

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 8 January 2024

PRESENT – Councillors Layton (Chair) Ali, Crudass, Dillon, Storr and Toms.

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Sally Hudson.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Allen, Johnson and Renton, and John Armitage

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Wallis.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion), Martin Graham (Head of Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement), Helen Watson (Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager), Joanne Littler (Head of SEND and Inclusion), Ann Baxter (Independent Chair of the Darlington Safeguarding Children Board), Louise Addison (Adoption Tees Valley), Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer).

CYP26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP27 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2023

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 23 October 2023.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 23 October 2023, be approved as a correct record.

CYP28 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 2 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 performance information for Quarter 2 (July 2023 to September 2023) in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group on 2 July 2021, and subsequently by each individual Scrutiny Committee Chair.

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 are reported annually, quarterly updates will not be available.

Members entered into discussion on the indicators in relation to Children in Care who had been placed 20 or more miles away from home as of September 2023, and the basis for the target of 10%.

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

CYP29 DARLINGTON CHILDREN’S SERVICES - SELF-ASSESSMENT 2023

The Assistant Director, Children’s Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with the Annual Self-Assessment for Children’s Services, to enable constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge to take place and drive improvement in public services.

It was highlighted the self-assessment is not a statutory requirement, however is developed with input from Ofsted, and that the self-assessment is used as part of Ofsted’s ILACS Annual Engagement Meeting and plays an important role in their understanding of local authorities and how they work.

Members noted that the number of Children in Care had risen, and expressed concerns in relation to the impact that this would have on service provision, with assurances provided that the agency market could be utilised, if necessary.

Discussion ensued on the number of children who were placed in care with no SEND diagnosis, but who subsequently left care with a SEND diagnosis, and whether there was a need to record ‘missed diagnosis’, however it was suggested that there could be a number of factors that would have an impact and that it would be difficult to quantify.

RESOLVED – That the content of the report be noted.

CYP30 SEND RESOURCE BASE REMODELLING AT HEATHFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an overview of the work being undertaken to remodel the existing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) resource base at Heathfield Primary School.

The submitted report stated that the resource base at Heathfield Primary School, which was part of Lingfield Academy Trust, had been in its current configuration for a number of years, and that the Lingfield Academy Trust had worked in partnership with Darlington Borough Council to explore how the resource base could be re-modelled effective from September 2024, to be more reflective of and responsive to the needs of Darlington children and young people with SEND.

It was reported that the re-modelling would see the base change to have a primary remit of support for communication and interaction needs which was aligned with the presenting need of Darlington children and young people with SEND, and that the base would be incrementally filled over a 3-year period supporting children from Reception to Year 2. It was noted that the re-modelling proposal fell within the Department for Education (DfE)’s significant change process for academies, and therefore required a period of open consultation, following which a business case could be submitted to DfE for review and determination.

Concern was expressed as to whether children at Northwood Primary School would still be

able to access provision at Heathfield Primary School, and Members were reassured that they would and that there would be no impact on provision.

RESOLVED - That the work being undertaken to remodel the existing resource base at Heathfield Primary School to align with, and respond to, the presenting needs of Darlington children with SEND, be noted.

CYP31 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23 AND CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE CHAIR ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an overview of the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers in relation to Children who are Looked After and Children who are the subject of Child Protection Conferences and / or multi-agency Child Protection Plans; and to consider the Annual Reports of the Independent Reviewing Officer for 2022/23, and the Child Protection Conference Chair for 2022/23.

The submitted report stated that the production of the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022/23 was a requirement under the statutory guidance and covered the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer which is a defined role that relates to Children Looked After; and the Child Protection Conference Chair Annual Report 2022/23 covered the role of the conference chair in relation to children who are in need of safeguarding and the statutory requirements are set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018).

It was highlighted that for the period April 2022 to March 2023, due to the roll-out of the Agile Working programme and post-Covid-19 working arrangements across agencies, formal meetings, which in previous years would have been face to face, had been conducted using virtual platforms. It was reported that this applied to all Child Protection Conferences and Child Looked After Reviews.

Members entered into discussion on the tracking of families between areas; how child participation in Children Looked After Reviews worked, and how children contributed; and the desire not to ask children to relive previous bad experiences.

RESOLVED – That the annual reports of the Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chair for 2022/23 be noted.

CYP32 YOUNG PEOPLE SEND ENGAGEMENT

The Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of how Council services engage with young people regarding the issues relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The submitted report outlined the various activities undertaken to ensure that young people with SEND were able to co-produce plans affecting them and contribute to wider strategic work.

Discussion ensued on the wider engagement opportunities that existed for young people, both provided by the Council and external partners, and the scope for a piece of work in this

area in the future.

RESOLVED – That the actions outlined and the progress made to date be noted.

CYP33 ADOPTION TEES VALLEY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

Louise Addison, Deputy Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley, presented the Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) Annual Report 2022/23, and outlined the work that had been undertaken across the Tees Valley during 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

The submitted report stated that the year had been one of building on partnerships and existing practice to strengthen and improve adoption in the Tees Valley. It was stated that worked had continued with the five partner local authorities to continue to strengthen early twin track care planning for adoption. Ms. Addison highlighted the increased offer to families, and the preparation undertaken for ATV's own Ofsted inspection.

The submitted report also outlined two key projects, the Pan Regional Early Permanence Project and the Pan Regional Multi-Disciplinary Adoption Support Service.

Focus centred on the funding received from the Integrated Care Board, and whether this was something that could be repeatedly accessed on an annual basis, or whether it was a one-off payment. The Chair thanked Louise Addison for attending the meeting and also for the work of the ATV.

RESOLVED – That the 2022/23 Annual Report of Adoption Tees Valley be noted.

CYP34 DARLINGTON SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to enable Members to consider and comment on the Annual Report of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) for the period 2022/23.

It was reported that Local Safeguarding Partnerships are required to produce an Annual Report to account for the Partnerships achievements over the previous year and make an assessment of the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements within the local area.

The Annual Report summarised and reflected on the work of the Partnership over the period 2022/23, drawing upon a range of data and information, to outline the progress made and to illustrate the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements across Darlington, and highlighted that the year continued to be shaped by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the national safeguarding context had been an evolving landscape as services continued to adapt, many organisations facing national recruitment challenges.

The submitted report outlined significant organisational change during the year with the introduction nationally of Integrated Care Boards and a new iteration of Working Together to Safeguard Children, along with the implementation of Local Authority Adult Regulatory inspections.

Ann Baxter, Independent Chair of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership attended the meeting to outline the Annual Report and answer Members questions thereon.

Members entered into discussion on the introduction of the Integrated Care Boards, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with the reorganisation; and thanked Ann for the worked of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership.

RESOLVED – That the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report for 2022/23, be noted.

CYP35 WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

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.