

FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA

Thursday, 2 December 2021 at 1.30 pm in the Bridges Room - Civic Centre

From the Chief Executive, Sheena Ramsey

Item	Business
1	Apologies for absence
2	Minutes of last meeting (Pages 3 - 8) The Committee is asked to approve as a correct record the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 October 2021
3	Corporate Parenting Training Training session delivered by Young Person Ambassador
4	Ofsted Focused Visit Inspection Update (Pages 9 - 16) Report of Deputy Director, Children Adults and Families
5	Work Programme (Pages 17 - 20) Joint Report of the Chief Executive and Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance

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GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, 21 October 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor(s): M Hall, C Buckley, B Clelland, P Craig,
S Craig, S Gallagher, K McCartney, J Mohammed, M Ord
and H Kelly

CO-OPTED MEMBERS Tim Kynoch

F11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bradford, Cllr Caffrey, Cllr Davison, Cllr Oxberry, Cllr Robson, Cllr Burnett and co-opted member Rachel Walton.

F12 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

F13 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE HOME SCHOOLED OR NOT IN EDUCATION

A presentation was given to the Committee on Elective Home Education (EHE) and Education other than at School (EOTAS).

Committee was advised that EHE is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure satisfactory education is being received. There has been a slight increase in the number of children being home education during the pandemic. However, in comparison to neighbouring authorities the increase in Gateshead has only been very slight (7.14%).

It is hoped that government strengthen the guidance for local authorities in the future as, at present, officers have no legal right to enter homes. It was however noted that the Fair Access Link Worker does have very positive relationships with the majority of families who are home educating their children.

It was reported that over the last 10 years there has been a significant increase in families in Gateshead choosing to electively home educate. In 2020/21 there are 247 children on Gateshead's home education register, a 20% increase from 2019/20. In September 2020 there were 36 young people removed from schools, this was an 89% increase than any previous monthly figure over the previous 4 years. In 2020/21 47 children left primary schools and 44 left secondary schools, the main reasons for this being given as ideological, emotional wellbeing and Covid anxieties.

In 2020/21 37 children returned to school after being electively home educated, an increase of 137% from 2019/20.

Schools are encouraged to get officers involved in early discussions between parents and the school. In 2020/21 7 parents were referred to the Legal Intervention Team for School Attendance Orders, this represented a 28% decrease from 2019/20.

As at 7 October 2021 there were 150 children and young people being home educated which represents 1-1.5% of the student population. 5% of these pupils are known to social services.

A breakdown of primary and secondary schools and the number of pupils who have left to be EHE was provided.

The three year trend for permanent exclusions was provided from 2019/20 onwards. It was confirmed that all permanently excluded pupils are receiving full time education from the sixth day, usually through River Tyne Academy. It was noted that the River Tyne model is aimed at reintegrating the pupil back into a mainstream setting.

For children and young people on the EOTAS register this relates to those children requiring home and hospital tuition. Generally 10 hours per week teaching is offered, however this depends on medical advice and the wishes of the parents. The DfE defines full time education as 18 hours per week, however there is a caveat for 10 hours for these particular pupils. Each case is continually reviewed.

It was questioned as to what happens with the funding for a child who is EHE and whether households can join together to share resources. It was noted that some families provide all of the education whereas some blend home education with a private provider or commission a provider for the full week. It was confirmed that the service is good at signposting parents to resources and providers. In terms of the funding for that child the school will not receive the funding, although there will be a funding lag.

It was questioned whether there is any record of how successful these pupils are, for example in terms of exam results. It was confirmed that exam results are received by the Fair Access Worker and that generally parents are quite keen on their electively home educated children moving into post 16 education or training. It was agreed that information would be shared with the Committee on exam results data and also data on re-entry into school.

Concerns were raised about those children that the authority does not have eyes on. It was acknowledged that is why there should be stronger government guidance as child safety is paramount and it would be beneficial to have similar powers to officers in social care in terms of being able to enter homes.

It was noted that there are very few numbers of young people in the care system who are EHE and that a multi-agency EHE group is in place so if there are any safeguarding issues action can be taken.

Committee also requested that the names of recommended providers be circulated to Committee members.

RESOLVED - That the information provided be noted.

F14 CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD UPDATE

The Committee received an update report on the newly established Corporate Parenting Board.

The first meeting of the Board was held on 28 September 2021, Chaired by Cllr Haley. The Board is made up of six Councillors and various partners including health, schools and police. There is still a vacancy for a representative from the Voluntary and Community Sector.

At the last meeting the Board looked at issues such as placement sufficiency, performance and missing from home episodes.

It was noted that December's Families OSC will focus solely on Corporate Parenting and it is expected that this will be used as a training session for members.

The point was made that, given the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, would the Corporate Parenting Board report to the Health and Wellbeing Board if appropriate. It was acknowledged that this could happen if deemed necessary.

It was agreed that the forward plan for the Board would be shared with this Committee and also with the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Representatives from One Voice attended the meeting and the Committee split into small groups for further discussions around young people's experiences.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the contents of the report.

F15 COVID-19 UPDATE

Committee were updated on the position with regards to Covid. It was noted that Children's Social Care continued to hold face to face meetings throughout the pandemic so emergency and safeguarding work remains the same.

It was expected that with the lifting of restrictions it would lead to an increase in demand and from May 2021 there has been a significant increase in demand in social care services and court proceedings. From May until now referrals have increased significantly, however the service is continuing to meet demand well and this has been recognised by Ofsted.

There are over 180 more children and young people in the system now than pre-Covid. There has been good support from the Council to increase the number of Social Workers. There are continued challenges in recruiting Social Workers into the profession.

There has been an increase in the complexities of cases, these are around trauma and mental health and there have been a number of young people struggling in terms of placements.

Ofsted has acknowledged the work of the service and a report of its findings will be published on 27 October.

The LAC population has stabilised but the increase in referrals is predominantly due to parental factor, i.e. domestic violence etc. The highest referrer remains the police with the second biggest number of referrals coming from schools.

Mental health in young people continues to be a concern and work is ongoing to look at developing more of a bespoke service.

It was questioned whether the Compact Agreement is robust. It was confirmed that HR is helping the service to work on a recruitment and retention strategy but currently the Council is not as competitive as it could be.

It was questioned whether the increase in mental health problems is due to better identification or whether there is a genuine increase in mental health cases. It was confirmed that there has been an increase in the number of young people with complex mental health needs who have not been known to any partners or children's social care services so it is important to understand that better.

It was asked whether there has been an increase in Social Workers working remotely. It was confirmed that all local authorities have a different position on this, however within Gateshead it has always remained a priority to keep eyes on children and young people in their family home so remote work is kept to a minimum.

In terms of education it was noted that schools have generally reported children coming back to school post Covid very resilient. Meetings are continuing to be held with Headteachers and regular Union meetings as well.

It was reported that there are higher levels of anxiety and stress than would be usual for this point in the term. Because Covid cases are continuing to rise this is impacting on staff and pupil attendance and supply agencies are also struggling.

The national vaccination programme for young people has not gone well, with anti-vax protests being held outside of one secondary school. The vaccination programme is now being handled at a local level and progress is being made.

It was questioned whether data is being held around which schools are being hit with Covid cases and whether this is linked to inequalities. It was confirmed that Public Health will keep that information.

RESOLVED - That the information presented be noted.

F16 WORK PROGRAMME

Committee received a report on the work programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year.

At the request of the Committee at its last meeting two additional issues have been added to the work programme; impact of Covid on new mothers and babies and FAS/FASD update on NICE guidance.

It was requested that a further report be brought back around permanent exclusions at a future meeting.

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

Chair.....

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TITLE OF REPORT: Ofsted Focused Visit – Front Door of Children’s Services

REPORT OF: Deputy Strategic Director, Children Adults and Families

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the outcome of the visit carried out by Ofsted as part of the new ILAC (Inspections of Local Authority Children’s Services). Ofsted undertook an on-site, focused visit of Gateshead’s Children’s Services on 22-23rd September 2021 to evaluate the quality of help and protection provided to vulnerable children and their families in the ‘front door’ integrated referral team (IRT) and in the assessment and intervention service (A&I).
2. The team of Her Majesty’s Inspectors met with social workers and their managers and looked in detail at children’s records. In addition, inspectors appraised the quality and impact of the local authority’s performance management and audit arrangements.
3. Full report, as well as the presentation delivered to Ofsted on the first day of the inspection can be found attached at Appendix 1.

Background

4. In January 2018 Ofsted published a new inspection framework and guidance for inspecting local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers. The new framework judges the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements:
 - To help and protect children.
 - The experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those who return home.
 - The arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption.
 - The experience and progress of care leavers.

Focused Visits

5. Focused visits evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children.
6. Inspectors will not make graded judgements (inadequate, requires improvement, good or outstanding). Nor will they indicate what the

grade may have been if the visit had been a short or standard inspection. The outcome will be findings about strengths and areas for improvement, reported in a letter.

7. Where inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will identify areas for priority action.
 8. An area for priority action is either:
 - An area of serious weakness that is placing children at risk of inadequate protection and significant harm.
- Or
- Unnecessary delay in identifying permanent solutions for children in care that results in their welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.
 9. Inspectors will use findings from focused visits when planning their next short or standard inspection, the evidence from a focused visit will not be used as primary evidence but may enable inspectors to target their evidence gathering more effectively.
 10. Gateshead's Children's Services was last inspected in May 2019 when the services provided to children were judged to be consistently, and strongly, good in all areas of the work.

In the News

11. The following extract is taken from an article in the Community Care publication 27th October 2021 praising Gateshead for the quality of services delivered:

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2021/10/27/inadequate-councils-make-progress-in-latest-ofsted-visits/>

Strong praise for North East authority:

Meanwhile, in a report today, Ofsted strongly praised good-rated Gateshead following a visit that focused on services at the front door.

Inspectors said the North East authority's "highly skilled, committed and caring social workers" and managers provided "sensitive, innovative, child-centred help and protection" to children.

Most assessments were "comprehensive and analytical", clearly reflecting the child's voice and experiences, while there was a "resolute focus" on understanding the impact of domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and mental ill-health and neglect.

This was backed up by “rigorous” performance management and “strong, effective and ambitious senior leadership” under director of children’s services Caroline O’Neill.

Summary of the Ofsted Visit Sept 2021:

12. *‘Gateshead’s highly skilled, committed and caring social workers and their managers in the front door teams provide sensitive, innovative child-centred help and protection to most children seen during the visit. Continuously strong, ambitious and effective senior leadership has resulted in sustained improvements. The well-respected and experienced director of children’s services (DCS), together with her senior team, has created a culture where doing the right thing to help children and their families is embedded across teams.*

Closely aligned, mature professional partnerships work together effectively to safeguard children from harm. Thresholds are understood well and scrutinised frequently. There is consistent and commendable evidence of continuous innovation and improvement during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Senior leaders are fittingly proud of their staff’s commitment and determination throughout this period to see vulnerable children and their families face to face. Staff report that they feel valued in their work and professional development and that their personal well-being is prioritised.

Performance management is effective. Leaders are intending to take action to strengthen their audit function by including the views of children and parents. Managers’ inconsistent evaluation in supervision and lack of direction around alternative ways of working, along with an absence of contingency planning, contribute to delay for a small number of children.’

13. Ofsted was very complimentary about Gateshead’s ability to continue to innovate under unprecedented demand and pressure even during a global pandemic:

despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic, a strong culture of outward-looking, continuous learning and accountability meant that Gateshead continued to innovate, and to take forward the new initiatives.’

14. Ofsted identified the following areas for improvement:

- The quality and impact of supervision and contingency planning for children in need.
- The routine inclusion of the views of children and their families in audits.

When will Gateshead receive a full, graded Ofsted inspection of Children's Services?

15. According to Ofsted there is no fixed cycle or end date for the programme of re- inspections. Under the current ILACS inspection schedule, Ofsted uses the intelligence and information they have to inform discussions about when and how best to inspect each local authority.
16. Ofsted has stated:

'There will be times when concerns arise about a local authority. The regional director will decide whether to undertake an inspection (standard or short inspection) at which Ofsted will make a graded judgement, or whether a focused visit would be more appropriate.'
17. In most cases, if the next standard or short inspection is not due, Ofsted determine to carry out a focused visit. This is intended to give the local authority and Ofsted the opportunity to identify what is going well and what needs to improve before the next judgement inspection happens.
18. Ofsted says this approach aims to support improvement while still holding the local authority to account in meeting their legal responsibilities to children in need of help, protection and care.
19. Ofsted will inspect local authorities based on the intelligence they have about them and the most recent Ofsted judgement, which for Gateshead was 'good'. The timing of standard and short inspections will usually be within six months before or after the three-year anniversary.
20. The Covid pandemic has impacted on the normal cycle of inspections so it is anticipated that Gateshead will receive a full re-inspection in 2022 or 2023. A significant advantage of receiving a very positive focused visit is that Ofsted will not be in any hurry to re-inspect Gateshead. However, a change of DCS will be taken into account in determining the timing of the next inspection.

Recommendations:

21. It is recommended that the Families OSC:
 - Notes the outcome of the Ofsted visit September 2021 and considers the implications for children in Gateshead
 - Receives a post Ofsted action plan so it can monitor progress against the areas Ofsted identified for improvement.

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27 October 2021

Caroline O'Neill
Strategic Director of Children, Adults and Families Gateshead
Civic Centre
Regent Street
Gateshead
NEB 1HH

Dear Caroline,

Focused visit to Gateshead children's services

This letter summarises the findings of a focused visit to Gateshead children's services on 22 to 23 September 2021. Her Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Brenda McLaughlin, Vicky Metherringham and Louise Walker (HMI designate).

Inspectors evaluated the quality of help and protection provided to vulnerable children and their families in the 'front door' integrated referral team (IRT) and in the assessment and intervention team (AIT). They met with social workers and their managers and looked in detail at children's records. In addition, inspectors appraised the quality and impact of the local authority's performance management and audit arrangements.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

Headline findings

Gateshead's highly skilled, committed and caring social workers and their managers in the front door teams provide sensitive, innovative child-centred help and protection to most children seen during the visit. Continuously strong, ambitious and effective senior leadership has resulted in sustained improvements. The well-respected and experienced director of children's services (DCS), together with her senior team, has created a culture where doing the right thing to help children and their families is embedded across teams.

Closely aligned, mature professional partnerships work together effectively to safeguard children from harm. Thresholds are understood well, and scrutinised frequently. There is consistent and commendable evidence of continuous innovation and improvement during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Senior leaders are

Ofsted

fittingly proud of their staff's commitment and determination throughout this period to see vulnerable children and their families face to face. Staff report that they feel valued in their work and professional development and that their personal well-being is prioritised.

Performance management is effective. Leaders are intending to take action to strengthen their audit function by including the views of children and parents. Managers' inconsistent evaluation in supervision and lack of direction around alternative ways of working, along with an absence of contingency planning, contribute to delay for a small number of children.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- The quality and impact of supervision and contingency planning for children in need.
- The routine inclusion of the views of children and their families in audits.

Main findings

Contact and referrals for children in need or at risk of harm are managed effectively in the IRT. Social workers and managers make prompt, well-informed decisions about what help and protection are required.

Decisions by managers to step up and down to early help services are appropriate. Partner agencies have a shared understanding of thresholds, augmented by the daily multi-agency triage meeting, which includes the early help service. Proportionate checks are undertaken with professionals; they work closely together and collaborate well. As a result, most children and families get the right level of help and protection at the right time, delivered by very committed and skilled professionals. This is making a difference to their day-to-day lives and is keeping them safer. Parental consent to share information is sought routinely, or appropriately overridden if required.

Responses to children at risk of harm are timely and effective. Visits are carried out swiftly by IRT staff when they are concerned about children's immediate welfare, and this is a real strength. Multi-agency child protection strategy meetings are used constructively to share information about children, leading to well-informed decisions about what needs to happen next to protect them from harm. Inspectors agree with a recent independent audit of strategy meetings and child protection enquiries, which concluded that children and their families receive a proportionate response.

Most assessments of vulnerable children are comprehensive and analytical. They demonstrate effective and thoughtful engagement with families and a good understanding of children's needs. They are thorough and clearly reflect the child's voice and experiences. However, some are not updated regularly.

Diligent work by staff across all front door teams, including the out of hours service, demonstrates a resolute focus on understanding the impact of domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, and poor mental health and neglect. Competent examples were seen of social workers using an array of direct-work tools to evaluate how these and other vulnerabilities interact with the ability of parents to provide stable, safe and consistent care for their children.

Risks and strengths are identified and carefully analysed, and consistently informed by the family's previous history. The child's views and lived experiences are central to most decisions, plans and planning. Effective, proportionate action is taken, protecting children from harm. Respectful inclusion of parental and extended family members' views during assessments is recorded well but parental needs do not eclipse those of children. Difficult and honest conversations are conducted appropriately, resulting in many parents working collaboratively and openly with social workers. Good-quality children-in-need plans are evident, but a minority of children remain on these plans too long without the requisite review.

Management direction is clearly articulated on children's records in the IRT. Supervision in the AIT is regular but recording by managers is perfunctory and lacks analysis and clarity on what needs to happen next. It does not include an ongoing evaluation of whether timely progress is being made. Contingency thinking and planning are limited, leading to delay for a small number of children. Regular management reviews of children's progress at 10 and 28 days are conducted. However, children in need whose assessments remain ongoing do not benefit from similar scrutiny beyond 28 days.

Leaders have recognised the need to strengthen services and systems to monitor and assess the impact of work with vulnerable adolescents, those missing from home and children at risk of exploitation. Action to appoint dedicated specialist staff is beginning to make a difference, but the alignment of services and systems to monitor and assess the impact of this work is not yet fully embedded to ensure that risks to children are fully understood and addressed quickly.

Performance management is rigorous. Leaders have an accurate grip on Frontline practice, supported by reliable real-time data. Leaders at all levels regularly investigate variances and emerging concerns in monthly performance clinics, chaired by the deputy strategic director. For example, a monthly missing-from-care meeting led by the senior management team identified that the number of children engaging in their missing-from-care interviews was not good enough. Consequently, a dedicated missing-from-care coordinator post has been created and this is beginning to make a substantial difference.

Senior leaders 'paused' routine audits in February 2021 due to the increase in referrals and pressures on team managers and staff as a result of the pandemic. However, they have continued to carry out thematic audits. Auditors focus on measuring the quality of the work and whether children are being helped and

safeguarded. Leaders are intending to take action to include the views of children and their parents during audits.

The DCS has an accurate view of the service she leads and shows exceptionally strong, stable leadership and commitment to continued improvement, working adroitly to progress the small number of areas for improvement that remain. There is no complacency. For example, despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic, a strong culture of outward-looking, continuous learning and accountability meant that Gateshead continued to innovate, and appoint more staff to take forward the new initiatives. They pioneered the successful development of a new social workers in schools team across six secondary schools, leading to earlier intervention and prevention of harm to children. This initiative is now being extended to include more schools. In addition, an independently commissioned peer review of the complex children-in-need team is leading to an enhanced service to children at risk of coming into care.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning your next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Brenda McLaughlin
Her Majesty's Inspector

TITLE OF REPORT: Annual Work Programme

REPORT OF: Sheena Ramsey, Chief Executive
Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance

Summary

The report sets out the provisional work programme for Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2021/22.

1. The Committee's provisional work programme was endorsed at the meeting held on 17 June 2021 and Councillors have agreed that further reports will be brought to future meetings to highlight current issues / identify any changes / additions to this programme.
2. Appendix 1 sets out the work programme as it currently stands. Any changes proposed to the programme will be set out in bold and italics for ease of identification.

Recommendations

3. The Committee is asked to
 - a) Note the provisional programme;
 - b) Note 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.

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Draft Families OSC Work Programme 2021-22	
17 June 2021 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Performance Framework – Update • Covid-19 Updates • Free School Meals Update • New Corporate Parenting Board/Partnership/OSC arrangements • Foetal Alcohol Syndrome – Update • Work Programme
9 September 2021 1.30pm	MEETING CANCELLED
21 October 2021 5.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid-19 Updates • Children and Young People who are Home Schooled or Not in Education • Corporate Parenting Board Update • Work Programme
2 December 2021 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Parenting Board Update • <i>Ofsted Visit Outcome</i>
3 February 2022 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Performance Framework - Update • Covid-19 Update (<i>to include impact of Covid on new mothers and babies</i>) • Children and Young People’s access to Dental Health Services in Gateshead – Update • Corporate Parenting Board Update • Work Programme
10 March 2022 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Permanent Exclusions Update</i> • <i>EHCP/SEND Update</i>
28 April 2022 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAS/FASD – Update on NICE Guidance <u>TBC</u> • New Performance Framework - Update • Covid-19 Updates • Corporate Parenting Board Update • Work Programme

Issues to Slot In –

- **Results of Covid 19 Survey**
- **Outreach Youth Work – targeted and universal** (*once discussion at Labour Group has taken place*)

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