

Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

1 February 2016

Present: Councillor S Graham (Chair)
Councillors J Allan, B Burdis, S Day, P Earley,
M Hall, Janet Hunter, N Huscroft, C Johnson, D McGarr,
A McMullen and M Rankin

School Governor Representatives
Mrs J Little

Others in attendance
Councillor M Green

OV47/02/16 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J O'Shea, A Austin and P McIntyre
Mrs M Ord - School Governor Representative
Rev M Vine - Church Representative

OV48/02/16 Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's constitution the appointment of the following substitute Members was reported:-

Councillor M Green for Councillor J O'Shea

OV49/02/16 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

OV50/02/16 Minutes

Resolved that the minute of the meetings held on 4 January 2016 be confirmed.

OV51/02/16 Looked After Children in North Tyneside

At the request of the Committee, it received a presentation that provided an overview of Looked After Children (LAC) in North Tyneside and an explanation of how information data was collected and used to ensure support was provided to the point of most need.

Russell Pilling - Senior Manager Safeguarding and Placement Services and Craig Anderson - Policy, Performance and Research Manager were present to deliver the information and answer questions.

The number of LAC within North Tyneside was considered relatively stable and were traditionally below its regional and statistical neighbours.

The data provided illustrated that the profile of LAC placements in North Tyneside displayed over 52% were placed in foster care provided by the authority. The Committee was informed that most children were placed close as possible to the family unit. However, if deemed appropriate a LAC would be placed away from the family.

Analysis indicated that the profile age of children showed 2 distinct ranges to the age when children are placed, the ranges were for children less than 12 months and 14+ years old. This analysis enabled greater provision of support to be focused to children within these age groups.

Information to the areas of North Tyneside where the main family home of children being looked after resided was provided and indicated that the Riverside/Chirton/Howdon and Wallsend wards had a higher concentration of LAC, this again was a good indicator to where resources should be focused.

Following a case review analysis of the primary reason for LAC the main issues were child and family breakdown followed by neglect and substance misuse.

It was questioned under what category would issues relating to alcohol abuse be recorded. It was stated the primary reason would be recorded under the Domestic abuse & substance misuse category.

It was questioned to the number of looked after children with physical disabilities and how this was monitored and supported. The Committee was reassured that each child has an allocated case manager who can offer a range of suitable support to a child.

It was highlighted that the LAC primary reason was for neglect which amounted to 14% and asked if this was partly due to changes in welfare provision. In response it was stated that welfare factors would have some effect such as low income, reduced benefit which then could manifest into further stresses that families would experience.

The level of Mental Health & Learning Disabilities /Special Educational Needs at 4% was queried. The Committee was informed that an audit had been undertaken in the summer of 2015 and the percentage was indicative of that audit.

A Member questioned to where the responsibility lay if a child was placed out of the borough and likewise if children from another authority was placed into North Tyneside.

The Committee was informed that it was the Local Authority responsibility to care for each Looked After Child and each child would have a social worker who would carry out visits and provide support when placed outside the authority area.

With regards for children leaving care the Committee was provided comparative information on outcomes for all North East Local Authorities. The main outcomes in North Tyneside were the majority of children returned to the family home followed by adoption and special guardianship orders.

With regards to children returning to the family home it was asked what measures were taken to enable this to happen. The main reason was good social work practice and working with families to overcome issues, it was stated that for most cases the best place for any child was in the family home.

It was questioned if there were multiple returners in to the care system. Members were informed that in any 12 month period there would be occasions when re-referrals would occur and these were recorded.

The Committee received information on the Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding Performance and Quality Assurance framework that detailed the measures/standards with associated assurance information.

Assurance was given that the reporting mechanism in place ensured that there were no gaps in information management.

An example of the the range of weekly reports produced with the type information that was accessible and available to officers was explained. An insight to information that was included in monthly service managements reports and presented to internal improvement groups, the Authority's Senior Leadership Team, Cabinet Members, the Corporate Assurance Group (chaired by the Chief Executive) and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (chaired by an Independent Person) was also provided.

North Tyneside was an active member of the regional Sector Led Improvement work that was in place to investigate and understand hotspot areas within the north east region.

Local Authorities and Local Safeguarding Children Boards were also open to month long Ofsted inspections of services for looked after children and care leavers. The Committee was informed the last Ofsted inspection in North Tyneside took place 2012.

It was asked if all looked after cases had a primary reason and the Committee was assured that the Authority's IT systems did provide this functionality. It was also highlighted that upon the completion of each case, analysis was undertaken where cases were reviewed to gain a clear understand and the root cause.

A Member stated and asked for reassurance that data security measures were in place regards to individual cases considered in relation with primary reason reports. In response assurance was given that any cases considered were anonymised.

A Member questioned if information was collected and analysed to the number of long stay LAC until adulthood. The Committee was assured that this data was collected and available and that each individual child was monitored on 28 day/3 month/6 month periods with support focussed on each childs individual need.

It was stressed that if a long term placement was the best option for a child that would be provided. However if it was better for the child to move more regularly that also would be provided. It was highlighted that North Tyneside has shown good practice and there had been cases where older children had been placed for adoption.

It was questioned how the Council and its Members demonstrate carrying out its corporate parenting duty. The Council has officers the maintain contact with LAC with supporting systems and with care plan analysis and regular monitoring. There is also a Corporate Parenting Committee that is comprised of both officers and members that meet bi-monthly. In respect to scrutiny the Council has a Children, Education and Skills sub-committee. It was also highlighted that Councillors and the Elected Mayor attend equality and diversity, corporate parenting and safeguarding training at least once per elected term as part of the Member induction programme or as appropriate when legislation/member responsibilities change.

With respect to the Corporate Parenting Committee, it was asked which Members were involved and for the opportunity for other Members to be involved. It was stated that the membership of the Committee would be circulated and the request to be involved would be put to the Corporate Parenting Committee for consideration.

Members sought reassurance that that there was good relationship with schools. Members were informed that each school has a staff member who works closely with carers and each LAC has a designated social worker, there was also a virtual school headteacher who would look for any further supporting needs for a child.

It was raised that poor dental health had become a possible indicator for abuse and it was asked if regular dental checks were undertaken. In response it was stated that checks were carried out on an annual basis.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation and stated that Looked After Children would be a topic that the Committee would revisit and placed on its 2016/17 work programme.

Agreed that (1) update on Looked After Children in North Tyneside be noted and (2) membership of the Corporate Parenting Committee be circulated and the request to be involved would be put to the committee for consideration.