
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.

Healthy Lifestyles Survey 2015/16

2. We considered the outcomes of the 2015/16 survey which uses social norms to influence positive behaviour and the encouraging results from the survey.
3. The survey gave results from 4475 secondary pupils and 1073 primary pupils and questions in the survey covered tobacco, bullying, the internet, relationships and sexual health and diet and exercise.
4. 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 were 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.
5. With regard to secondary pupils the key findings showed that 76 per cent could 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.
6. Feedback to individual schools is carried out through a Team Around the School Action Plan and issues that have been highlighted in this survey were included in plans for the new term in September, 2016.
7. We are pleased to learn that further primary settings have expressed an interest in participating in the 2017 survey and Members were keen to receive the Darlington reports for both primary and secondary schools and the questions for the next survey to be carried out in January 2017.

Sufficiency of Social Workers, Qualifications and Skills

8. Members gave consideration to the current situation in relation to the sufficiency of social workers to offer a good service to children and families, the qualification profiles of social workers and whether the advanced skill levels are currently sufficient.
9. The authority has to consider if there are sufficient numbers of cases carrying social workers with relevant experience to provide a good service to families.
10. We are facing similar challenges to many local authorities in the recruitment and retention of social workers. However action is being taken to address a number of issues, not least the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers.
11. On a positive, there is a noted trend in reduced caseloads over the previous two years and an improved ratio of children to social workers, the increased posts in the baseline budget and the introduction of an advanced social worker role.
12. It is envisaged that the operational measures and the recruitment and retention plan that has been introduced, combined with a reduction in turnover in the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams will promote sufficiency and improvement.
13. We noted the increased use of agency workers and agreed to continue to monitor this along with the overall situation regarding the retention of experienced social workers.

Update on the Audit of Section 20 Voluntary Accommodation Arrangements

14. We continue to monitor the actions 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.
15. The review followed a judgement made by the lead High Court Judge for the Family Division, Sir James Mundy in February 2015 and concerned the use of Section 20 by this Authority in respect of a specific case where it was concluded there was a misuse of the Act and too much delay in bringing the case before the Court.
16. 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 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 delays in a number of cases in respect of the Local Authority making long term permanent plans for them.
17. An Action Plan had been following the audit and some of the recommendations from the audit were included in the Children's Services Improvement Plan 2015 to 2017. A re-audit of cases was undertaken during May and June 2016 to evaluate impact following the recommendations on each case management.

18. 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.
19. On-going senior management oversight is ensuring there is a robust monitoring of the progress made in responding to the findings from the individual case audits so that social practice continues to improve.

Work Programme

20. 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.
21. We have agreed to include school improvement on the work programme as an area of immediate concern and to examine the effectiveness of the school improvement strategy which is due to be reviewed.

Meetings

22. Since the last meeting of Council, I have also attended the meeting of the Children's Services Improvement Board on 24 August and 28 September. The Board did not meet in July.

Councillor Chris Taylor
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee