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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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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. Following discussion on the Performance Framework we have agreed to include reports on the stability of placements for Looked After Children and practice arrangements around the recording of statutory visits in relation to child protection cases in our work programme.
4. We also agreed to undertake a Task and Finish Review to examine Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing from Care.

**Performance Framework**

5. Following the Ofsted Inspection in 2015 the two areas which were deemed to be inadequate were children in need of help and protection and leadership management and governance. The areas that have now been identified for improvement are performance and data, leadership and governance, practice and management oversight.
6. With regard to performance and data the inspection found that performance data was unreliable for a wide range of reasons and therefore work has been undertaken to resolve this issue by reviewing the suite of performance indicators, establishing a set of Key Performance Indicators and establishing performance targets for these key indicators.
7. We examined some of the key areas based on data to the end of December 2015 which included current performance for Early Help which is showing a positive trajectory of doubling overall numbers in 2015-16; contacts and referrals which showed that the number of contacts since 2013 had remained stable and the average number of contacts at the end of December remains at 517, with month on month variations; child protection performance on the percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) held within 15 days of strategy discussion was at 82.6 per cent, which showed a positive improvement of 10.73 per cent on November and significantly better than the beginning of the reporting year; and

Child Protection Plan (CPP) allocation to social worker which was in line with the national requirements of 100 per cent of CPP cases being allocated to a qualified social worker.

8. It was also noted that the number of Looked after Children (CLA) in our care per 10,000 population aged under 18 had reduced from 88.59 per cent in April 2015 to 81.9 per cent; since April 2015 100 per cent of CPP cases had been allocated to a qualified social worker and there has been an improvement of Looked After Children having three or more moves; the percentage of CLA placed more than 20 miles away from home remains in line with the England performance but slightly higher than the North East and our Statistical neighbours; the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation which remains good in this area and the numbers were low; and the percentage of care leavers not in education, employment and training showed an increase of eight per cent.
9. We were concerned that the percentage of child protection cases where the child has been seen in accordance with specified timescales was at 56.78 per cent but were reassured that a number of actions are currently underway to ensure that all statutory visits are made within the timescales and recorded consistently.
10. We also noted that stability of placements for Children Looked After for more than three moves and the percentage of Children Looked After who have been looked after for more than two and a half years who have been in the same placement for at least two years which was higher than our statistical neighbours.
11. Members also questioned the percentage of care leavers not in education, employment or training and the long term strategy to continue to improve performance and narrow the gap between care leavers and their peers. We were advised that Officers were working with the colleges and further work is to be undertaken around apprenticeship opportunities within this authority.

### **Health Assessments for Children Looked After**

12. Local authorities are responsible for making sure a health assessment of physical, emotional and mental health needs is carried out for every child they look after regardless of where the child lives and the initial health assessment should result in a health plan, available for the first statutory review by the Independent Reviewing Officer of the child's care plan within 20 working days from when the child started to be looked after.
13. There are set areas that the statutory health assessment should address in line with Schedule 1 of the Care Planning Regulations and the impact of undertaking health assessments for Children Looked After.
14. The publication 'Ten Questions to ask if you are scrutinising services for Looked After Children' which was produced for elected members and others working in children's services is a very useful tool.
15. Members will be aware of the Ofsted report which was published following the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked

after and care leavers in September 2015 which highlighted some improvement regarding the completion of initial health assessments within timescales but still deemed not to be good enough; dental checks and immunisations were deemed good and all above the England average; the percentage of Children Looked After with up to date dental checks was currently at 86 per cent; the percentage paperwork sent to the County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT) within seven days was showing some improvement following the introduction of new processes aimed at improving performance; completed annual health assessments were at 94 per cent which was an improvement on 2013-14 when it was 93 per cent and the English average was 88 per cent.

16. The Improvement Plan developed following the Ofsted Inspection will address the issues regarding health raised within the report including the recommendation to ensure that all children looked after have timely initial health assessments.
17. During discussion on the health assessments we questioned the potential reasons for the hesitation from families to complete the consent forms and the delays in getting the consent forms and officers advised us that the issues around the consent forms were more to do with mistakes being made with the signing of the forms rather than actual refusal to sign but we have requested that this is monitored carefully to avoid any unnecessary delays in the future.
18. It is a priority to improve the performance of health checks on Children Looked After and we noted that performance is regularly presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Improvement Board however this is an area that this Scrutiny will also closely monitor.

### **Understanding the Child's Journey**

19. Members received an overview of the child's journey to give us a broader understanding of the intervention points throughout Children's Social Care.
20. The Ofsted inspection which was carried out in June 2015 was conducted under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) and focused on the journey of the child and of the experiences and responses at each intervention through the system, from the identification of vulnerability through to intervention, assessment and care planning.
21. The report outlined the key areas where the Inspectors track the child's journey from early help, through referral and assessment and being in care to leaving care and key questions to be asked.
22. The Inspectors will now be keen to know what has been learnt from the recent inspection and what improvements we have made and any continued improvement. In January 2016 Ofsted published its latest framework for Joint Targeted Area Inspections and part of that inspection will be to focus on the evaluation of children's experiences, looking within the joint partnership arrangements in keeping children safe; and an additional 'deep dive' will focus on a particular theme to allow for additional scrutiny on a specific type of harm.

23. The first 'deep dive' will focus on child sexual exploitation and children missing from home, care or education so it is our intention to carry out a task and finish review group ahead of the inspection. We will also include the police and other agencies in our examinations.
24. Officers are expecting a further inspection at any time within a year of the original inspection in June 2015.

### **Social Services Training Update**

25. The 'Consolidating Good Practice' Training Plan has been designed to build on current training and development provision and provide a maximum impact programme of support, centred on specific agreed areas of need highlighted in the Darlington Children's Services Improvement Plan 2015-17.
26. We acknowledge and praise this extensive training programme for staff development and agreed that this should be a continuous programme and that staff training records be maintained.
27. Regarding the training on working with Gypsy and Traveller Communities we felt that this would be useful for our Members.

**Councillor Eleanor Lister**  
**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**