



FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA

Thursday, 9 March 2023 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 19 January 2023
3	Impact of Covid on new parents - update (Pages 9 - 16) Report of the Director of Public Health
4	Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2021/2022 (Pages 17 - 26) Report of Strategic Director, Children's Social Care and Lifelong Learning
5	National Transfer Scheme and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (Pages 27 - 30) Report of Strategic Director, Children's Social Care and Lifelong Learning
6	Work Programme (Pages 31 - 34) Joint Report of the Chief Executive and Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance

Contact: Rosalyn Patterson E-mail: rosalynpatterson@gateshead.gov.uk,
Tel: 0191 4332088, Date: Wednesday, 1 March 2023

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GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, 19 January 2023

PRESENT: Councillor M Hall (Chair)
Councillor(s): D Burnett, H Kelly, D Bradford, K McCartney, E McMaster, J Mohammed, L Moir, M Ord and D Weatherley

CO-OPTED MEMBERS Ayodele Akin and Rachel Walton

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor G Haley

F68 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Caffrey, Cllr Clelland, Cllr P Craig, Cllr Davison, Cllr Robson, Cllr Waugh and Cllr A Ord.

F69 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2022 be approved as a correct record.

F70 PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOLS 2021-2022 AND OFSTED INSPECTIONS UPDATE

Committee received reports and a presentation outlining the results of Gateshead pupil's performance for 2021/22 and the results of the most recent Ofsted inspections.

It was reported that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, maths, grammar punctuation and spelling at the end of Key Stage 2 was above the national average. Progress in reading and maths is also above the national average.

The proportion of pupils achieving attainment 8 and a good grade in English and Maths GCSE was also above the national average for both male and female pupils.

In terms of Ofsted inspections it was confirmed that the proportion of schools with a good or outstanding judgement is above the national average. It was also reported that the majority of schools inspected have retained or improved their judgement. It was noted that 11 schools were inspected during the Autumn term and there were no surprises in the outcomes for those schools.

Committee was advised that there remains challenges around the impact of Covid

on the youngest pupils. It was confirmed that average outcomes in tests for 5,6 and 7 year olds was below average. The widest gaps between Gateshead and national outcomes are for those children who have English as an additional language. In addition, outcomes in writing at the end of Key Stage 2 has been most affected by Covid.

In terms of Ofsted inspections, it was reported that a lot of experienced inspectors have left and this has led to a lack of consistency when schools are being inspected. It was confirmed that the issue has been raised with Ofsted who has acknowledged the concern and states it is addressing this through training.

The steps in place to address the challenges include professional development and resources in place to support the youngest children to improve writing. There is also support continuing to develop leadership and curriculum in schools. Strong working relationships have been developed with the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which includes 18 Gateshead Primary Schools within the Trust. In addition, there is tailored challenge and support for each school taking into account the individual circumstances of the school. For those schools judged as 'requires improvement' intensive targeted support is in place.

Committee raised concerns about new inspectors not being monitored effectively. It was noted that there is a lack of transparency with Ofsted, however Ofsted has advised that internal processes of monitoring are taking place. It was acknowledged however that this lack of consistency can add additional stress on school leaders.

It was questioned whether those pupils with English as an additional language are from Ukraine. It was confirmed there are a lot of pupils with English as an additional language and not just from Ukraine. It was noted that these pupils mostly catch up by the end of primary school.

It was questioned as to how long the impact of Covid is likely to last and when will there be stabilisation of learning. It was acknowledged that the biggest impact is affecting 7 and 8 year olds because they missed learning the basics. For those pupils under 5 the main issues are around social, emotional and communication skills. In addition, Key Stage 3 pupils in secondary school, current years 8 and 9, missed out on transition work and this left a lot of pupils not feeling comfortable going into secondary school. It was confirmed that attendance also still remains an issue and subsequently slows progress.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That Committee noted the contents of the report in relation to assessment, test and exam outcomes for the academic year 2021-2022.
 - (ii) That Committee noted the position of schools in relation to Ofsted inspections.

F71 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE 2021/22

Committee received a report and presentation on school attendance in Gateshead for the academic year 2021-22.

In terms of current strengths it was noted that Children's Social Care team is looking at innovative ways to improve attendance in schools. In addition, there is the Social Worker in schools programme which supports individual schools to offer advice and guidance. The total outreach of the programme is in excess of 6,000 young people and their families. It was acknowledged that this approach has enabled a robust multi-agency safeguarding approach to wider factors that can affect school attendance.

The Team Around the School model works with pupils and families identified, including around improving school attendance. There is also a robust approach to legal intervention when there are persistent non-attenders. The legal team works well with schools to address this issue.

In terms of challenges, there is a DfE national strategy on addressing issues it has recognised across the country as a result of Covid. Therefore, work is ongoing internally to align strategies and approaches across the system to the government's strategy. There is also a challenger around ensuring stronger governance and performance management arrangements, as well as using data more effectively and developing internal approach for school colleagues.

In terms of next steps it was noted that there will be the development of a graduated partnership approach to make certain there is an integrated service offer. There will also be a review of existing partnership governance arrangements and an alignment of strategies and priorities. Recruitment of a data officer is underway to ensure performance management systems support the routine, robust interrogation of data. This will allow resources to be directed more efficiently and effectively.

It was questioned as to when a school would go out to speak to a family once attendance of a pupil was recognised to be a problem. It was confirmed that all schools have attendance policies and have a member of staff responsible for attendance within school. Thresholds vary from school to school and schools should consider each case on its merits, looking at the need for support or whether the case should be referred to the authority for prosecution. It was noted that all schools understand the needs of its community and therefore the approach to attendance should be school led. It was noted that once a case comes to the Attendance Panel they will look at what should be in place and make recommendations to the school if necessary.

It was queried as to how often prosecutions occur. It was confirmed that there are not many prosecutions, there were only two court cases this year and it is mainly penalty notices.

Concerns were raised that without visits from Education Welfare Officers any wider family issues are not being picked up as quickly. It was acknowledged that most schools would act quickly if there was no first day response and take a proactive approach to getting pupils into school. Schools are held to account through Ofsted in terms of attendance so do take it seriously.

It was questioned as to whether there were examples of parents using the system to

aid non-attendance, for example asking for a CAMHS referral through a GP. It was confirmed that schools need to consider their own attendance policy and if they feel a child cannot attend school this should be referred to the authority.

It was queried as to who would provide school work after 15 days for a child refusing to attend school. It was confirmed that this would be the authority, it would be 10 hours per week with a one-to-one tutor. The authority would liaise with the child's school to provide progress information as the child is still on roll there. This arrangement would be reviewed on a six monthly basis.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the information presented.

F72 SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS 2021/2022

The Committee received a report and presentation on the number of exclusions in Gateshead for the academic year 2021/22.

It was reported that the authority has an experienced officer who can advise and support schools with regards to legal aspects of exclusion including training for governors. An offer has been developed to support secondary school pupils with challenging social and learning behaviours and increasing exclusions, through an assessment placement within River Tyne Academy. There are 103 places within River Tyne Academy with places held back for these 12 week assessments. The assessments can take place at individual schools, River Tyne academy or through outreach work. The aim of this work is to support young people to develop tools to manage in a mainstream school environment.

There is strong individual and multi-agency work that supports avoidance of permanent exclusions. A model has been developed for the mental health team through CNTW to do intensive work with pupils.

In terms of challenges it was acknowledged that there are too many suspensions and permanent exclusions in secondary schools. Some behaviour policies are very punitive and do not reflect an inclusive approach. It was also noted that there is a lack of alternative provision for pupils that require small nurture support or trauma informed intervention or a vocational offer. The biggest gap in alternative provision is at Key Stage 2 and 3 for Social Emotional and behavioural needs and vocational offers at Key Stage 4. Work is ongoing around improving this vocational offer.

The next steps outlined were around developing a commissioning strategy for alternative provision and develop the ARMS provision across Gateshead to meet the needs of more pupils in mainstream settings. There will also be a review to refine support for schools around exclusions with the aim of reducing the rate of permanent exclusions by developing the outreach offer from River Tyne Academy.

It was requested that school names be provided for the next report in order to identify if any particular schools are not using permanent exclusions correctly. It was confirmed that officers would seek guidance on presenting this information in future reports. It was also requested that the Committee be made aware of the figures relating to managed moves across Gateshead. Committee was given assurances

that there is robust challenge in Gateshead and routes that officers can go down if challenge of individual schools is required.

RESOLVED - That Committee noted the information presented.

F73 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

Committee received a report and presentation on elective home education in Gateshead for the year 2021-22.

It was reported that the authority has the expertise, knowledge and experience of the Elective Home Education Officers. These officers have a well established, supportive approach with families choosing to electively home educate. There is also a robust protocol to challenge those parents who are not providing suitable education in addition to strong multi-agency work with other organisations involved.

It was noted that there are increasing numbers of parents choosing to electively home educate where there may be limited capacity to do this sufficiently. There is a lack of local authority legal powers around this issue therefore this continues to be a challenge for the authority. There are also challenges around the timeliness of accessing mental health services once referrals are made.

In terms of next steps, a review of elective home education strategy will look to provide support to parents and encourage them to discuss the situation with the authority before de-registering their child. There is also a focus on families awaiting referrals to tier 3 mental health services around whether any additional support services can support the young person in the interim. It was also noted that a protocol for families wishing to home educate when open to children's social care will be explored.

It was questioned whether Ofsted look at elective home educated children. It was noted that this would only be through the ILAC inspection. Concerns were raised about some schools using this as an extension of a managed move, with schools encouraging home education if a child has complex needs. It was agreed that this would be picked up outside of the meeting to understand more specific cases.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the information presented.

F74 WORK PROGRAMME

Committee received the work programme report which included items requested for the next municipal year.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the provisional work programme for 2022/23 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.

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TITLE OF REPORT: COVID 19 update on impact on new parents and their babies

REPORT OF: Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to give the Committee an update following the report that was presented in April 2022 on the impact of COVID 19 on new parents and their babies.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

1. The previous report presented to committee in April 2022 gave an overview of a number of national reports and briefings that had been published during the pandemic and also what support was available for new mothers and their babies.
2. The reports that were included in the report were:
 - Lockdown babies: Children born during the coronavirus crisis (briefing from the Children’s Commissioner - May 2020)
 - Babies in lockdown – listening to parents to build back better (August 2020)
 - Babies in lockdown – no one wants to see my baby (November 2021)
 - Education Recovery in Early Years Providers (April 2022)
3. Whilst the above were national documents, they gave a good indication of the issues new parents and their babies faced during the various lockdowns and the ongoing pandemic. They also highlighted that there were some positives during this period. An overview of the issues and the positive experiences were outlined in the previous report.
4. A further briefing “Education recovery in early years providers” report was published by Ofsted in July 2022. This briefing drew on inspection evidence gathered in the summer term in 2022, and discussions with early years providers. It was based on evidence collected during routine inspections of 29 early years providers and included 9 childminders and 20 nurseries. Insight was also collected from 21 early years inspectors. However, the briefing advised that we cannot assume that the findings were representative of the whole sector but may illustrate the challenges that some providers and children experienced.

5. The main findings to note are:

- Children's communication and language development continued to be affected, and an increased number of children had been referred for additional support, although children are having to wait months for specialist help. Providers were encouraging children's vocabulary development and had returned to learning activities that were common before the pandemic e.g. supporting role play, reading stories
- Many children were still lacking confidence in social settings, with some taking longer to settle into nursery or with a childminder than would have been expected before the pandemic
- There had been some concerns about children's physical development and the lack of physical activity, including access to large-scale play equipment, during the pandemic which meant that some children had not developed the gross motor skills they need
- Some children were lacking in independent self-care skills, such as toileting and dressing, to a greater extent than would usually be the case for their stage of development
- Fewer children were ready for the move up to reception than would have been expected before the pandemic
- Most providers reported that they had continued to struggle to recruit high quality qualified staff and since the start of the pandemic had reported increased difficulties in retaining staff

6. It was noted that most providers had implemented a range of strategies to help children catch up with their learning and development. Providers have always cared for children who are behind in areas of their development to a greater extent than others, and the approaches to support these children remain the same.

7. Casting Long Shadows (The Ongoing Impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on babies, their families and the services that support them) was published in November 2022. This report was written for the First 1001 Days Movement and the Institute of Health Visiting. It sets out the results of a review of relevant reports, research and national data and a new survey of 555 professionals and volunteers who work with babies and their families in health visiting, mental health, maternity, early education, and other services. The survey was conducted between July and early September 2022.

8. The executive summary highlighted the following:

- More babies and young children are exposed to stresses and adversity at home, and access to positive activities had declined
- The pandemic is having an ongoing impact on children's health and development
- Changes made to services as a result of the pandemic are being sustained, with mixed impact
- Many services are struggling to meet children's needs

9. Various reports have highlighted that the picture is still evolving, and it could be years before researchers can adequately measure whether the pandemic had any material, long-term effect on early childhood development. Some babies born during the pandemic might be experiencing developmental delays, whereas others might have thrived, if parents/carers were at home for extended periods and there were more opportunities for siblings to interact. As with many aspects of health during the pandemic, social and economic disparities have a clear role in who is affected the most.

LOCAL OVERVIEW

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

10. The importance of best start in life is set out Gateshead's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Whilst Best Start in Life is the strategy's first policy objective, the other policy objectives are connected and needed to support best start in life, such as ensuring families have good jobs, incomes, homes, and communities in which to thrive. The need to support the implementation of the strategy has grown since the pandemic, and an implementation group has been set up to take this work forward, reporting into the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Family Hubs and Start for Life

11. As previously advised Gateshead Council is one of 75 local authorities who are eligible for funding from Government for the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. This includes funding to introduce a network of Family Hubs and to develop service provision in the following thematic areas:

- Parent-infant relationships and perinatal mental health support
- Infant feeding
- Parenting support
- Home learning environment to aid early years educational recovery

The funding should also be used to meet an expectation from DfE/DHSC that we:

- Publish a clear 'Start for Life offer' setting-out the support available to families during the '1,001 critical days'
- Establish new Parent/Carer Panels to ensure that parent/carer voices are heard in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services

12. The funding in the thematic areas identified above is mainly in relation to the start for life offer (1001 critical days - conception to age 2). However, the home learning environment funding is part of the education recovery programme, and is targeted towards parents of 3 to 4 year olds. This is to support those children whose cognitive and socio-emotional development has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, with priority given to parents and children who would benefit most.
13. Practitioners (parenting, early help, early years and health visitors) working with families in childcare or family support settings, such as family hubs, will be trained in home learning environment interventions and they will have the tools to deliver a range of support to families. They will deliver evidence-based interventions which

support one or more of the following learning outcomes: language, literacy, social and emotional development and or self-regulation.

14. A multi-agency steering group oversees the work and the delivery plan, and thematic groups have been established to take forward the individual strands identified above. Gateshead's delivery plan was submitted on 30th December 2022 and has been signed off by the national team as meeting the satisfactory assessment criteria (level 2) on first submission. We will now work with our steering group and regional support teams to progress our delivery plan to reach level 3 (strong).

0-19 Public Health Nursing Service (Growing Healthy Gateshead)

15. For child development, Health Visitors use the ages and stages questionnaires (ASQ3) when carrying out the 9 to 12 month and 2 to 2 ½ mandated contact visits with children. The questionnaires are issued in advance to the parents to complete (note if the parent does not complete the questionnaire prior to the visit the health visitor will help them to complete it at the visit). Parents answer questions about how they view their child's development.
16. The ASQ3 covers the following skills: communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, personal and social. The questionnaire is one part of a holistic assessment for the child, and the health visitor will discuss and explore with the parent how they have scored their child in each of the skills. The health visitor will carry out various activities, dependent on age, with the child to look at different skills. For the 2 to 2 ½ year check this can include getting the child to build blocks, understanding how many words the child can say, whether the child understands directions, walking up and down at least two steps, and turning the pages of a book by themselves.
17. The results of the questionnaire are then put into the electronic system and used to generate a score for the child against each of the skills. The electronic system also generates an overall score across the 5 skills. The results are shared with the parent and if there are any areas of concern the relevant support will be put into place by the health visitor/early years practitioner or a referral may be made to another service, where appropriate, or to the 0-4 referral meeting (see paragraph 17 below). If the child attends nursery there can be an integrated review with the parents and the nursery. If this is not possible, the parent can share the results with the nursery who will also support the child around any identified developmental needs.
18. The table below gives an overview of ASQ3 scores in Gateshead and England for the 2 to 2 ½ year checks (The results for the 9 to 12 month checks are not required to be reported nationally and are therefore not published). It should be noted that any babies born pre pandemic (e.g. December 2019) will have been due for their 2 to 2 ½ year check between December 2021 and June 2022 so their results could have been captured in 21/22 data or 22/23 data. Whilst there have been some reductions in the scores the most notable is in communication skills. However, it

should be noted that the figures for 22/23 only cover until September 2022 so we may see an increase in this figure by the year end.

Age 2 to 2 ½	2020 – 2021		2021 - 2022		2022 -2023 (Up to September 2022)	
	Gateshead	England	Gateshead	England	Gateshead	England
Communication	90.4%	86.8%	87%	86.2%	84.5%	85.5%
Gross motor	97%	91.8%	94.8%	93.1%	96.2%	92.8%
Fine motor	97.6%	92%	94.8%	92.9%	95.1%	92.4%
Problem solving	96.3%	91.9%	93%	92.4%	92.9%	91.8%
Personal & Social	95.6%	90.2%	92.7%	90.8%	93.2%	90.4%
All 5 skills	88.2%	82.9%	83.8%	80.9%	82.1%	79.4%

Gateshead 0-4 Referral Meeting

19. In terms of support for pre-school children Members may be aware that in Gateshead we have the 0 to 4 Referral Meeting, which is for children who have additional needs where specialist education, health and care services may be required. Each meeting is attended by a team of professionals from different services who act as a single point of referral for pre-school aged children (0-4 years old).

20. Regular developmental checks are carried out with children by the health visitor or a key person in the nursery setting and may be carried out by other professionals involved with a child. These checks help to identify as early as possible any additional developmental needs so that appropriate support can be provided. This support is usually provided by services in health and education, and sometimes social care. The following services may be represented at the meeting; Special Educational Needs Inclusion Team, Early Years Area SENCO's, Educational Psychologists, Early Years Childcare Services, Child Development Team, Speech and Language Therapy Service, Children with Disabilities Team, Growing Healthy Gateshead (health visiting), Paediatricians.

21. The 0-4 referral meeting continued to support children throughout the pandemic but had to adapt to different ways of working. One of the main changes is that the meetings changed to virtual, but this has been found to be a positive move with more partners being able to attend the meeting, rather than having to attend in person. In addition, the process is more efficient as all referral documents and papers are held and distributed electronically.

22. Different resource packs with advice, guidance and strategies were developed by services to be used during and after the pandemic to support children such as social communication and interaction, pre-verbal communication skills, sleep routines/calming strategies.

23. As can be seen from the table below the referrals have increased since 19/20. Whilst this may be attributed to the pandemic, without a deep dive into the cases and having a full understanding of the referrals we cannot definitely assume the increase to be due to the pandemic.

	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23 (To 30/1/23)
Total referrals	194	257	306	166

24. The main thing to note is that professionals are identifying children who need extra support pre-school, and that a multi-agency approach is in place to support these children. Professionals who are involved in the referral meeting have commented that it is a good mechanism for identifying who is best placed to support children who need additional help.

Children’s Centre and Play Services

25. As advised in the previous report Children’s Centre’s and Play Services have been providing a full offer to families since 1st April 2021. There continues to be a large and varied offer for families with babies and young children such as parent programmes, baby time, infant massage, time Together, Stay and Play, Sensory Rooms, Soft Play, Baby Yoga, Baby Sign, Baby Movers, Messy Play & Mark Making, Health and Wellbeing Clinics and Breastfeeding Support. In line with the development of family hubs and the start for life programme we will be looking to expand the support available around the key thematic areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

Contact: Moira Richardson – Public Health Practitioner, Ext: 3034

Links to National Surveys and Reports

[Education recovery in early years providers: summer 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-recovery-in-early-years-providers-summer-2022)

[F1001D-Casting-Long-Shadows-FINAL-NOV-22.pdf \(ihv.org.uk\)](https://ihv.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/F1001D-Casting-Long-Shadows-FINAL-NOV-22.pdf)

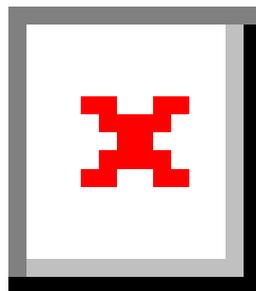
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TITLE OF REPORT: Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2021/2022

REPORT OF: Strategic Director, Children's Social Care and
Lifelong Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of the work undertaken for children with plans of adoption within Gateshead Local Authority.



Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the practice and delivery of adoption services in Gateshead Council.

Background

2. The Local Authority is responsible for securing permanency for those children who, for reasons of their safety and welfare are unable to live within their birth families and whose needs are such that adoption has been judged to be the best permanency option for those children.

- Policy Background:
- 1989 Children Act
- Adoption Acts 2002, 2014 & 2017

- Public Law Outline (2014)
- Children & Families Act (2014)

Proposal

3. It is proposed that the Local Authority continue to work towards adoption as the best outcome for some children for whom we act as corporate parents.

Recommendations

4. The Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider this report and make any recommendations for action as judged necessary.

Adoption in Gateshead 2021 – 2022

5. Adoption is the legal process in which the parental responsibility (PR) for a child is transferred from their birth parent or other persons with parental responsibility (PR) to the adopters.
6. Adopt North East, the Regional Adoption Agency responsible for adoption services on behalf of Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Council. The regional adoption agency has been created in response to the legal requirement that all authorities regionalise their adoption services. Adopt North East replaced the council's own adoption team in December 2019.
7. The Safeguarding and Care Planning Service is responsible for intervening to safeguard children, assessing families, and making decisions about whether adoption is the most suitable plan for permanency if the child cannot be cared for safely and appropriately within their family of birth. Within the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service there is a dedicated Support Assistant who undertakes all Life Story work and books for our children with Placement Orders and undertakes Life Story work with our adoptive parents. Feedback from Adopt North East and our Adoptive parents is this work to a high standard and invaluable to understand the child's journey.
8. All decisions about adoption are ratified by the Assistant Strategic Director for Children and Families by way of Agency Decision Making Meeting (ADM). The Family Court makes the ultimate decision if a child should be placed for adoption by the making of a Placement Order. The child is then freed for adoption and can be matched with adopters who thereafter can apply for an Adoption Order once the child has been in their care for ten weeks or more.
9. Until the Adoption Order has been made, the child remains the responsibility of the local authority and is deemed a Cared for Child.

10. In making the decision about whether the child should be adopted, social workers and the courts must satisfy themselves that “nothing else will do” and that all avenues have been explored with regards to that child being cared for by someone in their birth family network.
11. Between 2020/2021 the average number of days between a child entering the care of the local authority and moving in with an adoptive family is 358. This has increased in 2021/2022 to 401 days.
12. It is clearly in the child’s best interests to minimise the time spent in foster care and decisions for permanent care are taken as soon as possible. This is done through robust assessments work of birth family to ensure that when the birth parents cannot care for a child they and all alternative option of care including family and friends have been considered and ruled out.
13. Due to a court case in November 2021 in Somerset County Council where a judge raised concerned about the local authority’s adoption practice and deemed children’s adoption placement orders unlawful, adoption processes which reflected similar practices to Somerset stalled across the country. This did impact on children in Gateshead and the timeliness of adoption placements was affected. In April 2022, the High Court handed down a judgement in *Somerset County Council v NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group & Anor* [2021] EWHC 3004(Fam) dealing with the lawfulness of placement orders made in ten separate cases. The President of the Family Division Courts issued guidance for the approach to be taken by local authorities using similar practices where regulations have not been followed. In response to this guidance, Gateshead has changed it adoption practices and are now compliant with the adoption regulations.

14. Statistical Information:

15. Table 1: The number of children with a plan of adoption referred by Gateshead’s Safeguarding and Care Planning Service to Adopt North East in 2019/2020, 2020/2021, 2021/22:

Year	The number of children with a plan of adoption referred by Gateshead’s Safeguarding and Care Planning Service to Adopt North East
2019 - 2020	22
2020 - 2021	21
2021 - 2022	25

16. Table 2: The number of children for whom a Placement Order was made in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22:

Year	The number of children for whom a Placement Order was made
2019 - 2020	20
2020 - 2021	27

2021 – 2022	25
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17. Table 3: The number of children matched with adopters in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22:

Year	The number of children matched with adopters
2019 - 2020	16
2020 - 2021	20
2021 – 2022	21

18. In 2021/2022 the number of children with a plan of adoption reversed was one. The reason for reversal was that paternal grandparents presented late (at the Final Hearing) expressing a wish to care for their grandchild. The grandparents had been assessed in the early stages of the proceedings and made a decision that they did not wish to become fulltime carers for their grandchild and subsequently changed their mind.

19. Between September 2021 and March 2022, there have been 13 children placed in Foster to Adopt or Early Permanence placements.

20. When a child who has been placed with an adoptive family needs to be removed as the adoptive family no longer wish to care for them or the adopters are struggling to meet the needs of the child and the local authority intervene and remove the child, this is referred to as an adoption breakdown. In Gateshead there has been 2 (1 sibling group of 2 children) adoption breakdown's in 2021/2022. Fortunately for the child, their previous foster carers were available, and the children were returned to their care. The foster carers are currently being assessed as adoptive parents for the two children. This evidences that assessments of the child's needs and matching processes have been thorough and accurate.

Early Permanence

21. Early permanence is an umbrella term which includes both Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent Planning. Both schemes enable the Local Authority to ensure that permanent care arrangements are secured for the child as quickly as possible. Fostering for Adoption enables the Local Authority to find foster parents for children who are willing to adopt them at a later date if the courts decide they cannot return to live with their birth family. It is aimed at helping babies whose birth families are still being assessed as to whether they can look after their baby or not.

How does Early Permanence work?

- 22.** The Local Authority refers babies about whom there are concerns regarding the care they may receive from their birth family to the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt North East. If appropriate and agreed, the Local Authority places the babies with foster carers who have already been approved as adopters. This means they can go on to adopt the baby if the courts decide he or she cannot live with their birth family.
- 23.** Early Permanence avoids the risk that the baby may be moved from foster carer to foster carer while the local authority and the courts assess the birth family's ability to look after him or her. National data tells us that time taken from the baby being placed into local authority foster care to being placed with their adoptive family usually takes between six and twenty-four months. Once an order has been made in court which allows the child to be adopted (Placement Order) he or she can then be matched with adopters.
- 24.** Under the Public Law Outline (2014) and the Children & Families Act 2014, guidance states that court care proceedings should be completed within 26 weeks, to be sure that children are not being unduly kept waiting for their permanence plans to be legally agreed.
- 25.** Gateshead Local Authority and Adopt North East will only place babies under Foster to Adopt or Early Permanence arrangements when, based on the available evidence and the birth family's history, there is a high probability that the court decision for the child will be adoption. The evidence upon which social workers make their decision to recommend a foster-to-adopt placement usually includes previous siblings being removed from the parent's care and subsequently no evidence of improvement in the circumstances of the birth family.

26. Benefits of Early Permanence

- 27.** Because the foster carers with whom the baby is living have already been approved to adopt the baby it means there is a seamless transition from foster care to adoption.
- 28.** It is clearly in the child's best interests to minimise the time spent waiting in foster care. Early Permanence eliminates the waiting period for children.

29. Other advantages of Early Permanence are: -

- It speeds up the planning of babies' lives and avoids delay in deciding their future.
- It avoids the disruption of being moved from foster care to adoption or from foster carer to foster carer.
- Bonding with the people who will eventually adopt him or her can begin right away – in many cases the baby is placed with the Early Permanence carers directly from the hospital where he or she was born.
- The foster carers who go on to adopt will have had a chance to get to know the baby's birth parents during the court process. This means they will know all about the baby's background and the circumstances that led to him or her being placed in care.
- It strengthens the attachments between the child and their adopters and avoids disruption to attachment between the child and their foster carer.

30. For those children for whom Early Permanence placements are inadvisable because their specific family circumstances may mean that an outcome of adoption at court is uncertain. Gateshead Council has systems in place to ensure that children are placed with their adopters or in a permanent care arrangement as soon as possible. For unborn babies whose siblings have previously been removed from parents care because of safeguarding concerns, planning begins before the child has been born by way of Pre-Birth team.

31. For all children, if safeguarding concerns are so great that care outside that of their parents is necessary, a Legal Gateway Panel will be held immediately, and legal proceedings will begin. Thereafter, a period of concurrent planning will begin. This means that parents and other family members or persons connected to the child will be assessed regarding their suitability to offer permanent care of the child. This will happen alongside a referral to Adopt North East and planning for possible adoption.

32. To avoid any unnecessary delay in securing a child's plan for permanence, the child's Independent Reviewing Officer will seek assurances about the permanence plan for the child at their second Child In Our Care Review. This takes place no later than four months after the child has become cared for by the Local Authority.

33. An additional measure of quality assurance is the Early Permanence Panel, which is chaired by the Deputy Strategic Director for Children and Families. The panel is attended by Service Managers, Team Managers, and local authority Lead Solicitor. Relevant data regarding children who are in the care of the local authority and those who are the subject of court proceedings are

presented and individual cases are scrutinised. Within Panel the length of court proceedings and the reason for any delays are understood so that, if possible, measures can be taken to avoid similar delay in the future. Sometimes, however, timetabling by the court builds in delay to children's plans so that they sometimes wait in Local Authority care longer than necessary and their permanence arrangements are delayed.

34. Following the assessments of parents and any other family members, firm plans for the long-term or permanent care of the child will be agreed. This will take place in a Decision-Making Meeting, that includes social workers, team managers and the local authority legal representative. The plans will either be for rehabilitation back to birth parents or any person whom made hold parental responsibility, adoption, long-term fostering or placing a child with another family member through a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangements Order.
35. Agreement for Early Permanence and all adoption plans are agreed by Deputy Strategic Director for Children and Families by way of Agency Decision Making meeting (ADM) before recommendations about each child are made to the court.

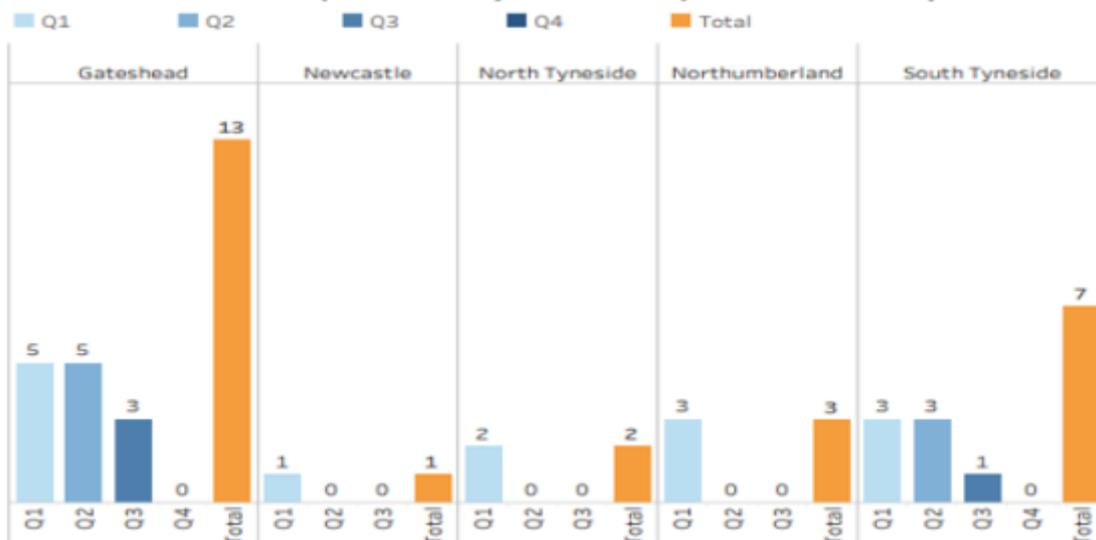
Statistical Information:

36. The number of Gateshead children placed in Early Permanence Placements during the year 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22

Year	Gateshead Children placed in Early Permanence Placements (Foster to Adopt)
2019 - 2020	4
2020 - 2021	9
2021 - 2022	13

37. Of the children referred to the Regional Adoption Agency from all 5 Local Authorities a total of 28 children were placed in Early Permanence Placements in 2021/22, up from 18 in 2020/21 and 6 in 2019/20. This was a 56% increase on the previous year. This represents a continued increase in the use of Early Permanence Placements by the partnership. Three out of five Local Authorities increased their use. Gateshead continues to be the highest user of Early Permanence.

The Number of Children placed in Early Permanence placements in 2021/22



38. Regional Adoption Agency – Adopt North East

39. Adopt North East is the Regional Adoption Agency based in the North East of England in which Gateshead is in partnership with alongside, Northumberland, Newcastle, North and South Tyneside Councils.

40. Adopt North East has primary responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions.

41. Adopt North East has primary responsibility for Family Finding for all children with a plan of adoption, but the five partner Local Authorities retain overall responsibility for children in their care.

42. Adopt North East provides support to all parties affect by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted children, adopted adults and birth relatives.

43. Please see attached for reference Adopt North East Annual Report 2021/22

[ANE Annual Report 2021-22 - Draft v1 - Jul 2022.pdf](#)

[ANE Annual Performance Report 2021-22 - Draft v1 - Jul 2022.docx.pdf](#)

44. Recommendations

(i) It is recommended that note and comment on the information provided in the report

CONTACT:

Victoria Mckay, Practice Lead for Safeguarding and Care Planning Services.

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9 March 2023

TITLE OF REPORT: **National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

REPORT OF: **Helen Fergusson, Strategic Director Children’s
Social Care and Lifelong Learning**

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides an overview of the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) national scheme and Gateshead Local Authorities progress to date.

Background

- 2 In December 2021, the Home Secretary of State directed the transfer of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) to Local Authority Care or Support. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are defined as an individual, who is under 18 when the asylum application is submitted, is not being cared for by an adult who by law has responsibility to do so, is separated from both parents and has applied for asylum in the UK in their own right.

Policy Context

- 3 On the 23rd November 2021, the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration served Local Authorities with notice under Section 72(5) of the Immigration Act 2016 to comply with the National Transfer Scheme. Local Authorities in this region were informed of the number of Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children they would be expected to take under the mandated scheme.
- 4 Since directed transfers under the mandated National Transfer Scheme started in December 2021, the rate of transfers to local authorities with children’s services across the country has significantly increased and it remains critical that the Government take steps to ensure these young people

receive the care placements they are entitled to and end the use of hotels for accommodating arrivals.

- 5 To escape Putin's invasion of Ukraine, an increasing number of Ukrainian children came to the UK under the Homes for Ukraine scheme announced in June 2022. Ukrainian children placed into local authority care are not included as part of the National Transfer Scheme and therefore not counted in the UCAS figures quoted by central government or within this report.

- 6 In August 2022 the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration made the following changes to the National Transfer Scheme:
 - Local Authorities have 5 working days for all transfers of UASC not currently in the care of a local authority, i.e., those children accommodated in hotels by the Home Office.
 - Local Authorities will be provided with an additional £2,000 per month for each child who is transferred from a hotel within 5 working days to local authority care. This funding will be provided for 3 months from the point of transfer.
 - The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children each local authority is required to care for increased from 0.07% to 0.1% of a local authority's general child population.

- 7 The Home Office have confirmed Gateshead allocation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is 39 at any one point in time. Which means when an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child reaches the age of 18 this means another young person is referred by the home office.

- 8 For note in January 2023 the home Office did indicate that the 5 days rule would be wavered and if young people were homed prior to the end of February 2023, we would receive £15,000 per young person. This is to support LA to make progress and to move the young people into their LA before there is an increase in the numbers of young people coming through.

Gateshead's position

- 9 From April 2022 until the end of December 2022, under the mandated scheme Gateshead Council have been allocated 33 young people:
 - 20 young people have a new home in Gateshead.
 - 9 young people were withdrawn by the home office before they arrived in Gateshead and we are not told the reason for their withdrawal.

- We are currently in the process of finding a foster family or flat with support for 4 young people and all young people will have moved in January 2023.
 - All young people were aged between 15 and 18 years old.
 - Most young people have identified their country of origin as Iran or Afghanistan.
 - Most young people identify as males.
 - 9 young people have required a foster carer and the remaining 24 were identified as requiring supported living.
- 10 All of the 33 young people are in some form of education. For those young people who live with their foster carer they attend a local school next to where they live. For those who live in Gateshead they all attend either Gateshead College or Newcastle college. All of the the young people are registered with a GP and all young people have been registered with a dentist and visited and for those who have recently arrived they are awaiting registration with a dentist or their first appointment.
- 11 All young people have a allocated social worker upon arrival in Gateshead who was allocated to them as part of the transfer arrangements. For those young people who are eligible for a personal assistant (PA) to support them with their independent living they are assigned a worker shortly after arrival. All of the young people above who are elegendable for a personal assistant (PA) have one and for those who are too young at the moment will be assigned a PA once they reach the required age.
- 12 Whilst we acknoweldge all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children will have suffered truma and by vertue of the nature in which they have arrived there will be a level of trafficking and expolitation, however unpon arrival there are no ongoing risks of expoliation.
- 13 We are notified by the home office of how many young people will be allocated to Gateshead in each cycle. A cycle is determined by how many young people require transferred at a given point in time. Gateshead have been identified to care for 4 young people in total across cycle 25 to 28, which is the next transfer period. The next transfer period is from mid January to March 2023. We can not forecast how many young people we will receive as this is dependent upon how many young people enter the country. What we do know is once the better weather comes we see a spike in uncompanied young people arriving which carries through the warmer weather before a spike again just ahead of the winter months.
- 14 The timescales set out by the Home Office are one of our biggest challenges as identifying suitable accomodate in time for the unaccompanied asylum-seeking young persons arrival from the interim hotel ready for transfer to

Gateshead. To help us, colleagues from the housing and lettings team are identifying one and two bedded properties which can be prepared ready for their arrival. Based on the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being referred through at least two priorities are being prepared at any one time. Where possible unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people are befriended and with another unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person and matched to live alongside each other which has proven to reduce social isolation. Whilst we are able to influence some of the Home Office discussion on who we receive this is part of on going discussions in line with the allocations. To date we have had one meeting with the Home Office and two letters where delays in accommodating young people within the 5 days was not met.

- 15 Identifying foster families is a regional challenge and to help us identify more foster carers who can care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children a regional recruitment campaign. Newcastle and Gateshead Local Authority have been leading on this on behalf of the 12 North East Local Authorities. This campaign also supports the initial training and development of foster carers who will be required to undertake caring responsibilities which may be new to them based on the cultural and religious beliefs held by the young person.
- 16 There will be a further report developed which will look to address the staffing resources required to meet the needs of the young people.

Recommendations

- 17 Overview and Scrutiny are requested to:
 - (a) Note and comment on the information provided in the report;
 - (b) Consider the frequency with which the committee would like to receive future reports

CONTACT: Claire Morris Practice Lead for Children in Our Care Resources

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 2022/23.

1. The Committee's provisional work programme was endorsed at the meeting held on 16 June 2022 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 2022-23	
16 June 2022 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Management & Improvement Framework – Year End Performance 2021-22 • Breastfeeding and Tongue Tie (to focus on targets and support available) • Implementation of Mosaic (the new Children’s Services ICT system) how it is improving processes etc and provide a demonstration to Committee • Results of Covid 19 Survey • Work Programme
8 September 2022 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted Improvement Plan – Progress Update • CAMHS & Impact of Covid – Update (to focus specifically on the waiting lists – what are the timescales, reasons for referrals etc and what are the interim arrangements which are being put in place given the reported length of the waiting list.) • Annual Report on Complaints and Representations – Children • Work Programme
20 October 2022 <u>5.30pm</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Justice - impact of SALT • Poverty Proofing Schools / affordability of school uniforms • Mockingbird Programme – Progress Update • Children’s Social Care /Early Help– Demand pressures, children in care and child protection • Work Programme
1 December 2022 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Management and Improvement Framework – Six Month report? • SEND Tribunal data (to focus on the number of Tribunals that are taking place and highlighting any themes arising and the outcomes) & Local Offer – SEND – Update (to include figures / information on Haskel Special School / the Jewish community) • Safeguarding Children – MASA and Business Plan • Inclusion in Mainstream • Work Programme
19 January 2023 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance of Secondary Schools • Ofsted Inspections / School Data – progress update • Permanent Exclusions / Suspensions and Elective Home Education – Update (to include the practice of “informal” suspensions).? • Work Programme

9 March 2023 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of Covid on new mothers – Update • Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report • National Transfer Scheme and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (new report added) • Work Programme
27 April 2023 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding Children – GSCP – Emerging Priorities • Children and Young People's Access to Dental Health Services in Gateshead – Update • Corporate Parenting Board - Annual Update • CAMHS – Progress Update • Work Programme

Issues for next year's work programme (2023/24) –

- Outreach Youth Work – targeted and universal
- The benefits arising from the changes to the music service
- Children's Services approach to poverty
- Family Hubs (raised under Youth Justice report)
- Demand Pressures on Children's Social Care
- Lack of critical paediatric beds in the region and the step down process / beds
- **Improvement Progress Report: Ofsted Inspection** (deferred from January 2023 meeting to allow outcome of annual conversation to be included)
- **Annual Conversation with Head Teachers of Special Schools** (deferred from March 2023 meeting)
- **Trauma Informed team update** (deferred from March 2023 meeting)

Training identified

- SEND – Training on the process and the statutory responsibilities of the local authority (for Families OSC only)
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (for OSC and other members of the council)