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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 2 September 2024

PRESENT – Councillors Allen (Chair), Ali, Crudass, Garner, Layton, Storr and Toms

APOLOGIES – Councillors Dulston, Johnson and Renton, ,

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services) and Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion)

CYP7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP8 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 JUNE 2024

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 24 June 2024

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 24 June 2024 be approved as a correct record.

CYP9 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS YEAR END 2023/24

The Assistant Director – Children's Services 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.

Members 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.

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 has 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.

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.

RESOLVED – Members 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.

CYP10 THE UNIFORM EXCHANGE SCHEME

The Darlington Partnerships Director 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.

Members 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.

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.

RESOLVED - Members noted the content of the update provided and members expressed their approval of the scheme and appreciation of the efforts of those involved.

CYP11 WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Group Director of Operations 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

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.