

**At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE held REMOTELY on THURSDAY 4th MARCH, 2021 at 5.30 p.m.**

Present:-

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Crosby, Mann, McDonough, McKeith, F. Miller, Noble, Samuels and Tye together with Ms Anne Blakey.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Chris Adamson, Team Manager, Together for Children
Ms Jill Colbert, Chief Executive, Together for Children
Karen Davison, Director of Early Help, Together for Children
Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate
Mr Simon Marshall, Director of Education, Together for Children
Ms Linda Mason, Service Manager, Together for Children
Mr David Noon, Principal Governance Services Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate
Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate
Ms Jayne Scott, YOS Case Manager, Together for Children

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Hunt.

**Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny
Committee held on 4th February, 2021**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 4th February, 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Schools Re-Opening – Update

The Chair welcomed and introduced Mr Simon Marshall, Director of Education who provided the Committee with a verbal update on the current position following the

Government announcement on 22 February 2021, of the reopening of schools for face to face teaching for all pupils from 8 March 2021.

Mr Marshall provided members with :-

- i) An assessment of the Government guidance on the re-opening of schools
- ii) The implications of the reopening for public health
- iii) The support provided to schools by the Council and Together for Children
- iv) The support provided for parents and the community.

Councillor Tye asked Mr Marshall if he could provide the Committee with an update in respect of the city's SEND schools regarding how they were adapting to the use of face coverings etc and what support was being given especially in respect of children with hearing difficulties.

Mr Marshall replied that it was an extremely difficult situation and additional guidance had been sought from the DfE because it wasn't just a Sunderland issue it was a national one. The response from the DfE was that they trusted schools to plan for it as effectively as possible. This may involve a great use of social distancing however there were obvious difficulties for anyone attempting to lip read. It was a challenge, but it was reassuring that Sunderland's special schools knew their pupils very well as this would help the schools in preparing their risk assessments. The Council had assured both schools and parents that they would provide the necessary support to ensure that they got the risk assessments right.

Councillor F. Miller asked what support was to be provided to parents whose children normally used taxis to travel to and from school and also, how would children be supported to administer their own lateral flow tests. Mr Marshall advised that Sunderland's SEND transport had continued to operate throughout the pandemic and managed via very tight risk assessments. He paid tribute to the fantastic work undertaken in this regard by Paul Tomlin who had a real gift for communicating with parents and was able to clearly explain the measures that had been put in place. Taxi drivers themselves were very experienced in working with this cohort of pupils. They were very skilled in dealing with the young people and had received a great deal of training / advice and were working within very clear risk assessments. The situation would continue to be monitored. There were challenges and change always brought anxiety for parents. It was about ensuring these anxieties were understood.

Mr Marshall acknowledged that the lateral flow tests could be a bit uncomfortable and for this reason the first three tests would be administered in school to enable pupils to receive training and gain the confidence to enable them to self-test at home.

Cllr Mann asked if there were any alternatives for children who may not be able to administer the tests or did not want to take them. Mr Marshall advised that schools were reporting that around 90% of pupils were able to take the tests. With regard to the remaining 10%, the schools would contact parents to try and understand the barriers they were facing and provide support to help them overcome them. All the information regarding lateral flow tests and the use of face coverings were available on the Council's website and a video on how to take a test was to be posted shortly.

At this juncture Councillor Samuels attempted to ask a question but could not be heard because of interference on her microphone. Mr Marshall suggested that she tried using the chat function and he would try and provide an answer. Councillor McKeith also advised that he was experiencing technical issues and was unable to ask questions.

The Chairman asked Mr Marshall if he was able to give any indication as to how far children had fallen behind academically as a result of the pandemic. Mr Marshall replied that over this last period of lockdown and as result of experience gained during the first period, the ability to provide successful alternatives to face to face teaching had been very good. As a result, initial research had suggested that children were not too far behind. It would be difficult to provide an accurate analysis however until all children had returned to school. His greatest concern revolved around the very youngest cohort as the first three years of a child's schooling were vital in terms of language development, social interaction and developing relationships.

Councillor Tye placed on record his thanks to everyone involved in the city's schools from the Senior Leadership Teams through to the cleaning staff for enabling children's education to continue safely. He stated that it was also important to recognise the role played by parents in adapting their lives to enable them to home school. He also advised that he had been working with a group of young people in Silksworth who having initially welcomed the fact that they could no longer go to school during lockdown, now couldn't wait to return. The intervening 12 months had made them realise how valuable school actual was to them.

Councillor Mann welcomed Councillor Tye's update and in particular the news of the positivity of the young people. She was mindful however of the potential mental health issues caused by the pandemic and asked Mr Marshall if schools were in a position to provide support if issues arose. Mr Marshall confirmed that schools were extremely cognisant of the issue and were ready to respond to it and any other barriers to learning. It would be more than a 6 week recovery period and it was likely it would take at least three years to fully understand the extent of the impact of the pandemic on children's education.

There being no further questions for Mr Marshall, The Chairman thanked him for his update and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

The Youth Offending Service – Update

The Director of Early Help submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members an update on the action being taken to prevent offending and reoffending by children and young people.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Linda Mason (Service Manager) presented the report advising that the Sunderland Youth Offending Service (YOS) was a multi-agency service comprising the four statutory agencies of police, probation, health and the Council. The service worked

in partnership with other key agencies such as the area courts and specialist service providers, including child mental health. The Committee was briefed on the partnership work undertaken to deliver both statutory and non-statutory services to the following, with particular reference to the impact of Covid:

- Young people aged 10-17 who, because of potential or actual offending had become involved in the criminal justice system
- Children and young people identified as at risk of offending
- Families of children and young people offending or at risk of offending
- Victims of young people who had offended.

Ms Mason then introduced Jayne Scott, YOS Case Manager, who provided the Committee with a case study which highlighted the positive use of restorative justice within the family home.

The Chairman referred to partnership working and asked officers if they felt the Youth Offending Service received the support it required from the Police Force and the Probation Service. Ms Mason advised that YOS had two Northumbria Police staff members who were based within the Team working on a part time basis. It was fair to say that the Northumbria Police view on working with young people and treating them as a child first and offender second had moved on considerably over the last twelve months and the Police's introduction of 'Outcome 22' was a testament to this. Working with the Probation Service provided greater challenges over the last twelve months as it had different covid rules in respect of making direct visits which had impacted on the ability of staff to undertake the visits.

Councillor Miller welcomed the use of the restorative justice programme and stressed the importance of adopting a holistic approach as there were always multi causal issues underlying any problem.

Councillor Noble stated that she loved hearing the successful outcomes relayed in Jayne's case study and absolutely endorsed the development of Outcome 22. She also confirmed that from her own experience working with young people in the west area of the city there had been a marked improvement in effectiveness of the partnership working between the YOS team, Probation and Police over the last 6 months.

Ms Davison added that it was important to note that the Police in particular had developed some really good partnership intervention working initiatives over the last 18 months and the Service was now starting to reap the benefits of this work. This included the 'safer schools' meetings, which were held on a very regular basis over different geographical areas of the city and also the 'VIP' (vulnerability, investigation and problem solving), initiative which were starting to make a big difference in terms of multi-agency working.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Ms Mason explained the working relationship between the YOS and the Early Help Team.

In response to a further enquiry from the Chairman, Mr Adamson advised that the service was currently seeing a reduction in the numbers of cases where young males had carried out acts of violence against female members of their own family

and explained the tools at hand to tackle the problem when it arose such as the Respect programme.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chair thanked Ms Davison, Ms Mason, Ms Scott and Mr Adamson for their report, and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Annual Report

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator submitted a report which sought approval from the Committee for the report as part of the overall scrutiny annual report 2020/2021.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report, advising Members that as in previous year's the annual report would be a single combined report of all four Scrutiny Committees and would be presented to Council via the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee. The report would outline the development in the scrutiny function and provide a snapshot of their work during the last twelve months.

There being no further comment or questions, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee Annual Report be approved and included within the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2020/21.

Annual Work Programme 2020/21

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with details of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2020/21

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report and advised Members that the April meeting was scheduled to include a report from Sunderland College on apprenticeships. It had also been previously pointed out that the scheduled meeting date (1st April) fell within the Easter holidays and members had requested that a new date was found outside the holiday period. Mr Diamond advised that following consultation with the college and members on two possible dates (26th and 28th April), the 26th had been identified as the most suitable for the majority of attendees.

Accordingly, Members agreed that the next meeting of the Committee be rearranged to be held on the 26th April, 2021.

5. RESOLVED that:-
 - i) the report be received and noted, and

- ii) the next meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on Thursday 1st April be cancelled and rearranged for Monday 26th April at 5.30pm.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from the 22nd February, 2021.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was advised that if Members had any issues to raise or required further detail on any of the items included in the notice, they should contact Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

The Chair referred to item 210210/563 regarding the Review of the Corporate Parenting Board and asked that an update report on the matter was provided to the Committee at its next meeting.

6. RESOLVED that the Notices of Key Decisions be received and noted.

There being no further items of business, the Chair closed the meeting having thanked members and officers for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.