

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 15 April 2024

PRESENT – Councillors Allen (Chair), Crudass, Durham, Kane, Layton and Toms.

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – John Armitage.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ali, Johnson, Renton and Storr, and Sally Hudson.

ABSENT – 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), Ken Ross (Public Health Principal), Lynne Davies (Strategy and Policy Manager) and Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer).

CYP44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP45 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 FEBRUARY 2024

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 19 February 2024.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 19 February 2024, be approved as a correct record.

CYP46 COUNCIL PLAN 2024-27 - DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) to introduce the draft Council Plan to Members of this Scrutiny Committee and sought comments from Members.

The submitted report stated that the Council Plan outlined the long-term ambitions for Darlington and the priorities the Council sought to deliver over the forthcoming three years (2024-2027). It was highlighted that the Plan gave strategic direction to the Council, defined priorities and shaped delivery, whilst providing clarity to residents, businesses and stakeholders on the Council's values, what the Council identified as important and what the Council would do.

It was reported that the public consultation on the draft Plan was open and ran from 6 March 2024 to 25 April 2024, and that the Council was seeking views from residents, businesses, charities and key stakeholders. The submitted report stated that it was intended that the finalised Plan would be submitted to Cabinet and Council in May for approval and adoption. In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People outlined the key aims for the 'Children and Young People' priority within the Plan.

Discussion ensued on the scope of the consultation and the stakeholders whom the Council had engaged with; the proposed expansion of in-house placements; the performance measures by which the success of the Plan would be assessed; and the sense that the eight key aims focused on the correct areas.

RESOLVED – That the draft Council Plan 2024-27 be noted.

CYP47 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 3 2023/24

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.

The submitted report provided Quarter 3 (October 2023 to December 2023) performance information in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs.

The submitted report also highlighted where Children and Young People 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 reasons for the increase in Children in Care placements within the previous twelve months; the relationship between foster parents and children, and the need for more foster parents; the increase in workload for the Building Stronger Families Team, and the support provided by the Early Help Team; the staffing challenges in terms of the completion of Children's and Families Assessments, and the agency offer available to support this challenge; the increase in the need for early support and the specific areas where need was greatest; and the continual monitoring of assessments, casework and supervisions.

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

CYP48 RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX EDUCATION AND HEALTH EDUCATION

The Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion, submitted a report (previously circulated) which summarised the current and future guidance from the Department for Education on relationships and sex education.

The submitted report provided an overview of the statutory guidance which related to relationships and sex education that schools were obliged to implement, and also covered the recently issued draft non-statutory guidance that related to gender questioning children.

Members entered into discussion on the work being done to establish what is being delivered in schools, however it was highlighted that subject delivery was a matter for schools themselves, who were required to follow the National Curriculum and national guidance which is inspected by OFSTED and not a matter for the local authority. It was clarified that, should anyone have questions relating to the delivery of the National Curriculum, these should be addressed to the academy or school in the first instance.

Discussion ensued on the national consultation on the recently issued draft non-statutory guidance that related to gender questioning children published by the Government, and the response submitted by the Association of Directors of Children's Services. Questions were raised in relation to the content of the Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) training offer provided to schools by the Council, however it was outlined that this was an offer, and not mandatory.

Particular focus was made to transgender policies within schools, and whether the Council had a role in developing such policies, and it was clarified that it was a matter for schools to develop their own policies, with a recognition that many policies may appear very similar in content. Concerns were expressed with regard to the NHS signposting children and young people to Kooth in relation to gender identity. Members were informed that this would be a matter for the NHS, however Officers were not aware of any concerns.

RESOLVED – That the arrangements currently in place, and the proposed changes to non-statutory guidance, be noted.

CYP49 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.