

COUNCIL
26 SEPTEMBER 2024

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 Year End 2023/24

2. We welcomed the Assistant Director – Children’s Services who provided members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.
Points of note included the 8401 contacts being the highest on record and a 58% increase from 2020/21 while also showing a higher level of complexity on average. The 768 referrals reported were a reduction from 2022/23 figures (but still a 49% increase on 2021/22) with 358 children currently in care.
3. We were informed that timeliness on assessments is showing improvements with 95% meeting targets, with a major factor in this being the stabilising of staff. However, stability of placements remains a challenge with children being moved more often than desired.
4. Questions raised included as to whether the large numbers of referrals are the result of the COVID period with officers confirming that this is the case and that numbers are not anticipated to reduce for some time. Members also asked to clarify what external agencies assist the service with officers stating that they are often health or education based with a number of partner agencies included however the service always have full sight of any work being undertaken.
Further questions included as to whether there has been a noticeable impact on resources with an increase in children being returned home and it was confirmed that there has not been a significant impact and that support is available for families where needed. It was also asked if support is available for care leavers with officers confirming that personal advisers and one to one advisers are available alongside the Care Leavers Covenant.
5. Discussions were held which included as to whether a “Risk Assessment” scheme could be introduced or standardised across schools, in the vein of the system employed in care homes to identify children’s possible needs. Officers stated that they could contact colleagues in Adult services to check if any schemes could be translated and also assured members that the Vulnerable People Panel also looks at any cases that schools have concerns over with schools being able to get in touch with staff to discuss any concerns whenever they arise.
A further discussion was held regarding the reasons why children may need to be moved with officers stating that it is often due to need outpacing the number of placements available with children occasionally having to wait to move to the most suitable placement for them.

6. We noted the content of the performance information provided and members also expressed that they would be willing to share any fostering information in ward newsletters and on social media.

The Uniform Exchange Scheme

7. We welcomed the Darlington Partnerships Director who provided members with an update on the uniform exchange scheme which continues to see growth in use. The relocation to a unit beside Feetham's multi storey car park has been successful, saving cost whilst providing a good facility for both volunteers and customers. We were informed that help with school uniforms was showing a great number of searches on the Darlington Council website and following this it was determined that the scheme would be valuable for residents. The new location is now running with positive feedback from both volunteers and the public who visit the site with 3006 customers to date.
8. Discussion was held with regards to the affordability of school uniforms with members commenting that having incorrect uniforms can make children feel singled-out with minor changes to uniforms making them unsuitable for donation or handing-down resulting in families having unsustainable uniform costs. It was also suggested that sewing lessons for parents could be useful to help longevity of uniforms.
9. We noted the content of the update provided and members expressed their approval of the scheme and appreciation of the efforts of those involved.

Work Programme 2024/25

10. We gave consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2024/25 and possible review topics. The work programme is a rolling work programme, and items can be added as necessary.

Councillor Hilary Allen
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee