

Children & Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children & Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 16th December, 2015.

Present: Cllr Carol Clark(Chairman), Cllr Tracey Stott(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Di Hewitt, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Lauriane Povey, Cllr Rachael Proud, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Sally Ann Watson

Officers: Jane Humphreys (Corporate Director of Children, Education and Social Care), Martin Gray (Head of Early Help, Partnership and Planning), Shaun McLurg (Head of Safeguarding and Looked After Children), Dianne McConnell (Head of Schools and SEN), Simon Willson (Head of Performance), Judith Trainer (Scrutiny Officer), Jenna McDonald (Governance Officer)

Also in attendance:

Apologies:

CYP 30/15 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CYP 31/15 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

CYP 32/15 Minutes for signature - 14 October 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2015 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

AGREED that the minutes were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CYP 33/15 Draft Minutes - 11 November 2015

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2015.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

CYP 34/15 Q2 2015/16 Children and Young People Thematic Report

The Committee was provided with a report on Thematic Summaries from Q2 2015/16 relating to Children and Young People. Targets for each summary were highlighted in Red, Amber and Green which represented the following:

Red - Off Target

Amber - Within Tolerance

Green - On Target

It was noted that a total of 4 out of 17 targets were 'Off Target' leaving 1 target 'Within Tolerance' 1 target with no available data and 11 'On Target'

Key points and emerging issues were highlighted as follows:

- Challenges existed around the uptake of free early education/childcare places

due to the difficulties in locating placements, particularly in Hardwick, Stockton-On-Tees. Members noted that a number of new providers had registered since the publication of Q2 data

- With regard to OFSTED, the Committee heard that OFSTED inspections were just one indicator of the success of a school. It was also noted that until schools had a follow up inspection, performance data regarding OFSTED would remain the same. Another key indicator to monitor would be levels of progress of pupils.

- The Committee heard that the proportion of child protection plans lasting 2 years or more equated to 18 children from a cohort of 155. A performance Group was in place which monitored the reasons behind a child protection plan lasting 2 years or more. A monthly performance meeting chaired by the DCS oversees a number of key performance indicators including children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

- It was noted that the reason for a child returning to a child protection plan could have been due to moving away from and back into the area

- With regard to adoption timescales, Members heard that in Q1 2015/16, the average time in days, between the Local Authority receiving Court Authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family was 271 days. A number of actions were in place which focussed on improving performance. It was noted that it was of a higher importance to place a child in a secure environment and to have as few a number of adoption breakdowns as possible.

- In relation to young people aged 16-18 Not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those unknown, Members were informed that the proportion of Not Known in the Tees Valley was high. It was highlighted that this was partly due to the destinations of school leavers not being identified until October

- During Q1 2015/16, all but 4 of the 32 care leavers aged 16 - 21 years were in suitable accommodation.

- During care leavers interviews, many care leavers spoke positively about their experiences of being in care

- The Committee noted that as a result of the Q2 inspections of OFSTED settings, in Stockton-On-Tees, 40 child-minders were inspected, 92% of which were graded good or outstanding.

Members raised the following points/questions:

- Members discussed the challenges surrounding the uptake of free early education/childcare places. It was highlighted that a number of actions were being taken to improve take up.

- The Committee were keen to understand the implications on children and young people during the time taken from Local Authority receiving Court Authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. In response, it was highlighted that while the adoption process

was often extended when placing older children or sibling groups this was not the case when placing individual babies. Although unnecessary delay was to be avoided, it was considered vital to take sufficient time when placing a child with an adoptive family in order to avoid breakdowns.

- It was highlighted that when a placement order was made by the Court, barriers such as challenges regarding birth parents often slowed down the process of the placement.

- The Committee asked whether care leavers were tracked and monitored once leaving care. It was highlighted that contact was maintained with all care leavers up until the age of 21 years, 25 years if in education. It was not possible for the Local Authority to prevent care leavers from areas outside of the Borough entering and causing problems within a neighbourhood.

- It was agreed that if a care leaver was in prison and therefore considered to be in unsuitable accommodation, this was not the in the control of the Local Authority however as responsible parents, we have a duty to try and avoid children and young people going into custody.

AGREED that:

1. The information be noted.
2. Figures of adoption breakdowns be provided.

**CYP
35/15**

Ofsted Self Evaluation

The Committee received a report which provided information regarding work that had been undertaken within Children, Education and Social Care Services (CESC) to:

- Evaluate how well services were currently performing in the context of the requirements set out in the OFSTED inspection framework
- Identify areas where there were likely to be some challenge with regard to current arrangements
- Inform our future service improvement planning

Members were presented with details of key areas likely to be challenged by OFSTED. Key areas included:

- Early Help

With regard to Early Help, it was noted that while many services were available, challenges existed around coordination. Members heard that an Early Help Strategy was in place

It was noted that key issues relating to Early Help included; understanding of thresholds across agencies, strength of partnership engagement and level of service provision and impact.

- Children in Need of Help and Protection

It was noted that work in relation to the Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH) was on going, it was envisaged that the hub would be operational by June 2016.

The Stockton Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB) was carrying out work on 7 different cases where a professional disagreed with the last decision made on the case.

- Looked After Children (LAC)

The number of LAC within the Borough was relatively high but had been stable for two years. Challenges existed around ensuring we had enough local provision for LAC. Members heard that the third Spark of Genius Home would open in early 2016.

Existing issues relating to LAC included; IRO Caseloads, sufficiency of provision particularly the balance of LA fostering and private fostering.

- Adoption

In relation to regionalising adoption, the Committee was informed that the Government expected Local Authorities to work together on the adoption process. Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council has joined the Tees Valley Bid , led by Middlesbrough Council.

The Committee noted that key issues relating to Adoption included; timelines, an increase in adoption numbers during 2014/15 and the development of the Tees Valley Regional Adoption Initiative.

- Care Leavers

Members heard that supporting children and young people into education and employment continued to be a challenge.

Issues existed around the level of contact with care leavers, supporting young people into Employment, Education and Training (EET) and also quality of Pathway Planning.

- Voice of the Child

It was important to use the appropriate technology for facilitating communication with children and young people in order to communicate in the most effective way possible

- Leadership, Management and Governance

The Committee was informed of the resignation of the current chair of the SLSCB. An advert was going out for a replacement Chair led by the Chief Executive.

Challenges existed around the recruitment of experienced Social Workers however, recruitment and retention work was on-going. A number of initiatives

were being explored including a pilot recommend a friend to be a Social Worker.

Members raised the following points/questions:

- As Middlesbrough Council was the lead on the Tees Valley Adoption Bid, the Committee was keen to understand the OFSTED performance. It was noted that the OFSTED results were not yet known.
- Members asked questions around numbers of missing people. It was noted that a Task and Finish Group was in place with an aim of ensuring that data was measured consistently by all agencies.
- It was asked whether OFSTED Inspectors would speak to the Children and Young People Select Committee in order to gather evidence. In response, it was noted that this was dependent upon OFSTEDs lines of enquiry but it was usual for OFSTED to speak to key members.
- The Committee asked whether measures were in place to encourage and empower members of staff to raise their concerns and express their opinions. It was heard that briefing meetings were in place to allow staff the opportunity to speak openly. Committee Members would also get the opportunity to speak to staff when visiting services. A Social Work Board was held by the LA which provided opportunity for staff to raise issues.
- Members asked how many years a Social Worker would have worked before being considered an experienced Social Worker. It was noted that clear progressive scales and salary bands existed in the field of Social Work and assessments were carried out before moving up the scale. Many Social Workers were considered experienced after four years' experience however in some cases this was possible at two or three years.
- Was an explanation sought when a Social Worker left the authority? It was heard that exit interviews took place and during the last 12 months, 24 Social Workers left the authority, none of which went on to work for another LA in the same role. Social Workers often went on to less stressful roles, agency work or retirement.

The Committee was provided with a presentation on Common Weaknesses in Local Authorities judged inadequate under the single inspection framework. Weaknesses were identified in areas including:

Management oversight

Performance management and data

Drift and delay mainly in children's case work

Changes in social worker, management and leaders

Recognising potential cases of child sexual exploitation, missing children and carrying out missing and return interviews

The Children's Early Help Review was presented to Members. It was heard that in 2015 a decision was made to carry out a Tees review of Early Help which focussed on:

- The role of partners in the development and delivery of early help

- Testing of thresholds and early help practice through auditing ten early help cases from each Council and through observations of practice including first contact arrangements

- The resources available and their deployment in each borough for early help services

It was highlighted that SBC's Children and Young People's Partnership provided effective leadership to the development and delivery of the Early Help Strategy. A report on the revised "Early Help Proposal" was taken to the partnership meeting held on 23 September 2015. It was noted that schools in the borough were engaged in strategic partnerships which reflected in their engagement and delivery in operational partnerships.

Other examples of good practice across the 4 focus points included:

- Operation Gremlin between the Police, Youth Directions and local voluntary organisations for young people

- CAF Team facilitating early help practitioners in other agencies but particularly schools

- Targeted mental health in schools carried out by TAMHs

- Evidence of good operational relationships with CAMH provider

- Council commissioning of voluntary agencies in a way that builds local capacity and is seen as co-production e.g. Big Life, Harbour and Eastern Ravens Trust

- Enthusiasm for re-commissioning of HV and School Nursing

- Opportunities to engage GPs in specific services developments they are interested in i.e. HC re-commissioning.

- There was good awareness of the early help strategy in the VCS and strong buy-in to its core objectives.

It was noted that on a recent visit to Tithebarn House and Stirling House, Members were pleased with the enthusiasm and positivity of staff and service users. It was heard that members of staff felt that they were able to communicate concerns to management teams and also received a high level of support in their roles.

AGREED that the information be noted.

**CYP
36/15** **Work Programme**

Members gave consideration to the Committee Work Programme 2015/16.

It was noted that extra sessions would take place in 2016 including the Lets

Take Action Group session and the Children's Homes Inspections Session.

The Chairman commended a Skills Event at held at Teesside University.

AGREED that the information be noted.