

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 21 February 2022

PRESENT – Councillors Crudass (Chair), Ali, Mrs Culley, C L B Hughes, Renton, Snedker and Willis

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bell, Lister, Lucas and Sowerby; Tim Fisher, Nick Lindsay and John Armitage

ABSENT – Malcolm Frank, Carly Spence, Maura Regan and Janet Woodcock

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Tony Murphy (Head of Education and Inclusion), Nicola Davies (Early Years Project Officer), Helen Ellison (Head of Education Partnerships); Eleanor Marshall (Education Partnerships Officer) and Allison Hill (Democratic Officer)

CYP33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP34 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES/NOTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON:

Submitted – The Minutes/Notes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 25 October, 20 December 2021; and 10 January 2022.

In reference to Minute CYP19/Oct/21, it was acknowledged that Members comments in relation to specific reporting changes to the annual report at the meeting held on 25 October 2021 had been taken on board and included in this annual report.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes/Notes of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 25 October, 20 December 2021; and 10 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

CYP35 REVIEW OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEND) ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY 2017-2020

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated to provide Members with an update on the progress to date in respect of the review of the Special Educational Needs (SEND) Accessibility Strategy 2017-2020.

It was reported that although the Strategy does not form a part of the Council's Policy Framework, it is a statutory requirement as required by Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 for the Local Authority to prepare an Accessibility Strategy in relation to schools for which it is the responsible body; and to comply with legislation a review of the Strategy is required every three years, however due to COVID, the review took place in Autumn 2021 and concluded in early 2022.

The Strategy sets out how the Local Authority will work with maintained settings to increase

the extent to which disabled children and young people can participate in the school curriculum; improve the physical environment of schools; and improve delivery of information to pupils with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

It was also reported that a consultation exercise had taken place with parent/carers and maintained settings to whom this Strategy applied and stakeholders, the Darlington Parent/Carer Forum and Darlington Association on Disability; a consistent message from parent/carers was the need to ensure more staff training for equality and diversity and to ensure that information was accessible.

This Strategy will be presented to Cabinet for approval on 3 May 2022.

Members discussed in particular the duty on the authority's academies and the ways in which this authority advise academies and offer them the expertise of our officers; the national recruitment issue and how that was affecting service delivery; how the strategy will be monitored and the compliance with the Local Offer; and the assessment process for an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) which remained above the national average throughout the pandemic.

Members also discussed in more detail the accessibility issues that had been experienced at the beginning of the pandemic and the ongoing work with the Parent/Carer Forum to better seek the views of parents to support future challenge in this area.

RESOLVED – (a) That this Scrutiny notes the process undertaken to review the Strategy.

(b) That this Scrutiny notes that ongoing consultation with children and young people will inform any further amendments to the Strategy and/or the action plan that will accompany this.

CYP36 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT 2021-22

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform Members of the findings of the 2021-22 Childcare Sufficiency Review.

Local authorities are required by the Department for Education's 'Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities June 2018' to ensure sufficient childcare as far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 or up to 18 for disabled children; and to report annually to elected Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents.

It was reported that the childcare market in Darlington was made up of private day nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, out of school clubs, nursery schools and nursery units. Prior to March 2020, Darlington's childcare market was fairly stable and the parental take-up rates of the various entitlements was predictable.

From early June 2020 when providers were again able to admit children other than those whose parents were key workers or vulnerable children, the number of pre-school children attending provision rose and by the end of the Summer 2020 term there were 263 pre-school

children in attendance. In comparison, by the end of the Summer 2021 term there were 839 pre-school children in attendance in childcare although this figure had reached a high of 1,413 by the end of May 2021 and the figure in early December 2021 was 1,117.

It was also reported that there were periodic short-term closures within the sector due to the pandemic but these were minimal and by the Autumn 2021 term, 1,696 children were accessing an Early Years Entitlements place compared with 1,587 children accessing a funded place in Autumn 2019.

During this pandemic, support continued to be provided to the childcare sector via: regular guidance up-dates; virtual network meetings; public health provider briefings, weekly Q & A sessions with public health; an early years strategy group; a group for early years leads in schools; virtual inclusion panels and individualised support around transitions; setting link officers and an Early Years newsletter.

Additionally, a childcare sufficiency task group meets regularly which includes colleagues from Economic Growth, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS), Darlington Association on Disability (DAD), Jobcentre Plus, Learning & Skills, Darlington Families' Information Service and Children's Centres.

It was also reported that providers had indicated that recruitment and retention was an issue; and following consultation with the Darlington Parent/Carer Forum in Summer 2021 it was agreed that up-dated marketing information, sign-posting parents to sources of information about different types of local, registered, inclusive childcare across the borough could be shared.

Providers were facing uncertainty with regard to childcare demand, early years entitlements and parent paid income as families' circumstances change, however it was reported that Indicators showed that there had been sufficient capacity to meet demand throughout this period, however any unmet demand will be continually monitored to ensure that parents are able to access training and work in the coming months and years.

Members discussed affordability issues and the worrying financial situation for providers; the national retention and recruitment problems and general uncertainty in the settings; and insufficient funding from other sources to ensure the providers are in a position to meet future demand.

Members also discussed areas of the borough where they felt that sufficiency was not meeting demand and requested further information be brought to Members at a future date regarding demographical/community data.

RESOLVED – That the information and findings of the 2021/22 Childcare Sufficiency Review be noted.

CYP37 WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included in the previously

approved work programme.

Members also gave consideration to a request to carry out a review of the Vulnerable Pupil Panel including the relevant quad of aims.

It was also reported that on 22 February, 2022 a virtual meeting had been arranged for Members of this Scrutiny Committee to meet with young people from the Darlington Youth Partnership and Council of School Councils to discuss projects the Council are working on to try and capture the voice of children and young people from across Darlington.

And on 11 February, 2022 the Head of Employment, Education and Skills, Tees Valley Combined Authority attended a joint briefing with Members of this Committee and the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to discuss the education and skills funding allocation as it relates to our authority and where specifically the spend is being focused.

RESOLVED – (a) That the work programme be noted.

(b) That a review of the Vulnerable Pupil Panel be included in the work programme of this Scrutiny Committee.