

**COUNCIL**  
**23 MARCH 2023**

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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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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.

**Childcare Sufficiency Review 2022/23**

2. Members considered the findings of the 2022-23 Childcare Sufficiency Review.
3. Local authorities are required by the Department for Education's 'Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities June 2018' to ensure sufficient childcare as far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 or up to 18 for disabled children; and to report annually to elected Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents.
4. The childcare market in Darlington is made up of private day nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, out of school clubs, nursery schools and nursery units and prior to March 2020, was fairly stable and the parental take-up rates of the various entitlements was predictable however since the pandemic the picture had become more complex and less predictable.
5. The most up-to-date census data showed that the total supply of pre-school places (FTE) in the borough in Spring 2022 was 2,476 and the demand for pre-school places (number of children) was 1,719 therefore there was no overall lack of childcare sufficiency in the borough.
6. However, feedback from the childcare sector was that registered holiday provision (not run by schools) was experiencing a decline in take-up and it was unclear yet whether hybrid working was affecting take-up and there had been a slight increase in the number of school registered out of school and breakfast clubs.
7. It was also noted that local providers had indicated that recruitment and retention remained an issue in a Childcare Recruitment and Retention survey carried out October 2021; and during 2022 early years funding audits had taken place with 13 of the 27 day nurseries and pre-schools in the borough where Managers also confirmed that recruitment and retention were affecting their business.
8. We continue to work with the sector through the Early Years Education Strategy Group and support continues to be provided to the childcare sector and two Members of that Group, Ella Long from the Play Hut Day Nursery and Amanda Summers from All Saints

Blackwell Pre School attended our Scrutiny meeting on 27 February to give their views on childcare sufficiency.

9. Members questioned how the Council can help raise awareness of the support and assistance available to families and in particular to promote Tax Free Childcare which in a mini survey of parents/carers at Beaumont Hill Academy revealed that 62 per cent of respondents said they had not heard of schemes to support childcare costs such as Tax Free Childcare and the Universal Credit Childcare Offer.
10. We also discussed the increased costs of living and the effect on both families and the childcare sector; the on-going difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff within the sector and what was being done within the authority to promote childcare as a career; the reducing numbers of childminders which was a national issue; discussed the general underfunding within childcare; and we raised our concerns at the costs of childcare for those children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) and the difficulties the childcare sector have in accessing SEND funding.
11. We agreed with the priorities for the Local Authority to continue to provide parents with up to date information about financial assistances towards children care costs, including any available tax credits; to work with settings and other interested stakeholders to continually improve the quality of care and make settings/activities more inclusive; and to assist childcare providers by providing information on matters relating to funding and sustainability.

### **Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2021/22**

12. Members considered the Annual Reports of the Independent Reviewing Officer for 2021/22 and the Child Protection Conference Chair for 2021/22.
13. These annual reports provide us with an overview of the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service in relation to Looked After Children and Children who are the subject of Child Protection Conferences and / or multi-agency Child Protection Plans.
14. It was highlighted that for the period April 2021 – March 2022, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, formal meetings, which in previous years would have been face to face, had been conducted using virtual platforms. This applied to all Child Protection Conferences, Child Looked After Review, and most of the contact with children, young people, and their families.
15. We discussed the actions for 2022/23 and the ways in which the authority plan to increase the number of children who attend their Child Looked After Review; discussed advocacy services available for Children Looked After and in particular how the

authority planned to increase uptake of advocacy services for those children and young people who were subject of Child Protection Conferences; and the improvements to the Independent Reviewing Officer footprint since the 2018 Ofsted inspection by the introduction of the Liquid Logic system.

### **The Refreshed Children and Young Peoples Plan 2023-2028**

16. We considered the proposals for the refreshed Children and Young People's Plan 2023 – 2028, a strategic plan for delivering outcomes for children and young people and the setting of priorities for the medium term.
17. It was noted that although the plan was no longer a statutory requirement, the production of such a plan was considered to be best practice and the refreshed CYPP will be completed and launched in Spring 2023. Progress against the refreshed CYPP will be managed through the Health and Well Being Board.
18. Members supported the Plan and acknowledged the key themes of the Plan drawn from feedback with face to face consultation with local schools and colleges, the Darlington Youth Partnership, the Youth Member of Parliament and engagement with key stakeholders which included children and young people's mental health and wellbeing; cyber bullying and suicide rates; the impact of young people awaiting a diagnosis for autism from the CAMHS service; and child poverty and the impact of hardship on families and their children.

### **Work Programme**

19. 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**