

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 27 February 2023

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

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

APOLOGIES – Carly Stonier, John Armitage and Sally Hudson.

ABSENT – Councillors Ali, Bell, Lucas, Preston, Sowerby, Maura Regan, Tim Fisher and Janet Woodcock.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Ella Long, The Play Hut Day Nursery and Amanda Summers, All Saints Blackwell Pre- School (Members of the Darlington Early Years Education Strategy).

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion), Christine Shields (Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation), Helen Ellison (Head of Education Partnerships), Martin Graham (Head of Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement) and Allison Hill (Democratic Officer).

CYP32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP33 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 DECEMBER AND THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON 9 JANUARY 2023

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 19 December 2022 and the Special Meeting held on 9 January 2023.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 19 December 2022 and the Special Meeting held on 9 January 2023 be approved as a correct record.

CYP34 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY REVIEW 2022/23

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform Members of the findings of the 2022-23 Childcare Sufficiency Review.

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.

It was reported that the childcare market in Darlington was made up of private day nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, out of school clubs, nursery schools and nursery units. Prior to March 2020, Darlington's childcare market 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.

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. There is no overall lack of childcare sufficiency in the borough however it was noted that this supply may vary across wards.

It was also reported that 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; there had been a slight increase in the number of school registered out of school and breakfast clubs; the number of registered childminders had declined by 19 per cent since Autumn 2021; from Spring 2022, some private day nurseries had reported an increase in demand for baby places; and there had been a drop in the take-up rate for 2 year olds accessing an Early Years Entitlement place in the Summer 2022 term and a decline in children accessing a Universal Entitlement place in Autumn 2022.

The local authority continued to work with the sector through the Early Years Education Strategy Group and support continued to be provided to the childcare sector via: regular guidance up-dates, virtual and face to face network meetings, public health provider briefings, monthly drop in sessions with public health, a group for early years leads in schools, virtual inclusion panels and individualised support around transitions, setting link officers and an Early Years newsletter.

Additionally, a childcare sufficiency task group meets regularly which includes colleagues from Economic Growth, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS), Darlington Association on Disability (DAD), Jobcentre Plus, Learning & Skills, Darlington Families' Information Service and Children's Centres.

It was also reported that local providers had indicated that recruitment and retention was an issue in a Childcare Recruitment and Retention survey which was 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.

In October 2022, the Early Years Team attended the Darlington Jobs Fair to promote childcare as a career and also to ensure people were aware that if they needed childcare to enable them to work, there was help available with childcare costs, such as Families' Tax Credit.

Ella long from The Play Hut Day Nursery and Amanda Summers from All Saints Blackwell Pre School attended the meeting to share their views and also on the work they are involved with as part of the Darlington Early Years Education Strategy.

Members questioned how the Council can help raise awareness of the support and assistance available to families and discussed the on-going work to promote assistance with the cost of childcare and Early Years Entitlements and in particular 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.

Members also discussed the increased costs of living and its 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 and discussed the various reasons for the decline in numbers; discussed the general underfunding within childcare; and Members raised their concerns at the costs of childcare for those children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) and the difficulties in accessing SEND funding.

Members 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.

RESOLVED – That the information the findings of the 2022-23 Childcare Sufficiency Review be noted.

CYP35 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22 AND THE CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE CHAIR ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an overview of the work by the Independent Reviewing Officer Service in relation to Looked After Children and Children who are the subject of Child Protection Conferences and / or multi-agency Child Protection Plans; and to consider the Annual Reports of the Independent Reviewing Officer for 2021/22 and the Child Protection Conference Chair for 2021/22.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2021/22 was a requirement under the statutory guidance and covers the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer which is a defined role that relates to Children Looked After; and the Child Protection Conference Chair Annual Report 2021/22 covers the role of the conference chair in relation to children who are in need of safeguarding and the statutory requirements are set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018).

It was highlighted that for the period April 2021 to 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.

The submitted report also provided information on the role of the IRO's, the statutory and

non-statutory functions that the service is responsible for; outlined the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans at 31 March; management and quality assurance; workload allocation; training and development; registration and accreditation; and highlighted the actions scheduled for 2022/23.

Members 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.

RESOLVED – That the annual reports of the Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chair for 2021/22 be noted.

CYP36 THE REFRESHED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES PLAN 2023-2028

The Assistant Director of Commissioning, Performance and Transformation submitted a report (previously circulated) to consider the proposals for the refreshed Children and Young People's Plan 2023 – 2028.

It was reported that although the plan was no longer a statutory requirement, the production of a Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) as a strategic plan for delivering outcomes for children and young people and the setting of priorities for the medium term was considered to be best practice.

It was noted that the development of the refreshed five-year Plan had taken place with input from a wide range of stakeholders including children and young people; young carers; health; police; the voluntary sector, and schools; and the Plan will need to be delivered within existing resources, maximising partnership working to deliver the refreshed Plan, and use every opportunity, where possible, to attract additional funding.

The refreshed CYPP will be completed and launched in Spring 2023 and progress against the refreshed CYPP will be managed through the Health and Well Being Board.

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.

RESOLVED – That the proposals for the refreshed Children and Young People's Plan 2023 – 2028 be noted.

CYP37 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.