

COUNCIL
29 SEPTEMBER 2022

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 2021/22

2. Members Annually receive a report on the progress and performance of the Designated Officer for the period April 2021 to March 2022 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 person 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 2021/22 the Designated Officer service received a total of 237 contacts in respect of allegations representing an 24 per cent increase in the number of contacts received in 2020/21; and of the total number of contacts received 59 allegations progressed to an Initial Evaluation Meeting (IEM). However, the increase in the number of Initial Evaluation Meetings was mainly a consequence of the introduction of meetings held remotely via Microsoft Teams during the Covid-19 pandemic and meetings held in this way proved very popular with practitioners and greatly improved attendance at meetings.
6. Members noted that of the contacts made in 2021/22 the main category for referral was allegations of physical abuse, which represented an increase of 9 per cent on last year's figures within this category. Other categories of allegation were emotional, sexual abuse, neglect and other incidents occurred in private lives of individuals.
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.
8. We were particular interested to learn what processes were in place for the Designated Officer to be notified about any referrals from education settings and if Officers were confident that there were sufficient procedures in place within schools to report incidents.
9. The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion confirmed that he was confident that there were sufficient policies and procedures in place as to what organisations should do

when an allegation is made and specifically in relation to schools, he advised that the service proactively briefs them on any legislative changes.

10. We also requested further information on non-substantiated cases and how those were dealt with and the reasons for these cases not reducing.

Children and Young People Public Health Overview

11. We received an annual update of the Children and Young People Public Health interventions and programs.
12. The Healthy Lifestyles Survey has been delivered for the past 12 years with a total of up to 8,624 pupils across 33 primary and secondary schools completing the survey annually; the survey of 2021 was the first full survey completed following the pandemic and included some specific topics and questions that had been developed and agreed by young people, schools and other professionals to reflect the impact of the pandemic on young people
13. The Child Health Profile is produced annually by Public Health England (now Office of Health Improvement and Disparities OHID) for every local authority area in England and the profile for Darlington this year when compared to the England averages showed that the health and wellbeing of children in Darlington was mixed.
14. Some key indicators such as breastfeeding, smoking in pregnancy and obesity were worse compared to England; however, other indicators such as vaccination uptake, admission to hospital for common health conditions being better or similar when compared to England.
15. The 0-19 Service, provided by Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, continues to perform well, achieving well against the statutory and contract performance targets and the service continues to receive positive feedback from parents and carers and other users of the service.
16. The Service has also continued innovative work in relation to infant feeding and introduced new interventions and continued work with schools including a new 'drop in' offer to schools post pandemic as well as close working and liaison with specialist mental health teams in Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Mental Health Trust.
17. Our questions to the Public Health Specialist related in particular to smoking and vaping among our young people; increasing obesity rates locally compared to the national average; and how Public Health comment on future use in terms of planning applications for takeaways within Darlington; and how the Healthy Lifestyles Survey is completed within schools to ensure that the survey was representative of all schools within the borough.
18. In response the Public Health Specialist advised Members that the function of Public Health was to advise on all policies although in relation to planning there were limitations on the Director of Public Health intervention by national legislation.

19. The Chair and Members offered their thanks to Public Health for all their efforts to tackle these issues and appreciate it is a struggle but something that must be done if we are to make a difference to the health of your young people.

Self-Assessment Overview

20. Members received the Annual Self- Assessment for Children’s Services to enable challenge to and drive improvement in public services.
21. 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.
22. 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.
23. Members questioned how progress on quality is measured; how the voice of the Social Workers working with children is captured; and how the authority plan to deal with the future effect of fuel costs on Care Centres and Foster Carers.
24. The Assistant Director Children’s Services acknowledged that this may have an impact on Foster Carers considering their current position and advised that there was work on going with existing carers also for potential barriers due to the economic uncertainty and also as a result of the recent pandemic.
25. We will continue to 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.

Work Programme

26. Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during 2021/22, and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.
27. We plan to re-examine the recommendations made following the review on the Effects of the Pandemic on our Children and Young People and examine the current situation.

Councillor Paul Crudass
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee