

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 16TH SEPTEMBER, 2021

A MEETING of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, DONCASTER on THURSDAY, 16TH SEPTEMBER, 2021 at 4.30 PM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Leanne Hempshall

Councillors Tim Needham, Bob Anderson, Laura Bluff, Steve Cox, Aimee Dickson, Susan Durant, Charlie Hogarth and Rob Reid

Co-optees – Antoinette Drinkhill (Diocese of Sheffield Church of England)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Riana Nelson, Director Learning Opportunities and Skills  
Lee Golze, Assistant Director, Partnerships, Early Interventions and Localities  
Rebecca Wilshire Director, Doncaster Children's Trust  
Alison Tomes Area Service Delivery Manager  
Clive Chambers Doncaster Children's Trust  
Denise Beevers Early Intervention Locality Service Manager

Joe Eaton - Young Advisor  
Lakhjoht Kaur – Young Advisor

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Bernadette Nesbit

|    |   | <u>ACTION</u> |
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| 2. | <u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u> |               |
|    | There were no items.  |               |
| 3. | <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>  |               |
|    | There were no declarations made.  |               |
| 4. | <u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24TH MARCH, 2021</u>  |               |

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|    | <p>It was outlined by the Chair that no-one at this meeting had been in attendance at the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> March, therefore asked that the minutes be noted. The Director of Learning, Opportunities and Skills indicated they were an accurate record of the meeting.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes, be noted.</p>   |  |
| 5. | <p><u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u></p>  |  |
|    | <p>There were no public statements made.</p>   |  |
| 6. | <p><u>SAFEGUARDING INCLUDING CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WITH THE EARLY HELP ELEMENT OF FOCUS</u></p>   |  |
|    | <p>The Panel gave consideration to a report outlining how local services, including the Local Authority, Doncaster Childrens Trust, Police and CCG work together to safeguard the Borough's Children and the role of early help. The continuum of need and response from level 1 to 4 from universal/additional need to multiple or complex needs were highlighted within the report.</p> <p>The following areas were addressed by the Panel:</p> <p><u>Early help referrals</u> – it was outlined that during lock down Schools had played an important and additional role with early help but this had now reduced, particularly visits, it was therefore questioned whether there had been an increase in referrals.</p> <p>It was explained that schools played a vital role with the early help offer but during lockdown this proved difficult overall, because schools were only open for the most vulnerable children. Welfare calls, including those carried out by school staff, were undertaken to the most vulnerable children that the partnership were aware of.</p> <p>The Panel noted that there had been an increase in referrals now children had returned to school and the Country's restrictions were easing and recognised that schools were exceptionally busy ensuring children were returning to education and were safe.</p> <p>It was noted that referrals to the social care system increased during lockdown and that social care practitioners continued to work on the front line. In response to schools informing the Local Authority they were having difficulties fulfilling the lead practitioner role, the Authority was successful in securing funding in March 2021 through the Covid funding stream, to provide an additional 13 family practitioners. These officers continued to support and were carrying large caseloads removing some strain from schools and partners. Concern was expressed that this resource could be lost when funding ended in May 2022. The Panel wished to hear at a future meeting the difference the</p> |  |

additional resources were making.

With regard to the thresholds required for a case to be accepted at any Level, it was stressed that these had not been changed. However it was highlighted that this could be perceived differently, but the partnership continued to ensure each child received the right support at the right time. It was stressed that the partnership worked well together and may provide different types of family intervention to avoid a child or young person entering the social care system.

With regard to who made referrals, it was noted that they came from a number of sources but currently the majority had been received from parents. It was noted that a telephone number had been advertised through a number of means for families to make self referrals. Data would need to be assessed but it was noted with reference to the first lockdown it was parents making the majority of referrals for early help. With regard to social care the majority of referrals were made by the Police.

Partnership roles - in response to a query relating to schools retaking responsibility for specific roles when Covid eases, it was stressed that all partners would refill their roles, including schools. The amount of pressure health colleagues had been under was acknowledged and as a direct consequence the number of health professionals in the lead practitioner roles had reduced over the last 18 months.

Data – increases seen by the DCST and Doncaster MBC were referred to and explained that during the lockdown all health services had been pulled back to assist the emergency response therefore the Local Authority and DCST increased their support. However the strategy moving forward was to ensure all lead practitioners continued to undertake their roles effectively.

It was stressed that now lockdown was easing there could be an increase in, for example, financial hardship and once data was analysed, services could reflect requirement and help inform local service delivery. Currently it was unclear what it could look like but more evidence would emerge through the Locality Silver group.

Infogram relating to practitioners table – in response to a query relating to a count for the final stage, it was reported that there could be a number of reasons why the figure was not yet showing, for example the final score may not have been done at this stage.

Positive Engagement with activity groups - it was outlined that the Family Information Service reached out to all groups including youth groups and voluntary faith sector organisations, with the work undertaken this year for summer staycations being highlighted. It was noted that providing a sustainable model through the Youth Strategy was important to build positive and healthy engagement for children

and young people, helping them to thrive. It was stressed that if a young person showed an interest in a specific activity then they would be signposted to the right organisation.

Lockdown support - During lockdown, Doncaster MBC provided a blended family offer including a virtual hub with the offer of one to one or group support for families. There was also support for children, including learning activity resources to keep them entertained and ensuring families had access to money and food throughout lockdown.

An officer who was new to Doncaster highlighted that it was hard to see there was a pandemic across the Borough because there was so much positive work being undertaken. Particularly ensuring the borough's children were looked after during such challenging circumstances and barriers in terms of delivery. The workforce was obviously affected and it couldn't respond in the way it wished with home visits being undertaken in a different way. For example, playing in gardens with children and holding conversations with parents through windows.

A Member of the Panel took the opportunity to thank everyone for their efforts from the start of the pandemic and roles that they had undertaken, particularly continuing services when a number of staff had contracted Covid.

Communication – It was outlined that following a referral, the child or young person was triaged by a social worker or appropriate partnership member, to determine what support was required. It was acknowledged that a referrer should be updated once a decision has been made about whether the child has been referred to early help or social care, however there may be areas where this was not being undertaken as quick as should. and was currently being addressed.

With regard to when schools make a referral, a family first meeting has been established, comprising all professionals, to ensure the correct plan is developed. Schools should be informed of the outcome at the latest within 7 to 10 days. When a case is closed all partners would be informed with feedback. It was noted this would not be the case if it had been a member of the public that made the referral.

Care Leavers – in response to a question relating to who provided support for care leavers up to 25, it was explained this was dependent on the level of need required for each individual. Care leavers have pathway plans developed and could have a number of partners responsible for support, for example, housing or health. It was noted that some young people do not wish to continue with a personal advisor or to stay in touch, however the partnership would still be available to them if they wished.

DCST Contract Targets – it was outlined that there were 39 targets

within the contract and would be provided to the Panel following the meeting. It was noted that a lot of the indicators were statutory and those that had been paused during Covid were national indicators. With regard to the 4 suspended during Covid, it was confirmed that reporting had resumed.

The Panel noted that measures within the contract were reviewed on an annual basis and moving forward would not just focus on numbers but quality of social care practices.

Staff Moral – it was explained that from a Council perspective people were generally tired and running on adrenalin whilst continuing to respond to the emergency and ensure people remained safe. However, they were being encouraged to take their leave and support was available through internal arrangements. Teams would soon start to reconnect in person.

With regard to the Children's Trust, mental health was starting to take its toll and work was being undertaken to reconnect everyone. However it was stressed that staff were very passionate and proud of the work they were undertaking and the whole partnership had work really well together.

Additionally the Local Authority and partners were learning from the pandemic and rethinking future service delivery taking account for the good practice developed over the last 18 months.

Universal Credit – it was acknowledged that the changes would have an impact on services and children living in poverty. It was noted that an anti-poverty group was addressing connecting people to employment and ensuring housing provision was appropriate. It was outlined that a rethink was required in relation to service delivery to build strong and healthy families.

Plans for Children in Need – There were a number of reasons why a small percentage of children in need did not show in the data as having a plan, including plans had not yet been finalised and therefore could not be included in the information.

Young Advisors – outlined that they mutually agreed that the Local Authority and partners had done everything they could throughout the pandemic to maintain service provision and family support but stressed that this needed to continue post covid.

It was explained that the Local Authority would be undertaking a piece of work about what type of support families were seeking. For example, were more families seeking early help provision? To ensure what was in place and fit for purpose it would be stress tested but whatever was provided it would need to be flexible to respond.

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|    | <p>The Panel acknowledge the amazing work the young people have been undertaking throughout the pandemic particularly peer support offered around social media platforms, knife crime, mental health and domestic abuse.</p> <p>It was highlighted that the Young Advisors were finalists for an MJ Award and the following day were attending the Awards ceremony in London.</p> <p>The Chair moved and it was seconded that a meeting with Teachers / Headteachers be arranged to discuss front door referrals relating to safeguarding from an education perspective.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED</u> that:-</b></p> <p>The statutory requirements and how they are enacted locally, be noted;</p> <p>The importance of early help in safeguarding children, and the benefits of providing support at the earliest possible stage, be noted; and</p> <p>A meeting with Teachers / Headteachers be arranged to discuss front door referrals relating to safeguarding from an education perspective.</p> |  |
| 7. | <p><b><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></b></p>  |  |
|    | <p>The Senior Governance Officer outlined the Scrutiny Work Plan and Forward Plan of Key Decisions.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> That the discussion, be noted.</p>   |  |