councillor Crudass and L. Hughes; Ms. Regan, Mrs. Woodcock, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Rickeard; David Mason, Head of Looked After Children, Youth Offending and Edge of Care Services; Brian Boggon, Assistant Director, Regeneration Projects and Yvonne Coates, Head of First Contact and Locality Services.

ABSENT – Mr. Frank, Mrs Harrison and Ms Miah. (3)

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None. (0)

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None. (0)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor C. Hughes; Three representatives of the Darlington Parent Carers Forum.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Kevin Kelly, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care; Alison Murphy, Interim Director – Children’s Services; Paul Richardson, Head of 16-19 Learning and Skills; Brett Neilson, Finance Manager, People and Neighbourhood Services; Chris Archer, Head of Early Years; Rachel Kershaw, Head of School and Pupil Support Services; and Allison Hill, Democratic Support.

CYP40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CYP41. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016/17 TO 2019/20 – The Scrutiny Committee met to discuss those proposals contained in phase 2 of the next round of spending reductions as contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20, which specifically under its remit.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the following proposals in relation to the Core Offer and the Impact Assessment Forms :-

Children’s Services Budget Rationale - The Director of Children and Adults Services gave an overview of the services provided by Children’s Services, together with the rationale and vision behind the proposed future budget over the next four years.

Information was provided on how it is intended to achieve the proposed savings across the service and continue to give young people in Darlington the best start in life through access to high quality early years provision, high performing schools, excellent health care and leisure opportunities; how the Early Help offer will be

delivered; following the Ofsted Inspection the improvements that have been implemented through training, development and better management oversight and an increase in the number of social work posts; and the development of a new operating model across Children's Services for early help services.

CYP3 – Disabled Children - Detailed information on the services which the Council had a legal duty to provide and the statutory duty to support disabled children and young adults and how those services were currently provided and resourced were contained in the core offer and also details of how the core offer meets the Council's obligations.

It was reported that although the local authority will continue to meet its statutory requirements the core offer budget will include a small reduction in the number of staff in those areas where there are no duties imposed by law; the Early Support Service is part of the 0-25 Team and work with children aged 0-3 and their families will end although continued support will continue to be provided by the remaining staff within the 0-25 Team.

It was also reported that further work will be undertaken to see whether any additional support can be provided by the Local Authorities Early Years' Service. Efficiencies of approximately £65,228 are to be made from the Early Support Service ceasing.

Discussion ensued on the possible additional support from the Early Years' Service and the initial discussions with the service on their capacity to offer support; the potential for additional cost to the authority in the future from ceasing this service at a vulnerable time for families; if there were transferable skills from the potential loss of personnel; if officers have any knowledge of other authorities that have removed this service; the number of hours that have been given to support vulnerable families; and discussions on how success of the Early Support Service is currently measured and how the impact of loss of service can be measured in the future.

The Assistant Director of Adult Social Care advised Members that families, parents and service users were currently part of a consultation exercise on the Early Support Service and their comments will be taken into consideration when considering the loss of this service.

Hu5 – Removal of Early Support Service from 0-25 Team – Reference was made to the Impact Assessment in relation to ceasing the Early Support function of the Disability Life Stages 0-25 team which it is anticipated will provide a net budget reduction of £67,291 by 2020/21.

It was reported that it is the intention to develop a first point of contact function elsewhere in the council to provide some sign posting and advice to assist in mitigating the impact on families. This will require work with the voluntary sector/community support.

A Member raised a question on whether there was a duplication of portage services by other specialist services and if it would be cost effective for this authority to sign post families to those services in future. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care advised Members that there was currently no duplication of this service within health providers although there may be some capacity in the voluntary sector and with other agencies to fill some gaps in service and he advised Members that a consultation process was currently being undertaken.

CYP6 – Education – Detailed information on the services which the Council had a legal duty to provide in relation to school improvement across both maintained schools and academies; the range of services in line with statutory duties for Early Years children who attend a range of school, private, voluntary and child minder settings; and for children with special education needs were contained in the core offer and also details of how the core offer meets the Council's obligations.

It was reported that despite all secondary schools and most primary schools within Darlington being academies, it was still the local authority responsibility for school improvement and for Early Years children and for those children and young people living in the area, including children and young people with Special Educational Needs..

It was also reported that it was the intention to reconfigure the current services within education, reduce Heads of Service posts from three to two and create a new Chief Education Officer post to ensure that all statutory duties are implemented from early years through to 11-19.

Members discussed the government white paper consultation which aims to reduce the local authority role in running schools, remove a number of statutory duties and make savings on the Education Services Grant (ESG). It is expected that by the academic year 2017/18 the local authority's role will be further diminished, also taking into account the push from central government policy for all schools to become academies.

It was also noted that the local authority school improvement function and Special Education Needs will be subject to Ofsted Inspection and the budget proposals are based on existing resource to meet the authority's current statutory obligations to school improvement.

Discussion ensued on the services that this authority currently provide to the academies and options for further services to be offered to academies, however it was noted that with the diminishing role of the local authority this may become increasingly difficult; and the self- evaluation exercise which was currently being undertaken for the school improvement model and it as suggested that this Scrutiny Committee have sight of the self- evaluation.

Further discussion ensued on the reconfiguration of the current services in Education and the reduction of the Heads of Service posts and the creation of a new Chief Education Officer and the costs implications.

The Finance Manager, People and Neighbourhood Services gave Members a brief overview of the changes to funding to schools and how the authority currently calculate the budget share to local authority maintained schools using a formula based on a national template to allocate funding per pupil. It was highlighted that under new proposals the formula will still exist with similar factors, however local authorities will no longer have the ability to set current funding per child, this will be done by central government.

Members agreed that as there were currently a lot of unknowns in this area that they will continue to monitor the situation and changes regarding school improvement.

CYP7 – Education School Transport – Detailed information on the service that the Council had a legal duty to provide in relation to travel arrangements for eligible children, attending qualifying schools and a discretion to make travel arrangements for other children in their area including children with special education needs, disabilities or mobility problems were contained in the core offer and also details of how the core offer meets the Council’s obligations.

It was proposed that consideration be given to how future savings can be made from School Transport. Members agreed that a target be set for the level of saving to be achieved.

Discussion ensued on the potential reduction in provision of school transport with a continued investment in good practice to support families in getting their children transported to school; the budget costs in respect of special transport arrangements; the tender process for taxi contracts within the borough; joining with other authorities for special needs transport and setting a reduction target for school transport.

RESOLVED – That the information provided at this stage be noted.