

Children & Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children & Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 17th February, 2021.

Present: Cllr Carol Clark (Chairman), Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Alan Watson (sub for Cllr Tony Hampton), Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Lauriane Povey, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Sally Ann Watson

Officers: Martin Gray (CS), Rebecca Saunders-Thompson, Michael Henderson (DS)

Also in attendance: Cllr Lisa Evans

Apologies: Cllr Tony Hampton

CYP 38/20 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

CYP 39/20 **Minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2021 - to follow**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CYP 40/20 **Children's Services - Overview Report**

Members received the annual Children's Services overview report and Children and Young People Performance Update from the Director of Children's Services.

The key issues were highlighted as follows:

- Members questioned if there had been a reduction in exclusions considering the work carried out on this subject in a previous scrutiny review. Members were informed that there had been a spike in permanent exclusions last year but, at present, there had been a significant reduction in fixed term and permanent exclusions. Some pupils might have benefited from learning remotely during the pandemic.
- Members asked how the 2019 inspection resulted in a 'requires improvement' rating especially around management oversight issues. Members were informed that the report focussed on the management of the pre-court proceeding stage and that the lengthy process before cases reaching court was criticised. A weekly panel has been created to accelerate the process following the inspection. Children's Services also focused on embedding continuity into their processes, by making use of previous research, to prevent cases from stopping and starting.
- Children's Services were working to further understand the fundamental, underlying causes of a referral rather than focussing on the presenting issue. This could prevent repeat cases within the same family from happening.
- Members asked how staff have been supported during a period of operational change. Members were informed that a lot of time has been spent talking to

employees through various methods, including surveys and workshops, to understand their needs and concerns. One of the reasons a system change was implemented was to allow staff to spend more time with families and less time on administrative tasks.

- There were only four social worker vacancies now. There was a higher number of agency staff at present than desired, but this was mainly a result of staff shielding or illness during the pandemic. There was a general concern for the nationally high turnover in the social worker and teaching professions.
- A relatively high maternity absence within social services resulted from a young female workforce and part of the current strategy is to continue to recruit newly qualified social workers and support their development through an enhanced support offer.
- Members questioned if child sexual exploitation was still a major threat. Members were informed that this was the case and there was also a newer threat around criminal exploitation. This included drug running and county lines gangs. However, the levels of both threats were lower across Stockton-on-Tees than other parts of the country. Young people were still assessed through the multi-agency VEMT group.
- Members asked how Ofsted consult with children out of the Borough as part of their inspection regime. Members were informed that Ofsted acquired information from SBC's system and would speak to some of the young people out of the Borough. Ofsted could also speak to the manager of a residential home. These meetings had mostly been taking place remotely at present.
- A cohort of 65 children in care resided outside of the Borough and this figure was low compared to other parts of the country. These children tended to be placed within the Yorkshire or North East region. This option was only used when there were no other alternatives.
- Most Children's Service staff were working from home. However, there was a regular turnover of staff working in the office to allow for socially distanced team meetings. Social workers have continued to work throughout the pandemic including out of hours work. Flexibility in working practices has worked well for some staff members.
- Members and officers commended the work of Children's Services staff during the ongoing pandemic.
- The Committee supported Child Poverty as a future review topic.

AGREED that the report and update be noted.

CYP 41/20 Work Programme and Chair's Update

The next meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee would take place on Wednesday 17 March 2021.

Members were informed that an officer would present the annual safeguarding report at a future Committee meeting.

The Chair had nothing to update.