

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on THURSDAY 5th JANUARY 2023 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mason-Gage in the Chair

Councillors Burrell, Dunn, Guy, S. Johnston, McKeith, P. Smith and Thornton.

Also in attendance:-

Ms Karen Davison, Director of Early Help, Together for Children

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

Ms Linda Mason, Service Manager, Together for Children

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

Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Cllrs Crosby, Gibson, Samuels and Tye and Mrs A. Blakey.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 1st December 2022

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 1st December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Early Help Directorate Annual Report 2021/22

Ms Karen Davison (Director of Early Help TfC) presented a report of the Director of Children's Services (copy circulated) in respect of the above matter which provided the Committee with a detailed commentary on the Early Help Directorate Annual Report for 2021/22 and an update on the current position with regard to Family Hubs.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was informed that

- There had been a return to the pre-pandemic level of families being supported by an Early Help Plan together with a further 8% decrease in the numbers of children stepping up to statutory services from an open Early Help Plan
- With regard to Troubled Families claims, 2020/21 represented a second year of 100% claims.
- 75% of families supported through Family Group Conferencing stepped down to the universal services and required no further support and a further 8% required a lower level of support.
- With regard to NEET and Unknown data, the three-month average in 2021/22 was 5.4%, equal to the regional average.
- 2,618 notifications were tracked in respect of Children Missing Education, and all children were located safely.
- 248 young people were supported with Relationships, Sex and Health Education.
- 2,137 young people were supported via Participation and Engagement.
- 13 schools achieved the Healthy Schools Award.
- 1,573 Mind of My Own and Express statements had been received.
- 9,418 children attended a Holiday Activity and Food session.
- 2,564 young people were supported by the Prevention Bus.
- Arising from the Bumps to Babies young parents' project, one young mum had progressed to university and four had gained employment.
- the Youth Drug and Alcohol project (YDAP) recorded a positive outcomes rate of 92%
- Of the young people engaged as part of the Wear Kids (Anti-Social Behaviour) programme, 80% remained out of the youth justice system.
- With regard to the Youth Offending Service, the number of First Time Entrants decreased for the 7th consecutive year, offending by cared for children decreased again to 2.2% and 221 victims of youth offending were supported.

The Chair thanked Ms Davison for her presentation, and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

In response to enquiries from Councillor Smith, Ms Davison advised that the Bumps to Babies project operated out of the old Ryhope Health Centre building. With regard to issues of funding she confirmed that there was a budget in place for 2023/24. A lot of services like Bumps to Babies were reliant on grant funding and whilst it could not be guaranteed, Ms Davison remained reasonably confident the funding would continue moving forward, particularly given the Government's recognition of the importance of supporting preventative programmes. Councillor Smith was also pleased to note the continuing operation of the Phoenix Project.

With regard to the location of the Bumps to Babies project, Councillor Guy queried whether there were any issues regarding accessibility, particularly for residents in the Coalfield area. Ms Davison replied that in addition to looking for a suitable building, factors such as public transport routes and journey costs had been evaluated and in this regard the Ryhope location had scored highly in terms of its accessibility from other areas of the city. In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Guy on how the issue of the 'unknowns' was managed, Ms Davison advised that this was undertaken by doing more of 'what works best', i.e. by putting boots on the ground. Telephone calls and text messages were often ignored.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Thornton, Ms Davison explained how the case loads of individual Early Help Workers were allocated and managed and the multiagency approach of building a whole team around a family. In response to a

further question from Councillor Thornton, Ms Davison explained that not all of the interventions outlined on page 20 of the agenda were delivered by the Early Help worker. The Early Help Workers were trained in respect of a generic range of social work skills however specialist interventions would be delivered by a specialist in that particular area of expertise who would be invited in to join the team around the family. With regard to parenting support for the parents of teenagers TfC were looking to deliver a Triple P style service as part of its future plans. It would provide a Sunderland focused approach to addressing fractured relationships between teens and their parents. To this end TfC was working in partnership with the University of Sunderland to train three cohorts of staff to masters level in the delivery of these interventions.

In response to an enquiry from Council Burrell, Ms Davison advised that the surge in referrals to YDAP showed no sign of reversing, it was an area of growth which was very concerning.

The Committee having congratulated Ms Davison on a successful Annual Report and the plans in respect of the family hubs it was :-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Inspection of Youth Offending Services in Sunderland – Feedback from HM Inspectorate of Probation

Ms Linda Mason, (Service Manager, TfC) ,presented a report of the Director of Children's Services (copy circulated) in respect of the above matter providing the Committee with feedback on the recent inspection of the Youth Offending Service following the publication of the HM Inspectorate of Probation's findings on 13 December 2022. The Service received an overall rating of 'Good' with a score of 26 out of a possible 36. All four aspects regarding Out of Court Disposals were rated as 'Outstanding', two of the four aspects in respect of Organisational Delivery were also rated as 'Outstanding' with the remaining two rated as 'Good'. All four aspects in relation to Court Disposals were rated as requiring improvement.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Chair thanked Ms Mason for her presentation, and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

With regard to the time being taken to appoint a second Probation Officer, Councillor Smith asked if there was a specific reason for this? In reply, Ms Mason advised that the main issue centred on the nation shortage of Probation Officers. There was currently a person operating in the post, but they were not a Probation Officer. With regard to the areas requiring improvement, Councillor Smith asked if Ms Mason had seen the Inspector's comments coming. Ms Mason confirmed that the service was aware it had areas which required improvement and the Inspector had recognised that the organisation was a very self-reflective one and acknowledged that not a great deal of work was required to achieve an improvement in the areas where it was required. An improvement plan had been prepared in response to the recommendations detailed in the inspection report.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Thornton, Ms Mason explained the difference between Court Disposals and Out of Court Disposals. Much would depend on the gravity of the offence with some offences not being eligible for Out of Court Disposal. Any referral orders would count as a court order.

Councillor Thornton stated that one of her concerns was that young people were more difficult to engage with once they were going through the court process. In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Thornton, Ms Mason confirmed that the Service did employ a victims officer and that the views of victims were always passed onto the YOS case officer.

Councillor Thornton highlighted some of the Inspector's less positive comments eg 'Direct intervention work was inconsistent' and 'Victim work was not consistent, was not always directed at the original offence and, in some cases, did not give the child a proper understanding of the impact of their behaviour', and sought reassurance that this would be addressed and evidenced. Ms Mason replied that the Service had agreed with the Inspector regarding the areas requiring improvement particularly in the need to maintain a consistency of approach. Actions to address the recommendations had been written into the improvement plan. In response to further enquiries from Councillor Thornton, Ms Mason advised that the Service was required to be victim led and could not force victims to engage with it. With regard to work to bring about effective transitions, the duty lay not with the Probation Service but with the Prison Service.

In conclusion and in response to enquiries from Councillor Dunn, Ms Davison advised that with regard to future plans to address the recommendations arising from Domain 2, this would be the focus for the YOS Board for the next 12 months and that the Service was subject to inspection every 4 years.

There being no further questions for Ms Mason, the Chairman thanked her for her attendance and it was:-

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

Annual Work Programme 2022/23

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator 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)

Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report and briefed the Committee on the current position regarding those items already scheduled on the work programme and those waiting to be programmed in on a suitable date.

It was anticipated that the next meeting would include items on Child Obesity, TfC Performance and the Prevention Bus.

5. 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 21st December, 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.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor McKeith regarding item 221212/765 (To endorse the North East Bus Service Improvement Plan Enhanced Partnership and Scheme), Mr Diamond advised that he would investigate however it was likely that the issue fell outside the purview of the Committee.

6. 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.