

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 23 October 2023

PRESENT – Councillors Ali, Allen, Crudass, Dillon, Johnson, Layton, Renton and Toms.

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – John Armitage.

APOLOGIES – Councillor Storr and Sally Hudson.

ABSENT – Councillor Durham, Carly Stonier, Maura Regan and Janet Woodcock.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Wallis and Snedker.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion), Paul Richardson (Head of Skills and Employability), Martin Graham (Head of Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement), Marian Garland (Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)) and Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer).

CYP16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP17 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 AUGUST 2023

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 21 August 2023.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 21 August 2023 be approved as a correct record.

CYP18 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS YEAR END 2022/23

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.

The submitted report provided performance information for the period April 2022 to March 2023, in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Coordination Group on 2 July 2018, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. The submitted report highlighted those areas where the Council were performing well, and identified those areas where improvement was required.

Members enquired about the changes to the 'front door' function; the increase in Early Help Assessments (EHAs); the measures in place to safeguard those who were victims of domestic abuse and coercive control; the definition of suitable accommodation for Care Leavers; the recording of missing episodes, and whether there was a greater need for individualised assessments.

Discussion ensued on recruitment and retention, and whether the service was adequately

resourced, with Members also keen to understand more around the support available for Social Workers and the Council's Fostering Teams. Members were also interested in the reasons for the recent success in terms of recruitment.

RESOLVED – That the performance information provided be noted.

CYP19 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1 2023/24

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.

The submitted report provided quarterly (April 2023 to June 2023) performance information in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group and subsequently by each individual Scrutiny Committee.

The submitted report highlighted where Children's Services were performing well and where there was a need to improve. It was also outlined that where indicators were reported annually, quarterly updates would not be available.

(NOTE: Members took this report alongside Minute CYP18, and therefore the discussion is outlined above).

RESOLVED – That the performance information provided in the submitted report be noted.

CYP20 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS USED IN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND REGULATION

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an overview of the current Performance Indicators used within the Scrutiny process and to consider appropriate next steps in relation to a review of the Performance Indicators.

The submitted report highlighted that Children's Services provide a range of statutory services and functions on behalf of the Council, as well as being a regulated service, subject to regular Inspection and judgement by OFSTED. It was stated that as part of these processes Children's Services were duty bound to measure their performance through a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Discussion ensued on Member access to the raw data in light of guidance received from the Local Government Association.

RESOLVED – That a Task and Finish Group be established to review the Performance Indicators used within the Scrutiny process.

CYP21 DESIGNATED OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update on the progress and performance of the Designated Officers' (DO) response to all contacts received relating to allegations/concerns of abuse by those who work with children for the period April 2022 to March 2023, and to highlight the required

actions for the period April 2023 to March 2024.

The submitted report outlined the function of the Designated Officer and stated that all organisations that worked with children in Darlington were required to have policies and procedures in place in relation to what their organisation would do when an allegation was made against an employee / volunteer who was in contact with children. It was stated that these policies and procedures should be in line with Darlington Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency procedures.

Members entered into discussion on the linkages that took place between organisations following a substantiated allegation to ensure that a Social Worker's record reflected any action taken; the propensity for SEND children to demonstrate challenging physical behaviour; and the sectors from which referrals may be expected.

RESOLVED - a) That the contents of the report and the work undertaken during 2022/23, and the priorities of the Designated Officer service for 2023/24, be noted.

b) That the annual report be agreed.

CYP22 LEARNING AND SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion submitted a report to provide Members with an update on the performance of the Learning and Skills Service for academic year 2022/23, and to allow Members oversight of, and an opportunity to challenge, the performance of this externally funded service.

The submitted report advised that the service was now seeing a recovery of learner numbers and performance remained high, and that the service was growing provision whilst continuing to respond to employer and community need. It was reported that the service was inspected by Ofsted in June 2022, and retained its assessment of 'Good' overall.

Discussion ensued on the similarities and differences in the provision of the Learning and Skills Service and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI); the robustness of the service provided, the involvement of refugees and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); and the mechanisms for growing funding and promoting the Learning and Skills Service.

RESOLVED – That the content of the report be noted.

CYP23 ADOPTION TEES VALLEY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley was unable to attend the meeting, and therefore Members agreed to defer the item until the following Ordinary Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (Monday, 8 January 2024).

CYP24 DEDICATED SCHOOL GRANT AND THE SAFETY VALVE

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update on progress made on the Council's Safety Valve agreement to address historic deficit in the High Needs Block which supported education provision for young

people with Special Educational Needs.

The submitted report stated that the Council has entered into the “Safety Valve” agreement with the Department for Education (DfE), enabling funding over a five year period to address the accumulated deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block (HNB). It was reported that the agreement would require commitment to areas of review and improvement identified by Department for Education (DfE) to bring in year spend in line with the in-year budget by 2023/24.

Discussion ensued on who retained oversight of the agreement and how it was addressed; the disparity between potential for infinite costs alongside a finite budget and whether this increased the chance of failure; whether adjustments could be made if costs were to increase; and the concerns of SEND parents were raised. Members were also interested to learn what safeguards were in place to ensure annual checks with parents had taken place in relation to early intervention work and Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) implementation, and the wider dialogue with parents.

Members entered into discussion as to how the deficit was recorded, how long the deficit had taken to accrue, and whether the Council as an organisation retained a liability for the deficit.

RESOLVED – That the terms of the agreement and progress made to date in relation to the Safety Valve, be noted.

CYP25 WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

The Assistant Director, Law and Governance, 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

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.