



South Tyneside Council

Children Safeguarding and Young People Scrutiny Committee 21 July 2026

Minutes 10 June 2026

Present: Councillors Tooley (Chair), Barclay, Jones, McKeown, Muquith, Ross, Stead, Turnbull.

Stuart Easingwood (Director of Children's Services), Jonathan Lunness (Scrutiny and Democracy Manager) and Kelly Ellwood (Democracy Support Officer).

There was one member of the press in attendance.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of meeting held on 24 February 2026

There were no Members present who had attended the previous meeting, therefore the minutes could only be noted rather than agreed as a correct record.

Agreed: That the minutes of the previous meeting be noted.

3. Scrutiny in South Tyneside

This presentation gave Committee an overview of good scrutiny practices and the scrutiny framework in South Tyneside, as well as terms of reference for the scrutiny committees.

It was explained that the current legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny committees could be found in the Localism Act 2011. It was further explained that the purpose of scrutiny was to hold the Executive to account, review, shape and develop Council policy and strategies,

ensure best value and performance management, and scrutinise external partners.

It was noted that the following could be scrutinised:

- The Executive (Cabinet)
- Council services and commissioned services
- Organisations with whom the Council has jointly commissioned services
- Health bodies and authorities
- Crime and Disorder

Functions of scrutiny included reviewing and challenging the impact of decisions, carrying out investigations into services and policy areas, involving communities in its work, where appropriate, and supporting and assisting the Cabinet, the Council Leadership and partner organisations in the formulation of future plans. It was advised that scrutiny should provide a “critical friend” challenge, be the voice of the public, and drive improvement in public services; it should not be political or focus on ward-level issues.

The South Tyneside scrutiny framework was included for information, and terms of reference for each Committee were outlined.

Agreed: That the contents of the presentation be noted.

4. Overview of Children and Family Services

This presentation gave an overview of Children and Family Services, including how the service was organised, what it delivered, and main strengths and challenges.

It was noted that the service included a range of teams working together to support children, young people and families. Some examples included the Youth Justice Service, Youth and Outdoor Services, and Connexions. There was also support available for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to help them settle into the local area.

There was a focus on engaging children, young people and parents or carers to ensure their voice was heard. Programmes such as MAGIC and “Let’s Talk” aimed to involve families and encourage participation. Overall, the service aimed to improve outcomes for children by working closely with partners and responding to individual needs. It was noted that timings were flexible to work around childcare, a Member suggested virtual sessions could be offered for those unable to travel.

The presentation outlined several strengths of the service, such as a clear vision and strong organisational culture. It was noted that

engagement with families and young people had been good, and staff and leadership teams had been stable. Practice had improved, as demonstrated by positive audit results, and two children's homes had been opened and were rated as good.

Work had been carried out to increase supported accommodation and extend provision for young people leaving care, and a strong kinship care offer was highlighted, with good relationships with care leavers helping to maintain regular contact.

Some key challenges and priorities were identified, such as continuing to improve practice and maintain a stable workforce and ensuring that support was provided early enough to meet needs. There was an ongoing requirement to increase the number of suitable homes for children and young people. It was advised that the service would also need to respond to social care reforms and prepare for upcoming inspections.

Members were informed that notice had been received and an OFSTED inspection was imminent.

A Member asked what key changes needed to be made when the new Director and Head came into post following the "inadequate" rating. It was noted that services had not been responding to needs at a local level, and children were placed in unregistered provision with no OFSTED oversight. It was advised that this was no longer the case around unregistered placements, which made South Tyneside an outlier.

On fostering placements outside of South Tyneside, it was explained that children and young people would be kept in borough wherever possible but only if it was safe to do so. It was clarified that the LA in which the child or young person was placed did not share the cost of care.

It was noted that foster carers were hard to recruit and numbers were dropping, but this was a national issue. New and innovative ways to attract were being looked at to try to bring children back in-borough.

A Member noted that the number of children engaged with Children's Services appeared very high. It was explained that this was not necessarily a statutory involvement but encompassed all areas, for example attendance at a youth club outdoor provision. It was requested that further detail be provided on this showing categories.

Discussion took place around the cost of beds per home and it was explained that this was a national issue with private providers charging high amounts based on the complexity of a child's needs. The importance of ensuring the cost was proportionate to the level of care

received was highlighted. This had been recognised in the press as a concern.

On the new build children's homes, it was noted that residence at these was dynamic and could change at any time; all other options would be exhausted prior to bringing a child into care, such as kinship carers. It was explained that this must be done through a court of law and would be a last resort.

Better incentives for foster carers were discussed, and it was noted that work was going on across the region; it was recognised that fostering offered better outcomes for children and meant they could stay local. Members were advised that the Committee had recently undertaken a deep-dive into demand and sufficiency in placements, and recommendations had gone to Cabinet. The Council were also promoting foster-friendly employee policies to support those who wished to take in a child.

In response to a Member query, it was clarified that the number of children and young people in care was a total figure and was across various companies as well as those in foster or kinship care. It was noted that there was a mixed economy with no lead provider.

As part of the consideration of the Council's Early Years provision, a Member requested that an item on Stanley Nurseries be considered at the committee. It was noted that due to the statutory consultation taking place under S188 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and the risk of prejudice to that process, any such item would need to be considered at an appropriate time after the statutory consultation process had finished.

Agreed: That the contents of the presentation be noted.

5. Work Programme 2026-27

This report highlighted the Work Programme for the 2026-27 Municipal Year and provided Members with an opportunity to amend or insert new activities for consideration at future meetings based on a list of contracts due to begin the procurement process.

Suggestions made for further discussion were data on number of children engaged with the service, cost and quality of care, barriers to fostering, and OFSTED improvements across the years. An item on Youth Justice would come to a future meeting.

It was suggested that SEND reforms be looked at, and it was advised that this topic would be better suited to the Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee.

Agreed: (a) That the report be noted, and (b) that the Work Programme be updated as necessary.

6. Chair's Urgent Items

There were no urgent items for discussion.

SIGNED _____
Chair 21 July 2026