

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, 2 March 2017

PRESENT: Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)

Councillor(s): S Green, J Adams, L Caffrey, B Clelland,
S Craig, M Hall, J Kielty, L Kirton, K McCartney,
E McMaster, S Ronchetti and C Simcox

CO-OPTED MEMBERS John Wilkinson and Jill Steer

F33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr J Graham, Cllr Mullen, Cllr Hawkins and co-opted members Sasha Ban and Maveen Pereira.

F34 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

F35 SPECIAL SCHOOL PROVISION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Committee received a report on the current position in relation to special school provision in Gateshead. It was confirmed that there are six special schools in Gateshead, all of which are either good or outstanding.

It was reported that Hilltop School is seeing an increase in the number of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, this means the overall profile of the school is changing. The school is not yet full, however staff are currently dealing with a higher level of need, with more pupils having complex mental health needs. Similarly at Gibside there are more pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, the school is full and faces continuing challenge in terms of additional space for more pupils. It was noted that there is a real need in Gateshead for additional provision for children with severe learning difficulties as many are now going out of borough.

The Cedars Academy became a trust when numbers fell previously, however the school is now over capacity and caters for early years to post 16. Currently the provision for post 16 is delivered from Walker Terrace, which is a rented space and offers independent life skill curriculum. The school is building their capacity and in the process of refurbishing the current site to enable extra students to be taken on, this will also enable a more definite split between primary and secondary provision

within the school.

Eslington School is operating from two sites due to an increase in demand for places. There are now 60 places and 8 Additionally Resourced Mainstream (ARMS) places. The school has been recognised as outstanding and works well with mainstream primary schools around transition work with potential pupils.

Furrowfield School is a secondary school with 71 places and 14 residential places, for children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. It was noted that there are challenges in terms of educational outcomes because a lot of pupils join the school late and their outcomes are not successful.

It was reported that Eslington Primary and Furrowfield Schools have gone through the soft federation process and are considering forming a hard federation. This will enable teacher practice to be shared across sites, offering more consistency of approach, and also ensuring better transition arrangements are in place. It was acknowledged that it is very important to manage transition well for these particular pupils and this is the benefit of a federation.

In terms of Dryden School the population continues to be stable, with some pupils having autism spectrum disorder as their primary need as well as severe learning difficulties. It was reported that there are financial challenges in relation to pupils within the 16-19 age range with profound difficulties as the Education Funding Agency only funds places for three days per week, however those pupils are receiving full time provision. Discussions are ongoing around how to continue to fund these places.

It was confirmed that the number of children and young people requiring special education is increasing, currently there are 525 in Gateshead which is an increase from 329 in 2009. Therefore there is a need to change the picture of provision as the needs of the children change. It was also noted that the closure of Additionally Resourced Mainstream School (ARMS) provision in some mainstream schools has impacted on special schools, for example The Cedars and Gibside took up extra capacity as a result.

The point was made that more places are needed for complex autism spectrum disorder and children with social, emotional and mental health needs as well as a need to accommodate two year olds. It was confirmed that numbers are increasing, however funding is not increasing at the same rate, therefore there is a need to prioritise provision.

It was questioned whether the increase in autism was due to a real increase or due to better diagnosis. It was confirmed that research has led to better diagnosis in more defined areas.

The point was made that there have been examples of families not knowing about The Cedars academy until after their child has been placed in a school out of the borough. It was therefore queried what the strategic plan for the future is in terms of The Cedars and what the cost of sending a child out of borough. It was noted that work is ongoing with special school Headteachers as to what information is going

out to parents to ensure they are aware of all the options. It was confirmed that the cost of educating a child out of the borough is approximately £30,000. The point was also made that there has been no capital investment in The Cedars for a number of years and more support is needed.

It was questioned whether the increase in permanent exclusions from mainstream schools due to behaviour has impacted on the demand on special schools. It was acknowledged that there are concerns about the levels of permanent exclusions and discussions are ongoing with secondary schools as the rate is increasing faster than the national rate. It was recognised that this is a secondary problem and if it became a primary school problem this could be absorbed by Eslington school. It was confirmed that many of the permanent exclusions are managed by the Fair Access Panel through managed moves to other mainstream schools.

Committee was advised that SEND inspection has been completed and formal feedback is expected in the next few months, verbal feedback is positive.

RESOLVED - That the Committee continue to receive an annual report on Special schools and provision.

F36 CASE STUDY - SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Committee received a case study on the support offered to care leavers. The Looked After Children's Team tracks 17-21 year olds in terms of whether they are in employment, education or training (EET).

It was noted that the Staying Put scheme allows young people to remain with their foster carers until they are 21, if the young person feels this is their best option. However, there are still a number of young people who want to leave care.

In terms of 2015/16 data, there were 144 care leavers, aged between 18-21 years, the highest number of young people were aged 20, with similar numbers of both male and female. It was noted that some young people will not work with the team and work is underway on how to prevent this, so there has been identification of hard to reach young people and additional support put in place.

In 2015/16 there were 50% of care leavers in some form of education, employment or training, of which; 56% were in full time training or employment, 22% in education, 11% in high education, 8% and 3% in part time training or education respectively. It was acknowledged that there were 39 male and 41 female NEET during the year 2015/16, some became parents and some were no longer in contact with the service.

It was reported that a panel is held on a monthly basis to look at potential care leavers and a bespoke package is put in place for each child. An accommodation panel is also held to encourage potential care leavers to stay put or if not supported accommodation is considered. The panel has been developed with Housing colleagues who help to look at the cohort and can offer taster flats. Taster flats offer a high level of support, the tenancy sits with the local authority until the young

person is in a position to take on the tenancy alone. Work is ongoing to look at areas that young people want to live and appropriate resources. It was reported that this work has been nominated at the NGA Awards and the team has been shortlisted for an award.

Work is underway to try to engage better with those hard to reach care leavers, for example they must come in and speak to the team in order to receive their weekly living allowance, this has proved to be fairly successful. In some cases the living allowance has been split into instalments to encourage more contact.

It was questioned whether the number of care leavers not going anywhere is a sign that they have been failed at an earlier point in their lives. It was acknowledged that these are usually young people who have come to care at a later point in their childhood.

It was noted that apprenticeships are being pushed as far as possible but there are some young people not ready for apprenticeships so the team is looking at lower level opportunities. Discussions are underway with Paul Dowling's service around the provider offer becoming wider.

Concerns were raised about the number of care leavers NEET. It was acknowledged that there are strict rules in terms of how the data is collated, and if a young person's EET experience is intermittent this is not always captured in the figures.

The point was made that performance of care leavers is worse than was reported last year and it was therefore suggested that a further report be brought back to inform Committee of the direction of travel. It was noted that Ofsted identified this as an area needing improvement but that performance is above the England average. It was recognised that there are challenges in relation to the 16-17 offer and the 18-25 offer, as well as the trend in receiving LAC at later years in their life, therefore this is being looked at more strategically to effect change. It was suggested that in the future report information should be included about the age of children entering care and what setting they live in so give a better understanding of the outcomes.

It was questioned whether the pregnancy figures amongst care leavers is high in terms of the general population and whether these pregnancies were as a result of mature choices. It was confirmed that some young people made those choices purposefully, however some are accidental. Youth Services continue to provide sex education. For those male care leavers NEET, becoming a father is not the primary reason for why they are not in employment or education.

RESOLVED - That a further report be brought back to Committee in 6-12 months, to include background information on each care leaver.

F37 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Committee received a report on the recruitment and retention of Social Workers in Gateshead. It was reported that Government has tried to understand and learn from situations within social care and in July 2016 the DFE published a strategy to

transform Children's Services and support local authorities. The strategy was a three pronged approach; people and leadership, practice and systems and governance and accountability.

There are key reforms around the knowledge and skills that Social Workers are expected to have. The DfE intends to test Social Workers to ensure they are meeting standards through accreditation, a consultation is currently out on this.

It was noted that recruitment and retention of Social Workers is influenced by a number of factors, for example Ofsted outcomes, where failing Council's will haemorrhage Social Workers. The market offer is a key influencing factor, with agencies upping their offer to entice Social Workers away from local authorities. It was acknowledged that Social Workers tend to stay in the same area, therefore recruiting takes place from a relatively small pool.

Gateshead has a solid reputation in terms of student placements and is doing well in relation to the Step Up programme and Frontline project.

It was reported that, following an inadequate Ofsted inspection, Sunderland was able to offer more than Gateshead could, this resulted in the loss of 16 Social Workers. Since then, 10 Social Workers have been recruited, 9 of which are newly qualified, therefore there has been reliance on a high number of agency staff to plug the gap. There are threats that there could be a similar response in the near future as local authorities in the area continue to be inspected. It was recognised that the service is working to attract and retain Social Workers and develop succession planning, in order to avoid being in a vulnerable position in the future. There are six outcomes that have been developed to recruit and retain Social Workers in Gateshead;

- A competitive salary
- A recruitment process in line with Knowledge and Skills statements
- A clear programme of development
- A clear progression structure
- Manageable caseloads
- A unique selling point

It was questioned how much is paid out for agency Social Workers. It was noted that this varies week to week but is approximately £250,000. It was confirmed that a memorandum of agreement has been made with the local authorities in the region to agree hourly rates and terms and conditions.

It was queried whether the cost of agency staff could have been better used to offer a better financial package to retain the 16 Social Workers who left. It was confirmed that management responded immediately to attempt to make a better offer but that due to the channels that decisions have to go through in local government this was ineffective. It was also confirmed that a report is due to Cabinet this month around competitive salaries for Social Workers so that the authority is not in a similar position in the future.

It was questioned what the authority does to nurture Social Workers and what is its

unique selling point. It was noted that the unique selling point is around systematic practice and techniques in working with children and families, to play to the strengths of families, which came out of the Munro report. It is expected that the whole workforce will be trained in this technique and specialist training will be offered to Social Workers. This training will not have been delivered outside of the London Boroughs. It was noted that the management work strongly with staff relationships to make them feel safe and reassured. It was recognised that Social Work is a complex job and there is a need to show leadership, encourage and check on welfare of staff.

The point was made that this issue was raised previously when the situation was predicted, at the time Committee suggested making changes to issues such as parking, essential car user allowance. It was confirmed that a review of the pay and structure has been taken into account as well as essential care user allowance, this will go to Cabinet this month.

It was questioned whether there is any scope to establish a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for children's services in Gateshead. It was confirmed that there are a number of models for managing demand that could be looked at, including a MASH, however as yet it is not clear whether this is needed in Gateshead.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Committee continue to champion the work undertaken by the Council's Children's Social Workers.
 - (ii) That the Committee noted the content of this report.
 - (iii) That the Committee agreed to receive regular reports from the Children's Principal Social Worker regarding the progress of work against the six outcomes articulated above.

F38 REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH IN GATESHEAD - INTERIM REPORT

The Committee received the interim report following its review into children's oral health in Gateshead.

Evidence gathering sessions have been held to look at inequalities, gaps in provision, rate of decay, number of hospital admissions and the commissioning landscape. From this evidence ten emerging issues and challenges have been developed;

- Commissioning landscape is complex – there is a need for those services to work together
- School dental survey for five year olds – future report around the outcomes
- Prevention is key – more early intervention
- Health promotion
- Review provision through the 0-19 service review – includes Health Visitors and School Nurses
- Dental caries low in terms of the region but there are geographical inequalities within Gateshead – reflect this in the Joint Strategic Needs

Assessment

- Mobile provision – currently in special schools
- Continue to fluoridate the water
- Removal of tuck shops etc within schools
- Interventions from Public Health England toolkit to consider over the whole life course.

RESOLVED - That the Committee was satisfied with the interim report and will receive the finalised report at its meeting on 6 April 2017.