

People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 7th July 2025.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Hugo Stratton and Cllr Barry Woodhouse

Officers: John Lathaen, Louise Nixon, Mandie Rowlands (Children's Services), Aishah Waithe, and Michelle Gunn (Corporate Services).

Also in attendance:

Apologies: None

PEO/17/25 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/18/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/19/25 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd June 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/20/25 Scrutiny Review of Partnership Working in Early Help

The Committee received a presentation from the Service Lead for School Support and Sufficiency which covered:

- The School Support Team structure
- The current offer from the team, who worked with all schools across five cluster areas, including hosting solution circles, advice and signposting, and acting a Lead Professionals on complex cases.
- The number of Pupils on roll and number of pupils receiving Free School Meals (FSM) in each cluster, with children in Thornaby and North Stockton cluster receiving the highest number of FSM.
- The number of Social Care referrals and External Early Help Assessments. It was highlighted that the 1,768 contacts into the Children's HUB from schools was not the number of individual children that were referred, as the same child could be referred for support several times.
- The outcomes that the Team around the School Service (TASS), wanted to achieve for children, which included not only improving attendance but making sure children knew how to ask for help and had someone they would be able to go to if they had an issue.
- The outcomes that TASS wanted to achieve for schools which included upskilling school staff to recognise any signs or changes in their pupils that indicated they

- could require early help, thereby ensuring that support was offered at the earliest opportunity.
- The level of support offered to schools, which would be agreed with schools based on the intelligence and ongoing conversations, with schools requiring targeted support receiving more than those that required preventative or universal support.

The key issues discussed included:

- The School Support Worker made sure that there were smooth transitions from primary to secondary school, as well as secondary to higher/further education. TASS was working to ensure that information on the child and the support they had received 'followed the child' and was shared with schools/colleges when they transitioned. They were also working towards sharing information with secondary schools on the post 16 outcomes for their pupils so that schools could put measures in place to prevent their former pupils becoming Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET).
- The Team also worked with services outside of schools e.g. family hubs, so that conversations with the family, and support being offered, was carried out by the most appropriate person/service.
- A portal was being developed to ensure that any support received from external partners could be reported, and therefore a better picture of the family's needs could be built.
- Members asked what the biggest barrier to achieving the outcomes for both children and schools were and informed that these were attendance and communication with schools along with parents/carers. Work was ongoing to improve these. Raising the aspirations of children was also key.
- It was questioned what the target was for attendance and how it would be improved. Officers noted that they would work with individual schools to set their targets for attendance, and what their own barriers were. Best practice from schools both within and outside the Borough would be shared. It was important to ensure that the importance of attending school and education was introduced from primary school, along with how this would impact future employment. It was also noted that it would be a five – ten-year plan. There was an acknowledgement that Covid had an impact on schools and attendance which needed to be reversed.
- FSM were discussed, and members questioned whether this was an indicator for families that needed support. Officers confirmed that it was and by identifying those areas where high levels of pupils received FSM there were able to ensure that resources were aligned to where there was a greater need for support. They also wished to help families to get to a place where they no longer needed to apply for FSM.
- The Government announcement regarding Best Start Family Hubs was raised and officers noted that they would respond to any initiatives that were put in place.

The Committee also received a presentation from the Service Lead for Children's Response and Assessment team regarding referrals to social care and Social Care Assessments. The presentation included:

- The role and remit of the assessment team, which included carrying out assessments when a referral was received from the Children's HUB regarding concerns with safeguarding.
- The total number of referrals received, referrals that led to No Further Action (NFA), and referrals that proceeded to action. The referrals could be made via

phone call, email, or by the Police PPN. The biggest referrer was the Police, followed by Primary Schools, Local Authority, Secondary Schools and then Accident & Emergency.

- The key insights and possible implications, including the reasons for the number of referrals that led to NFA. Many of the referrals did not meet the threshold for action, however that did not mean that referral wasn't the right course of action as there may have been short term actions and/or services taken place within the 45 days that resolved the family's issues. Also, the family might not have given consent, despite trying several avenues, and therefore resulted in NFA.

The key issues highlighted and discussed included:

- The Social Worker had up to 45 days to complete an assessment, however many were completed sooner. Outcomes of the assessment included:
 - A Child In Need Plan was made by the Children & Families team
 - There might be a "step down" to Early Help service
 - A Child Protection Plan was put in place, via a child protection conference
 - Child taken into Local Authority care
- If a Section 17 referral was made the parents must consent. If a Section 47 referral was made, when a child had a bruise or told someone they had been harmed, this was an enquiry and there was a greater need as the child was likely to be at significant harm.
- The referral criteria needed to be clarified to make sure that referrals were sent to the right place, e.g. Early Help rather than the Assessment team.
- Collaboration with partners was needed to ensure that the right support was given at the right time and thereby reduce the number of referrals that resulted in NFA. The team were offering ongoing support to referring partners.
- The Committee questioned what happened if the parents/carers refused to give consent for support and informed that, if there was a significant concern, a strategy meeting would take place and they could override the requirement for consent.

AGREED that the information be noted.

PEO/21/25 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2025 - 2026

The timing of the Select Committee meetings was raised and it was noted that they clashed with another meeting. The Committee therefore agreed to move the meetings to 2pm start.

Members were reminded of the Children and Young People workshops taking place on 31 July and 29 September where partners had been invited to co-produce the Early Help Strategy. Members had been invited to observe and feedback to the Committee to inform the review, and the invitation would be recirculated.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.