

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, 8 September 2022

PRESENT: Councillor M Hall (Chair)
Councillor(s): H Kelly, D Bradford, L Caffrey, P Craig,
K McCartney, E McMaster, J Mohammed, L Moir, A Ord and
D Robson

CO-OPTED MEMBERS Rachel Walton

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): D Burnett, B Clelland, C Davison and M Ord
Co-opted Member(s): Ayodele Akin

F50 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2022 be approved as a correct record.

F51 CAMHS AND IMPACT OF COVID - UPDATE

The Committee received a report in relation to the impact if the Covid 19 pandemic on the mental health of children and young people in Gateshead and the services supporting them.

The impact of Covid 19 on the mental health of children and young people has been widely reported.

Public Health England recognised the need and issued the guidance on supporting children and young people with their mental health and wellbeing. The guidance offered advice on:

- Ways to get urgent help for mental health and support
- How CYP might cope with stress during the pandemic
- How CYP might manage with physical health issues
- How CYP who care for others might be supported
- Strategies to address bullying
- Support for CYP experiencing grief or bereavement

Referrals into Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) during the first wave of the pandemic dropped, this was attributed to the loss of the school structure (education being a key referrer for children and young people) and concerns about attendance at GP or other appointments during lockdown.

However, many young people were clearly struggling with the changes to their routines, the fear of the unknown, worries about loved ones, the loss of social contact with peers and increased pressure on families who were under financial pressure and forced to be together for long periods of time. Sadly there was a marked increase in domestic violence and many young people were exposed to risk which they may not otherwise have faced had they been at school or able to socialise.

As children returned to school and more readily started to access primary care support, the referral rate to all pathways in the CYPS services increased and has continued to do so exponentially.

Initially all young people, including those waiting for services were contacted and risk assessed to monitor their wellbeing. Face to face contact with appropriate PPE was maintained for those deemed to be at highest risk.

Young people were helped to understand and strengthen their internal resilience, learn helpful coping strategies, relaxation techniques and mindfulness. Parents were encouraged to promote confidence and support their children by understanding the importance of communication, empathy and the need for their children to feel safe and supported.

There has been a noticeable decrease in overall staff resilience in the service through the pandemic. The CYPS service has experienced high levels of staff sickness (made of both covid and non-covid related sickness) and recruitment and retention of staff have become a significant challenge.

The average number of referrals accepted over the past six weeks are 25 per week with the rate showing a continued increase. Under a waiting list initiative the Trust are transferring 25 cases per month to Toby Henderson Trust. A total of 292 cases have been transferred to Psychiatry UK between April 2022 and July 2022 with the total number being 480 within the 22/23 financial year.

There are lots of children with Autism/ADHD and a lot of children being referred for assessment, work is ongoing to look at how children are supported when waiting for a diagnosis and work is ongoing with schools and families.

Support is being requested from colleagues in the voluntary sector to assist in making an impact on waiting lists.

It was queried as to how we can all work better together. It was noted that capacity issues have been described but it feels like we aren't getting the bigger picture in how CAMHS has the ability to deal with the issues.

It was noted that CNTW can't do this on the own and by working together with education and both primary and secondary care and picking up children at the earliest possible juncture. There is a question of what we can do at every level and integrating into the community, and if we don't line up all the dots can we deal with this on our own, the answer is no.

It was noted that the report gives us an insight into the fact that we are dealing with

complex problems. This Committee's role is to scrutinise services provided so without knowing what the demand is its difficult to scrutinise how well the demand is being met.

It feels that there are some missing bits to the puzzle. The Health and Wellbeing Board at its December meeting will be having a focus on mental health, we will have a candid discussion about services and how they are meeting needs.

It would be good when the update is provided next year that we can see a baseline and where we are going.

It was queried what had been the impact of Covid on school attendance and what specifically has been put in place to capture the needs of children. It was noted that unless a child has been referred to the service by a professional or school the service wouldn't be aware of the numbers.

If a children is not brought to an appointment there would be a safeguarding concern raised, there would be a red flag if they were out of school and known to the service.

The service is linking in with schools and has a designated clinical officer who is new to post.

It was noted that a query had been raised about the current contract and if the need is higher doe the contract meet the need.

It was noted that it would be helpful to have a couple of case studies to show the pathways, length of time someone is waiting, details of recruitment and retention.

RESOLVED (i) That the information presented in the report be noted.
(ii) That further information be brought to the Committee in April 2023 as requested.

F52 OFSTED IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee were provided with an update in relation to areas identified for improvement from inspection activity by Ofsted. The improvements being worked upon are supporting our aim to become an outstanding children services provider.

During a short inspection in 2019, the service was judged good and then in a focussed visit in September 2021 the report was that we were continuing to provide a good service that had improved. The findings of the inspections were overwhelmingly positive but both identified a small number of areas for improvement.

An action plan has been developed which identifies 6 key areas of improvement.

- Improve the quality and focus of written plans to ensure they are specific and targeted to meet the needs of individual children
- Secure access to services for those children in care who live out of the borough
- Improve the quality and impact of supervision and contingency planning for

- children in need (ensure consistency for all children)
- Ensure routine inclusion of children and their families' views in audits
- Development of contextual safeguarding arrangements
- Further development of domestic abuse provision

For each of the 6 areas of improvement in the action plan, broad improvement themed actions have been identified which are supported by detailed operational activities designed to achieve the themed action. A lead officer has been identified for each themed action.

The service has already started to implement actions from the plan. The service is seeking to complete the actions over the next 6 months with good progress already being made over the previous 6 months. It was noted that there were some really good actions and it was queried how realistic the targets were for recruitment of foster carers were they too ambitious. It was noted that they were ambitious but that we need to be ambitious as some of the carers we currently have are becoming staying put carers. We are seeing new carers coming through but we don't currently have any vacancies with carers.

It was queried if it would be possible to have the results shared on the audits that children and families are involved in. It was noted that it would be possible to provide these anonymously.

It was queried how children who are living in a household where there is domestic abuse are being identified. It was noted that referrals com in through from members of the public, teachers, health professionals, referrals through the front door.

It was queried whether it would be possible to have a glossary of terms or an easier to understand version of the plan.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) that the information contained within the report and plan be noted.
 - (ii) that the request for information and comments be noted.
 - (iii) That a progress report will be brought back to Committee in 6 months

F53 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS - CHILDREN

The Committee were presented with a report on complaints, compliments and Representations for the period April 2021 to March 2022.

The Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 Requires that Councils with Social Services responsibilities produce an Annual Report of their Statutory Children's Services Complaints Procedure.

The Annual Report is specifically about Children Act 1989 Statutory Complaints about Children's Social Care Services with information on complaint related queries and compliments that are received about staff or services.

The procedure has three stages

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

Stage 2 – Investigation

Stage 3 – Independent Review

In 2021/22 the number of complaints and representations dealt with was as follows:

- The number of formal contacts received, including compliments, about Children's Services decreased by 13.2% (187) compared with the number of contacts received during 2020/21, (215).
- The number of contacts raising dissatisfaction increased by 11% (79 to 88).
- This is the same level of dissatisfaction received during 2019/20.
- Children's Services received 11 Stage 1 complaints during 2021/22. This is almost a 35% decrease on Stage 1 complaints received during 2020/21, (17).
- The number of complaint related queries (low level issues not requiring a written response) increased by 3% compared to those received during 2020/21 (26 from 27).
- 59% (16) of complaint related queries were regarding the quality of services provided.
- All complaint related queries received about Children's Social Care were dealt with directly by either the team manager of the service complained about or by the Complaints Section after prior discussion with the worker concerned.
- There were no complaints registered at Stage 2 of the complaint's procedure during 2021/22.
- However, there were three Stage 3 Review Panels held during this time. Two of the Panels held were in respect of the same complaint. The first Panel was stood down due to new information submitted by the Service.
- During 2021/22, 53% (99) of all Children's Services contacts were compliments.

The following key points were highlighted to the Committee

- Complaints brought by relatives of children receiving a service accounted for 91% (10) of all complaint referrals.
- One complaint was raised directly by a cared for young person. This complaint was regarding the actions of staff in a commissioned residential facility. This complaint was partially upheld after investigation.
- Children and young people receiving a service have recourse to the Council's Children's Rights Officer. The Children's Rights Officer works closely with those who raise concerns and, in most cases, can resolve these successfully.
- 36% (4) of all complaints received were in respect of services provided by the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams. However, it should be noted that most children receiving a service are allocated a social worker from the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams.

- 27% (3) of complaints were regarding the services provided by the Assessment and Intervention Team.
- The key theme identified from complaints about the Assessment and Intervention Service were disputes to information within assessments or the assessment process.
- 27% (3) of complaints received were regarding services provided by the Cared For Children Team. This is at the same level as the number of complaints received about the team in 2020/21, (3).

Some examples of Service Improvements identified during 2021/22 were also presented to the Committee.

- As a result of a Statutory complaint, where it was alleged that the social worker failed to recognise a child's religious and cultural upbringing, it was arranged that specific training in respect of religious awareness for social workers will be included in the portfolio option for staff and will be a regular occurrence.
- It was also recommended that all staff across Children's Services are mindful of any cultural and religious differences across the communities in Gateshead and that these are considered during social work involvement with BAME families. This issue was also addressed by the Local Authority carrying out mandatory Equality and Diversity for all Local Authority staff.
- After a Data complaint about the presentation of personal records following a Subject Access Request, (SAR), the Service responsible for administering the requests carried out a review of the process. All current applications were subsequently reviewed to ensure that they were being dealt with efficiently and appropriately. In addition to this SAR Officers are now able to dedicate sufficient time to deal with each request in line with service requirements.
- Following a complaint where the parent of a child receiving a service complained about the lack of support during the Covid19 lockdown period, it was found that the family's self isolation period along with sickness within the Social Work Team did slightly impact on support provided. An apology was given at the time and was also reiterated within the response letter. The complainant was satisfied with the service support following the ceasing of the Covid-19 restrictions.
- After a LG&SCO investigation into a complaint about the removal of a cared for child from the foster placement along with concerns about the quality of the LADO process the Ombudsman did identify recommendations which were shared with the Council. The Council accepted the recommendations and implemented the changes required.

- After a complaint about delays in receiving Child Protection Review Reports, the worker was instructed to ensure all future reports are shared in line with timescales. This will then provide an opportunity to consider the content of the reports and to allow the family member to raise any concerns or queries before the Review Conference take place.

It is proposed that for 2022/23 officers and senior managers continue to meet on a regular basis to consider what action needs to be taken to make sure that:

- Complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity
- The number of complaints being investigated and resolved within the statutory timescales is improved
- The number of complaints progressing to Stage 2 and Stage 3 remains low
- Any identified improvements to services are implemented where appropriate and monitored to ensure compliance by teams across Children's Services

Work will continue to ensure that staff members who received compliments continue to have the details passed on so that they or their team received the recognition.

The Committee felt that the report was presented with enthusiasm and were struck by the resources and time which is put into an investigation. They also felt that the self reflective learning was a positive and that everyone is treated in the same way.

It was queried what the position was with regards to the equalities monitoring. It was noted that it is sometimes difficult to have customers complete the monitoring and sometimes officers can pull out the information, but this is not always possible. A copy of the monitoring form to be sent to the Committee for information.

It was noted that it was good to see improvements are made following the investigation of complaints.

RESOLVED - (i) that the comments of the Committee be noted.
(ii) that the Committee are satisfied with the performance of Children's Service in responding to complaints and that this results in continuous service improvement.

F54 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee were presented with the work programme report and the minor amendments were highlighted, the two SEND reports are to be linked and the Early Help Demand pressures moved to October meeting.

It was noted that there is still the Edberts House update on the work they are doing around Adverse Childhood Experiences.

It was requested that the updated training for Corporate Parenting be done in person.

It was queried whether it would be possible to have an update on the music service and what / how people in the community are getting involved in music.

It was requested that there be a review of people's experiences with energy costs and cost of living in general in 2023.

RESOLVED - (i) that the provisional work programme for 2022/23 be noted.
(ii) that further reports on the work programme with be brought to the Committee to identify any additional policy issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.