

**At a meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 9<sup>th</sup> JUNE, 2011 at 5:30pm**

**Present:-**

Councillor Morrissey in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Bonallie, MacKnight, Oliver, D. Richardson, Scanlan, D. Snith and Williams together with Ms. R. Elliott and Ms. C. Hutchinson

**Also in Attendance:-**

Cllr Tate - Chairman of Management Scrutiny Committee

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Stewart and on behalf of Mr. K. Morris

**Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2011**

Councillor Oliver referred to page 4 of the minutes and asked if further information on staff sickness levels had been provided. Mr. Cummings advised that he would check with Mr. Foster and share the information with Members directly.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

**Annual Work Programme and Policy Review 2011/12**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) asking Members to determine the Annual Work Programme for the Committee during the 2011-12 municipal year, including the main theme for a detailed policy review.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report advising that the Scrutiny Committee were responsible for setting its own work programme within its remit to

consider issues relating to children and young people, and learning for all ages. He also advised that the Scrutiny Committee was aligned to the most relevant priorities within the Sunderland Strategy and that for this Committee that would be the Learning City priority. The draft work programme for the year was an appendix to the report and would be populated with items agreed by Members and amended during the year as required.

With regards to the policy review topic for the year, Mr. Cummings advised that the following topics had been selected as a shortlist following discussions that had been held between Members, Officers and Partners at the Annual Scrutiny Conference on 19 May, 2011:-

- Teenage Pregnancy;
- Corporate Parent;
- Early Intervention;
- Educational Performance; and
- New Relationships with Schools.

Discussions ensued between Members and Officers around the benefits of each of the short listed topics and it was suggested that Early Intervention could be the main policy review topic with Task and Finish Groups for Teenage Pregnancy and Corporate Parent feeding in to the main review topic.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The draft annual Work Programme 2011/12 be received and agreed; and
- (ii) Early Intervention be agreed as the main policy review topic with Task and Finish Groups for Teenage Pregnancy and Corporate Parent being set up to feed into it.

### **Offending by Children and Young People Living in Children's Homes**

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which had been prepared following a request made by Members of this Committee to provide more detailed information on the offending of young people in children's homes.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Boustead, Head of Safeguarding, presented the report to the Committee advising that a lot of work had been carried out over the last few years to reduce the number of young people committing offences or being involved in criminal activity whilst being resident in children's homes. Last year had seen a considerable improvement in performance measured against figures regarding young people in the wider population. This year's figures look not to be as successful and the service needed to investigate the reasons behind this to see if other strategies needed to be employed to continue improving performance.

In response to a query from Councillor Williams regarding paragraph 2.3 of the report and the young people who were arrested for damaging the fabric of the home, Ms. Boustead advised that she was aware one of the cases had been due to a new television being damaged but that she did not have further detail on the others. She commented that she would gather the further information and report back to Members directly.

With regards to covering the costs for the slashed tyres rather than being arrested, Ms. Boustead advised that it was something that could be looked at but it was dependant of whether the member of staff involved wished to complain to the police. Councillor Williams went on to comment that in a normal family setting they would face other consequences such as loss of privacy, technology or pocket money rather than being arrested.

Councillor MacKnight commented that as a magistrate she noticed that there were not as many young people coming through the courts system from children's homes as there had been in the past and that they had to learn to deal with consequences to their actions. Following a query from Councillor MacKnight, Ms. Boustead advised that if fined by the court the staff in the homes were not allowed to take away their basic pocket money allowance and how much the young people got was dependant on their age and increased every year.

Councillor Richardson referred to the case study set out in Appendix 1 of the report and asked if once the young person turned 18 and was claiming job seekers, if unemployed, could they not ask them to pay fines and was advised that technically, the children's homes can not have young people as residents once they turned 18. Exceptions were sometimes made to allow young people to carry on living in the home beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday for a short period of time until they could live comfortably independently. With regards to paying fines, once the young person was working or claiming benefits then they could be asked by the courts to pay the fines from their income.

Councillor Oliver highlighted the figures set out in the table at paragraph 2.1 of the report and asked how these compared with regional and national figures as he was keen to see if this was a particular problem within Sunderland or if it was similar to the national scene. Ms. Boustead informed Members that the comparative data was not available for this year as yet. Last year's figures had compared very well with regional and national performances and she was aware that this year the results would be slightly lower but advised that it did depend upon the cohort of young people that were resident in the children's homes at any one time. Further information would be available for the Committee as part of the performance reporting later in the year.

Councillor Oliver went on to ask if there were more cases in one home than any of the others and if there was did they know the reason why and was informed that there was one home with a number of quite troubled young people resident at the moment which had been causing difficulties. Following an incident with one young person they had made the decision not to send them back to the home to attempt to break the clique that had been made in an attempt to alleviate the problems.

In response to a query from Councillor Oliver as to whether it was coincidental that one home had ended up with a number of troubled young people, Ms. Boustead advised that they did try and match the young people they put together in the homes but obviously this was not an exact science and staff found it a constant balancing act. As a point of information Ms. Boustead advised that they liked to have less than seven young people resident in a home at any one time and that they were currently moving towards reducing this to six.

Councillor Williams asked how much evidence there was of foster carers involving Northumbria Police and was advised that they were involved very rarely as it was a completely different calibre of young person that was in a foster family. If a young person was resident in a children's home they would have already been through the foster care process as it was very rare for a young person to be placed directly into a children's home. The bulk of young people resident in children's homes were unable to live in a family setting anymore as it had shown not to work for them so the children's homes were made to feel as homely as possible but it was not the same as a normal family setting.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith regarding the number of young people and children's homes, Ms. Boustead advised that there were six children's homes in Sunderland, three homes with 7 young people resident in each and 3 homes with six. On occasion a young person's needs may not fit with the homes in Sunderland and they may need to be placed in a children's home outside of the city for a limited time, unless it was felt that they had settled particularly well in that area and it would be detrimental to move them.

Having thanked the Officer for her report and attendance at the meeting, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the information contained within the report be received and noted.

### **Commissioning of Youth Work Contracts**

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which was in response to a request from the Committee for detailed performance information on each of the Commissioned Youth Work Contracts, following a report that was presented to the Committee in March, 2011.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Sandra Mitchell, Head of Performance Improvement and Policy presented the report advising that there were 24 contracts issued to cover each ward, except where two wards were combined, and one city wide contract for the black and minority ethnic (BME) community and that the contracts were to ensure that a minimum of three universal youth work sessions were delivered per ward using a wide range of different methods.

She informed Members that section 3 of the report set out those wards where the contracts were performing below target and the agreed actions that were in place to

address the issues, whilst the appendix to the report set out the targets for all twenty five contracts and the actual achieved number in 2010-11 for each of the performance indicators.

Ms. Mitchell informed the Committee that all of the contracts were two year contracts in the first instance with the expectation to extend them when it was agreed appropriate to do so.

In response to a question regarding cross pollination of young people between activities from Councillor Morrissey, Ms. Mitchell advised that the young person's postcode was recorded when they attended an activity so they could see if there was any crossover of young people and ensure they were only counted once. The targets were set in relation to the number of young people who lived in the area who they recommended should be made contact with and the actual figures had far exceeded these.

Councillor MacKnight advised that she had visited some of the youth villages around her ward and had seen that there was some young people who followed the activities and attended more than one event. She informed the Committee that she had found the visit interesting and informative and recommended any new Councillors to undertake similar visits in their areas.

Councillor Bonallie commented that the youth villages were an excellent concept and a tribute to Andy Neal who had worked so hard to achieve the success that they have become.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Mitchell for her attendance at the Committee and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the information in the report be received and noted.

### **Safe and Sustainable Consultation : Children's Heart Services**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with detail of the ongoing consultation about the reconfiguration of children's heart services in England.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Cummings, presented the report advising that the NHS were currently consulting on proposals for reconfiguration of children's congenital heart services in England and followed the national 'Safe and Sustainable Review' which proposed four options to reduce the number of hospitals providing children's heart surgery from eleven to six or seven. The review also proposed that many non surgical services were provided closer to where patients live.

The four proposed options for the number and location of hospitals that provide children's heart surgical services in the future, were:-

- A Seven surgical centres at Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool, Glenfield Hospital, Leicester, Birmingham Children's Hospital, Bristol Royal Hospital for Children and 2 centres in London;
- B Seven surgical centres at Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool, Birmingham Children's Hospital, Bristol Royal Hospital for Children, Southampton General Hospital and 2 centres in London;
- C Six surgical centres at Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool, Birmingham Children's Hospital, Bristol Royal Hospital for Children and 2 centres in London; or
- D Six surgical centres at Leeds General Infirmary, Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool, Birmingham Children's Hospital, Bristol Royal Hospital for Children and 2 centres in London;

Members were advised that the consultation ended on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2011 and the final decision was expected to be made in November, 2011.

Following discussions around the four proposals and the impacts each would have for Sunderland, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the Committee strongly support option A, whilst secondly supporting options B and C and strongly opposing option D as set out.

### **Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 June, 2011 – 30 September, 2011**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider the relevant items of the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 June, 2011 – 30 September, 2011.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

6. RESOLVED that the Executive's Forward Plan for the current period be received and noted.

The Chairman then drew the meeting to a close having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

(Signed) T. MORRISSEY  
Chairman.