

COUNCIL
28 NOVEMBER 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.

Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2023/24

2. We received the Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2023/24. Contents were noted with members agreeing to forward any questions to officers for response.

Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2024/25

3. The Assistant Director Children's Services presented the report to provide performance information (April 2024- June 2024) in line with an indicator set agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 2 July 2018.
4. Points of note included that at the end of Q1 2024/25, there were 205 families, 416 children open to the Building Stronger Families team. A further 60 families with 108 children were open to an external agency supporting the families. 115 children were subject to a Child Protection plan (CP) as at the end of June 2024 with a rate of 51.7 per 10,000 population with a CP plan. This is an increase on previous years and comparable to the increase in CiN plans open and decrease in Children in Care seen during the same period last year.
5. Areas for improvement were highlighted which included in Q1 2024/25, 81.0% of the children had their referral completed within 1 working day not meeting our 90% target. 7.5% of Child Protection statutory visits were completed within 10 working days in Q1 2024/25 and 94.9% of the visits were completed within 15 working days. Although below target (90%), this is an improvement on Q1 2023/24 where 70.1% of visits occurred within timescale.
6. Discussion was held with regards to the volume of information being presented to members in performance indicator reports with a member suggesting that a review of many indicators KPIs would be useful as well as an analysis of trends or notable anomalies. Officers noted this input and reiterated to members that realistic additional indicators can always be requested by members.
7. Members also stated that performance figures paint a picture of the service as a whole and that they are useful in presenting the work and progress that officers are undertaking.
8. We noted the content of the performance information provided.

Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027

9. We welcomed the Assistant Director - Commissioning, Performance and Transformation who provided members with an overview of the Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is one of the identified delivery plans within the Council Plan and identifies what key actions will be taken to deliver the agreed priority for children – the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations while being driven by the children themselves.
10. This is a partnership plan which shows how organisations and agencies in Darlington will work together collectively to improve outcomes for all children and young people in Darlington. A multiagency Steering Group has been in operation since 2017 and will continue to be responsible for implementing the CYPP over the next three years.
11. We were presented with the video that has been produced to support the plan (available on the Council's website) in which Children and members of our Youth Parliament outlined the purpose and priorities of the plan.
12. We raised questions which included whether members will have access to updates on the progress of the plan with officers confirming that the website will be updated with the latest progress reports on a six-monthly basis.
13. A member asked if it would be possible to have a further video produced by the children solely for scrutiny members in the future with officers agreeing to look into the viability of this.
14. We applauded the work being done around the plan, the quality of the video and the performance of the children who are involved. A member highlighted that signposting and raising awareness of the existence of the plan would be worth the time investment to draw attention to such a positive piece of work.
15. We noted the content of the report and support the recommended next steps for the plan.

Learning and Skills Annual Report 2023/24

16. We welcomed the Head of Skills and Employability who provided members with an update on the performance of the Learning & Skills Service for academic year 2023/24. Members were informed of the range of training provided by the service and those whom the service seeks to support.
17. Points of note included that the service was inspected by Ofsted in June 2022, retaining its assessment of 'Good' overall.
18. In 2023/24 the service had 1,501 across a wide range of programmes, including:
 - (a) 73 16–18-year-olds on Study Programme
 - (b) 1,370 people on Adult Skills courses
 - (c) 58 Apprenticeship starts

19. We asked questions that included whether the services we provide are the same as those offered by local Colleges with officers responding that a mix of provision is present and that the service works closely with Darlington College, with no curriculum issues being present.
20. We also clarified TVCA funding – members were informed that although funding has not been cut, the final figures from last year's over-delivery have not been consolidated into this year's budget. Ideally the final figures from the previous year would be used as a baseline for the following year's funding but this has not been the case. Members expressed that greater funding-assurance from TVCA would be desirable.
21. We noted the content of the report and commended the service for the positive work being carried out.

Children's Service Self-Assessment

22. We welcomed the Assistant Director Children's Services who provided Scrutiny with the Annual Self- Assessment for Children's Services which aims to provide a constructive 'critical friend' challenge to drive improvement in public services.
23. The self-assessment draws on existing documentation and activity and reflects the local authority's business for children's services. It identifies what leaders are doing to maintain or improve good practice for children and their families, demonstrating the effectiveness of our actions and address weaknesses in practice, with clear, appropriate plans to improve services.
24. The self-assessment aims to address three questions:
 - (a) What do we know about the quality and impact of social work practice in our local authority?
 - (b) How do we know it?
 - (c) What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
25. We asked questions that included whether the assessment has highlighted any areas for improvement with officers noting the key challenges around the increased need and complexity of many cases on which the early-help service is focussing.
26. A member asked if the assessment is too time consuming for the service with officers providing assurance that time spent on the assessment is worthwhile in order to solidify a shared understanding across the service and highlight areas for improvement.
27. A member suggested that a six-monthly update on the most notable aspects of the assessment would be useful for the committee.
28. We noted the content of the report, and the information covered in the self-assessment.

Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2023-24

29. We welcomed the Service Manager – Children’s Services who presented the annual report which includes an overview of the work undertaken by Independent Reviewing Officers, who, in Darlington, provide independent reviewing and associated functions in relation to:

- (a) Children who are Looked After
- (b) Children who are the subject of Supervision Orders
- (c) Children who are the subject of Child Protection Conferences and / or multi-agency Child Protection Plans.

30. In addition to the contents of the report, we were informed that team structures are to be reviewed in the near future. Members were also reminded that due to low numbers involved in many statistics, percentage increase / decreases in can be misleading and do not generally represent trends in the short-term.

31. We noted the content of the report.

Work Programme 2024/25

32. 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