

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 December 2021

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS WAS NOT A FORMALLY CONSTITUTED MEETING

PRESENT – Councillors Crudass (Chair) , Ali, Mrs Culley, CLB Hughes, Renton, Snedker and Willis

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bell, Lucas and Sowerby; Carly Spence, John Armitage

ABSENT – Councillor Lister, Malcolm Frank, Maura Regan, Tim Fisher, Nick Lindsay and Janet Woodcock

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Clarke

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Allison Hill (Democratic Officer), Tony Murphy (Head of Education and Inclusion), Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Joanne Benson (Service Manager) and Martin Webster (Workforce Development Manager)

CYP25 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 OCTOBER 2021

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 25 October, 2021.

CYP26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP27 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 2 2021/22

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

The submitted report provided mid-year (July 2021 to September 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 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.

It was highlighted that 10.7 per cent of the children referred during this quarter had been re-referred to Children's Social Care within 12 months of a previous referral which was positively below the internal target of 18 per cent; 100 per cent of children with a Child

Protection (CP) plan, and 100 per cent of Children in Care (CiC) had an allocated social worker; 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 five per cent; the number of Children in Care (CiC) was 266 by the end of September 2021, which was a large reduction of 11.9 per cent when compared with the number of children at the end of September 2020 (302) and work continues to safely reduce the number of children coming into care; 92.9 per cent of statutory CiC visits were completed within timescale during Q2 above the target of 90 per cent; 9.8 per cent of our Children in Care, as of September 2021, had 3 or more placements within the previous 12 months and performance was positively below the internal target of 10 per cent; 69.8 per cent of Children in Care aged under 16 (who have been looked after for at least 2.5 years) had been in their current placement continuously for at least two years, in line with the internal target of 68 per cent; 8.3 per cent of Children in Care had been placed 20 or more miles away from home as of September 2021 below the target of 10 per cent; 93.7 per cent of children due a review health assessment year to date had one completed, which was above the target of 90 per cent; and 21.3 per cent of Care Leavers were not in employment, education or training (NEET) at the end of September 2021, which was positively below target of 30 per cent and 100.0 per cent were in suitable accommodation.

The areas highlighted for focus were in respect of Social workers completed 87.3 per cent of the C&F assessments within timescale during Q2 2021/22, which falls below the target of 90 per cent, although was higher than the 80.4 per cent for the same period last year; 78.8 per cent of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) were held within 15 working days from the strategy meeting / section 47 being initiated, excluding transfer-in conferences, by the end of Q2; 68.2 per cent of referrals were screened and completed within 1 day by the end of Q2, below the target of 90 per cent and 7.6 per cent of the referrals took over three days to complete; at the end of September 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 9.8 per cent, above the 6 per cent target, however this was a reduction from 14.3 per cent as at the end of Q1 2021/22; 87.1 per cent of children received a statutory CP visit within 10 working days during Q2 below the target of 90 per cent; and 75.7 per cent of children due a dental check assessment year to date had one completed, and although below the target of 90 per cent it was a significant improvement from 55.8 per cent as at the end of Q1 2021/22.

Members discussed in particular the challenges around the recruitment and retention of social workers which was noted as both a regional and national challenge and requested information on what the authority was doing to address the shortfall in social workers; questioned the current position regarding caseloads and were assured by the Assistant Director of Children's Services that caseloads were at a safe and manageable level; and noted the increase in missing from care and questioned what was being done by the authority to address this.

Members also questioned if the recommendations of the Munro Review of Child Protection and the subsequent recommendations in May 2011 were now in practice within this authority. The Assistant Director of Children's Services assured Members that over recent years there had been a move away from bureaucracy and procedure to focus more on families and practice alongside the Strengthening Families work in collaboration with Leeds City Council which aims to build connections and communities and the authority were moving in the right direction.

CYP28 UPDATE OF DEVELOPING DARLINGTON CARE COLLECTIVE

The Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Transformation submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on progress made with the Developing Darlington Care Collective (DDCC), linking MECC (Making Every Contact Count) brief intervention work.

The submitted report gave the background to the Collective and the key achievements throughout 2021 with the focus on collaborative working and the key aims and plans of the Developing Darlington Care Collective for 2022 which included the key priority the workforce.

Martin Webster, the Workforce Development Manager gave a presentation on the Developing Darlington Care Collective and also outlined the plans to support all aspects of recruitment, retention, training, progression and destination by the launch of the 'Darlington Xtra' microsite and associated platforms that support the implementation of the DDCC and also gave Members a brief demonstration of the site and its content.

CYP29 CHILDREN'S CENTRE SERVICES REPORT

The Assistant Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) at the request of Members to provide an update on the position in relation to services offered for young parents during and post Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions.

It was reported that the Building Stronger Families Service for Darlington Borough Council based at McNay Street Children's Centre, prior to the start of the Covid 19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in March 2020, offered a high level of support by way of targeted delivery through early help assessments and universal groups focusing on parents' mental health, practical skills, and children's development.

Parents to be and new parents were able to attend a range of groups across the town, including a pre and post birth group for teenage parents, with midwives working with teenage parents on hand to conduct antenatal checks and several groups aimed at babies up to 12 months and their parents, focussing on parents' well-being and helping them to promote the development of their babies in all areas.

Unfortunately, once the working from home directive came from Government, and the centres were closed, all these group closed as well however it was reported that work immediately began to try to get as many of these services online and the Children's Centre Facebook page became somewhere to access advice and guidance, as well as practitioners delivering live and pre-recorded sessions on child development, behaviour management and other related issues; and over the summer of 2021 the groups run from the children's centre began to re-open with Covid 19 safe measures in place from July, with the bulk re-opening in September 2021.

Members discussed the importance of interaction with children and parent through playgroups and other informal networks and that this connection may have been lost during the pandemic and questioned how these links were being continued.

Joanne Benson, the Service Manager, Building Stronger Families advised Members of the methods of communication and media plans in place to link in to all these groups to support families and to reach out to those hard to reach families.

CYP30 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 was making arrangements for Members to meet informally via Microsoft Teams with the Darlington Youth Partnership and Council of Schools Councils; and Shona Duncan, Head of Education, Employment and Skills, Tees Valley Combined Authority had agreed to make a joint presentation to this Scrutiny and Economy and Resources Scrutiny on the funding allocation for our authority and where the education funding is being focused.

Others areas suggested by Members to examine further included young people who were currently out of school and how to get those children back into education; access to education for children in care; and school meals for primary school aged children.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services also advised that he would provide Members with information on a number of key changes in terms of intervention and support for those children who are 'missing from care' at a future meeting.