

**REPORT OF THE REPORT OF THE HEAD OF MEMBER SUPPORT AND
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

CONSULTATION WITH STAFF FROM EARLY HELP TEAM

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider feedback from the Committee's visit to meet staff from the Early Help Team.

2. Background

- 2.1 In setting its work programme for the year, the Committee requested that members be provided with an opportunity to meet and receive feedback from staff working for Together for Children.
- 2.2 To this end, arrangements have been made for a rolling programme of meetings with staff involved in each stage of a child's journey through social care.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 On 26 March 2017, Committee members met with staff belonging to the Early Help Team. The meeting was held at Bede Tower. Members in attendance included Councillor Pat Smith, Councillor Paula Hunt and Councillor Stephen Foster.
- 3.2 The meeting involved an open discussion between members and staff on the issues facing the service. In summary these included:-
- It was considered that good progress was being made by the new Team in what was very much a transition period. New ways of working were being established with a greater focus on outcomes and greater flexibility. There were no issues relating to the recruitment and retention of staff.
 - The introduction of Liquid Logic was having a positive impact on efficiency and staff had been well supported during its introduction.
 - Workload was still an issue with an ever increasing demand on the service. It was important that the work of the team was targeted and that it worked closely with its partners to ensure that the best use was made of available resources. At the present time only 7% of cases were being moved up to social care thereby relieving pressure on that service.
 - Reference was made to the potential increase in demand for the service due to the introduction of Universal Credit and the growth in personal debt

- It was considered that partnership working was good and joint working effective. It was recognised that the success of early help would depend on the joint working and collaboration. Reference was made to the importance of training to ensure that the staff working with young people were aware of the powers and responsibilities they have in dealing with young people. It was noted that some problems still existed in the sharing of information with health services though by closer joint working together it was hoped that these problems could be reduced.
- It was noted that the Youth Offending Team had had a very good reputation for its work but that funding reductions had seen the team reduced from around 200 staff to around 50 staff. While crime figures had fallen it was felt that this had much to do with the treatment of the figures and there was a concern that in future the service could struggle to cope with demand.
- Discussion took place on the factors behind the increasing need for early intervention. It was felt that these included domestic violence, mental health issues among young people and substance misuse. It was felt that there was a gap in services for children who witness domestic violence and require specialist help to deal with the subsequent trauma. Staff had also noticed a growth in violence from young children towards their mothers and grandmothers.
- There was concern over the delays in mental health assessments. It was felt that the greater recognition of such services could explain the increase in demand for its services.
- There continued to be occasional difficulties in securing appropriate accommodation for young people with challenging behaviour. There continued to be occasional use of hotel accommodation where all other avenues had been exhausted.
- Concern was expressed at the services available for 18 year olds. While early help team offer support up to 19yrs many other partners withdraw support at 18 yrs. leaving some people in limbo. Reference was made to a study conducted by the East Area Committee which had considered that undiagnosed special needs of some young people in hostels. It was important to ensure that support is provided as early as possible.
- Staff felt that it was important that there were opportunities for career progression for staff interested in working in other areas of social care.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The meeting with staff from the Early Help Team provided the opportunity to seek the views of staff on the development of the service.

4.2 Members suggested that the Scrutiny Committee may wish to include in its work programme further information on the support provided to young people aged 18yrs.

4.3 Members also suggested that a further meeting be arranged with social workers dealing with safeguarding referrals.

5. Recommendations

5.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the feedback from staff based in the Early Help Team.

6. Glossary

None

7 Background Papers

None