

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on THURSDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2022 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor McKeith in the Chair

Councillors Burrell, Crosby, Dunn, PWL Gibson, Guy, S. Johnston, Mason-Gage, Samuels, P. Smith Thornton and Tye

Also in attendance:-

Cllr Louise Farthing, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children, Learning and Skills.
Jill Colbert, Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive for Together for Children.

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate.

Ms Majella McCarthy, Head of Service for ICRT, Assessment and Locality, Together for Children.

Mr. David Noon, Principal Governance Services Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate.

Ms Pamela Robertson, Strategic SEND Lead, Together for Children.

Prior to the commencement of the business the meeting was informed that the Chair Councillor Mason-Gage had lost her voice and she had therefore asked the Vice – Chair, Councillor McKeith, to chair this meeting of the Committee.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Mrs. A. Blakey.

Minutes of the last Ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 7th July 2022

Councillor Thornton advised that she notified officers of her apologies prior to the meeting however they had not been included in the minutes.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 7th July 2022 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Thornton in the list of apologies.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an update on the further development of Corporate Parenting for Together for Children and Sunderland City Council, through a renewed Corporate Parenting Strategy and the adoption of the Change Council's 'Change Game' as a training tool for corporate parents.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

To complement the report, Majella McCarthy, Head of Service for ICRT, Assessment and Locality, at Together for Children provided the Committee with a comprehensive powerpoint presentation which detailed the key responsibilities of corporate parents, the priorities of the strategy, how they would be achieved and how TfC and the Council would know that they were making a difference.

Councillor Farthing advised that Care Experienced young people could feel very isolated and it was important that through the strategy they would receive support and mentoring in relation to post 16 education, employment and skills and housing that was tailored to each young person. The Change Game was an eye opener which would enable corporate parents and others to understand what life was like for cared for and care experienced young people. Councillor Farthing added that she sat on a regional meeting of Lead Members for Children's Services and the group was of the opinion that care experienced should be added to the list of protected characteristics. This was something she wanted to discuss with the young people of Sunderland to gain their views on the matter.

The Chairman thanked Ms Colbert and Ms McCarthy for their presentation and invited questions and comments from Members.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Crosby regarding plans to support young people in supported accommodation during the cost of living crisis, Ms Colbert advised that the Council had the ability to make exceptional payments and would work with the partnership to mobilise support however it would not necessarily increase the various allowances granted to young people as a default option.

Councillor Mason-Gage asked if the pressures of the cost of living crisis would effect the number of foster parents coming forward. Ms Colbert stated that this was an interesting question and her honest answer was that she didn't know. The number of people coming forward had decreased nationally and not just in Sunderland. Despite potential foster parents being able to earn allowances of up to £32,000, Sunderland had not managed to recruit any additional carers. A regional recruitment campaign would shortly be underway which would be based on the realisation that word of mouth was the best recruitment tool. Councillor Farthing confirmed that foster carers recruiting foster carers was the best and most effective route. Foster caring tended to run in families and in friends of those families.

Councillor Thornton referred to the health related priority in the strategy regarding rapid access to emotional well-being support for children and young people and asked what this would look like in reality. Ms Colbert replied that TfC paid for a dedicated service and that young people should be offered an appointment within 48

hours. In reality there was a piece of work required regarding the waiting list and the model did need to be modernised. Councillor Farthing added that the position in respect of the waiting list was now much better than it had been.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Smith, Ms Colbert advised that we have probably travelled further than we might have thought in respect of reducing the challenges faced by cared for young people in terms of stigma, employment and housing. The change language campaign made people pause and think about the kind of language they used, in terms of education as a gateway to employment many of Sunderland's cared for young people were now out-performing their counterparts. Young people had also met with the Chief Executive of Gentoo to discuss the issue of housing. Councillor Farthing added that it was the role of every elected member to champion the cause of Sunderland's cared for young people and work to help overcome the stigma they faced.

Councillor Guy referred to care experienced young people who were also NEET and the speculation from the Prime Minister about the potential removal of personal statements from university and college applications thus placing a greater emphasis on results. He believed that this would increase the amount of anxiety faced by young people especially those who were currently NEET and asked how it would be addressed. Ms Colbert replied that TfC received an incredible amount of support from the University and the College who met with the city's cared for children and were prepared to make adaptations. TfC worked with cared for young people who were NEET to give them a rounded CV and coached and mentored them in respect of job and university interviews.

Councillor Guy asked if TfC directed its cared for young people to, or away from particular types of employment and if they would check pay and terms of conditions. Ms Colbert replied that every cared for young person had a Pathway Plan and issues such as those would feature as part of the plan. In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Guy, Ms Colbert confirmed that most of Sunderland's cared for young people would move into social housing in the first instance.

There being no further questions the Chairman thanked Ms Colbert, Ms McCarthy and Councillor Farthing for their presentation, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

Sunderland Local Area Written Statement of Action

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an update on the Sunderland Local Area Written Statement of Action (WSOA) issued by Ofsted following the joint Inspection of the Sunderland Local Area SEND provision in June 2021.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Pamela Robertson, Strategic SEND Lead, Together for Children, presented the report providing a detailed commentary on the actions taken to address the following two priorities identified in the WSOA as areas for specific focus:-

Priority 1: Joint commissioning, in a way that demonstrably and quickly improves provision and outcomes for children and young people, is not fully embedded. The information used to inform this process is not comprehensive, and coproduction with children, young people and families is inconsistent

Priority 2: The support for children and young people at times of transition across all services and age ranges is too variable in quality processes involved together with any trends or themes arising and addressed questions and comments from Members thereon.

At this juncture upon the announcement of the death of Her Majesty the Queen, the meeting was adjourned.

(Signed) J. McKEITH,
Chairman.