

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.

Childcare Sufficiency Review 2018/19

2. We noted the findings of the 2018/19 Childcare Sufficiency Review and the authority's 2018/19 Action Plan as a result of the findings.
3. Local authorities are required by the Department for Education's 'Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities June 2018' to ensure sufficient childcare as far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 or up to 18 for disabled children; and to report annually to elected Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents.
4. Factors which affect childcare demand include the number of parents in work in the Borough and recent trends showed an improving picture regarding skills and productivity of Darlington residents with an increase in the employment rate and a reduction in the unemployment rate. The number of regeneration projects and availability of appropriate family housing and residential development in the Borough and the number of new dwellings can also affect childcare demand.
5. Supply data for 2018 revealed that the early education and childcare market in Darlington has remained fairly stable; however feedback from a pre-school childcare gap analysis carried out in Summer 2018 showed that there was a latent demand for childcare in the Borough with cost being the main barrier to high take up of private hours.
6. Analysis of the overall volume of supply showed that there was sufficient capacity to meet demand; and parent and provider feedback also suggested that there was sufficient capacity to meet overall demand for 30 Hour places.
7. There is evidence to indicate that providers are under increasing financial pressure with several settings reporting that their operating costs were higher than funding rates; financial pressures were also impacting on the capacity for some providers to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities; and feedback from parents and employers called for greater flexibility and lower childcare costs.
8. We discussed the unmet demand for after-school provision and holiday childcare and the unmet demand for places for those children with special educational needs and disabilities and the rising cost of childcare; the reduction in schools being able to provide extra curricula activities after school; and the submission by Whinfield Primary School to the Department for Education's School Nurseries Capital Fund

for a 52 full time equivalent place nursery with wrap around at the start and end of the day and on-site holiday provision.

Special Education Needs – Accessibility Strategy 2017/20

9. We received an update on progress to date against the delivery of the Special Educational Needs Accessibility Strategy 2017/20 and the actions required to comply with legislation.
10. All local authorities are required by Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 to prepare an accessibility strategy in relation to schools for which it is the responsible body and this was approved by Council in 2017. The Strategy sets out how we will work with schools to increase the extent to which disabled children and young people can participate in the school curriculum and improve the physical environment of schools for these pupils.
11. Although the Strategy is in relation to this authority's maintained schools the authority has developed a Traded Service for Academies providing advice and guidance and within the first year of offering this service two academies have already come on board and there is some interest among the Primary Forum.
12. The submitted report also outlined some key messages which have been received from supporting and guiding educational settings in their development of Accessibility Plans which underpin the strategy.

Special Educational Need Strategy and Funding/Travel Assistance Policy Consultation Review Group

13. The findings and recommendations of the Review Group established to examine the proposals and submit comment on the Special Educational Needs (SEND) Strategy and Funding consultation process and plans to consult on the SEND Travel Assistance Policy were presented to Members for approval.
14. Members of this Scrutiny Committee have attended the various public consultation events that were organised during the consultation period of 17 October to 28 November 2018 and the Review Group Members met on 26 October 2018 to discuss the feedback received at the various consultation events and to propose our response to the proposals in the Strategy.
15. Members of the Review Group concluded that there was support for the proposals in the SEND Strategy and Funding from both parents and Members, however we felt that there were some improvements that could be made to the services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.
16. Our main concern was the lack of local resource bases and we agreed that now was an appropriate time to review this provision which was last commissioned in 2010 and we also proposed a key person responsible for accountability and communication between parents and schools.
17. The Head of Education and Inclusion discussed the recommendations in detail with Members and confirmed that they would be included as part of the consultation on the strategic plan for delivering better outcomes for children and young people with

special educational needs and proposed amendments to the application of the High Needs Block in relation to those children and young people.

Performance Indicators Quarter 2 2018/19

18. Members examined performance against key performance indicators for Quarter 2 (July to September).
19. Areas that were performing well were contacts completed within 24 working hours at 97.8 per cent, an increase of 25.4 percent compared to last year; 93.6 per cent who had a Review Health Assessment due received their assessment within the required month; 98 per cent of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held within 15 working days; 100 per cent Child Protection reviews had been completed within the required timescales; 100 per cent of children with a Child Protection Plan and Children Looked After have an allocated Social Worker; 98.7 per cent of Looked After reviews were completed within timescale; 90.1 per cent of statutory visits of Looked After Children were completed in timescale, which was above the target of 90 per cent; 8.7 per cent of Looked After Children had three or more placement moves within the last 12 months, an improvement of 3.3 per cent when compared to the end of Quarter 2 2017/18 and in line with benchmark data for statistical neighbours at 9.5 per cent and the national average at 10 per cent; and 25 per cent of Care Leavers were not in employment, education or training (NEET).
20. Areas where there was a need for further improvement included the percentage of dental health checks completed which was currently at 78.5 per cent (73 out of 93), which showed good progress from Quarter 1 however was still an area to undergo close scrutiny; and 80.4 per cent of child protection statutory visits were completed within timescale at the end of Quarter 2 which was slightly behind Quarter 1 performance at 86 per cent and will continue to be closely monitored and managed.
21. We particularly noted the continuing increase in demand for Children and Young People services and the possible reasons for this increase and added pressures on the service and the Assistant Director of Children's Services confirmed that this was an area that officers were monitoring closely and the Edge of Care wrap around support that was due to go live in January had a number of projects with the intention of actively working towards reducing these numbers.
22. Members also discussed the number of children and young people coming into this authority from out of the area and the number of private children's homes and independent fostering places within the authority. As the number of private homes was increasing Members agreed that this and the planning restrictions imposed on the setting up of private homes may be an area for further examination by this Scrutiny.

Work Programme

23. We continue to give consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee and taking into account the ambitious programme of change across the Council and the key role of Scrutiny in ensuring that the programme is able to deliver the service improvements and the budget savings necessary.

Councillor Chris Taylor
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee