

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Thursday, 7 March 2019**

**PRESENT:** Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)

Councillor(s): M Hall, L Caffrey, B Clelland, S Craig,  
L Kirton, K McCartney, E McMaster, S Ronchetti, M Ord,  
C McHugh, R Oxberry, C Buckley and N Weatherley

**F99 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mullen, Councillor Bradford, Councillor P Craig and Jill Burrell.

**F100 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

RESOLVED:

- (i) The minutes of the last meeting held on 7 March 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

**F101 REVIEW OF OBESITY (ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE) - INTERIM REPORT**

The Committee received a report and presentation providing an update in relation to the review of healthy weight agenda across the life course and the impact on Gateshead Communities.

From the report an overview of the scope and aims of the review were explained in addition to details of the draft recommendations for the review which were:

- A whole system approach
- Clear leadership
- Strategic and Operational groups
- Health in all policies approach
- Focus on inequalities
- Long term commitment
- Healthy Weight Declaration
- Community led interventions
- Tackling food advertising/promotion
- Balance between population and targeted approaches

It was asked what work is being done in Gateshead to tackle the issues around healthy weight. It was stated that the solutions for the problems are not simple to pin point and would be long term and perhaps generational. It was noted that as a whole

system Gateshead Council are working with partners such as schools to improve meals and education around food. It was also stated that Gateshead Council, along with other Councils are working together to lobby Government to implement changes that go beyond the recent introduction of the sugar tax.

A comment was made noting that the issue of healthy weight is discussed at Gateshead's Health and Wellbeing Board where good examples of work being done have been presented such as improved school meals, healthy options available in staff canteens and reducing the availability of vending machines in business and in public areas. It was further stated that weight loss is a personal issue and without a common denominator it is a difficult issue to address short term.

The work being done to decrease levels of obesity was compared to the work being done to reduce smoking across the UK. It was noted that there has been a decline in the number of people smoking over the years due to increased prices and enhanced public awareness of the side effects. It was also highlighted that the Director of Public Health's annual report focussed on the complexity of the healthy weight agenda.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the contents of the report.

## **F102 ANNUAL CONVERSATION WITH THE HEAD TEACHERS OF SPECIAL SCHOOLS**

The Committee received the report to provide an update relating to the changes and developments to special school provision.

From the report it was highlighted that there are 6 special schools in Gateshead, Dryden and Hill Top schools are a hard federation, though they continue to function as separate schools with a single governing body. It was also noted that they now have individual head teachers were as previously they had an executive headteacher and head of school.

The Committee were advised that all the schools have been rated by Ofsted as at least 'Good' with Dryden, Eslington and Gibside schools being rated 'Outstanding'. From the report the Committee were provided with a summary of current developments within the special schools; it was stated that within Gibside the numbers on roll are currently 163 which supports the Council's decision for a new school. It was further noted that at Furrowfield school there is strong governance with an exceptional level of experience being brought to the school in addition to in-house residential provision.

It was noted that at Dryden school there are currently 47 pupils on roll making it undersubscribed. It was stated that there is potential for more pupils in the school which needs to be considered alongside the growing numbers in other special schools.

The Committee received a breakdown of the Top 5 SEN (Special Educational

Needs) categories for Gateshead special school pupils which included Autism Spectrum Disorder, Moderate Learning Needs, Social, Emotional and Mental Health, Speech Language and Communication Needs and Severe Learning Difficulty.

It was asked whether there was a need for a specialist provision for those with autism in Gateshead; it was stated that autism provision is not all in one place to allow for increased parental choice for school admissions.

A question was asked as to whether pupils are still contacted after they have left the school to check on their progress; it was noted that many of the schools do this up to the aged of 19 with their pupils. A comment was also made noting the reliance on the voluntary sector for parents prior to their children attending a special school, it was noted that this issue is acknowledged and that it can be challenging for parents to access the right support quickly.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee received and noted the annual report.

### **F103 RECRUITMENT & RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

The Committee received a report providing information with regards to children and families social work recruitment and retention.

From the report it was noted that in July 2016 the Department for Education published its strategy to transform Children's Services due to ongoing concerns that the reforms of the previous years had not improved the quality of work with children and families. Known as 'Putting Children First' it was highlighted that the reform was structured on 'three pillars' which were:

- People and leadership
- Practise and systems
- Governance and accountability

The Committee were advised that the Government introduced and supports two fast track training programmes for would be Social Workers: 'Step up to social work' and Frontline. It was noted that both programmes involve partnership arrangements with interested Local Authorities of which Gateshead is one.

The Committee were reminded that as at April 2016, sixteen social workers left the Council's employment during a very short period of time. It was highlighted that a rolling programme of recruitment advertising for both new and experienced staff was put in place due to the difficulties experienced in attracting sufficient experienced staff.

From the report the Committee were then provided with an update on the six outcomes period 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 detailing the range of social work leavers and starters.

A comment was made noting that the report provided a positive a reassuring picture

at services. It was stated that it is good to see that recruitment and retention is stable so that essential support can be provided for those who need it most in Gateshead.

A further comment was made noting that Gateshead lost a lot of social workers due to the removal of essential care allowances; this was acknowledged by officers but it was also highlighted that Gateshead do offer excellent career progression prospects compared to neighbouring authorities.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the contents of the report and agreed to receive further updates at a future meeting.

#### **F104 SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS - PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

The Committee received a report providing an update on the continuous rise in the number of permanent exclusions across secondary schools. The report also presented an update on exclusion figures in the 2018/19 academic year as of February half term 2019.

From the report it was noted that the consequences for children who are permanently excluded from school are known to be serious. It was also stated that schools have the right to permanently exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds and that pupils can be excluded for one or more fixed term periods.

It was highlighted that evidence shows that the proportion of children and young people being excluded in both primary and secondary schools is increasing nationally. It was noted there has been a 40% increase over the past 3 years having previously been on the decrease since 2006/7.

It was noted that Gateshead currently has 10 secondary schools consisting of 8 secondary academies, 1 maintained secondary school and 1 City Technology College. It was highlighted that one secondary academy is due to close at the end of the academic year August 2018. The Committee were also advised from the report that Gateshead has 68 primary schools consisting of 47 community schools, 16 Roman Catholic schools, 1 Roman Catholic academy, 2 Church of England schools, 2 primary academies, 3 infant and 3 junior schools and 1 nursery.

Within the report a table and chart was provided detailing the number of permanent exclusions from 2004/5 to 2017/18 academic years. It was noted that persistent disruptive behaviour continues to be the most significant reason for permanently excluding a secondary school pupil. It was further noted that primary school exclusions spiked in 2016/17 however numbers have declined.

The report provided an overview of strategies used to address the rise in permanent exclusions which included pilots of 'Kooth' an online counselling service as a means of providing intervention early when the need first arises. It was further noted that projects such as the mental health trailblazer should also have an impact on permanent exclusion numbers.

It was asked whether the national rise in ASB and knife crime can be linked to increasing numbers of permanent exclusions. It was stated that this cannot be ruled out but that there are likely other socio-economic factors involved. It was also noted that Ofsted are developing a new framework of guidance on exclusions that acknowledges the reducing budgets for schools.

A discussion took place on the transition for pupils from primary to secondary school; it was noted that this can often be a difficult time for children and that information known to primary schools may not always be passed to secondary schools.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the contents of the report.

## **F105 BEST START IN LIFE - OUTCOME OF PILOT SELF-ASSESSMENT**

The Committee received the report and presentation to provide an overview of the North East public health sector led improvement (SLI) conception to two years pilot.

From the report it was noted that the transfer of public health responsibilities in 2013 brought public health services into the established local government SLI regimes. It was also noted that in the public health sector-led improvement framework the Association of Directors of Public Health indicated that the purpose of SLI is to “provide confidence both internal and external stakeholders and the public as well as demonstrate continuous improvement to public health practice”.

From the presentation it was highlighted that there were two pilot areas for the regimes, Durham and Gateshead. It was also noted that a steering group was established, led by Public Health to identify information and evidence in relation to local need, leadership and planning, wider determinants and local delivery of evidence-based practice.

The Committee received a summary of the results of a self-assessment as well as areas identified for improvement which included smoking in pregnancy, teenage pregnancies and housing. It was highlighted that areas of priority for SLI would be smoking in pregnancy and breastfeeding due to the long-term benefits for both mother and child.

From the report it was noted that areas not identified at this time for prioritisation included education, housing and low birth weight. It was stated that details of the findings from the self-assessment were presented to the Gateshead Child Be Healthy Group for consideration. This group is chaired by Dr David Jones and is attended by partner agencies and services including the CCG.

A question was asked regarding new-borns being tongue tied causing them difficulty in being able to latch on to the breast; officers advised this was an issue with varying views as there can be differing severities seen in a child being tongue tied. It was also noted that there are some private practise procedures available to parents for babies that are tongue tied which can be expensive.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the contents of the report.

#### **F106 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the Work Programme report which sets out the provisional programme for the Committee for the year 2018/19.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Committee noted the contents of the Work Programme report and appendix.