

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, 30 November 2017

PRESENT: Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)

Councillor(s): B Clelland, A Geddes, M Hall, L Kirton,
K McCartney, E McMaster, R Mullen, S Ronchetti,
D Bradford and C McHugh

CO-OPTED MEMBERS Jill Burrell and Cheryl Lain

F29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Caffrey, Cllr S Craig, Cllr P Craig and co-opted members Sasha Ban and Maveen Pereira.

F30 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 October 2017 and 1 November 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

F31 OSC REVIEW - CHILDREN ON EDGE OF CARE - FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the final report on the review into support to young people and families with complex needs on the edge of care.

The review looked at the challenges facing young people on the edge of care, as well as the key ingredients to successful approaches to supporting young people. There was also a focus on the elements of service design that will support best practice and strengthening service delivery to safely reduce the numbers of children coming into care.

During the review partners have been involved, including; health partners, housing, education, commissioning and mental health services. The outcome of the review demonstrated that all partner agencies play a key role, partnership working is a strong element to reducing the number of looked after children and preventing children coming into care.

It was noted that the Committee recognised the importance of a responsive model, in terms of stable housing, housing for care leavers and supporting financial management. The Committee felt that it was important to support families to manage financial issues and the service has incorporated this into the overall service design.

The draft recommendations were outlined as;

- The service to implement the complex child in need team and the rapid response service development by January 2018
- The delivery of the rapid response service to strengthen links with benefits support services
- The service will train staff in systemic approaches as a strengths based model best practice model
- The committee acknowledged the importance of developing the housing options offer for care leavers and agreed that strengthening this offer during the next commissioning process
- The committee agreed that continuing to build joint service delivery with partners is important and needs to continue within the edge of care service development work

In terms of working with partners to provide financial advice it was queried what the response has been from DWP. It was confirmed that there is good access as there is a named person in DWP for care leavers. Housing support has recognised the importance and there are additional opportunities to develop. In terms of private landlords there are links through The Gateshead Housing Company and there is confidence that financial and benefit advice will not be affected by the type of landlord.

RESOLVED - That the Committee agreed to the draft recommendations and referred it to Cabinet on 19 December 2017.

F32 THE COUNCIL PLAN - SIX MONTHLY ASSESSMENT AND PERFORMANCE DELIVERY

Committee received the six monthly performance report which provided an overview of performance and highlighted trends that have improved and declined since the last report.

It was reported that there are seven indicators highlighted as exceptions as they have not improved. Overall performance trends are positive with 15 out of the 22 indicators showing improvement since the last report.

It was noted that 7 out of 12 indicators under the Live Well Gateshead outcome have improved. This includes; an increase in the number of families engaged by the Troubled Families Gateshead programme; a reduction in the use of custody for 10-17 year olds; a reduction in the number of mothers smoking at the time of delivery; a reduction in 4-5 year olds with excess weight issues; a reduction in the number of children subject to a child protection plan and an increase in the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and education, training and employment.

Committee was advised that eight out of 10 indicators under the Prosperous Gateshead outcome have shown improvement. It was reported that there has been an increase in the percentage of schools rated outstanding and the percentage of children offered their preferred primary school place. There has also been an increase in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at age

5, and those achieving the expected standard at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

In terms of those indicators that have declined these were outlined by service area. In relation to Learning and Schools there has been a reduction in the number of children offered a place at their preferred secondary school, although performance is 88% and is above the national average this is still a decline from last year. It is expected that this figure will continue to decrease in future years as capacity within the current secondary school system remains as it is. In the Early Help service, performance has declined in relation to the number of eligible two year olds accessing free places, however it is likely that this will improve as information is still being collated. Also, there has been an increase in the number of first time entrants into the youth justice system aged 10-17 years, this is currently being investigated by the YOT Board and prevention staff have moved into Early Help to provide an early intervening co-ordinated service. There has also been a decline in performance in relation to the support for young carers.

In the Public Health service performance has declined in terms of the reduction of excess weight in 10-11 year olds, a Members Seminar has been arranged for January 2018 to look at this issue further. In addition, hospital admissions for self-harm rates have increased, a further report will be brought back to the Committee to look at local level data and analysis. It was reported that there has also been an increase in the percentage of children in low income families, children in poverty, work is ongoing around financial inclusion to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms.

Following actions identified in the last performance report it was noted that work is ongoing to look at the increase in permanent exclusions and focusing on individual pupils to identify issues, a behaviour conference was held in July 2017 with Head teachers to address issues. Work is also underway on developing the Early Help Strategy to empower families and professionals from all sectors. In addition, the statutory duty to provide 30 hours free childcare for eligible 3 and 4 year olds commenced on 1 September. It was noted that a Complex Child in Need Team and Rapid Response Team has been established to improve the planning framework and to address the increase in Child Protection Plans. In the last performance report it was identified that more work was needed to improve outcomes for care leavers, since then a report has been to Corporate Parenting OSC detailing the provision of support to care leavers, including programmes such as Wise Steps, Choices, Pathways 2 Work. Also Service Directors have pledged to offer apprenticeships to care leavers. An action plan is now in place to oversee the SEND Joint Commissioning arrangements.

Key actions over the next six months were noted;

- Continue to develop and implement the learning and actions emerging from the Behaviour conference linked to permanent exclusions
- Allow for the new early help model to settle and ensure that families will not experience delays in receiving the service in the transition period
- Implement the new Rapid Response and Child with Complex Needs teams within Children and Families Social Care
- Continue to develop and implement the learning and actions from the SEND Joint Commissioning arrangement action plan

It was questioned why decreasing the number of children living in poverty was not included in the key actions. It was noted that the key actions were broad objectives with a number of actions ongoing around each key action, and there was an understanding that this was continually looked at over a longer than 6 month period. Committee was reassured that child poverty prevention is a priority even if not listed as a key action. The point was made that there was a limited ability to do anything to solve child poverty due to the financial pressures on all and that the Council did not have the tools to resolve, in particular in the short term. It was agreed that this issue could be considered as a potential review topic in the Committee's work programme next year.

It was questioned whether the decline in the number of people receiving their first choice secondary school was to do with the majority of schools becoming academies. It was noted that there are inequalities across schools in Gateshead in relation to GCSE results and there continues to be extremely popular schools.

It was queried what the care leavers programmes entailed. It was confirmed that these are pre-training preparation for young people, providing an opportunity for them to get a taster of work. There are links with further and higher education establishments through designated staff who can help tailor bespoke work for looked after children.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) Committee agreed that the activities undertaken during April to September 2017 are achieving the desired outcomes in the Council Plan 2015-2020.
 - (ii) That the comments of the Committee be noted in relation to areas it feels require more detail.

F33 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN LSCB ANNUAL REPORT AND PLANS

Committee received the annual report and business plan from the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

It was noted that new legislation states that there is no longer a requirement for an LSCB and sets out requirements for a new strategic partnership made up of the local authority, police and the CCG. The new arrangements will come into effect from April 2018 and preparation is already underway. It was noted that the challenge will be whether this has an impact on safeguarding.

It was reported that over the last year workloads have increased, early help has been reviewed and the LSCB has scrutinised those arrangements. A one year Business Plan has been agreed, however this will change as the future set up of the Board becomes clear.

It was questioned where the most common category of neglect sits within the new early help model. It was confirmed that the early help model runs across and includes various referrals, preventative work continues and in the main a lot of the referrals are due to neglect.

It was confirmed that child death figures include stillborn deaths and suicides.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Committee noted the LSCB and partner agency performance for 2016-2017 and noted and endorsed the proposed priorities and agreed to participate in future consultation around safeguarding priorities.
 - (ii) That the Committee agreed to receive updates in relation to forthcoming changes to the LSCB and safeguarding arrangements as a result of new legislation and Government guidance.

F34 WORK PERMITS FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN WITHIN THE BOROUGH

A report was presented to Committee on the employment of children under the age of 16. In line with government guidance the Council has byelaws which set out the number of hours children and young people can work.

If a child wants to work the employer must request a work permit from the Council. The application submitted by the employer must set out the hours, days and type of work and officers will ensure it matches regulations. A letter is then sent to the employer stating expectations, the child is also given the letter as well as the child's school asking them to identify any educational impact of the employment. The parent of the child will also receive a letter which makes it clear that any issues as a result of the employment must be highlighted.

It was reported that in the year 2010-2011 110 permits were issued, however in 2016-2017 this figure was only 30. It was noted that this is because there is reduced capacity to send reminders to employers, however if any child employment is brought to the attention of officers they will investigate to ensure the environment is suitable for a child to work in.

It was suggested that the decrease in requests for permits could be because people are unaware of the need to have permits in place.

It was questioned whether this applies to paid work only. It was confirmed that this applies to any occupation where the aim is to make a surplus profit, for example this would not apply to a voluntary position within a youth centre.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Committee noted the contents of the report.
 - (ii) That the comments of the Committee be noted.

F35 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the work programme for the municipal year 2017/18, which is a standing item on the agenda.

It was noted that, following the last meeting, the Permanent Exclusion 14 Point Action Plan has been added to the work programme for March 2018.

- RESOLVED - (i) That the provisional work programme be noted.
- (ii) That further reports on the work programme will be brought to the Committee to identify any additional policy issues, which the Committee may be asked to consider.