

COUNCIL
24 NOVEMBER 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.

Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2021/22

2. We received the Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) Annual Report for 2021/22 outlining the work that had been undertaken across the Tees Valley during the period 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022.
3. There had been slightly lower levels of adoption activity overall within this year, with numbers of children being placed with adoptive parents reducing from 82 in the previous year to 78 in this year, however this position is reflected nationally with fewer children with an adoption plan and Placement Order during this year.
4. In Darlington we were advised that there were 17 children with a Placement Order not yet placed, however 16 of these were already linked with prospective adopters.
5. However, there had been a significant improvement in the timeliness of finding a family and matching with adoptive parents with ATV reducing the average timescale by 64 days to 174 days so for many children in this region, we are finding families and helping children to achieve permanence via adoption more quickly.
6. We discussed the governance arrangements of the Board with Vicky Davidson-Boyd, Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley and were assured that governance arrangements were working well in Darlington and that there was full representation at Board meetings by representatives of this authority.
7. A significant legal ruling, the Somerset Judgement which took place in November 2021 has impacted adoption activity nationally and locally and caused delays in some children being matched and placed and led to a significant re-examination of the medical advice provided to the Agency Decision Makers in coming to their decision that adoption is the Local Authority plan for the child.
8. The Service has also been awarded the Coram BAAF Early Permanence Quality Mark in recognition of meeting the standards and criteria for this award.
9. The report highlighted adoption activities carried out which included marketing campaigns to promote need; data in relation to recruitment and assessment of adopters; and delivery of the Preparation to Adopt Training courses.
10. We were also provided with statistical data on children referred, referrals by Local Authority and Agency Decisions that Adoption is the child's plan and Placement Orders,

Children Matched and Placed, Early Permanence, Adoption Orders granted, characteristics of children adopted, children waiting for placement, timescales for adoption and disruptions was also contained within the submitted report; and advised that in February 2022 the ATV had been invited to be a pilot Regional Adoption Agency for a new Adoption Support Audit

Learning and Skills Annual Report 2021/22

11. Consideration was given to the annual update on the performance of the Learning and Skills Service for the academic year 2021/22 allowing us an opportunity consider performance and to challenge this externally funded service.
12. We were provided with details of the Learning and Skills Service; learner numbers; funding information; performance data; learner progression data; learner and employer satisfaction rates; observation of learning, teaching and assessment; the impact of covid on the service; the Ofsted inspection outcome; and the challenges that are faced by the service going forward.
13. The pandemic has had an impact on the Learning and Skills service and delivery and still continues to do so by impacting both learner numbers and subsequent income however, despite these challenges the staff have responded magnificently and continued to deliver a successful transition to online teaching and learning when needed and the service was inspected by Ofsted in June 2022 retaining its assessment of 'Good' overall.
14. We discussed with the Head of Skills and Employability the work currently being undertaken by the Tees Valley Combined Authority skills strategy 'Inspiring our Future' to examine skills need and flexibility around funding to develop skills; the current skills shortages in certain areas of business, in particular catering and retail; the reluctance from young people to take up apprenticeships and to engage; and the effect of larger businesses in the town on the overall recruitment issues.

Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2022/23

15. Children's Services Quarter 1 (April to June 2022) performance information was presented to the October meeting which highlighted the following areas of good practice:
 - (a) 79.6 per cent of referrals were screened and completed within one day during Quarter 1 (Q1) 2022/23 and a continuing improvement when compared with previous quarters with a small number of referrals which took over three working days to be completed in Q1 (1.9 per cent) which was an improvement on 5.6 per cent for the same period last year and is within our threshold of 5 per cent;
 - (b) 16.1 per cent of the children referred during Q1 had been re-referred to Children's Social Care within 12 months of a previous referral, which was below the threshold of 18 per cent and an improvement on the same period last year;
 - (c) 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;

- (d) 100 per cent of children with a Child Protection (CP) plan, and 98.8 per cent of Children in Care (CiC) had their reviews completed within timescale;
- (e) there were 273 Children in our care at the end of June 2022, excluding the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (7) which was just above the number of Children in Care (CiC) in June 2021 (264) and below that in June 2020 (291);
- (f) 25.0 per cent of the children ceasing to be in our care did so due to return home to their parents, 20.0 per cent had a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / Child Arrangement Order (CAO) granted to a relative and 15.0 per cent were adopted;
- (g) 89.1 per cent of statutory CiC visits were completed within timescale during Q1 which was in line with the target of 90 per cent;
- (h) 10.4 per cent of our Children in Care, as at June 2022, have had three or more placements within the previous 12 months which was in line with the internal target of 10 per cent;
- (i) 67.0 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 as at June 2022;
- (j) 6.5 per cent of our Children in Care have needed to be placed 20 or more miles away from home as of June 2022 which was positive performance and below target of 10 per cent;
- (k) 19.6 per cent of Care Leavers were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) which was positivity below target of 30 per cent and 98.2 per cent of care leavers were in suitable accommodation; and
- (l) 60.7 per cent of our care leavers were in training or employment (30.4 per cent in full time, 30.3 per cent in part time) as of June 2022, and 19.7 per cent were engaging in education (5.4 per cent of which are in studies beyond A level).

16. Areas highlighted for focus were in respect of:

- (a) 79.0 per cent of Children and Families assessments were completed within timescale in Quarter 1 (Q1) 2022/23 which was below Q1 2021/22 performance of 90.4 per cent in timescale, however, that was with 58.3 per cent less assessments needing to be completed as we continued to see a rise in assessments required;
- (b) 75.0 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, during Q1 which showed a dip in Darlington's performance this quarter and it was reported that additional processes had been put in place to address this;
- (c) at the end of June 2022, the percentage of children becoming subject to a Child Protection plan (CP) for a second or subsequent time within two years of the previous

plan ending was 25.0 per cent, above the 6 per cent target, however, related to two families;

- (d) at the end of June 2022, 8.3 per cent of children ceased to be subject to a CP plan in Q1 after being subject to the plan for two or more years and the plans had been confirmed as appropriately opened for this length of time;
- (e) 73.2 per cent of children received a statutory CP visit within 10 working days during Q1 with a further 14.3 per cent of visits taking place one or two days outside this and below the target of 90 per cent; and
- (f) 28.8 per cent of children due a health review during Q1 and 19.2 per cent due a dental check assessment had had one completed.

SEND Written Statement of Action

- 17. Scrutiny received an update on the Ofsted/CQC Inspection carried out between January and 1 February 2022, on the provision of Special Educational Needs (SEND) support in Darlington and the subsequent development of a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to address the two areas of weakness identified across Darlington.
- 18. The inspection was to see how well the area had put in place the changes across all services that the Children and Families Act 2014 requires for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families; and in particular it assessed how well Darlington Borough Council, Schools, Academy Trusts and all parts of the Health Service identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, as well as the outcomes they achieve.
- 19. We will be receiving regular updates on the implementation of the action plan and to monitor progress made.

Childcare Sufficiency Task and Finish Review Group Final Report

- 20. I presented the findings and recommendation of the Task and Finish Review Group established by this Scrutiny Committee to gain a better understanding of childcare sufficiency with the borough and the barriers to the provision of childcare provision.
- 21. Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny agreed that Cabinet be requested to approve assistance in communicating the availability of jobs in the childcare sector and to make local Members of Parliament aware of the concerns highlighted in the final report of the Review Group with regard to the provision of sufficient childcare to meet the needs of our families.

Work Programme

22. Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during 2022/23, and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

Councillor Paul Crudass
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee