

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Monday, 25 October 2021

**PRESENT** – Councillors Crudass (Chair), Mrs Culley, C L B Hughes, Lucas, Snedker, Sowerby and Willis

**STATUTORY CO-OPTees** – None

**NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees** – None

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Ali, Lister and Renton; Carly Spence, Tim Fisher, Nick Lindsay and John Armitage

**ABSENT** – Councillor Bell, Malcolm Frank, Maura Regan and Janet Woodcock

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Ann Baxter (Darlington Safeguarding Partnership) and Vicky Davidson-Boyd (Adoption Tees Valley)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Chris Bell, Allison Hill (Democratic Officer), Martin Graham (Head of Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement) and Paul Richardson (Head of Skills and Employability)

### **CYP17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

### **CYP18 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 AUGUST 2021**

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 23 August 2021.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 23 23 August 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### **CYP19 ADOPTION TEES VALLEY ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21**

Vicky Davidson-Boyd, Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley presented Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) Annual Report 2020/21 and outlined the work that had been undertaken across the Tees Valley during 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.

It was reported that this was the third annual report of Adoption Tees Valley which was the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for the five local authorities Councils of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton.

The Service Manager advised Members that this period had been impacted by the National Covid 19 pandemic and characterised by adoption activity conducted within the amended regulations and restrictions imposed because of the public health emergency. This brought

both challenge and opportunity to work differently across Children's Services; and the service had trialled new ways of working and implemented practices which had been underpinned by nationally developing adoption practice, and research.

The submitted report highlighted The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (2020) which permitted adoption services a range of flexibilities which were outlined in the report; outlined the governance arrangements by a Board comprised of five Directors for Children's Services of the five Local Authorities within the partnership; set out the National Context of Adoption; gave details of the Early Permanence Strategy which had been collaborative, and had involved key stakeholders with a role in care planning and the placement of children for adoption; outlined the three year review of Adoption Tees Valley which will conclude its findings in September 2021; and provided individual authority performance benchmarking data and analysis of performance.

The submitted report also provided details of marketing and recruitment activities; various data in relation to adopter journey, referrals and placement, characteristics of children placed, adopted support; and the new initiative to support pathway for prospective adopters.

The submitted report also detailed the Quality Assurance mechanisms in place for managing and monitoring the work of the agency, and the quality of work; provided details of the joint budget and support funding available to the ATV; and outlined key development areas for the ATV within the 2021 Service Plan.

Particular reference was made to this local authority performance which had seen fewer children adopted than previous years; the Moving on To Adoption Model adopted by the ATV as a best practice model in some targeted cases; the challenges with managing the volume of Life Story books for children who are placed for adoption and how the ATV can address this issues; the continued employment of an Education Support Worker co-funded by the five local authority Virtual Schools via Department for Education grant funding for children previously in the care of the local authority and 59 families and children had been supported during this year.

Members expressed concern at the delays reported in progressing plans and were advised that Panel Chairs produce a six monthly report for each local authority and were given reassurance that this was not a particular concern in Darlington; discussed the increase in Stage 1 adopters which did not progress to Stage 2 and how this may have been affected by the Covid pandemic; discussed the investment in marketing to attract the correct adopters for the children in Darlington; and the resource and demand issues related to non-agency, step parent adoptions.

**RESOLVED** – That the Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report for 2020/21 be noted.

## **CYP20 DARLINGTON SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT**

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to enable Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny to receive and comment upon the Annual Report of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) for the period 2020/21.

It was reported that the Local Safeguarding Partnerships were 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 outlined what the Partnership had done over the period 2020/21, drawing upon a range of data and information to outline the progress made and illustrated the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements.

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

It was also highlighted that the Covid-19 Pandemic and the challenges posed to ensure children, young people and vulnerable adults were safeguarded had been the main focus throughout the year.

Particular reference was made to the multi-agency Critical Safeguarding Partnership Group which was established in response to the Government's emergency procedures and met weekly for the management and oversight of vulnerable children; and the sharing and learning between partners working closely and adapting ways of working to ensure that the most vulnerable were supported and safeguarded.

Members referred to domestic violence and the services provided, working closely with the police to understand the situation in Darlington and Anne assured Members that this was a priority area of the Partnership; discussed the increase in the number of children looked after in Darlington; and questioned the current position regarding Home Elective Education and if systems were in place to re-introduce those families who have elected to home educate back into schools if they so wished.

Members also discussed the safeguarding partners and the challenges of ensuring that all groups other than health, police and the local authority are represented and their voices heard. Ann acknowledged the work of this Scrutiny on the 'voice of the child' during the pandemic and confirmed that the final report of Members had been noted by the Partnership.

**RESOLVED** – That the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report for 2020/21 be noted.

## **CYP21 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21**

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an overview of the work by the Independent Reviewing Officer Service; and to consider the Annual Reports of the Independent Reviewing Officer for 2020/21 and the Child Protection Conference Chair for 2020/21.

It was highlighted that for the the whole of the period April 2020 – March 2021 the work undertaken by the Children's Safeguarding Unit had been under Covid-19 arrangements and in line with guidance, all formal meetings, which in previous years had been face to face, had

been conducted using virtual platforms.

The submitted report provided Members with an overview of the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service in relation to Looked After Children, including the Dispute Resolution Process and an overview of the performance of the unit in a range of responsibilities.

The submitted report also provided information on the role of the IRO's and statutory and non-statutory functions that the service is responsible for; the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans at 31 March; Child Protection Demographics; Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences and Children Protection Review Conferences; the percentage of subsequent plans; and highlighted the actions scheduled for 2021/22.

Members questions were in relation to the rising caseloads as a result of the increase in the number of Looked After Children; the welfare of the workforce; and the impact of home working on the workforce.

**RESOLVED** – That the annual reports of the Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chair for 2020/21 be noted.

## **CYP22 LEARNING AND SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on the performance of the Learning and Skills Service for academic year 2020/21; and to allow Scrutiny members an opportunity to challenge the performance of this externally funded service.

It was highlighted that the pandemic had impacted on the Learning and Skills service and delivery in a number of ways over the last two academic years; however staff had responded magnificently and continued to deliver throughout that time, making a very successful transition to online teaching and learning.

It was reported that the service's aim was to grow provision whilst continuing to respond to employer and community need; and outlined the challenges ahead.

Members discussed in particular the low take up of apprenticeships and the possible reasons for this; how the Service had been affected by the pandemic and the challenges faced; and Members expressed their concerns for the Learning and Skills service with the impact of the pandemic and the potential uncertainties of the Tees Valley Combined Authority devolved funding model diverging from what the rules and requirements were under the Education and Skills Funding Agency. It was also suggested that Cabinet be made aware of this Scrutiny Committee's concerns about the financial impact on learning and skills.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

## **CYP23 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1 2021/22**

The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.

The submitted report provided Quarter 1 (April 2021 to June 2021) performance information in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group and subsequently by each individual Scrutiny Committee.

The submitted report 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.

It was highlighted that 10.1 per cent of the children referred during Q1 had been re-referred to Children's Social Care within 12 months of a previous referral below the internal target of 18 per cent; Social workers completed 90.8 per cent of the Childrens and Families assessments within timescale, which remains higher than statistical neighbours, regional and national average benchmarks; 89.7 per cent of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held within 15 working days from the strategy meeting / section 47 being initiated, excluding transfer-in conferences which was below internal target however remained higher than our statistical neighbour, regional and national average benchmarks; 100 per cent of children with a Child Protection (CP) plan and 100 per cent of Children in Care (CiC) have an allocated social worker; during Q1 no child had ceased to be subject to a CP plan who had been subject to the plan for two or more years and continue to positively perform below the target of 5 per cent; the number of Children in Care (CiC) has decreased to 264 by the end of June 2021 (end of June 2020 (302)) and work continues to safely reduce the number of children coming into care; 90.5 per cent of statutory CiC visits were completed within timescale in line with the target of 90 per cent; 9.8 per cent of our Children in Care, as of June 2021, had three or more placements within the previous 12 months below internal target, our statistical neighbour, regional and national average benchmarks; 69.1 per cent of our Children in Care aged under 16 (who have been looked after for at least 2.5 years) have been in their current placement continuously for at least two years; 8.8 per cent of our Children in Care have been placed 20 or more miles away from home as of June 2021 below the target of 10 per cent; 86.4 per cent of the children, newly into care, were seen by CDDFT within 20 working days for an initial health assessment; 86.4 per cent of children due a review health assessment year to date had one completed; 21.7 per cent of Care Leavers were not in employment, education or training (NEET) which was positivity below target of 30 per; and 100.0 per cent were in suitable accommodation.

The areas highlighted for focus were in respect of referrals were screened and completed within 1 day during Q1 2021/22 were below the target of 90 per cent at 68.5 per cent and 9 per cent of the referrals took over three days to complete; at the end of June 2021, the percentage of children becoming subject to a CP plan for a second or subsequent time within two years of the previous plan ending was 14.3 per cent above the 6 per cent target, however, related to one family; 87.3 per cent of children received a statutory CP visit within 10 working days during Q1 below the target of 90 per cent; and 55.8 per cent of children due a dental check assessment year to date had one completed

**RESOLVED** – That the performance information reported for Quarter 1 2021/22 be noted.

## **CYP24 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Group Director of Operations 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.

The Chair advised Members that he, along with Councillor Renton, Chair of Economy and Resources had met with Paul Richardson, Head of Skills and Employability to discuss the position regarding youth unemployment in Darlington and were advised that a piece of work had already been commissioned by the Chief Executive which Seth Pearson, Chief Executive of Darlington Partnership was leading on.

**RESOLVED** – That the work programme be noted.