

Children & Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children & Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 12 October 2022

Present: Cllr Carol Clark (Chair), Cllr Barbara Inman (Vice Chair), Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Sally Ann Watson

Officers: Martin Gray (CS), Judy Trainer (DS)

Apologies: Cllr Dan Fagan, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Lauriane Povey

1 Evacuation Procedure

The Evacuation Procedure was noted.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2022

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Children's Services – Performance Update

The Select Committee considered a performance update on Children's Services.

Key issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

- Children's Services continued to implement a significant programme of change set within the context of increasing demand for services, cost of living rises, economic uncertainty, external inspection outcomes and financial pressures
- A major review of the Children's Services Directorate had been undertaken with completion of the structural changes in March 2022. The review had realigned responsibilities to enable better integration of Children's Social Care and Help and Support. There were also plans to increase the number of social workers alongside a recruitment and retention plan
- Investment in the recruitment of social workers was being strengthened with the "Grow Your Own" apprenticeship programme
- The number of children in care had stabilised and 25% of children in care were now being placed with kinship carers – nearly double the national rate
- The Residential Homes programme was a key priority for the year ahead. The shortage of placements was a national issue; the lack of providers driving up costs resulting in significant budgetary pressures for Local Authorities
- The majority of children were able to get their first choice at Stockton primary and secondary schools, although there were issues around over-subscribed secondary schools in the south of the Borough. Lower birth numbers were

- accounting for a reduction in primary admissions
- Schools perform well overall. Although national comparative data was not available for the last two years, 93% of secondary schools were good or better (63% nationally) and 97% of primary schools (87% nationally)
- In July, a SEND revisit took place. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission determined that sufficient progress had been made against the four areas of weakness in the Written Statement of Action
- Operated by the North East Autism Society, Kiora Hall opened in September to provide specialist provision for children and young people with neurodevelopmental needs
- Referrals to the neurodevelopmental pathway had increase by 300% post covid due to a radically streamlined referral process; this did not account for an increase in prevalence, with about half of the referrals achieving an autism diagnosis
- Although there was a choice of high quality multi academy trusts within the Borough, the benefits of a Council-led Multi Academy Trust were being considered as an option
- Although not a formal adoption, Special Guardianship Orders were one of the routes out of care and were particularly beneficial in cases where a family wished to look after a child

The Select Committee paid tribute to Council officers for their work in the context of increasing financial pressures on the Local Authority and the high level of children living in poverty in the region.

AGREED that the report be noted.

5 Chair's Update and Work Programme

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.