
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.
3. 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 following 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.
4. We agreed that to fully scrutinise Children's Services we, as Members of this Scrutiny Committee, require 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 the process map to help us understand the journey of a young person once they come into the system and how they progress along that system.
5. It was also agreed that we receive an update at each meeting from a Senior Officer on the Improvement Plan and also the work of the Improvement Board.

Medium Term Financial Plan

6. We gave consideration to the report submitted to Cabinet on 1 December 2015 which recommended amendments to the Medium Term Financial Plan, proposals for 2016/17 Budget and Council Tax increase and to agree an approach to further revise the MTFP following the Local Government finance settlement.
7. Members acknowledged that there were no specific charges relating to Children's Services, however agreed to recommend to the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee that the charges within the MTFP were appropriate.

Young Carers Review Update

8. We continue to monitor the progress of the Young Carers' Action Plan 2013/16 which was implemented as a result of recommendations of the Task and Finish

Review Group established by this Scrutiny and agreed by Cabinet in March 2015.

9. The Action Plan for 2013 to 2016 sets 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.
10. 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.
11. Members were pleased to hear about the successful awareness raising within schools and that nine schools had been awarded the Young Carers' Charter and a number of schools were in the process; however, were concerned that a number of schools had chosen not to pursue the Charter.
12. We agreed that any further awareness raising and encouragement we could do within schools as Ward Councillors or as School Governors be undertaken as soon as possible.

Extension of Funding to Age 21 for Children in Foster Care

13. We received further information regarding the cost of funding to age 21 for young people in foster care.
14. All local authorities have a statutory duty to provide Staying Put Arrangements for young people who are in foster care until they reach the age of 21.
15. We received details of 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; 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 the priorities for the coming six months.
16. Members noted that currently there is support to local authorities to implement the Staying Put Arrangements and a grant is paid to Darlington Borough Council. However, this is only until March 2016 and we acknowledge that there is an increasing cost to the Council with no future funding for the Staying Put provision which as Members of this Scrutiny Committee fully support as a high priority provision.

Childcare Sufficiency Review 2015

17. Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Children and Families Act 2014 to ensure sufficient childcare as far as is reasonably practicable and officers report annually to this Scrutiny on how their duty is being met to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents.

18. 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.
19. Supply data for 2014/15 shows that the education and childcare market in Darlington is fairly stable; however parental feedback has shown that there is an unmet demand for affordable, after-school and holiday childcare provision including accessible and appropriate childcare for children and young people with disabilities.

Virtual School for Looked After Children

20. We received an update on the performance of the Virtual School for Looked After Children (LAC) and the progress of key performance measures relating to examination performance, attendance, exclusion and post-16 destinations.
21. Calvin Kipling, the Virtual School Head attended the meeting and outlined the role of the Virtual School which was to promote the academic achievement of Looked After Children. The Virtual School Head has now commenced a full time role and two lead designated teachers, for Primary and Secondary Phases have been identified in schools to help design and quality assure the new Personal Education Plan process.
22. Members were pleased to note that there had been positive progress since the Ofsted Inspection towards improved monitoring of educational progress of children looked after and improving the consistency and quality of personal education plans (PEPs) and to ensure that the pupil premium is effectively utilised to improve educational outcomes.
23. We were also encouraged to learn 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.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee