

COUNCIL
30 SEPTEMBER 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.

Designated Officer Annual Report 2020/21

2. Members Annually receive a report on the progress and performance of the Designated Officer for the period April 2020 to March 2021 and the action plan for the period April 2021 to March 2022.
3. The role of the Designated Officer, based with the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit, is to ensure that advice and guidance is provided to partner agencies and staff where an allegation is made against a period who works with children in a paid or voluntary capacity and to facilitate and oversee this process.
4. It is a requirement of all organisations working with children in Darlington to have policies and procedures in place on what their organisation should do when an allegation is made against an employee/volunteer who has contact with children.
5. In 2020/21 the Designated Officer service received a total of 191 contacts in respect of allegations representing an 18 per cent decrease in the number of contacts received in 2019/20 which demonstrated that despite the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the response of the Designated Officer and the partner agencies in terms of holding Initial Evaluation Meetings and conducting enquiries in respect of reported allegations remained consistent.
6. Members noted that of the contacts made in 2020/21 the main category for referral was allegations of physical abuse, however this was a decrease of 24 per cent on last year's figures. Other categories of allegation were emotional, sexual, conduct, neglect and suitability.
7. Although there is no requirement in legislation for enquiries to meet timescales, local targets are set in Darlington and we were pleased to note that 80 per cent of allegations were resolved within one month and 90 per cent within three months, consistent with previous year's performance.

Children and Young People Public Health Overview

8. Members received an annual update of the Children and Young People Public Health interventions and programs below.
9. The Healthy Lifestyles Survey was delivered to 8500 pupils across 33 schools completing the survey annually; between April and June 2020, the Public Health team delivered virtual focus groups and online surveys with pupils from year 5 to year 10, parents and carers and

school staff; and responses were received from 167 pupils, 32 parents and carers and 41 school representatives.

10. The Childhood Healthy Weight Plan aims to increase a healthy weight in children and young people and the objectives are focused to increase fibre and fruit and vegetable uptake, reduce sugar by increasing healthy food and drink swaps and aim to achieve 60 minutes of physical activity for every child and young person in the borough; and partnership work has resulted in the coproduction of a looked after young people and families toolkit, a children's home food policy and a nutrition education staff training programme.
11. With regard to mental health in schools the Children and Young Peoples (CYP) Mental Health Network continues to meet and provide an overview of CYP Mental Health and has highlighted that children and young people are still being affected by COVID-19 in terms of mental health and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other services are noticing increased referrals. We were pleased to note that a Suicide Prevention Grant programme for training to support staff in schools in relation to suicide prevention and self-harm was launched in June and the two applications submitted by Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College and St. Aidan's Academy were successful in receiving £2000 each.
12. The 0-19 Service has introduced an enhanced digital offer to children and families during the Covid-19 pandemic and as restrictions were lifted the Service introduced more face to face appointments, while continuing to build on the success of the virtual offer.

Self-Assessment Overview

13. Members received the Annual Self- Assessment for Children's Services to enable challenge to and drive improvement in public services.
14. Children's Services update each quarter an assessment of social work practice, inclusive of Early Help, based on changes in performance data. To bring the information into a stand-alone easy read document an annual self-assessment overview document is completed.
15. The aim of the self-evaluation is to answer three questions: What do we know about the quality and impact of social work practice in our local authority; How do we know it; and What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice. 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.
16. We will examine the Self-Assessment Overview on an annual basis and will also continue to monitor performance throughout the year in the quarterly performance reports to Scrutiny.

Trauma and Horizon Scanning

17. At the request of Members we received an overview of 'Trauma Informed Practice' and how Children's Services are starting to embed and respond to Trauma and progress towards becoming a Trauma Informed Service.

18. Trauma is conceptualised in a broad spectrum, from the impact of poverty to the significant events that can be thought of in terms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (having a clear clinical start point). Trauma for children, young people and families can also occur via interaction with professionals and organisations, particularly when the approach does not follow a relational and strength-based methodology.
19. Trauma Informed Practice is relational and strengths-based, grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma and the overarching practice methodology is based on the embedded approach to working with families within the Strengthening Families and Relational Practice.
20. The Virtual Head advised us of the expanding role of the Virtual School to embed the Trauma Informed approach and the training which is being carried out with the majority of schools in Darlington and Governing Bodies.

Children's Social Care – Off Framework Placements

21. Following a request by Members we received an overview of children in care who are placed in provision that is 'off – framework', the rationales behind off-framework provision and the annual costings and comparisons with placements made 'on-framework'.
22. The average residential placement cost for off framework in Darlington in 2020/21 was £3,791 per week compared with £3,069 per week on Framework and the number of off framework residential placements is 66 per cent based of all residential placements made in 2020/21, however it was noted that this was reflective of regional and national trends and Darlington had a comparatively low number of off framework placements within Independent Fostering.
23. Members discussed with the Assistant Director of Children's Services the cost of off framework placements and the rationale for placing off framework and noted that placement demands significantly outstrip placement availability. It was also highlighted that placements were not necessarily more costly because they were off framework and the Assistant Director of Children's Services emphasised that off framework placements can be the most suitable for some young people and can include education on site.
24. Members were assured that work is ongoing to continue to review placements and placement costs and to analyse the cohort of Looked after Children.
25. Members also questioned if there was any help the authority could offer to small local providers who find the bureaucracy associated with large framework contracts and procurement prohibitive and we were advised that Children's Services were working with providers and commissioners to provide encouragement and assistance.

Work Programme

26. 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.

27. We also considered a request from Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to undertake a joint piece of work on Youth Unemployment and have agreed that this Scrutiny lead on this work.

Councillor Paul Crudass
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee