

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, 12 September 2019

PRESENT: Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)

Councillor(s): M Hall, D Bradford, C Buckley, P Craig,
S Craig, S Gallagher, L Kirton, K McCartney, E McMaster,
M Ord, R Oxberry, I Patterson, Reay and N Weatherley

CO-OPTED MEMBERS Cheryl Lain

F9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Caffrey, Councillor Clelland and co-opted members Jill Burrell and Tim Kynoch.

F10 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the last meeting held on 20 June 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

F11 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN - LSCB ANNUAL REPORT AND PLANS

Committee received the 2018/19 Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). It was noted that it has been a good year for the LSCB with Ofsted reporting that the partnership as a whole is working effectively.

It was reported that areas of progress over the last year include early help and early intervention, where the strategy has had positive impacts on children and their families. Positive work has also been ongoing around domestic abuse, Operation Encompass has been working to inform schools of domestic abuse incidents where children are part of the family involved. The next steps are to roll this out further as domestic abuse levels remain high in Gateshead. Progress has also been seen through the Integrated Referral Team (IRT), this has restructured the council's front door in order to support a more effective response to referrals.

In relation to performance it was noted that the number of Child Protection Plans are decreasing, also the number of on time assessments is extremely good. Overall in terms of children and young people in the system progress is being made in the right direction.

The LSCB was quickly responsive to Ofsted around missing children procedures

and the Board was able to agree to change procedures within 48 hours.

It was reported that there has been a reduction in the number of children and young people being referred through the Missing and Sexually Exploited (MSET) sub group. This is due to improved screening and assessment of risk rather than a decrease in the incidence of exploitation.

It was noted that permanent school exclusion numbers have increased, despite the partnership working on strategies to tackle this issue.

It was noted that there still remains concern around sexual exploitation, drug abuse and in particular the issue around county lines, although there is no strong evidence that this is an issue in Gateshead it would be naïve if this did not stay as a focus. Similarly knife crime will be a focus going forward due to the national focus, although this has not increased in Gateshead.

New arrangements are in place for next year following new government legislation. There will be more work done on a regional basis in the future. It was noted that due to the changes to the arrangements this would be the final LSCB annual report.

The independent Chair of the LSCB gave a summary of the last year and advised that arrangements are going well, public service in Gateshead on average are good. However, there are concerns around mental health and in particular access to services at a lower level.

RESOLVED - That Committee noted the contents of the report.

F12 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS - CHILDREN

Committee received the annual report on the number of complaints and compliments received from April 2018 until March 2019.

It was reported that last year representations decreased by 22% from the previous year. There was an 18% decrease in stage one complaints. During the last year only three out of 40 complaints received moved to a stage two investigation. In relation to complaint related queries (CRQ), these are low level issues dealt with by the service. It was noted that the service has been proactive in dealing with CRQ's and none have moved to a stage one complaint over the last year.

The key themes from the complaints were around quality of service, including quality or worker support or involvement and attitude of staff. This is an increase on the previous year. In terms of attitude of staff complaints three of these were in relation to the quality of foster care placement or the professional behaviour of the foster carer. Two of the complaints were partially upheld, following this the service address the issues directly with the foster carers. Where the complaint is around staff conduct additional training and monitoring is carried out.

It was noted that the majority of complaints for this year were in relation to Looked After Children services and quality of service.

The number of complaints in relation to safeguarding and care planning reduced by 57% this year. This is due to low level issues being dealt with a resolved at an earlier stage.

For this year the main methods of complaint were by email and telephone.

11 complaints were received from Looked After Children or an advocate acting on behalf of the child. This is an increase of 120% on the previous year and demonstrates that children and young people are getting more confident to complain on their own behalf.

The statutory timescales for resolution are 10 working days however this can be extended to 20 working days at the agreement of the complainant. It was reported that 62% of the complaints were responded to within the extended timescale, and the majority of complainants were happy to waive the timescale if officers kept in touch with them.

It was found that 18 complaints were not upheld after investigation and 19 were partially upheld. Three complaints out of 40 moved to stage two of the Complaints Procedure, this involved a full and formal investigation and is reported back to the Service Director. If unsatisfied a complainant can request to move to a Stage 3 Review Panel, there was one held during 2018/19.

Over the last year 73 compliments were received, this is 44% of all representations received.

RESOLVED - That Committee noted the annual report and was satisfied with the performance of Care, Wellbeing and Learning in responding to complaints and ensuring that this results in continuous service improvement.

F13 SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS - PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Committee received a report outlining the current situation around permanent exclusions. It was noted that the number of permanent exclusions increased by 11% last year, with the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) excluding the highest proportion of pupils. Committee was advised that a working agreement is now in place with the PRU so that they do not exclude but instead approach the authority with any potential cases.

It was reported that during 2018/19 Joseph Swan School had a high proportion of permanent exclusions. It was confirmed that officers are now working with the new Headteacher to manage avoidance of permanent exclusions. Similarly, work is ongoing with Lord Lawson to look at alternatives to exclusion.

Work is underway at a strategic level, an annual report on exclusions is presented to the LSCB, therefore this provides an opportunity to link with other partners to work on a multi agency approach. At a strategic level, regular conversations are held with

all Headteachers and at an operational level there is an officer who works with schools.

Schools work with the authority when they choose to permanently exclude therefore officers are able to look at whether a permanent exclusion is appropriate. In addition the authority actively supports parents and looks at suitable alternatives.

A Headteachers conference is due to be held in October, where another local authority will attend to help look at good practice in the areas of leadership and arrangements for their PRU.

The Timpson Report has been published which looked into the use of permanent exclusions. Committee was advised that Gateshead schools and the authority are currently doing what is recommended in the Timpson report. It was noted that guidance has changed to say that Social Workers must be notified when a child in need is moved out of their school, this is to ensure that no child slips through the net.

It was queried whether there is any indication that secondary Headteachers use permanent exclusions to get rid of problems. It was acknowledged that there are inconsistencies however all Headteachers regard permanent exclusions as a last resort. Reassurance was given that the authority would challenge any potential permanent exclusion that was weak and would look at alternatives such as managed moves to another school.

The question was asked as to how responsive the PRU is to Gateshead's needs. It was confirmed that the relationship with the PRU is strong, meetings are held regularly with the PRU's leadership team which allows challenge between both the PRU and the authority.

In terms of those pupils being home schooled it was confirmed that a Home Education Multi Agency Group has been established to support and encourage pupils back into mainstream education. It was noted that Ofsted is increasingly challenging home education.

RESOLVED - Committee noted the information contained in the report.

F14 OFSTED INSPECTIONS / SCHOOL DATA - PROGRESS UPDATE

Committee received a report outlining the Ofsted inspection findings for the spring and summer terms 2019.

It was reported that Falla Park Primary school received a 'good' rating following the appointment of a new Headteacher, this is following a 'requires improvement' finding previously. Similarly, Kingsmeadow Comprehensive received a 'good' judgement which is an improvement on the previous inspection.

It was noted that the number of outstanding schools in Gateshead has reduced over the last year.

Ofsted has increased its focus on outstanding schools in Gateshead and is now inspecting those outstanding schools where published test results have fallen.

It was confirmed that Ofsted will implement a new inspection framework from September 2019 which will put demands on primary schools in particular to take a different focus on the wider curriculum.

Concerns were raised about Fell Dyke moved from 'outstanding' to 'requires improvement'. It was confirmed that there was a senior management change which meant that the quality of teaching was not as good as it previously had been. Committee was advised that a steering group has been put in place to ensure the school gets back on track.

The question was raised as to the current situation regarding Swalwell Primary School following two 'requires improvement' findings. It was confirmed that a steering group is in place and a new Headteacher has been appointed who will work with the authority to improve the quality of teaching. It was also noted that part of the problem is low numbers.

RESOLVED - Committee noted the position of schools in relation to Ofsted inspections.

F15 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the work programme report setting out the provisional work programme for the Committee for the year 2019/20.

It was requested that domestic abuse be looked at following issues raised under the LSCB report.

RESOLVED - (i) Committee noted the provisional programme.
(ii) Committee noted 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.

F16 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with the indicated paragraphs of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

F17 MONITORING REPORT - OSC REVIEW OF CHILDREN ON EDGE OF CARE

A monitoring report was presented on the review undertaken by the Committee into

the support for young people and their families with complex needs on the edge of care.

RESOLVED - That Committee noted the recommendations outlined in the report.