

**COUNCIL**  
**13 MAY 2021**

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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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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.

**Performance – Quarter 3 (October to December) 2020/21**

2. Children's Services Quarter 3 performance October to December 2020 was presented to the April meeting which highlighted the following positives:
  - (a) Children are appropriately safeguarded as Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) (92.5 per cent) were held within 15 working days which remains higher than our statistical neighbour, regional and national average benchmarks.
  - (b) All children with a Child Protection (CP) plan and children in care (CiC) have an allocated social worker with (85.8 per cent) of children receiving a statutory CP visit within 10 working days and (93.4 per cent) of statutory CiC visits being completed within timescale, above the target of 90 per cent.
  - (c) Year to date (YTD) no child has ceased to be subject to a CP plan who had been subject to the plan for two or more years and we continue to perform below our target of 5 per cent.
  - (d) We have low numbers of Children in Care (CiC) who have had 3 or more placements within the previous 12 months (6.7 per cent) which is an improvement on the internal target, national, regional averages (10 per cent) and statistical neighbour (9.9 per cent), however it still equates to 19 children in care experiencing 3 or more moves.
  - (e) We are below our target of 30 per cent for Care Leavers not in employment, education or training (NEET) and (98.0 per cent) were in suitable accommodation.
3. The areas identified for improved focus were:
  - (a) An emphasis on the quality of referrals has improved practice in screening and triaging the information but this has led to a drop in performance of which shows YTD (77.7 per cent) completed within 1 working day.
  - (b) We continue to monitor an increase in re-referrals YTD (19.7 per cent) repeated within 12 months, to ensure a range of different presenting factors and no practice issues on closure of the preceding referral.
  - (c) A continued focus on the quality of the children and family assessments has resulted in a slight decrease in the timeliness of assessments (85.2 per cent), being completed. Any assessment that exceeds the timescale is scrutinised by

the team manager to ensure that there is no drift and delay in care planning for the child

- (d) We have recently seen a slight increase in the percentage of children becoming subject to a Child Protection plan for a second or subsequent time within two years of the previous plan ending (8.3 per cent) above the (6 per cent) target
  - (e) Work continues to safely reduce the number of children becoming looked after; 284 by the end of December 2020
  - (f) As a result of dental surgery closures during lockdown, (29.5 per cent) of children in care, that were due a dental check assessment, have had one completed
4. Members discussed in particular the percentage of referrals completed within one working day and the rise in those taking over 3 working days and questioned what procedures were in place to expedite this and also had concerns at the percentage of re-referrals that are received within 12 months of a previous referral and were assured that officers were undertaking a 'deep dive' to look at this further.
  5. Regarding the number of children and families assessments completed Members questioned if there were any emerging themes; and if officers were expecting any change in the number of Child Protection Plans coming out of lockdown and if they had any thoughts as to why this authority was below regional neighbours on this indicator.
  6. Members noted that the number of children in care with three or more separate placements over the past 12 months had reduced however felt this still required constant monitoring.
  7. We also acknowledged the work that had been undertaken to ensure that the number of initial health assessments completed within 20 working days was 100 per cent however questioned what the authority intended to do to encourage the number of children in care having an annual dental check.
  8. Members also requested further information to be provided on the number of agency social workers the authority employed and the approximate ratio of Looked after children placed from outside the authority in Darlington.

### **Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People – Review Group**

9. At the meeting on 13 April, 2021, Members gave consideration to the findings and recommendations of the Review Group established by this Scrutiny Committee in January to examine the current picture; identify good practice and if there were any gaps in service.
10. Councillor Crudass presented additional comments and recommendations to be considered and included in the report. In line with governance arrangements, Members were not in a position to make amendments and therefore agreed the report be referred back to the Review Group for further discussion.

11. A Special meeting was held on 22 April 2021 when the final report was further considered by Members and the recommendations contained therein were approved and the report forwarded onto Cabinet for its consideration.

### **Work Programme**

12. 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

**Councillor Cyndi Hughes**  
**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**