

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Monday, 31 October 2022

**PRESENT** – Councillors Crudass (Chair), Ali, C L B Hughes, L Hughes, Johnson, Lucas, Snedker and Willis

**STATUTORY CO-OPTees** – None

**NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees** – John Armitage and Sally Hudson

**APOLOGIES** –Carly Stonier,

**ABSENT** – Councillors Bell, Preston and Sowerby; Malcolm Frank, Maura Regan, Tim Fisher and Janet Woodcock

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Vicky Davidson-Boyd (Adoption Tees Valley)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion) and Paul Richardson (Head of Skills and Employability) and Allison Hill (Democratic Officer)

**CYP15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

**CYP16 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2022**

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2022.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2022 be approved as a correct record.

**CYP17 ADOPTION TEES VALLEY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**

Vicky Davidson-Boyd, Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley presented the Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) Annual Report for 2021/22 and outlined the work that had been undertaken across the Tees Valley during the period 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022.

Adoption Tees Valley is 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 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; and the regional picture was reflected nationally, with fewer children with an adoption plan and Placement Order during this year.

It was also reported that there had been a significant improvement in the timeliness of moving in with adoptive parents in 2021/22 and ATV had improved on its own timeliness since last year and also the timeliness of finding a family and matching with adoptive parents had also improved with ATV reducing the average timescale by 64 days to 174 days.

The submitted report outlined the governance arrangements of the Board which comprised of the Directors for Children's Services of the five Local Authorities within the partnership; highlighted the Somerset Ruling, a significant legal ruling in relation to adoption cases which took place in November 2021, having a significant impact on adoption activity nationally and locally; and outlined the National Adoption Strategy 2021 which set out an overarching strategic vision for adoption aimed at a consistent England wide offer to children and families.

The submitted report also set out adoption activities carried out which included marketing campaigns to promote need; data in relation to recruitment and assessment of adopters; delivery of the Preparation to Adopt Training courses.

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.

It was reported that the Adoption Panel had appointed a new Panel Manager and Advisor and the report of the Adoption Panel Chair was detailed in the Annual Report; detailed adoption support as a key strategic priority; highlighted that in February 2022 the ATV had been invited to be a pilot Regional Adoption Agency for a new Adoption Support Audit; and gave details of therapeutic and educational support .

The submitted report also provided details of Non-Agency Adoptions; staffing; quality assurance; finance and funding information; and outlined the future development plans for the ATV.

Members questions related to how the service support and work with birth families when a child is taken into care; timeliness of Placement Orders and in particular those relating to complex cases; sought reassurance that governance arrangements were working well and there was full representation at Board meetings by representatives of this authority; asked for clarification on the definition of Disruptive Placements; questioned the relationship between officers of this council and the ATV and were assured that there was a good working relationship; requested information on funding opportunities for the ATV; and discussed future plans for the recruitment of prospective adopters, the impact of the pandemic and cost of living increases on the service; and recruitment plans for a more diverse Adoption Panel membership.

**RESOLVED** – That the Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report for 2021/22 be noted.

## **CYP18 LEARNING AND SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an annual update on the performance of the Learning and Skills Service for the academic year 2021/22; and to allow Scrutiny members an opportunity to challenge the performance of this externally funded service.

The submitted report provided 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 ahead.

It was highlighted that the pandemic had impacted on the Learning and Skills service and delivery and still continued to do so by impacting both learner numbers and subsequent income although staff had responded magnificently and continued to deliver a successful transition to online teaching and learning when needed.

It was also reported that the service's aim was to grow provision whilst continuing to respond to employer and community need; and the service was inspected by Ofsted in June 2022 retaining its assessment of 'Good' overall.

Members discussed in particular the work 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 skills shortages in certain areas of business including catering and retail; the reluctance from young people to take up apprenticeships and the impact of removal of the Level 2 qualification; the effect of larger businesses in the town on the overall recruitment issues; encouraging young people to engage; the Tees Valley initiative to encourage businesses to plan and invest in training for their existing employees, including contingency planning; the Government White Paper 'Skills for jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth' published in January 2021 aimed at reviewing further education funding systems; and the Youth Friendly Darlington webpage and press release to reduce youth unemployment.

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

## **CYP19 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1 2022/23**

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 Quarter 1 (April 2022 to June 2022) 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 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; 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; 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; 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; 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) and work continues to safely reduce the number of children coming into care;

It was also highlighted that 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; 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; 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; 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; 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; 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 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).

Areas highlighted for improvement were in relation to 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; 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; 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; 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; 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 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.

Members discussed in particular the recent negative OFSTED Inspections of two Children's Homes and the impact of these and how it was being managed; and the information in relation to the number of missing episodes in Q1.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services responded to Members on their concerns and in relation to Children's Homes advised Scrutiny that a full review was being undertaken and would be reported to Members at a future date.

**RESOLVED** – That the performance information reported for Quarter 1 2022/23 be noted.

#### **CYP20 SEND WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION**

The Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Scrutiny Members with 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) also previously circulated.

It was reported that 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.

It was also reported that although the inspection was not graded a detailed letter was produced which identified a number of strengths in the local area, however also highlighted two areas of significant weakness identified across Darlington which were detailed in the report.

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion advised Members of the Scrutiny that since the inspection there had been a lot of work undertaken locally and will continue to update Members on the implementation and progress of the action plan.

**RESOLVED** – That the report and Written Statement of Action be noted.

#### **CYP21 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY TASK AND FINISH REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

The Chair of the Childcare Sufficiency Task and Finish Review Group submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update on the findings and recommendation of the 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.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee approved the submitted report with an amendment to paragraph 8 and 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 submitted report with regard to the provision of sufficient childcare to meet the needs of our families.

**RESOLVED** – That the Scrutiny Committee approve the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Review Group and agree that the report be submitted to Cabinet.

**CYP22 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.

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