

COUNCIL 25 MARCH 2021

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.

Correction to Minutes of Meeting held on 4 January 2020

2. Committee voted at its meeting on 1 March 2021 to amend the minutes reported to this Council as Item 2 in the last Overview of Children and Young People Scrutiny report dated 28 January 2021. For this reason, I must make clear that under the item Medium Term Financial Plan, a majority of members indicated by rollcall vote the following: (a) That this Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make on the proposed schedule of fees and charges for those services within its remit (as there are none) and supports the budget lines set out within the Children's Services area of the budget.

Work Programme

3. Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during 2019/20, and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

Children In Need Self Harm Project

4. Ian Neale, Darlington Mind Young Persons Co-ordinator gave an update on the Children in Need Self-Harm Project and the work of Darlington Mind in supporting young people in all mental health issues. He confirmed that young people are generally struggling with their mental health and, in particular, worried about the impact of Covid-19 and returning to school on 8 March.
5. We were advised that Darlington Mind has two counsellors offering help to young people and Members can also signpost young people for counselling to Ian, upon completion of a referral form. This service is available to young people aged 11-18 years.
6. Members discussed how to encourage more young people to take up mentoring roles as the 'drop in' funding unfortunately ceases in June/July and future plans to have peer mentors within schools. As Ian is relatively new to this post, we encouraged him to make contact with some other organisations who are already doing some fantastic work with young people to address mental health.

Development of the Darlington Care Collective

7. Members received an update report on the Developing Darlington Care Collective (DDCC) which was developed following the National Social Care Recruitment Campaign ("We need you now, they need you always") and was initially discussed during the first Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

8. The rationale of the DDCC is to provide support to the Care Sector in response to Covid-19, particularly in terms of low-level role capacity and need, supporting mental health and resilience, whilst creating opportunities to develop partnerships and multi-agency working across the health, social care and education sector in Darlington.
9. A number of priorities have been discussed with cross sector partners across the borough including support for the development of capacity across the Children and Adults Care Sector, particularly Care Homes and Children's Residential Care, should a second wave of Covid19 manifest and to promote good mental health and make every contact count (MECC); and a Workforce Development Team have linked with key partners from across the borough to gauge appetite in supporting and being part of the DDCC.
10. Martin Webster, Workforce Development Manager outlined the four key focus priorities of the Darlington Care Collective; ways to support the Adult Care Home Sector and Children's Residential Services and support across the board for those working with people; how the Collective were looking at ways to develop volunteering, training and employment opportunities through multi-agency working bringing together 50 key partners from across the Borough, including the Council, Care Homes, Health partners, the Police, Children's residential homes, colleges, universities and the voluntary sector; and the key drivers around supporting the sector in terms of bodes and designing consistent and sustainable models of training to link people into opportunities including access to Work Force Capacity Funding.
11. Members questions related to apprenticeship schemes and if adequate support was being provided to access funding; support for employment opportunities and getting people engaged into the process and progression of social work. We were also advised that of the National Social Work Apprenticeship Scheme and the work with Sunderland University regarding this.
12. Members welcomed the DDCC and have requested an update on the project at a future meeting.

Digital Inclusion

13. Tony Murphy, Head of Education and Inclusion gave Members a verbal update on the current position with regard to digital inclusion. We were advised that approximately 3,600 devices had been issued to schools and Academy Trusts prior to February to focus on disadvantaged children. The number of devices available to each school is based on the Department for Education (DfE) estimates.
14. Remote formal learning has developed throughout the pandemic and a higher degree of formal learning has been developed and therefore the limited number of devices in households is creating problems with some families. Detailed allocation and distribution data has been requested from the DfE so that this authority can support our schools in the best way. The Education Strategy Group also meet weekly with the DfE to examine the level of need and also to identify any other barriers to learning.

15. Members discussed with Tony the varied home learning experiences within families; the mental health impact on parents and in particular single parents; the barriers to accessing learning for some families who have multiple people trying to access remotely; access issues especially in rural areas; and the access to quiet space which is limited in some households. We acknowledged that despite schools returning on 8 March this still remained an issue of this Scrutiny Committee's agenda.
16. The chair provided members with a copy of her email to the North East Regional Schools Commissioner and the reply received regarding this Scrutiny Committee's continuing concerns over access to and provision of digital devices and connectivity for children and young people in Darlington.

Review Group

17. As part of the ongoing review to understand the impact that Covid-19 has had in Darlington on our children and young people and what future actions may be required, and the second virtual evidence gathering event to hear the 'voice of the child and young person' will now be held on 25 March 2021 after the schools return.

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee