

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CITY HALL on THURSDAY 7 JULY 2022 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mason-Gage in the Chair

Councillors Burrell, Crosby, PWL Gibson, Guy, McKeith, P. Smith and Tye

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Ms Stacy Hodgkinson, Service Manager, CIRT, Performance, Customer Feedback & Planning, TfC.

Ms Tracy Jelfs, Head of Service Cared for Children and Provider Services, TfC.

Ms Kayla Lincoln, Sunderland Youth Council Representative

Ms Helen Monks, Strategic Service Manager, TfC

Mr. David Noon, Principal Governance Services Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny and Members Support Coordinator, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Dunn, S. Johnston, Samuels and on behalf of Mrs. A. Blakey.

Minutes of the last Ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 31 March 2022

The Vice Chair informed the meeting that Cllr Dunn was present at the last meeting however this had not been recorded in the minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 31 March 2022 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Dunn in the list of attendees.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Together for Children Self Evaluation

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with information on, and an analysis of childrens services, identifying areas where improvements had been made and areas for continued attention and improvement as detailed in the March Self-Assessment Document.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

To complement the report, Ms Helen Monks and Ms Tracy Jelfs, provided the Committee with a comprehensive powerpoint presentation which detailed the various aspects of the work undertaken since the publication of the self-assessment in March with regard to Safeguarding, Signs of Safety, Localities, Children with Disabilities, Cared for Services and planned future areas of improvement.

The Chairman thanked Helen and Tracy for their presentation and invited questions and comments from Members.

In response to enquiries from Councillor Smith, Ms Jelfs confirmed that Maple Lodge was located in Nookside and that while there was a national shortage of social workers, Sunderland was not experiencing any great problems. There was currently only a single vacancy following an internal promotion. Four years ago, Sunderland was employing 46 agency staff now that was down to just 1.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Tye regarding whether there was any elected member involvement in the development of the self-assessment document, the meeting was advised that the process was overseen by Councillor Louise Farthing, the Portfolio holder for Children, Learning and Skills.

Councillor Crosby having sought details as to what the 'Pause' and 'Start Well' initiatives related to, Ms Jelfs advised that Pause was an initiative run by Barnados that was designed to break the cycle and address the needs of women who had experienced repeat removals of children from their care. Start Well was again run by Barnados along the same lines as Pause but tailored specifically for pregnant women.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Crosby, the meeting was informed that that 'Edge of Care' was a collective term for a variety of services designed to prevent people coming into care.

With regard to Residential Care Homes, Councillor Guy noted that Monument View had been inspected in May receiving a 'good' rating and asked what it had done to generate this improvement. Ms Jelfs replied that it had appointed a new manager who had redesigned the processes at the home to make them clearer.

In response to a question from Councillor McKeith regarding inspection regimes, Ms Jelfs informed the meeting that all residential homes were inspected by Ofsted before they were allowed to open, and were then inspected on an annual basis thereafter.

There being no further questions the Chairman thanked Ms Jelfs and Ms Monks for their attendance, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

Together for Children Customer Feedback Annual Report

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with information relating to the compliments and complaints received by Together for Children during the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Stacy Hodgkinson, Service Manager presented the report highlighting the processes involved together with any trends or themes arising and addressed questions and comments from Members thereon.

In response to enquiries from Councillors Smith and McKeith, Ms Hodgkinson confirmed that in future reports she would endeavour to ensure where percentages were used, the actual numbers the percentages related to were also included.

The Chairman commended the report stating that some of the compliments received were amazing. She noted however that there was very little detail of the complaints received and what had been done to resolve them. Ms Hodgkinson advised that it was often difficult to do so in a public report, given the confidential nature of the complaints. She suggested that this could probably be best addressed in the future through the use of anonymous case studies.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Gibson, Ms Hodgkinson confirmed that the instigation of the 'initial contact' process had been one of the main reasons for the reduction in cases escalating into a stage one complaint. The reduction was also linked to implementing the lesson learned from previous cases.

Councillor Gibson referred to a large compensation payment highlighted in paragraph 10.2 of the report which related to a legacy complaint dating back to 2017 and Ms Hodgkinson confirmed that there were no similar complaints waiting in the pipeline.

Having fully considered the report and there being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Ms. Hodgkinson for her presentation and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

Annual Work Programme 2022/23

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the developed of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2022/23 and appended a copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Crosby regarding whether there was scope to look at the impact of the declining number of nursery school places, the Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator suggested that it could possibly be factored into the Early Help item.

Councillor McKeith informed the meeting that he had recently attended the Mental Health Charter Mark award ceremony and suggested that an update could be scheduled on the work programme to see how the initiative was progressing and consider how it could be expanded.

There being no further questions or comments, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from the 15 June, 2022.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was advised that if Members had any issues to raise or required further detail on any of the items included in the notice that were within the purview of the Committee, they should contact Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

There being no questions or comments, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

There being no further items of business, the Chair closed the meeting having thanked members and officers for their attendance and contributions.

Signed) K. MASON-GAGE,
Chairman.