

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 September 2016

PRESENT – Councillor C Taylor (in the Chair); Councillors Crudass, Curry, KE Kelly, Mills, Storr and Tostevin (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Crumbie, Lister, L. Hughes and Wright; Janet Woodcock and Lorraine Fox. (4)

ABSENT – None (0)

STATUTORY CO-OPTES – None. (0)

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTES – None. (0)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Suzanne Joyner, Director of Children and Adults Services; Jane Kochanoswski, Assistant Director of Children's Services; Corina Dias, Human Resource Manager; Ken Ross, Public Health Principal and Allison Hill, Democratic Support.

CYP11. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CYP12. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 27 June, 2016.

With regard to Minute CYP4/Jun/16 the Chair commented that Initial Health Assessments were still a concern and that the Children's Services Improvement Board were discussing further at their next meeting on 28 September. The Director of Children and Adults Services advised Members that there had been an improvement on the consent forms being completed within 7 days which was at 67 per cent and then forward to health to undertake the health assessment within 20 days, however there was still some delay in completing the whole process and that she intended to speak with Senior Health officers to avoid any time lag issues in future. She also reported that an action plan was to be taken to the Children's Services Improvement Board and that the action plan along with any updates will be reported to this Scrutiny Committee.

General discussion ensued with the Members on this issue and the fact that it was a country wide concern and it was agreed that this Scrutiny would continue to monitor the situation with regard to the Initial Health Assessments and that this be included in the regular performance reports.

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

CYP13. HEALTHY LIFESTYLES SURVEY 2015/16 – The Public Health Principal gave a presentation on the outcomes of the 2015/16 Healthy Lifestyles Survey which uses social norms to influence positive behaviour.

The survey which is undertaken on an annual basis included responses from 4475 secondary pupils and 1073 primary pupils who took part. The Survey covered tobacco, bullying, the internet, relationships and sexual health and diet and exercise.

The presentation advised Members that key findings from the primary schools showed that 97 per cent of those surveyed had not tried smoking; 66 per cent overestimated how many children their age had tried smoking; 40 per cent are often near second hand smoke; 75 per cent had one or more social network account; and 36 per cent of children had online friends they do not know in person.

With regard to secondary pupils the key findings showed that 76 per cent were able to identify someone they would talk to if they were worried; 74 per cent said they could deal with peer pressure and say 'no'; 24 per cent of those questioned said they had experienced bullying; 86 per cent said that they felt happy in general with their life at the moment; 85 per cent access the internet at least once a day; 32 per cent had friends online that they do not know in person; 44 per cent are never supervised on the internet; 25 per cent had accessed pornography; and 23 per cent admitted to accessing content online their parents or carers would not be happy with.

The presentation also outlined the actions to be taken following the results of the 2015/16 survey which included feedback to schools through a Team Around the School Action Plan; school plans to be implemented around the issues raised; review the questions to be included in the 2017 survey and engage with wider stakeholders to share messages for the survey and ensure that all resources are utilised.

It was also reported that further primary settings have expressed an interest in participating in the 2017 survey.

Members' questions related to results from the primary settings and if this was across all ages; if demographics were highlighted within the survey; and whether the survey was a statutory requirement.

Members also requested that they receive a copy of the Darlington reports for both primary and secondary and the specific questions asked within the survey.

RESOLVED – That the results of the 2015/16 Survey be noted.

CYP14. SUFFICIENCY OF SOCIAL WORKERS, QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS
– The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members on the current situation in relation to the sufficiency of social workers to enable this authority to offer a good service to children and families; the qualification profiles of social workers; and whether the advanced skill levels are currently sufficient.

It was reported that sufficiency of social workers within child protection was a national issue and authorities across the country have seen a decrease in social workers applying for permanent posts and an increased dependency on agency social workers to ensure adequate staffing.

It was also reported that this authority continues to invest in social work posts with an additional six posts built into the budget from 1 April 2016; a recruitment and retention plan for 2016/17 has been developed, including a new post of advanced social worker to attract social workers with more substantive experience. It was also reported that in order to support existing social workers an Accommodation Review has been undertaken and initial benefits reported are sharing of practice, increased peer support and accessibility to managers; and Business Support teams have been increased. Further work is to be undertaken to improve retention including a review of the current progression scheme to provide appropriate opportunities for professional development and timely career progressions.

The submitted report gave details of the number of children's qualified social workers as at 31 July 2016 of 94 posts, compared against regional and national numbers for 2013, 2014 and 2015; turnover and retention rates; overall vacancy rates including agency workers; caseload numbers within the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams; internal workforce data which is gathered on an on-going basis for all social workers employed by Darlington Borough Council; additional training undertaken by social workers; retention of newly qualified social workers; qualifications held by first line managers; the recruitment and retention Action Plan covering 2016/17 which has been produced; and future skills requirements within The Children and Social Work Bill.

Discussion ensued on the increased use of agency staff and controls over the use of agency staff; the proposal across local authorities to have a standard specification for agency workers; the reasons why social workers are leaving and if this is recorded; the reduction of caseloads to a manageable level; the recruitment microsite; liquid logic and the benefits for social workers of the system; and the systems in place to ensure that all cases have the most appropriate and skilled social worker allocated to them;

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That Members of this Scrutiny receive a progress report in April 2017.

CYP15. UPDATE ON THE AUDIT OF SECTION 20 VOLUNTARY ACCOMMODATION ARRANGEMENTS – The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to update Members on additional action taken following the audit of children's cases where the child/young person is looked after by the Council under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. The previous report presented to Scrutiny (Minute Ref. CYP44/Apr/16 refers) outlined the full details of the outcome of the audit undertaken during December 2015.

The audit looked at 64 children's cases where Section 20 was applied and concluded that it was right for all the children to be Looked After, although it was concluded that some children could have been accommodated earlier and whilst there were some good arrangements for helping children and young people to keep in touch with birth family, the audit found that there had been delay in a number of cases in respect of the Local Authority making long term permanent plans for them.

An Action Plan was developed following the audit and some of the recommendations from the audit were included in the Children's Services Improvement Plan 2015-2017. A re-audit of cases was undertaken during May and June 2016 to evaluate impact following the recommendations on each case management.

It was reported that to gain the maximum amount of learning from the audits and to ensure that all actions identified had been carried out a challenge panel was undertaken during August 2016 which examined the case history, plans and audit findings and all actions taken since the audit. It was also reported that there is on going senior management oversight to ensure that there is robust monitoring of the progress made from the findings of the individual case audits.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That Members note the work undertaken in response to the outcome of the Section 20 audit.

CYP16. WORK PROGRAMME - The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) on the current work programme for this Scrutiny Committee.

Members previously agreed a revision to the work programme to enable the Committee to analyse information for each topic area aligning it to the eight outcomes and the three conditions in the Sustainable Community Strategy and relevant performance indicators from the Performance Management Framework.

The Chair advised Members that he had spoken with the Director of Children and Adults Services as was soon to commence the review of the service for children aged 0-3 with disabilities; and that school improvement was to be added to the work programme for Members to examine the effectiveness of the school improvement strategy which was due to be reviewed.

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