

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on THURSDAY 18th APRIL 2024 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Samuels in the Chair

Councillors Crosby, Curtis, McDonough, G. Smith, P. Smith, D. Snowdon, and D.E. Snowdon together with Mrs A. Blakey.

Also in attendance:-

Ms. Nicola Childs, Head of Community and CYP, South Tyneside and Sunderland ICB

Mr. Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Smart Cities and Enabling Services

Ms. Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Coordinator, Smart Cities & Enabling Services

Mr. Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial, Sunderland College

Mr. David Noon, Principal Democratic Services Officer, Smart Cities & Enabling Services

Ms. Judith Quinn, Vice Principal, Curriculum and Innovation, Sunderland College

Mr. Scott Watson – Director of Place (Sunderland), North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllrs Chapman, Dunn, Gibson and Thornton.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 29th February 2024

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 29th February 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Councillor D.E. Snowdon made an open declaration as a Trustee of Washington Mind in relation to Item 4 (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Update).

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – Update

The NHS North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a presentation from Nicola Childs on the transformation of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Service.

(for copy report and presentation – see original minutes)

Ms Childs briefed the Committee on the services commissioned through the Integrated Care Board, work undertaken over the previous 12 months, the operation of the Mental Health Support Teams, the development of the MDT Pilot and the pilot outcomes, the transformation of the neurodevelopmental pathway and the next steps.

The Chairman thanked Ms Childs for her presentation and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor Crosby welcomed the excellent initiatives to support children in schools but worried that children undertaking elective home education could be overlooked. Mr Watson and Ms Childs replied that the ICB were aware of issue but confirmed it was an area that Board still needed to look at to ensure these children were not missed.

Mrs Blakey stated that the presentation was music to her ears and welcomed the clarity it provided as being exactly what schools needed. She believed the MDT panels were great and in particular welcomed the neurodevelopment hotline for schools as a great tool for signposting. With regard to this she asked for timelines in respect of the further roll out of the hotline? Ms Childs replied that there were currently 7 clinicians working on it and that the ICB were looking at capacity and how to further roll out the service. She admitted that to date the take up had not been good. Mrs Blakey replied that visiting cluster group meetings would be a good way to connect with schools and that she could email Ms Childs to discuss this further.

Councillor P. Smith stated that she did not envy Ms Childs and Mr Watson in the task they faced. The issue of waiting times in relation to CAMHS had been a major concern for parents for numerous years prior to the onset of Covid-19, and to compound this, the number of children requiring help with mental health issues in the aftermath of the pandemic had increased massively. Ms Childs and Mr Watson acknowledged the size of the issue they faced and believed that it could only be successfully tackled through trying to move to a more systematic approach.

Councillor Dianne Snowdon welcomed the report and presentation but asked if a glossary could be provided given the number of abbreviations and technical terms used (Mr Watson confirmed that he would circulate a copy to the Committee via Mr Diamond). Councillor Snowdon also asked if the list of the 43 schools in which the Mental Health Support Teams operated could be circulated to the Committee. Ms Childs confirmed that she would forward the list to Mr Diamond.

Councillor McDonough stated that the rise in the number of autism assessments had been dramatic and asked if there were people who were going through the assessment who should perhaps be using other routes. Ms Childs replied that there were probably examples where this was case however the children would obviously have needs that were required to be met.

Councillor McDonough further asked if staff ever felt they were being 'strong armed' by parents to go down a particular route. Ms Childs replied that there would always be this form of pressure as parents would obviously want what they believed was best for their child. A communications campaign was being devised with Public

Health to promote the messaging to parents around the most appropriate pathways in respect of the various child mental health issues.

In conclusion, Councillor McDonough referred to Sunderland's Suicide Prevention Service which received numerous referrals from CAMHS. He expressed his concern that the service was to lose its funding and asked if these concerns could be passed on to the Integrated Care Board.

The Chair referred to a point made during the presentation about problems arising from having two service providers. She asked that if there were problems, could they be fixed? and also, what were the benefits of having two providers. Ms Childs replied that there were no problems in having two providers as long as there were clear lines of accountability.

In response to an enquiry from the Chair, regarding why Sunderland had not chosen to go down the route of a single point of access, Ms Childs replied that the decision was taken before her time, however she was aware that Sunderland had looked at the possibility of a single point of access before ultimately deciding against. Mr Watson confirmed that it was an issue that continued to be looked at, however whilst it was back on the agenda it was not top of the list of priorities. There were lots of different models in the North East and the power to alter the one operating in Sunderland lay with the Integrated Care Board.

In response to an enquiry from the Chair as to whether altering Sunderland's model was a large task, Mr Watson replied that while waiting times were lengthy, the lists in Sunderland were generally a lot shorter than in other areas of the North East. As a result, it could be said that Sunderland was doing something right in this regard. Given the variety of systems operating across the region and the subtle differences in how they were applied, it was difficult to make comparisons between models.

There being no further questions or comments, it was:

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

Apprenticeship and T Level Qualifications Update – Sunderland College

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a presentation from Judith Quinn (Vice Principal, Curriculum and Innovation, Sunderland College) and Iain Nixon (Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial, Sunderland College) on the current position in relation to T Levels and Apprenticeships.

(for copy report and presentation – see original minutes)

Mr Nixon introduced the presentation by providing the Committee with an overview of the College as an organisation and its geographical reach, before providing a comprehensive update on the situation regarding apprenticeships, including:-

- An overview of national trends,
- Changes in funding arrangements and the streamlining and simplification of the processes concerning apprenticeships,

- A comparison between the current uptake of Education Partnerships North East (EPNE) apprenticeships and those pre pandemic,
- An assessment of the quality of EPNE apprenticeships as evidenced by a 3 year improving trend in achievement rates (despite the impact of the pandemic on apprentice withdrawals and delays in end point assessments), achievement rates that were 10.9% above the national rate, very positive employer and apprentice feedback and green ratings on all DoE accountability measures,
- The variety of opportunities available across the advanced manufacturing and engineering sectors, and the health and care sectors, including case studies of apprenticeships undertaken with Envision AESC, Nissan Manufacturing UK and Sunderland Care and Support.

Mr Nixon then introduced Ms Quinn who provided the T Level section of the presentation highlighting:-

- The background (arising from the 2016 Sainsbury Review of post 16 technical education, introduced in September 2020 with routes in construction, digital, education and childcare, its expansion to 18 routes ranging from engineering and manufacturing, health and science through to business and administration),
- The introduction of T Level delivery at Sunderland College in 2021,
- An outline of what T Levels comprised (a 2 year advanced technical programme for 16-19 year olds developed in collaboration with employers - taken after GCSEs - broadly equivalent in size to 3 A Levels – practical knowledge based learning (80%) and industry placement (20%) - prepared students for entry into skilled employment, apprenticeships or related technical study in higher education,
- An example of a T Level programme,
- Changes to T Levels to be introduced from September 2024 and what it would mean for the College's 16 to 19 year old learners moving forward,
- Positive case studies of the destinations secured by former T Level students.

The Chairman thanked Ms Quinn and Mr Nixon for their presentation and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor D.E. Snowdon referred to the national mandatory requirement that students will have achieved a level 2 qualification in English and Maths to gain entry to a T Level programme and asked what could be done to support those who did not get the required grades? Ms Quinn confirmed that this was also a concern for the College and advised that it offered a 12 month transition course which focused on maths and English. On some T Levels (in particular Health Care), the College would support a November resit in maths, and or English if required.

In response to a suggestion from Councillor D.E. Snowdon regarding the importance of parents and carers recognising the value of T Levels, Mr Nixon replied that the best way of achieving that was to get former students to talk about their experiences and the destinations reached through taking the T Level route.

Councillor P. Smith stated that for years, employers had criticised schools and colleges for not providing prospective employees with the right qualifications and asked if this position had changed. Mr Nixon replied that colleges had always worked with employers, but the position had strengthened over the last two years. Employers now realised that they had a key role to play in co-designing programmes and reviewing progress. The current data showed that the proof was in the pudding with virtually all of Sunderland College students being kept on by employers following the end of their placements.

Councillor Crosby asked if the T Level courses were provided free of charge? She noted that cared for children often experienced a negative attitude from employers and asked if there was anything that the College could do to address this. Ms Quinn confirmed that T Levels were provided free of charge and advised that the support the College provided was bespoke with regard to each student's individual needs.

The Chair stated that the importance of the College to economic development of the city needed to be recognised. She referred to the Crown Works development and asked how T Levels would be used to support young people into employment at the studios. Mr Nixon and Ms Quinn replied that the current focus of the College was working with the Local Authority and Fulwell 73 on the skills strategy however it was not waiting around for the studios to be build. The North East was blessed with a lot of small creative companies and the college was already in discussions with them regarding the future.

There being no further questions or comments the Chair thanked Ms Quinn and Mr Nixon for their attendance and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Annual Report 2023 / 2024

Mr Diamond presented the report and advised that as in previous years, the annual report would be a single combined report of all four scrutiny committees. The Report would outline the development in the scrutiny function and provide a snapshot of its work undertaken during the last 12 months. Subject to any comments from Members, this Committee's report would be included in the Scrutiny Annual Report for submission to the next available Council meeting for approval.

For the sake of completeness, Mr Diamond advised that reference would be made in the final report to the consideration given at this evening's meeting to the topics of CAMHS and T Levels and Apprenticeships.

The Chairman thanked Mr Diamond for his report and thanked Members and Officers for their contributions over the course of the year. There being no questions and comments, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be approved for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/2024.

Annual Work Programme 2023/24

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the development of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2023/24 and appended the final copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Diamond, Scrutiny Officer having presented the report, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

There being no further items of business, the Chairman closed the meeting by paying tribute to Councillor Pat Smith who was to retire from the Council at the forthcoming Local Government elections.

(Signed) A. SAMUELS,
Chairman.