

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

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Francis, G. Hall and Oliver together with Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. C. Hutchinson and Mr. S. Laverick

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Kelly, T. Martin, I. Richardson, Snowdon and Tye and on behalf of Professor G. Holmes.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 11th February, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 11th February, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

School Admission Arrangements – September 2011 – Urgent Business

The Chairman reported that a report entitled 'School Admission Arrangements – September 2011' had been submitted to be considered as urgent business.

The Chairman advised that he had agreed to add this to the Committee's agenda as urgent business in accordance with Section 100(B) of the Local Government Act 1972 by reason of special circumstances related to the timescales involved for the submission of the admission arrangements to the DCSF and publication for parents.

Declarations of Interest

Item 6 - Building Schools for the Future (BSF) – Progress on BSF Wave 2 and Submission of the BSF Wave 2 Strategy for Change (SfC) Business Case

Councillor Bell declared a personal interest in the item as a Council appointed Governor of Castlegreen Community School.

Councillor Oliver declared a personal interest in the item as a Council appointed Governor of Farringdon School.

Mrs. D. Butler declared a personal interest in the item as a Governor of Washington School.

Item 9 – School Admission Arrangements – September 2011

Councillor Hall declared a personal interest in the above item as he had recently gone through the school admissions process for his daughter.

Apprenticeship Opportunities

The Chief Executive submitted a report which provided Members with information about apprenticeship opportunities within Sunderland Council.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Sue Stanhope, Director of Human Resources and Occupational Development, presented the report advising the Committee of the current position and development within the Council and the targets for 2020 to increase the number of apprenticeship opportunities not only in the Council but with partner agencies and in the city overall.

In response to a query from Councillor Hall regarding the overall success rate of apprenticeships, Ms. Stanhope advised that historically there was around a 66% success rate but that they were hoping to see this increase. With the introduction of a central team who could trace apprentices on the completion of their training and the 'grow your own' trainee routes being implemented by the Council, they were hopeful they would start to retain staff following their apprenticeship and the success rate would grow.

With regard to concerns raised by Councillor Hall around young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), Ms. Stanhope advised that they were working with colleagues in Children's Service to address issues around NEET, and especially in relation to looked after children. They were examining how apprenticeship work could be linked with work experience and where if a young person was in a placement, this could be extended to become an apprenticeship opportunity. This area of work was not as well developed as some but they were continuing to target young people who were NEET.

Councillor Francis asked how long an apprenticeship lasted and was informed that the duration of them varied according to where they were studying and the pace at which the individual made progress through the course content, as well as the occupation they were studying.

In response to a further query from Councillor Francis around the definition of a successful apprenticeship, Ms. Stanhope advised that there were two key areas to define, a success for the Council or Organisation providing the placement and a success for the apprentice. With regard to the Council/Organisation, they would see

it as a success if they retained the apprentice as a full time employer following the end of their apprenticeship, allowing them to grow and continue to develop within the organisation. A success for the apprentice would see them being given a good quality of training and development, as well as learning the appropriate skills for them to gain permanent employment in the city or region.

Councillor Francis questioned what qualifications the apprentices were able to get and what these would then lead on to and was advised by Ms. Stanhope that, again it was dependant upon the occupation and subject but that there were a lot of apprenticeships offering qualifications around the NVQ levels. As the Council invest heavily in training and development for employees, support is given to employees wishing to undertake vocational or professional training where possible.

In response to a question from Councillor Oliver around the age profile of people undertaking apprenticeships, Ms. Stanhope advised that the majority of participants were under 25 and that the Council didn't see much movement in trends around this but that she would check and report the information back to the Committee.

With regards to older, more skilled people taking apprenticeship vacancies from younger people, Mr. Laverick commented that the funding for apprenticeships was aimed towards those between the ages of 16-18 and that the funding for 19-30 year olds had been significantly cut back.

Ms. Burn referred to paragraph 3.2 of the report and commented that it was good to see the number of apprentice opportunities having increased since 2006 from 23 to upwards of 170 across Council Directorates and was told this was partly down to the fact that there had been a much more active jobs market since 2006 with the housing transfer to Gentoo and the transition from old style apprenticeships.

In response to a comment from Councillor Oliver regarding areas in which apprenticeships were offered within the Council, Ms. Stanhope confirmed that he was right in that they were still offered in the traditional areas, such as that of the office junior working his/her way up the career ladder but that the majority were in Business Administration, with apprentices working in areas around the Council where administrative services were provided. She advised Members that they were starting to try and map out what the future workforce was going to be and developing young people within the Council to fit these future roles.

Mr. Laverick suggested that the Council should have a procurement policy with their suppliers, whereby they had to commit to take on a number of apprentices. Mr. Moore advised that through the LSP partner organisations were encouraged to promote the use of apprentices within their own organisations.

In response to a question from Councillor Stewart around the progression routes for apprentices currently in the Council, Ms. Stanhope referred Members to paragraph 3.3 of the report and the developments taking place to promote a 'grow your own' ethos which would define routes into progression through the Council for staff. Historically, the Council had looked at employing experienced, qualified staff which has meant always bringing new people into the organisation instead of recognising someone who may have talent and skills to achieve that position with some further

development. They were looking to address this by providing trainee routes into all areas of the Council where possible.

Further to this, Councillor Stewart asked how the positions of trainee would fit with the apprenticeship opportunities and was advised that a lot of the apprenticeship positions created would be the trainee posts so there should be a seamless transition between the two.

Councillor Stewart asked how hard to reach groups and NEETs would be involved and was advised that the Council worked closely with the colleges and Children's Services who were able to identify individuals either already NEET or having the potential to be. The process was not as sophisticated as it needed to be but work was still ongoing around this with Children's Services to understand how best to work with groups or individuals prior to approaching them.

In relation to a query from Mrs. Hutchinson regarding the 'grow your own' model and recruiting and retaining social workers, Mr. Moore advised that for a number of years they had been looking at the progression routes for social workers within the Council. He explained that the qualification was now a three year degree course with a work placement for the second year. The Council offered placements for this year and then helped to support the individual during their third year so that they could return and having already worked within the section they should have a better understanding of the city and any issues. Ms. Meg Boustead informed the Committee that they also helped to support the students through their course by offering work placements during their holiday periods or out of class hours.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for her report and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Social Work Roles and Responsibilities

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update on developments within social work with children and families both locally and nationally.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Meg Boustead, Head of Safeguarding, presented the report to Members advising them on the following developments:-

- the update on the Integrated Children's System;
- consideration of how social workers spend their time;
- the findings of the Social Work Task Force; and
- the development of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Qualified Social Workers in Sunderland's Children's Services.

Ms. Burn referred to the fact that only 13% of the social workers time had been spent on client visits and asked if there was a way for the admin work to be carried out by

other members of staff. Ms. Boustead advised that it was an issue that had been discussed previously as to how best to use the talents of individuals within a service to support the frontline staff and free up professionals to undertake other work.

Councillor Hall referred to the social worker who was less skilled in IT and asked if the Council had training available to help them progress in this area and was advised that there was and staff who needed training were being identified and provided with the relevant course. She explained that one of the issues had been that the service had moved from a paper based procedure to an electronic one and as staff had left and been replaced the training had not been carried on but that this matter was being addressed.

With regards to each workers case load, as raised by Councillor Hall, Ms. Boustead advised that they were working towards ensuring that each worker had a manageable caseload, which at the moment was around 25 cases each. She informed Members there was a lot of difference between individual workers as each case came with a varying level of workload attached. One family could have 5 or 6 children within it which would not create as much work as 5 or 6 separate homes and then there was also the complexity of each case to take into account when looking at workloads so it was not as easy as just ensuring each social worker had the same number of cases.

They were always looking at how to reduce the caseloads of social workers and one way of achieving this would be to work more effectively. The service were working closely with partners to create an infrastructure to work with children earlier and provide more intervention.

Councillor Hall referred to paragraph 5.4 of the report and that the social worker who had been shadowed had spent 71% of their time in the office and asked if the worker needed to have ownership of all of the admin associated with their cases or if this work could be carried out by introducing a supporting admin position. Ms. Boustead advised that the difficulty lay with the administrating of the Integrated Children's System (ICS) which was a fundamental role of the job. She advised that one of the criticisms which had come out from the Baby P case was that too much notice had been taken of the family and not of others involved with the family. The ICS contains information from not only the child and family but other agencies involved and holds a chronological history of the case so that anyone accessing it gets a full idea of the situation.

In relation to paragraph 6.4 of the report and none of the 15 recommendations from the Task Force being imaginative solutions to the problem of the national shortage of children's social workers, Ms. Boustead advised that they were interested in seeing if new routes could be found into social work as had been done for the teaching and probation services, whereby individual's life experiences could be taken into account rather than them just completing a degree course. This would allow older people with relevant life experiences to undertake a shorter course to be trained in the profession of social work.

Councillor Bell commented that there was a need to look at how the boundaries were set as to what the social worker did with families and ensuring that all agencies involved with the family were communicated with, especially since the findings of the

Baby P case. Mr. Moore commented that it had caused an increase of pressure on the system but that this had been a positive outcome for Sunderland as they were now receiving more referrals, which could cause a challenge to the service but it was for the professionals to agree as to how best manage this.

Mr. Laverick asked if the service were looking at ways to retain staff and asked if they had looked at other professions which involved high stress levels to see how they relieved the pressure on staff. Ms. Boustead stated that she was not aware of any particular studies into the social work profession but felt it may be something to look into. Mr. Moore commented that the Council had been improving over the last few years and that they were much more pro-active in looking at individual's careers and planning moves for them as appropriate. Schemes were also in place such as flexible working and staff were referred to occupational health if it was felt necessary.

In response to a comment from Councillor Francis regarding promotion opportunities for frontline social workers, Ms. Boustead advised that the Social Work Task Force had recognised that there were lots of other professions where individuals continued to practice as they developed but with social work it seemed that the only way to progress was by taking a management role. Two recommendations from the Task Force had been to create two higher positions than that of the social worker to give staff options for promotion which would still include some frontline work.

With regard to a query from Councillor Francis around tensions which may be caused by staff being competent at their job and the need for qualifications, Ms. Boustead agreed that it could pose a dilemma as individuals did expect to progress through their role but also that it would not be unrealistic to expect current staff to 'top up' any existing qualifications they had. The nature of the job was that it was one of constant learning and reflecting on practices.

Councillor Francis referred to the Victoria Climbié and Baby Peter cases and commented that it must be worrying for staff. He asked if the number of agency staff employed presented any worries for the section and how much, if any, extra management was needed. Ms. Boustead advised that team managers had experienced difficulties in the past with long term sickness of staff but that now there was a consistent cohort of staff in place. She commented that it was the responsibility of the staff to ensure that a level of continuity is kept, even at times of staff shortages, and this could result in more pressure on staff so there was a lot of work ongoing around developing and supporting staff where needed.

Councillor Stewart referred to paragraph 3.5 of the report and the detailed improvement plan for the ICS which Ms. Boustead agreed to circulate to Members for their information, and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the content of the report be received and noted and further updates be submitted to the Committee as required.

Change in the Order of Business

The Chairman advised that the urgent business item, 'School Admission Arrangements – September 2011' would be considered at this juncture.

School Admission Arrangements – September 2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) appending the Cabinet report of 11 March, 2010, which sought approval of the school admission arrangements for September 2011.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor Hall referred to the proposed Published Admission Number (PAN) for Seaburn Dene Primary for 2011 reducing from 45 to 30 and the reason behind this. Ms. Scanlon advised that the school has had a number of surplus places and one way to support the school is to reduce their capacity and the PAN reflects this by being reduced from 45 pupils to 30. The Admissions Team have looked with the school at the projected number of pupils expected to come into the school and reduced the capacity and teaching spaces accordingly to reflect this.

Councillor Bell commented that as part of the school place planning process they looked at the cluster of schools in the particular area and found that the surplus across the number of schools in that area was substantial so places had to be reduced.

Councillor Stewart stated that it was a way of ensuring that schools were available in local areas. By reducing admission numbers, the Local Authority could support schools in reducing their overall capacity to ensure communities continued to have that school.

With regard to a query from Mr. Laverick regarding secondary school admissions policies and the Academies, Ms. Scanlon advised that as part of the Sunderland Model, the Academies had agreed to sign up and share the local authority's protocols on admissions. Preference forms were submitted to the local authority, who would allocate places in line with the set admissions criteria and the Academies would set their own appeals panels to deal with any appeals for oversubscription.

In relation to issues raised by Councillor Hall around applications to schools in neighbouring authorities, Ms. Scanlon advised that the local authority acting as a 'clearing house' for all applications to schools for children in Sunderland, so that any applications for schools outside of the authority would still need to come through the Council's Admissions Team who would then liaise with neighbouring authorities and schools. Where schools in other areas were their own admission authorities, such as voluntary aided or faith schools, this could lead to more complexities in dealing with out of authority applications.

She did advise that there had been a small number of issues and errors identified this year with regard to the co-ordinated admissions, whereby a school in another area had supplied the authority with a list of allocations and then amended it without then updating the Council's Admissions Team of the changes. She informed the

Committee that they were currently looking at a number of ways as to how better to liaise with other local authorities and schools. Councillor Stewart asked if a briefing note could be circulated to Members around the issues that had been presented this year and plans for future admission arrangements.

Councillor Francis referred to the reduction in the admission numbers at Seaburn Dene Primary School which had taken place over the last six years and asked if there were plans to redeploy any staff who were at risk. Ms. Scanlon advised that the PAN had been reduced from 90 to the proposed 30 for 2011 to reflect the expected numbers of pupils but that this had resulted in no staff redundancies.

Councillor Hall asked how many surplus school places there were across the city and was advised that there were approximately 13-14% surplus primary and secondary places combined. Ms. Scanlon commented that the Council could comfortably cope with this amount of surplus places if there were evenly spread across the city schools but they were not.

Councillor Stewart asked how parents could find out what the relevant admission criteria was for the schools they were applying for and was informed that all criteria's were included in the primary and secondary schools admissions booklet which was given out to parents of children in years 5/6 and of nursery age, as well as being placed throughout Children's Centres and Council Offices.

4. RESOLVED that the content of the report be received and noted.

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) – Progress on BSF Wave 2 and Submission of the BSF Wave 2 Strategy for Change (SfC) Business Case

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) updating Members on progress made on Wave 2 of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Programme and on the submission of the BSF Wave 2 Strategy for Change to Partnerships for Schools (PfS) by 12 March, 2010.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

With regard to Farringdon School, Ms. Scanlon advised that one of the main benefits to Farringdon School would be space and the guidance document BB98 determines the amount of space funded in the BSF programme. Some schools in the first wave have found that some of them benefited from having the additional flexibility for the use of space.

In response to a query from Councillor Oliver around lessons having been learnt from the first wave in relation to ICT provision, Ms. Scanlon advised that the same process for ICT provision through a managed service was to be used. She explained that the contracts had been awarded over a five year period and that during the first wave of BSF there had been some early implementation issues. Lessons had been learned and changes would be applied during the implementation process in Wave 2.

Councillor Oliver asked how the managed ICT service had worked with regards to the aftercare service and keeping computers up and running to a good standard within the schools. Again, Ms. Scanlon advised that there had been some issues in the early stages but that in terms of how consistently the ICT was operating she informed the Committee that they would be on site in schools and that the support offered was very good. There was a helpline to call with any problems and they were now familiar with systems and could support the school and its provision.

Councillor Oliver asked if there was permanently someone on site to support the ICT provision and was advised that there was a Network Manager and an ICT Technician.

5. RESOLVED that the content of the report be received and noted and that further updates on the progress of the BSF be received.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 March, 2010 – 30 June, 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 March, 2010 – 30 June, 2010

(for copy report – see original minutes).

6. 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.

[\(for copy report – see original minutes\)](#)

7. 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.

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.