

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.....