
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. We have also agreed to revise our work programme to enable us 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.

Medium Term Financial Plan

4. We have had two special meetings to look, in detail, at the proposals contained in phase 2 of the next round of spending reductions as detailed within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20 which are specifically under the remit of our Scrutiny Committee. In considering the proposals, we also considered the impact assessments in relation to the proposed reductions in the core offer and those specific areas which it was proposed to include in the Futures Fund.
5. We have a further special meeting of arranged for 16 May, 2016, and taking into account, all the discussions we have had at our meetings, will formulate a response on behalf of our Scrutiny Committee which will be submitted to a special meeting of Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 26 May 2016, as part of the consultation exercise.

School Improvement and Educational Performance in Darlington

6. Members received an update on the local authority's school improvement strategy and we examined the summary of educational performance in our schools between September 2014 and August 2015; and the work of the Council's Learning and Skills Service who support young people into employment.
7. The vast majority of schools in Darlington have converted to academies so the amount of funding available to the local authority through the Educational Support Grant (ESG) has reduced significantly. The Government is also consulting on the

statutory duties of local authorities and it is likely that the Education Support Grant will cease as local authorities lose the responsibility for school improvement.

8. However, we still currently hold the overall responsibility for the education of our children and bear the moral and legal responsibility for ensuring that all children are well-educated, including those children in academies.
9. In the first 12 months of the strategy the percentage of children educated in schools graded as good or better by Ofsted increased from 77 per cent to 82 per cent and locally, 85 per cent of schools were judged to be 'good' or better by Ofsted.
10. However, the percentage of primary schools in Darlington graded as 'good' or better is 93 per cent, whereas the percentage of secondary schools graded as 'good' or better currently stands at 58 per cent.
11. We also considered the position regarding those not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the support available to young people to encourage them into employment.
12. Members expressed their concern that the statistical information contained in the submitted report did not provide us with enough information to fully identify what we needed to do to improve attainment and identify the gaps; and also we had some concerns over the poor progress being made in English and Mathematics and have requested further information so that we can examine this area in more detail.

Participation in Education and Training up to 18 Years

13. We requested 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 Act (RPA) which places a duty on all young people to participate in education and training until their 18th birthday.
14. Department for Education data shows 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.
15. We received information on the work that was being undertaken by the local authority, schools, post 16 providers and other partners to promote RPA and also what was being done to engage those at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).
16. We noted that December 2015 NEET data showed that 73 per cent of those NEET were male and 58 per cent were 18 year olds and we were concerned about the number of care leavers that were NEET which we intend to examine in more detail.
17. Members also 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; how levels of engagement are becoming more difficult due to the absence of any sanctions on young people to engage; and the reduction of training providers in Darlington.

18. We will continue to receive regular updates on this.

Audit of Section 20 Voluntary Accommodation Arrangements

19. Members gave consideration to 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, resulting 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.
20. 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 key findings and ten recommendations for senior managers.
21. Work to better understand and prevent children's placements breaking down and how the supply of foster carers can be improved will continue.
22. It was noted that the monitoring of the recommendations will be through the Improvement Plan and Members expressed their views that this Scrutiny Committee should have regular sight of the Improvement Plan.
23. We have agreed to hold a special meeting in June 2016 to reconsider the follow-up Audit results and also to examine the Improvement Plan and key performance indicators.

Meetings

24. Since the last meeting of Council, I have:
 - (a) The Children's Services Improvement Board meeting on 13 April 2016.
 - (b) Continue to attend the Safeguarding training sessions.
 - (c) Briefing meetings with the Director of Children and Adults Services and the Interim Director of Children's Services.

Councillor Eleanor Lister
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee