

**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 2024**

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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.

**Council Plan 2024-27 – Draft for Consultation**

2. We received a report which introduced the draft Council Plan to Members of this Scrutiny Committee. The report stated that the Council Plan outlined the long-term ambitions for Darlington and the priorities the Council sought to deliver over the forthcoming three years (2024-2027), and it was stated that the Plan gave strategic direction to the Council, defined priorities and shaped delivery, whilst providing clarity to residents, businesses and stakeholders on the Council's values, what the Council identified as important and what the Council would do. In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People outlined the key aims for the 'Children and Young People' priority within the Plan.
3. The Committee entered into discussion on the scope of the consultation and the stakeholders whom the Council had engaged with, the proposed expansion of in-house placements, and the performance measures by which the success of the Plan would be assessed. There was a general consensus across the Committee that the eight key aims focused on the correct areas.

**Performance Indicators Quarter Three 2023/24**

4. The Committee received an update on performance against key performance indicators as at Quarter 3 (October 2023 to December 2023), in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. Both the areas where Children's Services were performing well and where there was a need to improve were highlighted.
5. Members were keen to understand the reasons for the increase in Children in Care placements within the previous twelve months, and learn more about the relationship between foster parents and children. It was noted that there was a need for more foster parents.
6. The increase in workload for the Building Stronger Families Team, and the support provided by the Early Help Team was examined, and Members examined the staffing challenges in terms of the completion of Children's and Families Assessments, and the agency offer available to support this challenge.
7. Members noted the increase in the need for early support and the specific areas where need was greatest, and there was an acknowledgement of the need for the continual monitoring of assessments, casework and supervisions.

## **Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education**

8. We received a report which summarised the current and future guidance from the Department for Education on relationships and sex education. The report provided an overview of the statutory guidance which related to relationships and sex education that schools were obliged to implement, and also covered the recently issued draft non-statutory guidance that related to gender questioning children.
9. Members entered into discussion on the work being done to establish what is being delivered in schools, however it was highlighted that subject delivery was a matter for schools themselves, which were required to follow the National Curriculum and national guidance, and it was not a matter for the local authority. It was clarified to the Committee that, should anyone have questions relating to the delivery of the National Curriculum, these should be addressed to the academy or school in the first instance.
10. Discussion ensued on the national consultation on the recently issued draft non-statutory guidance that related to gender questioning children published by the Government, and the response submitted by the Association of Directors of Children's Services. Questions were raised in relation to the content of the Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) training offer provided to schools by the Council, and Members heard that this was an offer, and it was not mandatory for academies and schools to take the Council up on this offer.
11. Particular focus was made to transgender policies within schools, and whether the Council had a role in developing such policies, and we received clarification that, whilst many policies may appear very similar in content, it was a matter for schools to develop their own policies. The Committee heard concerns as regard the NHS signposting children and young people to Kooth, an online mental wellbeing community, in relation to gender identity. Members were informed that this would be a matter for the NHS and that Officers were not aware of any concerns.

**Councillor Hilary Allen**

**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**