

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 19 February 2024

PRESENT – Councillors Allen, Crudass, Durham, Johnson, Kane, Layton, Storr and Toms.

APOLOGIES – Councillor Ali and Renton.

ABSENT – Councillor Carly Stonier, Maura Regan, Janet Woodcock, John Armitage and Sally Hudson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Wallis and Snedker.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion) and Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer).

CYP39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP40 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2024 AND 15 JANUARY 2024

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 8 January 2024 and 15 January 2024.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 8 January 2024 and 15 January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

CYP41 SCHOOL TRANSPORT AND THE ASSOCIATED SERVICES

The Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion, submitted a report (previously circulated) which provided Members an update on the current arrangements for the Council's Home to Transport Policy and outlined the changes made in recent statutory guidance.

The submitted report highlighted that Darlington Borough Council has a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport in certain circumstances.

Discussion ensued on the different budgets involved in the provision of the service and the sharing of information on the recent changes with appropriate staff. Members were also keen to understand how information regarding the policy and the recent changes was communicated to parents.

Members raised questions in relation to the number of children that transport was provided for, the average cost per pupil, and whether any checks were undertaken to ascertain whether parents had the wherewithal to transport their own children accordingly. The transport provision for those receiving specialist provision elsewhere was analysed, with Members questioning whether it might be more efficient to provide the specialist provision within the Borough.

Members also requested greater clarity around the timetable, consultation and decision-making in relation to the policy, and expressed a desire for the policy to come back to Scrutiny prior to the final decision being made.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Scrutiny Committee note the arrangements current in place.

(b) That the Scrutiny Committee note the changes to the statutory guidance relating to home to school transport.

CYP42 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY REVIEW 2023-24

The Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion submitted a report (previously circulated) to inform members of the findings of the 2023-24 Childcare Sufficiency Review.

The submitted report set out the Department for Education's Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities that they require the Local Authority to secure sufficient childcare. Local Authorities should report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty.

The report highlighted how the Darlington Childcare Market is made up of private day nurseries, pre-schools, childminders out of school clubs, nursery schools and nursery units and that since the Pandemic it has made the Childcare Market more complex and less predictable and that in the autumn term of 2023 the early years entitlement has declined.

The submitted report has demonstrated that there is sufficient overall capacity demand throughout the period of review. It still will be continually monitored to ensure parents are able to access training and work in the coming months/years.

Members entered into discussion on the limitations to provision, and whether any limitations were related to infrastructure, resources or staffing. Members were keen to hear the feedback received from providers in relation to the National Childcare Expansion Programme, and the Committee were pleased to note that providers appreciated the Council's early action and surety around funding, and that there was no sense of undue alarm in relation to April's phased changes, however Members heard that there was not the same confidence in relation to future tranches of the programme.

Discussion ensued on the potential for expansion of the Council's own maintained nurseries, and the funding streams available to meet the cost of any future expansion. Members further explored the additional demands around recruitment, which included additional Government funding and the piloting of a retention and recruitment scheme, which included a bursary scheme with an incentive payment for those qualifying or returning to the sector. Members were keen to understand any contingency arrangements should childcare provided by extended family, such as grandparents, reduce.

RESOLVED – That the findings of the 2023-24 Childcare Sufficiency Review be noted.

CYP43 WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

The Assistant Director, Law and Governance, 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.

Members expressed concern in relation to the lack of items on the Work Programme for future meetings. Members were reminded that should they wish to request items for the Work Programme they should complete and submit a Quad of Aims, and that they may wish to give consideration to items that they would like to see on the Work Programme for the new Municipal Year.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.