

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 19 December 2022

PRESENT – Councillors Crudass (Chair), Ali, C L B Hughes and Willis

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Sally Hudson

APOLOGIES – Councillors L Hughes, Lucas and Snedker; Carly Stonier, John Armitage

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Ann Baxter, Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

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

CYP23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP24 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 31 OCTOBER 2022

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 31 October 2022.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 31 October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

CYP25 DARLINGTON SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) for Members to consider and comment on the Annual Report of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) for the period 2021/22.

It was reported that Local Safeguarding Partnerships are 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 summarised and reflected on the work of the Partnership over the period 2021/22, drawing upon a range of data and information, to outline the progress made and to illustrate the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements across Darlington; and highlighted that the Covid-19 Pandemic had continued to pose a significant challenge throughout the year ensuring children, young people and vulnerable adults were safeguarded.

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

A Member questioned the current scrutiny arrangements following the revised Partnership Governance arrangements and the subsequent exclusion of schools and external bodies and how the new arrangements were working. Ann expressed some concern over the changes to the legislation regarding the exclusion of education but advised that during the pandemic arrangements had been strengthened with schools and there had been improved engagement with the education sectors, however felt that there had been some loss of voice from the wider partners.

Ann advised Members that the Children's MASH Operational Group focused on a number of key themes being seen through the Children's Front Door and that engagement was one of the areas highlighted for the multi agency group meetings. It was also proposed that an elected member from this Scrutiny Committee be invited to attend the multi-agency meeting.

The Independent Chair also advised Members that she had attended Primary and Secondary Heads meetings to address any concerns, however did acknowledged that over this reporting period, and as a consequence of covid, direct contact with young people had been missed.

The 11-19 Partnership representative confirmed that education colleagues were satisfied with the front door service, however also felt that education should be a statutory partner as some of the most vulnerable young people were in schools.

Discussed also ensued on the Gypsy Roma Travelling (GRT) Community and Members sought reassurance that the voices of the traveller families were being heard, especially in relation to education. Ann confirmed that the Elective Home Education (EHE) advisor worked closely with the GRT Education Service and that this was also an area of focus for the multi agency group.

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion advised that Darlington was one of a few local authorities that maintained a GRT Education Service and that 50 per cent of EHE were from the GRT community.

RESOLVED – That the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report for 2021/22 be noted.

CYP26 OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICES (ILACS)

The Assistant Director of Children's Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to update Members on the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in Darlington.

It was reported that between 10 and 21 October 2022 a full inspection of Children's Services in Darlington was completed by Ofsted and was the first inspection of this kind since 2018 when services were found to Require Improvement.

The inspection led to an overall grading for the service, as well as specific gradings for Help and Protection, Services to Children in Care and Care Leavers and for Leadership and Management.

It was reported that Good ratings were received for the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families, the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and overall effectiveness; and an Outstanding rating for the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers.

Discussion ensued on the report and Members agreed that it was an excellent report recognising the strengths and improvement across all areas within Children's Services and acknowledged the hard work since the last inspection to achieve the Good rating overall.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services advised Members that timeliness of assessments and workforce stability and recruitment were priorities going forward and acknowledged Scrutiny feedback which continues to hold the service to account and help drive improvement.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the ILASC report and observations of the Ofsted Inspectors be noted.

CYP27 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 2 2022/2023

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 Quarter2 (Q2) (July to September 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 84.4 per cent of referrals were screened and completed within 1 day during Q2 and although below the target of 90 per cent, this was a continuing improvement when compared with previous quarters; 15.3 per cent of the children referred during Q2 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 98.9 per cent of Children in Care (CiC) had their reviews completed within timescale; no child ceased to be subject to a CP plan during Q2 who had been subject to the plan for two or more years, positively reducing the cumulative performance measure to below the target of 5 per cent to 4.7 per cent; as of September 2022, no child open to CP had been on their plan for more than 18 months; and no child became subject to a CP plan for a second or subsequent time within two years of the previous plan ending during Q2 positivity reducing the cumulative performance measure lower to 8.1 per cent.

It was reported that 286 Children were in care at the end of September 2022, 13 of which were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children compared to 273 children, excluding UASC, in care at the end of September 2022, an increase from 266 at the end of September 2021 but a decrease from 302 at the end of September 2020; 24.2 per cent of the children ceasing to be in care did so due to being adopted, 42.3 per cent had a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / Child Arrangement Order (CAO) granted to a relative and 12.1 per cent returned home to their parent; 72.4 per cent of children due a review health assessment and 40.7 per cent of Children in Care that were due a dental check assessment by September 2022 had had one completed; the percentage of children who had refused their medical checks had positively decreased throughout the year, with 5.7 per cent refusing their health review and 1.9 per cent refusing their dental review.

In relation to Care Leavers it was reported that 19.6 per cent of our care Leavers, aged 19-21 and 19.6 per cent of our care leavers, aged 22-25, years were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) which was positivity below target of 30 per cent; 98.2 per cent of care leavers aged 19-21 and 96.1 per cent aged 22-25, were in suitable accommodation; and 58.9 per cent of our care leavers, aged 19-21 and 68.6 per cent of our care leavers, aged 22-25 were in training or employment as of September 2022, and 21.4 per cent of those aged 19-21 were engaging in education, 10.7 per cent in studies beyond A level with 11.8 per cent of those aged 22-25 years also engaging in education; and 7.8 per cent were in studies beyond A level.

Areas highlighted for improvement were in relation to Children and Families Assessments, 68.1 per cent of assessments had been completed within timescale in Q2, however there had been a reduction in the timeliness of the written aspect of the assessments, although there was an increase in the number of assessments required compared to previous quarters; 87.2 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 Q2 2022/23. Although we are below the internal target of 95%, this is an improvement on the timeliness seen in Q1 2022/23 (75.0 per cent) and Q2 2021/22 (78.8 per cent) both of which saw less conferences being held during the quarter; 62.2 per cent of children received a statutory CP visit within 10 working days during Q2 which was negatively below the internal target of 90 per cent; and 85.2 per cent of statutory CiC visits were completed within timescale during Q2 which was negatively below the internal target of 90 per cent.

It was also highlighted that 11.9 per cent of Children in Care, as of September 2022 had had three or more placements within the previous 12 months, which was negatively above our internal target (10 per cent); 63.3 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 as of September 2022, which was negatively below our internal target (68 per cent); and 11.1 per cent of Children in Care had needed to be placed 20 or more miles away from home as of September 2022 which was negatively above the target of 10 per cent, but all placements had been confirmed by team managers to be appropriate for the child enabling them to have the best support either with family links or specialised care.

Discussion ensued on the concerns around placement stability and the availability of long term placements; and Members discussed the challenges anticipated as a consequence of the cost of living crisis and Christmas and that more families will be in need of help in the new year.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services referred to the ongoing issue of recruitment and retention of Foster Carers and advised Members of discussions ongoing for a regional approach to fostering and recruitment. He also advised Members of a review of Children's residential services which was to be reported on at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the performance information reported for quarter 2 be noted.

CYP28 THE REFRESHED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES PLAN 2023-2028

The Assistant Director of Commissioning, Performance and Transformation submitted a report (previously circulated) for consideration by this Scrutiny Committee on the proposals for the refreshed Children and Young People's Plan 2023-28.

RESOLVED – That this item be deferred until the next ordinary meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 27 February 2023.

CYP29 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.