

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 11th FEBRUARY, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, G. Hall, Kelly, D. Richardson, Snowdon and Tye together with Mrs. P. Burn and Mr. S. Laverick

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman, Management Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Francis and on behalf of Ms. R. Elliott, Mr. M. Frank, Mrs. M. Harrop, Mrs. C. Hutchinson, Professor G. Holmes and Mrs. H. Kelly.

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 18th December, 2009 and of the last meeting held on 14th January, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 18th December, 2009 and of the last meeting held on 14th January, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 5 – Local Area Agreement Delivery Plans
Item 7 – National Curriculum Final Results 2009

Mr. Laverick declared a personal interest in the above items on the agenda as he wished to comment on them in his capacity as Vice-Principal of City of Sunderland College.

Item 11 – Progress Report on Hylton Red House Primary

Councillors Bell and Stewart declared personal interests in the above item on the agenda as they were members of the Shadow Governing Body of the School.

City Services – Culture and Tourism Review of Fees and Charges 2009/2010

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report which updated Members on the review of the Culture and Tourism Fees and Charges Policy and sought further comments from Members.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Julie McCann, Principal Librarian and Ms. Allison Clarke, Library Manager, presented the report advising Members of a number of further recommendations with regard to the current levels of fees and charges following concerns that had been raised from Members and customers.

Councillor Hall shared his concerns over the fact that there did not appear to be an overall policy for the way in which groups were charged for using facilities and was advised by Ms. McCann that there were standard fees in place but the libraries had been working with longstanding users to best meet their needs and make the facilities more affordable for them.

Members commented that in future any discussions around changes to fees should be presented to the Scrutiny Committee for consultation so that they could be given a proper and decent amount of time. They also felt that there should be consistency across the Council around how smaller community groups are charged to use facilities and the way concessions are applied. The Chair suggested writing to City Services regarding the standardisation of a fair charging policy across the Council, specifically in relation to concessions.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their report and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the Committees comments on the review of Culture and Tourism Fees and Charges Policy be received and noted.

Local Area Agreement Delivery Plans

The Learning City and Healthy City Delivery Partnership submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the Local Area Agreement Delivery Plan for those services delivered by partners who are members of the Learning City Delivery Partnership and the Children's elements of the Healthy City Delivery Partnership.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Mike Foster, Building Schools for the Future, Project Director, delivered the presentation which provided Members with background details about the plans

including the key aims and purpose of the Delivery Partnership; the Council services and partners which were involved in the partnership; the key achievements to date and the challenges faced.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

In response to a query from Councillor Hall regarding the 97% of young people in training or employment, Ms. Judith Hay, Head of Positive Contributions and Economic Well-Being, advised that at any time the target was to have 98% of young people in some form of training or employment but that the Councillor was right in that at times there were some gaps where courses stopped and young people were looking for the next opportunity. She explained that the aim was to have a seamless programme of activities so that the young person had a clear pathway to an accreditation at the end of possibly a number of courses.

Councillor Hall then went on to comment that there was the fear of the young person undertaking training with no relevant job opportunity being available at the end of it. Ms. Hay advised that Officers had examined the data and identified those schools in the city that produced high numbers of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), to help the service identify where gaps in provision or support were. She advised that young people who went on to college did tend to stay on their courses and that the challenge was in getting all of the partner agencies to the Council to offer more modern apprenticeships for young people to get them ready to work.

Ms. Hay then responded to a further query from Councillor Hall regarding the NEET Panel, advising that they met every week and managers would bring along 20 cases of individuals who they felt were 'stuck' and they would work out the best pathway for them. As of today's meeting 34 young people had been cleared through this route.

Councillor Hall went on to ask about the review of existing contraception and sexual health services for young people and if this was being undertaken as part of any initiative. Mr. Marc Hopkinson, Children's Services Acting Health Improvement Lead, advised that they had listened closely to what the young people had told them regarding where they wanted services delivered so that local sex health clinics would be most widely accessible by young people. When services were delivered in schools or community areas, young people had not been confident in going into them. Now that there was a clear approach taken the service were working in their areas but obviously the service would continue to set targets for improvement.

Councillor Kelly raised concerns over the quality of apprenticeships and how providers were monitored. Ms. Hay advised that previously the Council had little influence as the providers had been managed by the LSC. From April this would change and fall under the Council's remit so they could approve and monitor providers.

Ms. Hay also advised that providers would also have to go through the quality assurance framework at either a silver or gold level which would help in improving provisions. Councillor Kelly commented that he looked forward to the changes and would welcome the figures coming to Committee Members for monitoring.

Ms. Hay informed the Committee that Canon Stephen Taylor and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) were striving to get businesses to commit to taking on apprentices and the college had recently agreed to accept seven young people. The aim was to have every large organisation in the city to have a young apprentice for a two year period. Councillor Stewart commented that discussions had been held around this topic before and he felt that the Council's own policy on providing apprenticeships needed to be developed internally also.

Ms. Hay advised Members of the Committee that an opportunity had arisen from a training provider in London whereby Sunderland had managed to secure 20 places for young people from the city and they were the only city north of London to have achieved it.

Mr. Laverick commented that there were going to be budget cuts in Further Education in the coming years, in light of the current economy, and that there would be difficulties ensuring that the same levels of training provision were available across all sectors.

Councillor Stewart referred to the personalised approach to teaching at Key Stage 4 level and asked how this would work in practice? Mr. Foster advised that they would be looking to build a personalised teaching package around the young person's curriculum subjects so that they may take a normal session of maths but then also take a maths plus class on another day. This would mean that the individual may not be able to take another subject in its place but the aim is to encourage young people to leave school with 8 or 9 higher graded qualifications than have 10-14 qualifications at a grade D or below.

Councillor Stewart agreed with the approach that different individuals would learn in different ways and finding the best way to suit them would benefit them. Mr. Foster advised that the extra work and new approach often motivated the young person and made them more focus and would in turn help them to receive higher grades than initially expected.

In response to a query from Councillor Stewart regarding the lack of information received from Job Centre Plus, Ms. Hay advised that there was an issue nationally regarding the levels of information around the number of young people claiming benefits or having gone into work and they were looking at providing a route for information to be passed from them on a regular basis. Ms. Jessica May, Partnership Manager, commented that discussions would be taking place with the Department for Work and Pensions to see what could be done to improve communications.

Councillor Stewart referred to the proportion of children living in poverty and one of the key actions being to get them back into work, and asked how the service intended to address this. Ms. Julie Raine, Director of Skills for Life, advised that they knew that a parent's basic skill levels had a direct impact on that of the young person so they were working hard across the primary and secondary sector to raise the aspirations of parents and the Connexions service were also working closely with schools, offering them support for young people from an early age.

Mr. Keith Moore, Deputy Director of Children's Services, informed the Committee that a working partnership was developing a strategy to approach lowering child poverty which would provide some quick wins and as part of the strategy it would look at how to address different aspects of young people's lives.

The Chairman asked that a report be brought to a future meeting of the Committee on the issues around the potential impact of future budget reductions for training and education providers in the city and having thanked the Officers for their report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the content of the Delivery Plan be received and noted.

Reference from Cabinet – 3rd February, 2010 Children and Young People's Plan 2010 - 2025

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought the Committee's advice and consideration on the report considered by Cabinet on 3 February, 2010 presenting a consultation draft of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2010-2025 and Delivery Plan 2010-2013.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Keith Moore, Deputy Director of Children's Services and Mr. John Markall, Planning and Commissioning Manager, presented the report advising that it set out the key issues of the plan and raises Members awareness to the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning (ASCL) Act which facilitates greater partnership ownership of the Plan by legislating to place duty from April 2011 on the Children's Trust board to produce, publish and monitor the Plan.

Councillor Stewart advised that the Committee had discussed the Plan on two previous occasions and requested that the comments of the Committee raised on those occasions and through the working group be forwarded to Cabinet to note and that the Plan be endorsed.

4. RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee endorsed the Children and Young People's Plan 2010-2025 and Delivery Plan 2010-2013.

National Curriculum Final Results 2009

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) updating Members on the final, validated 2009 national curriculum results, including individual school and college results.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sue Morgan and Mr. Patrick Candon, Senior School Improvement Officers and Mr. Stuart Laverick, Vice-Principal City of Sunderland College, attended the meeting to answer any questions from Members on the current position with regards to results from the Early Years Foundation Stage right through to Key Stage 5 (A Level and equivalent).

Councillor Stewart commended the work of the staff involved in helping the Early Years Foundation Stage children improve significantly and asked that the Committee's congratulations be forwarded to them.

With regard to Key Stage 1, Councillor Snowdon referred to the Every Child a Reader (ECaR) programme ending in April, 2010 and was advised that the funding into the Local Authority was only secured until the end of March, 2011 but the programme would run until the end of the school year. Ms. Morgan advised that they would look hard at how the programme could be sustained following this using the school's own funding but work would need to be done around how the programme was maintained.

Councillor Hall referred to the ECaR programme working with 120 children, making 3% difference and asked if this was accessing the correct amount of children. Ms. Morgan explained that this was around the right number of children for the programme and that it was offered to schools on the basis of their results, with those children being below the bottom of level one being supported to access the programme. She informed Members that the programme was a 12 week intervention programme which was very structured and was not allowed to be modified in anyway to warrant the most successful rates of improvement. Of the children that accessed the programme 60-70% would go on to attain Level 4 Reading.

Mr. Laverick commented that there was a good range in terms of language development at Key Stage 2 and asked if there was support for the programmes from the young person's family. Ms. Morgan advised that each programme was directly linked to working with the young person's parents or carer and the reason for the child being on the programme was carefully explained so that it was firmly embedded with their parent/carer in their home life.

Councillor Stewart referred to the national indicator floor target ensuring that at least 55% of pupils achieve level 4 or higher in both English and Maths, and pointed out that there were one or two schools which did not meet this target and were considerable below the 55% and asked what work was being done to rectify the problem. Ms. Morgan advised that the service were mindful of the number of schools not reaching the target and the Department for Children, Schools and Families shared their concerns.

She explained that they held a database of those schools that were 'hard to shift' and they maximised a consistent level of support, having been given the highest priority to improve. She informed Members that once a school was able to show it had improved it was removed from the 'hard to shift' database and that one of the schools on the database was long term but with the right level of support it was improving.

Councillor Hall referred to the School Level Performance table and asked if there was any explanation as to why some schools figures were so erratic, giving Southwick Primary as an example, having been at 53% in 2007, 58% in 2008 and then only 30% in 2009. Ms. Morgan advised that this could be as a result of a number of things but that a low position of attainment does not necessarily mean it is a bad school. Some children start so low with their abilities that the progress being made could be good and show they were doing well but would not be up to level 4+. Ofsted reports would explain the circumstances of each individual school better and show if children were reaching their expected potential.

In response to a query from Councillor Stewart regarding schools working in the context of the new Ofsted Framework, Ms. Morgan informed the Committee that those schools where attainment was low, would, generally speaking, start in a low category. Schools which they were concerned may fall into the lower bracket were formally identified and the appropriate support was offered to them.

Councillor Stewart sought more information around the Gaining Ground Initiative and was advised that it was a national challenge which looked at those schools which were doing quite well but with additional support could do better and within those schools there was a certain group of children who should be achieving more and would benefit from additional support. There were six Sunderland Schools on the initiative and all pupils were raising their achievement levels.

In response to a query from Councillor Stewart regarding the disparity between the Contextual Value Added Scores at Key Stage 5 between the City of Sunderland College and the three Sixth Forms, Mr. Andrew Baker, Information Manager, advised that there were a number of factors that made up the score and schools were still working to get their heads round the system and that it was early days for everyone to fully understand it. As an example he worked out that the College's score of 1005 would put them just above the top 40% on a national level.

Councillor Stewart commented that young people who attended college appeared to become more independent than those who attended sixth forms. Mr. Laverick stated that it was crucial to the young person to gain some level of independence and confidence if they were to move successfully onto the next stage of higher education.

5. RESOLVED that the performance of Sunderland national curriculum results be received and noted.

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2000-2010

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) informing the Members of the current position of the Council as a 'Corporate Parent', ensuring that Members are aware of the current performance on the Council in meeting this responsibility.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Meg Boustead, Head of Safeguarding, took the Committee through the report advising Members of the services and initiatives in place and under development to further improve outcomes for those children and young people for whom the Council has parenting responsibility.

Councillor Tye commended the report, stating that the information contained within it was excellent and giving credit to its author and with regard to training for Members asked if there would be a way to bundle it together into one package and possibly offer it online or via one-to-one training. Ms. Boustead agreed this was a good idea and was aware that there were a number of e-learning packages already offered and agreed to look at the issue with Corporate Development to see if this could be personalised for each Member and offered that way.

Councillor Hall advised that the Committee had received the Ofsted Inspection reports of the Children's Homes and wished to congratulate the Management Teams and staff involved in continuing to make progress and consistently report high quality of care.

With regards to the Regulation 33 training, Councillor Hall advised that himself and Councillor Bell had taken part in it and had found it extremely informative and he looked forward to taking part in the monitoring visits.

In response to a query from Councillor Hall regarding young people placed in care outside of the city, Ms. Boustead advised that there were a small number outside of the city but not the region in various placements. Some young people were placed in independent foster care where their needs could not be met in Sunderland and a small number were in specialist residential care who had challenging behaviour or complex needs. She advised that there were a small number of young people overall and they were constantly monitored and provided with the exact service that a child in the Council's own provision would receive.

With regards to the issue of young people leaving care at the age of 18 and not being ready to, Ms. Boustead advised that since 1999 every child must have a Pathway Plan which determines the individual's future and looks at what their preparation needs are in the build up to them leaving care. Young people have still stated that despite all the support they are offered they still felt unprepared to leave care at 18 years old.

Ms. Pat Burn referred to paragraph 15.1 of the report and was concerned that one third of care leavers were not in education, employment or training and that just over ten percent were being housed in unsuitable accommodation. Ms. Boustead informed Members that she had spoken with the Leaving Care Service and shared their concerns but also advised that they could only report on those young people who they were still in touch with once they left care. Once the young person left care, they did not have to keep in touch with the service but they were trying to put incentives in place to encourage them to stay in contact.

Councillor Bell advised that he would be participating in the Regulation 33 Monitoring Visits the following week and was looking forward to them. He advised the

Committee that he had previously completed safeguarding training on-line and felt it was a good way for Members to undertake training in their own time.

In response to a query from Councillor Bell regarding any increase in caseloads following the Baby P enquiry, he was advised that there were now 383 young people on the child protection plan as opposed to 200 young people previously so the number of cases had almost doubled.

Councillor Hall asked how the increase in young people on the child protection plan had impacted on social workers and if anything had been done in terms of recruitment of new members of staff and was advised that the Committee would be receiving a report to their next meeting on the roles and responsibilities of a social worker. With regards to recruitment and retention issues, Ms. Boustead advised that there were a number of initiatives being undertaken such as the golden hello welcoming new members of staff to Sunderland, good conditions of service, flexible working, development opportunities and more.

She explained that one difficulty was that now there were less trained and experienced staff in the field of work but that there was a lot of work being done nationally to improve the situation. Newly qualified staff were supported throughout their first year to allow them to develop their skills and settle into their position.

6. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 February, 2010 – 31 May, 2010

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 February, 2010 – 31 May, 2010

(for copy report – see original minutes).

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

Work Programme 2009/2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching the current work programme for the year 2009-2010.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

8. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted and items as discussed previously in the meeting be added where appropriate.

Progress Report on Hylton Red House Primary School

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an update on activity and progress at Hylton Red House Primary School that is subject to Special Measures through an Ofsted judgement.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

9. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted for information.

Inspection of Sunderland Youth Offending Service

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of the outcome of inspection of Sunderland Youth Offending Service which took place in October 2009.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

10. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted for information.

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

(Signed) P. STEWART,
Chairman.