

Children & Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children & Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 6th December, 2017.

Present: Cllr Carol Clark (Chairman), Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Di Hewitt, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Evaline Cunningham (sub for Cllr Stott), Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Marilyn Surtees

Officers: Martin Gray, Dianne McConnell (CS), Dave Pickard (SLSCB); Judith Trainer, Annette Sotheby (DCE)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Tracey Stott, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Paul Weston

**CYP
43/17** **Evacuation procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

**CYP
44/17** **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**CYP
45/17** **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th July 2017 were APPROVED by Members and SIGNED by the Chairman as a correct record.

**CYP
46/17** **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th September 2017 were APPROVED by Members and SIGNED by the Chairman as a correct record.

**CYP
47/17** **Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Six Monthly Progress Reports**

An update was given by the Director of Children's Services as follows:-

- The Wood Review had moved on significantly since the review was undertaken.
- The Children's Social Work Act came in recently.
- The Government will be consulting on the revised Working Together guidance.
- Joint agreements and discussions had taken place, moving towards a joint Hartlepool and Stockton approach.
- Chair of the LSCB had written to the Chief Executives of each of the safeguarding partners and circulated a progress update on making those arrangements happen - aiming to be an early adopter of the new arrangements with a start date of September 2018, rather than the end-March 2019 date.
- New proposals were now being brought forward, looking at how arrangements fit in with the system, retaining cross Tees activity but bringing things together in a slightly different way across Hartlepool and Stockton.
- The operation and format of the Board and the annual report would be

highlighted in the next presentation by the Independent Chair of SLSCB and would cover progress around skills of Board Members as part of Ofsted recommendations, looking at the recent joint targeted area inspection and focus on LSCB.

AGREED – that the information be noted.

CYP 48/17 Children's Services Progress Update

The Director of Children's Services gave Members an update on the key priorities for 2017/18 as follows:-

- o Redesigning approach to early years, children's centres, health visiting and school nursing as part of early help approach
 - o Reviewing pathways and outcomes for early help
 - o Redefining role in supporting educational achievement
 - o Implementing the review of SEND
 - o Introducing new edge of care approach
 - o Tackling domestic abuse through a new strategy
 - o Improving response to supporting children and people who are subject to VEMT
 - o Implementing the S-Work project as a whole systems change programme for children's social care
 - o Developing a new approach to support children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing
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- A key focus was on young people not known in education, with averages comparing well and good progress being made.
 - Recruitment of 17 social workers had taken place so far this calendar year, 15 of whom were experienced. At the end of September there were 17 agency workers and 6 outstanding social worker vacancies.
 - Work was ongoing to understand the reasons for the increase in the number of children in care, a consistent trend across the country. There would be more focus on prevention, different ways of working, number of foster carers, residential homes, review of out of borough placements and whether youngsters could be brought back to Stockton.
 - The new Adoption Tees Valley service to be located in Stockton would go live from April 2018.

Members comments and questions could be summarised as follows:-

- The increased number of children subject to a second or subsequent Child Protection Plan was concerning. It was noted that this was monitored and kept under constant review. The continuing success of Signs of Safety, creating better support plans with greater family engagement was beginning to have an impact.
- What incentives were available for the recruitment and training of social workers? It was noted that there were 4 current programmes in operation – 12 local authorities in the north east were working with universities involved in a training partnership; the Grow Your Own scheme encouraging non-social worker posts to apply, Step Up to Social Work (a national programme recruiting those new to the profession) and Front Line (a national recruiter). We have a cohort of 4 students training with a practice supervisor and evidence suggests

people remain with the authority in which they trained.

- With regard to the number of children in care, was there a possibility of acquiring a new children's home for young people? It was noted that this was part of the strategy, although purchase of a property previously run as a private children's home had recently fallen through.

AGREED – that the information be noted.

CYP 49/17 Stockton-On-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board

A presentation was given by the Independent Chair of the SLSCB, key points as follows:-

- Board governance and membership
- Annual Report
- Stockton-on-Tees locality
- Board 3 main functions:-
 - o ensuring co-operation and co-ordination
 - o enabling change to improve outcomes
 - o effective challenge and scrutiny
- Ofsted challenge and change – recommendations made to address the shortfalls identified by Ofsted during their inspection
- Priority areas 2018/2019

The main priority was to prevent harm - focusing on domestic abuse, drugs and alcohol, parental mental health and protecting vulnerable children.

Members asked about efforts to establish greater commonality of reporting missing children. It was noted that when a child goes missing they are vulnerable, and that in teenagers the focus may be on their behaviour, rather than how troubled they themselves are. It was often difficult to build trust to ascertain the cause of that behaviour.

The police were focussing on becoming more child-centred in their approach.

Members expressed concern at the number of episodes of children in hostels / B&Bs, and asked if improvements had been made in securing permanent housing for families. In response it was noted that hostels were used only as temporary accommodation and although quality assured, modern and purpose-built, timescales were kept to a minimum.

Members asked if school nursing services were being utilised to help reduce our higher than national average conception rates in under-16s. It was noted that this was a safeguarding issue, and schools played an important role in sex education. Discussion followed on contraception and the importance of safe sex, and the availability of a credit card for free condoms for 13 – 24 year olds, accessed through local pharmacies. Members were reassured that safeguards were in place for under-age young people who used the service more than 3 times.

AGREED – that the information be noted.

Scrutiny Review of the Role of the Council in Education

The Assistant Director of Children's Services gave a presentation on the role of the local authority in exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, the key points as follows:-

- Although Stockton was usually below national average, there had been a spike last year in exclusions following conversions to academy status, with limited alternative provision available.
- Emphasis should be on identifying causal factors, and scaffolding vulnerable children with support to prevent problems escalating.
- There had been a high number of in-year transfers.
- Managed moves were an option but could be problematic at secondary where curriculum content can differ.
- LEA responsibility after sixth day of exclusion.
- There were concerns that schools were "off-rolling" pupils to enhance their attainment levels, rather than in the best interests of the child.
- Ofsted have given the message to schools that they cannot be judged on good behaviour if they have large number of exclusions. There have been no inspections yet to test their undertaking.
- Examples of primary and secondary cases were highlighted with children showing regular challenging behaviour, to demonstrate when exclusion is appropriate.
- Work ongoing to focus on the cause of poor behaviour, with multi-agency support available.

Children who have experienced trauma often find it difficult to moderate their behaviour and, if in a state of distress, will verbally or physically react. There is a need to ensure that all services are available to prevent exclusion which can cause difficulty in academic achievement, subsequent employment and long term damage for young people's outcomes.

Going forward, it was hoped to have a culture in Stockton to acknowledge that creative solutions need to be found for excluded children.

Questions and comments from Members could be summarised as follows:-

- Was there a peak in Year 10/11? This was confirmed, with more children receiving home education in Year 11.
- Was there any evidence that academic ability is taken into account? Statistics showed that high achievement schools had lower level of exclusions.
- Were special arrangements in place for LAC? It was noted that no permanent exclusions had taken place of a Looked After Child.
- Concern was expressed around alternative provision and a better menu of options available than the default position of construction or catering, for example. It was noted that this was in the process of being developed. What was the waiting time for a child referred to an Education Psychologist? Members noted that the aim was for early support. More resource had been put into this service and schools are encouraged to use it, although they have to pay.
- What safeguards and checks were in place for home education? It was reported that 178 children were currently home educated – a strength for some,

but concern for many. The Safeguarding Report highlighted the national picture, with numbers increasing dramatically. Parents had to demonstrate age appropriate education, and home visits could be made, although the local authority had no rights of inspection or to see a child.

- If permanently excluded, children attend the PRU, but it can then be difficult to get them back onto the school roll. An earlier managed move could avoid this.
- The fair Access policy has been amended so that if children re-enter mainstream schools within 2 months of being taken off roll for EHE, they will re-join their previous school. This is to deter schools from off-rolling pupils.
- Does a school have to pay back pupil funding if a child is excluded, and does the school the child is moved to then receive that money? Members noted that schools do not have funding reimbursed owing to an FTE. If an exclusion is permanent they will eventually lose their AWPU, but this is not immediate and does not come close to covering council's costs. This may be a case for fining/penalising offending schools which Middlesbrough is considering.
- Are behaviour management policies the same? It was noted that schools have different policies and operate in different ways – Members needed to be aware of the different approaches and policies.
- There was a need to understand what adjustments were being made for SEN in the various behaviour management policies.
- Bishopsgarth operate “consequences” which is a punitive approach advocated by Outwood Grange Academies Trust - Northern Education are also introducing this policy and the concern is that this will have an adverse impact on exclusion rates at schools that do not currently have a problem.
- Trusts may make a school comply with a particular behaviour management policy.
- Committee need to challenge offending schools and Outwood Grange and Northern Education about these policies, also Ofsted about what action they are taking in respect of schools with rising exclusion levels.

AGREED – that the information be noted.

**CYP
51/17** **Work Programme**

Next meeting to be held on 24th January 2017

AGREED – that the Work Programme be noted.

**CYP
52/17** **Chair's Update**

The Chair wished the Committee a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and had nothing further to report.