

**COUNCIL
30 NOVEMBER 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 Management

Performance Indicators Year End 2022/23 and Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2023/24

2. The Committee received two reports one of which provided an update on performance against key performance indicators for the Year End 2022/23 (for the period April 2022 to March 2023), and one which provided Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators for the initial quarter of 2023/24 (April 2023 to June 2023).
3. Each report used an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Coordination Group on 2 July 2018, and subsequently agreed by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. The reports highlighted those areas where Children's Services were performing well, and identified those areas where improvement was required.
4. Members of the Committee were keen to know more about the changes to the 'front door' function and the increase in Early Help Assessments (EHAs). There was also interest in the measures in place to safeguard those who were victims of domestic abuse and coercive control, the definition of suitable accommodation for Care Leavers, the recording of 'missing' episodes, and whether there was a greater need for individualised assessments.
5. Discussion focused on recruitment and retention, and whether the service was adequately resourced, with Members also keen to understand more around the support available for Social Workers and the Council's Fostering Teams. Members were pleased to note the recent success in terms of recruitment, and analysed the reasons for this.

Review of Performance Indicators used in Performance Management and Regulation

6. At our meeting on 19 June 2023, Members expressed the wish to review the Performance Indicators used in our quarterly Performance Management reports and we received a report at our October meeting which encouraged the Committee to consider the appropriate next steps in relation to such a review.

7. The Committee decided to establish a Task and Finish Group to review the Performance Indicators used within the Scrutiny process.

Designated Officer Annual Report 2022/23

8. Members of the Committee received a report which provided an update on the progress and performance of the Designated Officers' (DO) response to all contacts received relating to allegations/concerns of abuse by those who work with children for the period April 2022 to March 2023, and to highlight the required actions for the period April 2023 to March 2024.
9. The Committee were provided with an overview of the function of the Designated Officer role and stated that all organisations that worked with children in Darlington were required to have policies and procedures in place in relation to what their organisation would do when an allegation was made against an employee / volunteer who was in contact with children. We were informed that these policies and procedures should be in line with Darlington Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency procedures.
10. We were keen to understand the linkages between organisations following a substantiated allegation to ensure that a Social Worker's record reflected any action taken, and discussion took place on the propensity for SEND children to demonstrate challenging physical behaviour. We also heard as regard from which part of the sector referrals may be expected.

Learning and Skills Annual Report 2022/23

11. The Committee received a report from the Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion which provided Members with an update on the performance of the Learning and Skills Service for the academic year 2022/23, and which allowed Members oversight of, and an opportunity to challenge, the performance of this externally funded service.
12. We were advised that the service was now seeing a recovery of learner numbers and that performance remained high, and that the service was growing provision whilst continuing to respond to employer and community need. It was reported that the service was inspected by Ofsted in June 2022, and retained its assessment of 'Good' overall.
13. Discussion ensued on the similarities and differences in the provision of the Learning and Skills Service and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the robustness of the service provided, the involvement of refugees and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and the mechanisms for growing funding and promoting the Learning and Skills Service.

Dedicated School Grant and the Safety Valve

14. The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion submitted a report to provide an update on progress made on the Council's Safety Valve agreement to address historic deficit in the High Needs Block which supported education provision for young people with Special Educational Needs.
15. We were advised that the Council has entered into the "Safety Valve" agreement with the Department for Education (DfE), enabling funding over a five year period to address the accumulated deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block (HNB). Members heard that the agreement would require commitment to areas of review and improvement identified by Department for Education to bring in year spend in line with the in-year budget by 2023/24.
16. Particular focus was given to who retained oversight of the agreement and how it was addressed, the disparity between the potential for infinite costs alongside a finite budget and whether this increased the chance of failure, and whether adjustments could be made if costs were to increase. The concerns of SEND parents were also raised.
17. Members were also interested to learn what safeguards were in place to ensure annual checks with parents had taken place in relation to early intervention work and Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) implementation, and of the wider dialogue with parents.
18. We also scrutinised how the deficit was recorded, how long the deficit had taken to accrue, and whether the Council overall retained a liability for the deficit.

Councillor Hilary Allen
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee