

**COUNCIL
20 JULY 2023**

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.

Performance Indicators Quarter 2 2022/23

2. The Committee received a report which provided Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators, in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group, and subsequently by each individual Scrutiny Committee. The report also highlighted where Children's Services were performing well and where there was a need to improve.
3. Members were keen to discover the extent of staff turnover in Children's Services, and the impact that this had on performance. Members were advised that staff turnover was consistent with the rates across the region, and anecdotally mirrored the national picture.
4. We were also interested to learn more in relation to those Children in Care who needed to be placed 20 or miles away from home, and questioned whether the reason for need was captured. Members were advised that this indicator covered a relatively small number of children.

The Government Response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care

5. The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report to the Committee to provide Members with a summary of the Government Response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, entitled "Stable Homes, Built with Love".
6. Members recognised that, whilst it was preferable that children remained with birth parents, or be placed with wider family, families should not always be considered safe spaces for children, and were keen to discover more about how the Council ensured that extended families provided safe spaces.
7. Members noted that, in relation to the six pillars outlined within the response, it was pleasing to learn that the Council had initiatives in place to address each. Members

were particularly interested in hearing more in relation to the fostering and retention programme, and ensuring that this was something that was delivering.

SEND Written Statement of Action

8. We received a report to update Members of the Committee on the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) / CQC (Care Quality Commission) Inspection on the provision of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support in Darlington, and the subsequent development of a Written Statement of Action (WSOA).
9. The report outlined that between January 2022 and 1 February 2022, the local area of Darlington was inspected by Ofsted and the CQC, and that the purpose of 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 required for children and young people with SEND, and their families.
10. It was highlighted that, whilst the lead inspector identified a number of strengths in the local area, there were also two areas of significant weakness identified across Darlington – namely the ineffectiveness of meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND and the impact of this on their outcomes, and poor preparation for adulthood and post-19 opportunities for children and young people with SEND. It was reported that actions were already taking place to address the highlighted concerns, however the report stressed the need to accelerate these changes and implement the required improvements.
11. Members were keen to ensure that partners were working together to receive benefits, and to understand how the voices of young people were heard. Members were disappointed to learn that job opportunities frequently broke down within six months, due to a lack of SEND support, and wondered whether the Youth Employment Initiative team would have capacity to coach employers to ensure that these opportunities weren't lost.
12. Members wanted to learn more about the scrutiny within the school setting, to ensure that actions identified within Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were being undertaken by schools, and how the reported feedback aligned with the perception of parents. Members were keen to understand how those with SEND needs were involved in the governance development and arrangements.
13. Discussion ensued on the work undertaken by Third Sector providers, with Members enquiring as to whether there were any metrics as to the success. Members also highlighted the 20% year on year reduction target in terms of the numbers of requests

for specialist provision for children and young people whose needs could continue to be met in mainstream education, noting the graduated model. Focus returned to the relationship between parent and school, with Members seeking assurances around a parent's right to challenge, and the mechanisms in place to facilitate that challenge.

Work Programme

14. 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. Members proposed a review of the Performance Indicators received during the year to ensure that they remained relevant; an item on the Dedicated School Grant and the Safety Valve to provide a deeper understanding for the Members of the Committee; a review of the Youth Engagement and SEND Communication Strategy; an item on Transitional Services (SEND) for 16 – 25 year olds; a review of School Transport and the associated services; and the delivery of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education.

Councillor Hilary Allen
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee