

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at Council Chamber - County Hall on Thursday, 1 December 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

W Daley (Chair) (in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

C Ball
M Richardson
T Thorne

R Dodd
M Swinburn
A Watson

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

A Hodgson

OFFICERS

C Angus
L Little
G Reiter
K Scovell

Scrutiny Officer
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Joint Interim Director of Children's Services
Senior Manager - Specialist Services

ALSO PRESENT

Cabinet Member

Around 1 member of the press and public was present.

50 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors A Dale, C Dunbar, S Fairless-Aitken and G Renner-Thompson also L Houghton, D Lennox, and J Sanderson.

51 FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the National Funding Formula Report which was coming to this Committee in January should also be included on the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Ch.'s Initials.....

CARE PROCEEDINGS AND PUBLIC LAW OUTLINE ANNUAL REPORT ON PROGRESSION

The report provided information on the performance of Children's Services within legal proceedings in 2021/2022. G Reiter, Interim Joint Director of Children's Services and K Scovell, Senior Manager, Specialist Services were in attendance and provided an introduction to the report. Highlighted were the Ofsted Focused Inspection which had been undertaken at the end of July 2022 and which had found that Social Workers identified permanence plans for children at the earliest opportunity; and the creation of the Pre-Birth Team which had been set up in response to the Born into Care review, to work with parents who had previous significant involvement with the Social Care service. Positive feedback was now received from regular meetings with the Lead Family Court Judge, however the average time for a case to conclude was still significantly higher than the Public Law Outline target of 26 weeks.

In response to questions Members were advised that no Court nationally achieved the target of 26 weeks mostly due to Court capacity but also the need to explore all alternative safe options for each child thoroughly ensuring that the decision to go to proceedings to provide permanence was robust. Feedback was consistently provided from the Directors of Children's Services across the Country that the target of 26 weeks would never be achieved unless Court capacity was increased. Once a care plan and order had been made by a Judge parents could only appeal a decision if a threshold of sufficient grounds was passed. If this happened then the 26 week target would start again.

The Pre-Birth Team had been recruited from the Council's own team of Social Workers, however all had joined the team without any other casework. It was expected that following the establishment of the team a reduction in other Social Worker caseloads would occur, however this should be taken in the context of increasing demand for Social Care generally. It had been anticipated that the Team would see approximately 100 cases per year, however from it going in live at the end of September 2022 they had already been involved with 20 unborn babies. The Team worked alongside the front door service however as soon as a pregnancy was known a referral could be made to the service. A system to review the effectiveness of the team would include data being fed into CAFCASS, feedback from partner agencies and also the families themselves.

Members thanked the officers for the information and welcomed the transformation in the service since the original concerns were raised by the Lead Family Court Judge in 2017. It was asked that thanks and the acknowledgement of the large amount of work undertaken by staff and the leadership team be fed back to the staff involved.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

53 **FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT 2022/23**

The work programme had been circulated for information and any issues which Members wished to bring to the Committee should be raised with the Chair or the Scrutiny Officer in the first instance.

Clarification would be provided on the date the National Funding Formula would be coming to this Committee. A report on the School Organisation Plan would be included on the January agenda. An invitation would also be issued for Northumberland College to attend a future meeting. A scoping report on the Task and Finish Working Group would also come to Committee in January. The report on School Transport had been deferred and it would added back to the work programme once a data had been agreed.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

54 **URGENT BUSINESS**

Councillor Thorne advised of the death of Miss Nancy Middleton who had been an inspirational infant school teacher at Newton on the Moor Primary School. He wished that her contribution to education in Northumberland County Council be marked and celebrated.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....