

Children, Education and Skills Sub Committee

Thursday, 23 January 2020

Present: Councillor M Thirlaway (Chair)
Councillors T Brady, J Cassidy, N Huscroft, M Madden, A Newman, P Oliver, E Parker-Leonard and S Phillips.

Mr S Fallon – Church Representative
Rev M Vine – Church Representative

Apologies: Councillor M Wilson and Mrs M Ord

CE24/01/20 Appointment of substitutes

There were no substitute members.

CE25/01/20 To receive any declarations of interest

Councillor E Parker-Leonard declared a registerable personal interest in Item 6 The attainment of looked after children, as she was a foster carer with another local authority.

Councillor S Phillips declared a registerable personal interest in Item 6 The attainment of looked after children, as he was a school governor

CE26/01/20 Minutes

Resolved that subject to the amendments below, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 November 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair:

Paragraph 6 be replaced by: In 2018, approximately 55% of children had plans completed in time within the 20 week assessment process timescale.

Paragraph 7 be replaced by: Members sought clarification on the average length of time it took to complete a plan.

Paragraph 10 be replaced by: It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report and it was noted that on average, an EHC Needs Assessment took 27 weeks to complete.

CE27/01/20 Changes to Local Safeguarding Arrangements

The Sub-committee received a report from the Independent Advisor to the North Tyneside Children Partnership on the implementation of the new arrangements for Safeguarding as required by the Children and Social Work Act and revised statutory guidance "Working Together" 2018.

These arrangements replaced the requirement for a statutory Board and Independent Chair. Responsibility and accountability for the delivery of the requirements of the statutory guidance, now rested with what were termed the three Statutory Partners who were the Local Authority, the Chief Constable and the Clinical Commissioning Group.

The retention of a form of partnership was identified through consultation as being important. In order to reflect past learning, a new partnership had been formed (North Tyneside Children Partnership) which looked to combine the strengths of the previous Children Young People's Partnership and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. This would provide a focus on overall outcomes for children and young people in the borough and integrate assurance and learning to ensure that all priorities and outcomes were widely owned. This partnership would also develop an approach to learning and assurance that ensured there was a focus on joint working to protect children and promote their welfare in order that the Statutory Partners could meet their statutory requirements.

The new partnership was directly accountable to the North Tyneside Strategic Partnership and would develop effective lines of reporting and sharing with other partnerships. The Statutory Partners had established regular meetings to provide a lead for implementation and a work plan would address key delivery and development issues. This included the need to produce a report within twelve months outlining progress, learning and impact. This report would also itemise further changes that might be needed.

There was a requirement for the provision of independent scrutiny, but the guidance was not specific as to what form this should take. For the interim period, a role of Independent Advisor had been created to provide the statutory partners and the partnership with support and advice. This role was also responsible for the development and operation of the means to look into the effectiveness of practice and how joint working arrangements were acting on learning.

The new partnership would continue to benefit from the arrangements in place to provide children and young people with an opportunity to be heard and to influence priorities and outcomes. In terms of safeguarding arrangements, it was the intention to develop a particular approach that reflected the need to recognise and learn from the experiences of children who were vulnerable and who had experienced harm, neglect, abuse and exploitation. This would draw on wider learning that was emerging and was often referred to as "lived experience". If successful, this would add a new perspective to the understanding of abuse and therefore how joint working arrangements could be developed to reflect this. There were parallels with the approaches to Children who were Looked After and the wider intention to ensure that the new arrangements were focused on joint working practice.

Following the implementation of the new arrangements the responsibility for how the system learned lessons from serious child safeguarding incidents lay at a national level with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and at a local level with the safeguarding partners. The three safeguarding partners were required to make arrangements to identify serious child safeguarding cases which raised issues of importance in relation to the area and commission and oversee the review of those cases, where they considered it appropriate for a review to be undertaken.

A Member expressed concern that there could be a dip in service between the abolition of the Statutory Board and the development of the new service and the Independent Advisor stated that the risks had been addressed.

He noted that the implementation of the new arrangements was at an early stage. The Statutory Partners in North Tyneside had embraced the opportunities this represented on the basis of a considered and careful approach. This recognised the need to remain focused on the high levels of jeopardy safeguarding represented, not least for local children and young people. As before being assured that the complexity and real challenges of effective joint working arrangements were effective was not a simple task. Notwithstanding the local choices, there was an inherent level of risk in the changes required by legislation and guidance especially regarding adjustments in terms of leadership, accountability and the role of independence.

Effective safeguarding required ownership and investment at every level and across the many places where children and young people lived and came into contact with risk.

At this point developments were likely to benefit from close monitoring, degrees of challenges including an independent perspective, in order to realise the potential and opportunity to develop and maintain a meaningful and effective perspective on being assured that children and young people were protected and that their welfare was promoted.

In response to a question regarding the move away from a statutory independent partnership, the Independent Advisor noted that there was a risk of reducing the level of challenges taking place but that anyone had the opportunity to raise questions and challenges with Ofsted.

Members referred to the arrangements in place to involve young people and hoped that children and young people's voices would be valued and that there would be a cultural change.

The Committee received an update on the case of Child A and it was noted that the decision not to undertake a Review had been endorsed by the three statutory Safeguarding Partners. The Independent Advisor stated that the National Panel which scrutinised and challenged all decisions had agreed with the decision not to commission a local child safeguarding practice review (LCSPR).

A request was made that in future, the Sub-Committee would be informed of the death of a child in the Borough. The Senior Manager undertook to liaise with the Cabinet Member regarding a mechanism for informing the Sub-Committee.

A concern was expressed that education was not a full statutory partner in the new arrangements. It was noted that the Executive Group membership included two Head Teachers and at operational level the education service was absolutely committed to safeguarding.

It had been agreed that the annual Section 11 self-assessment process for schools and colleges would be maintained and this produced a pro-active picture of how children and young people were being safeguarded where they were educated.

The Chair thanked the Independent Advisor and Officers for the informative report and for attending the meeting.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.

CE28/01/20 The Attainment of Looked After Children

The Sub-Committee received an overview of the educational outcomes and progress of the children in the care of North Tyneside Council.

The Council as Corporate Parents had a statutory duty to promote the education of looked after children in the care of North Tyneside Council. They also had an extended remit to provide advice and information to schools and families relating to the education of previously looked after children (who had achieved permanence through adoption, special guardianship or a child arrangements order).

The Virtual School sat within the Raising the Health and Education of Looked After Children Team (RHELAC) and together with health colleagues closely monitored the holistic needs of looked after children. The Virtual School had a small team of teachers that provided support, mainly in schools, to help pupils fill gaps in their knowledge and give them a boost in preparation for exams and assessments. Over the last few years psychological support had been developed through educational psychologists and counsellors to help pupils manage their mental health needs that could sometimes be a barrier to learning.

The Virtual School Head managed the Pupil Premium Plus for looked after children and this partly funded the support available within the team and the funding was used to provide ICT equipment, fund extra tuition or fund educational visits. Schools also received a direct allocation of £1200 per looked after child each year to provide additional support in school.

The Virtual School closely monitored the progress and attendance of looked after children through their Personal Education Plans and the termly data collection from schools. The Virtual School had a performance officer who analysed the presenting data and identified any gaps in provision and held schools to account when pupils did not appear to be making enough progress.

The looked after children in the early years foundation stage OC2 cohort (in care for more than twelve months) outperformed both looked after children nationally and their non-looked after peers in North Tyneside.

Whilst there were only four children in this cohort, they all passed their Phonics test. They also had a higher average point score than the other cohorts. This was the second year 100% of the OC2 cohort had passed their Phonics Check. The Team had invested in a Reading Recovery teacher who had supported the pupils that met the criteria and provided intensive support in reading and writing. This enabled the pupils to make accelerated progress and catch up with their peers. The evidence base around Reading Recovery was very strong and the Council would continue to use this approach.

The seven pupils in the Key Stage 1 cohort also out-performed their non-looked after peers in Reading, Maths and Science but three did not meet the expected standard in writing which had impacted on the Reading, Writing, Maths (RWM) achievement. Looked after children nationally had lower writing scores and writing had been an area of focus for many years. This was a combination of poor fine motor skills from neglect in their early life, poorer vocabulary and a lack of experiences to write about. The Team now had an occupational therapist within the Team and it was hoped that she would support with handwriting. The Reading Recovery Programme also supported with writing and hopefully those that had

benefitted from this intervention would see further improvements in the future.

The Key Stage 2 Cohort only included four children that had been in care for more than twelve months (as of March 2019). This made statistical analysis difficult. 50% of the OC2 cohort achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths which was higher than looked after children nationally.

The National Consortium for Examination Results NCER data for the Key Stage 4 cohort had too many gaps currently to be included due to the numbers in independent residential provision that had not been uploaded to the system yet.

The Key Stage 4 cohorts were always significantly larger than the other cohorts due to the number of adolescents entering care. 33% entered care during Key Stage 4, making it difficult to fill knowledge gaps in time for the exams.

Whilst the number achieving 'the Basics' at Grade 4+ was lower than previously, 22% only missed by one grade. The changes in the GCSE grading system had made it much harder for pupils to meet the Grade 5+ benchmark that schools were now judged on. Targeted work was being undertaken with Key Stage 3 pupils to fill gaps in their mathematical knowledge.

This year's cohort had 25% with an Education, Health and Care Plan which also impacted on the outcomes. The National Association of Virtual School Heads had analysed some of the national data and had found that the new Maths and English GCSEs were much harder to achieve for looked after children with identified Special Educational Needs (SEN). Since the changes in 2016 the outcomes for looked after children had declined.

The Key Stage 5 post-16 cohort took many different routes to employment. Three looked after children completed A Levels this year and all of them achieved the grades they required to go to university. Others achieved well by taking a vocational route at Tyne Met and Newcastle College and there were an increasing number securing apprenticeships within the council. The Government had announced some Pupil Premium Plus for looked after children in Further Education but the Team were awaiting further news about this.

Overall the Team were very proud of the achievements of looked after children this year. The younger pupils had demonstrated that being in care did not necessarily need to be a barrier to achieving. The Early Years Foundation Stage and Phonics outcomes were higher than pupils who were not in care and at Key Stage 1 in Reading and Maths, this was also the case. Although the cohort sizes were small, this was still an impressive achievement.

The Team recognised that the Key Stage 4 cohort provided the team with more challenge and although the outcomes were not as high, many missed achieving the Grade 4s by only one grade. The new higher Grade 5 benchmark would be a challenge for those that had missed significant parts of their education prior to entering care and any instability at home or school impacted on progress.

A Member asked how the Team were evidencing the work and the Virtual School Head reported that the data system enabled the analysis to pull out the cohort and look at them against a larger cohort and to see how the children performed against the cohort nationally.

Members welcomed the achievements of the looked after children and it was confirmed that they entered a variety of different employment areas after school.

The Chair thanked Officers for the informative report and for attendance at the meeting.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report.