

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on THURSDAY 30th MARCH 2023 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mason-Gage in the Chair

Councillors Burrell, Crosby, PWL Gibson, Guy, S. Johnston, Samuels, P. Smith, and Tye.

Also in attendance:-

Ms Jill Colbert, Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive, TfC

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

Mr Simon Marshall, Director of Education, TfC.

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

Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator, Smart Cities & Enabling Services.

Ms Jane Wheeler, Early Help Service Manager, Prevention and Innovation TfC

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Cllrs Johnston, McKeith and Samuels.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd March 2023

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 3rd March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Councillor Guy made an open declaration, as a co-opted Governor of the Virtual School, in respect of Items 4 and 5 on the agenda (Measures to Reduce Young People Who Are Not in Employment, Education or Training. – Update on Training and Apprenticeship Access for Care Experienced Young People and Measures to Reduce the Number of Neet Cared for Young People in Sunderland).

Measures to Reduce Young People who are Not In Employment, Education Or Training

Ms Jane Wheeler, Early Help Service Manager, Prevention and Innovation, Together for Children, presented a report (copy circulated) which updated members of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee on the measures taken by

Together for Children's Prevention and Aspiration Team to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was informed of the activities undertaken by TfC's Careers and NEET Service to reduce the number of NEET young people including:-

- Responding to referrals received directly from young people, parents and organisations for careers Information, Advice and Guidance
- Targeting careers and NEET referrals for those at risk of becoming NEET through data from TfC performance team and schools
- Careers advisers support provided to the Wear Here 4 You prevention bus sessions in schools and the community.
- Work in partnership with other Together for Children teams including the Virtual School, Youth Offending Service and Next Steps.
- Work in partnership with Educational Establishments, providers and careers provision
- Directly delivering drop-in information sessions to young people in schools, colleges, community venues and on-line.
- Directly delivering drop-in information sessions on apprenticeships throughout the year during apprenticeship week and mailout to all NEET young people to invite them to local sessions.
- Supporting national campaigns such as National Apprenticeship and National Careers Week via social media platforms and community events.
- Joint work with Sunderland City Network Partnership (Beacon of Light Jan 2023) to support Careers and promote to Year 11 and NEET young people
- Data sharing agreements established with EET providers including Colleges, Sixth Forms, Training and Apprenticeship providers
- Worked with local business such as Ocado and Howdens to provide opportunities to some of our most vulnerable young people such as young people who are Care Experienced.
- the direct employment by TfC of a number of care experience young people on apprenticeships and permanent roles within the services.

In conclusion the Committee's attention was drawn to section 9 of the report which contained case studies illustrating the practical application of the measures to support young people.

The Chair thanked Ms Wheeler for her report and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor P. Smith stated that she was aware that nationally there were now thousands of young people being educated from home and asked how many had taken this route in Sunderland? In response, Ms Wheeler advised that the current figure was 320. This represented an increase of 49% on the previous year's figure. The majority of the young people undertaking elective home education were year 10 and 11 pupils.

Councillor Crosby expressed surprise at the success of the data collection exercises and asked if people had been reluctant to share information. Ms Wheeler advised that there had been no lack of cooperation and people were happy to engage.

In response in an enquiry from Councillor Gibson, Ms Wheeler confirmed that she would provide the Committee with the national and regional comparative performance data once it was available. Councillor Gibson referred to the new North East Devolution deal and asked if this would help in dealing with the issue at a regional level. Mr Marshall advised that it would not harm, however any impact was likely to be minimal as the relationships at a regional level were already very good. Ms Colbert advised that the issue was not a defined part of the Deal. In conclusion Councillor Gibson expressed concern that the parents of children who were electively home educated did not always take up the offer of high-quality careers advice and guidance from the Careers and NEET service.

Mrs Blakely added that she believed that children needed to be with other children and that electively home educated pupils missed out on that peer support.

In terms of career advice, Councillor Burrell asked how secondary schools in Sunderland approached the issue. Ms Wheeler advised that some schools trained up their own staff as careers advisers and others bought in the service from providers such as CareerWave.

Councillor Dunn welcomed the report. With regard to elective home education, he asked what would happen if the young person wanted to remain in mainstream education, but the child's parents wanted to educate from home? The Committee was advised that in such cases the wishes of the parent would take priority. In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Dunn, Ms Wheeler advised that she would provide a break down of the 4.8% as detailed in Figure 2 of the report (% of young people who are NEET or who activity is not known in Sunderland - ac yr 12-13).

Councillor Guy believed it was a really positive report given he was not certain that in the past good careers advice and guidance was always there. He welcomed the work and persistence of the Careers and NEET service in tracking young people, he noted that as an example he was now in his 3rd Local Authority and could have been lost to the data otherwise. In response to an enquiry from Councillor Guy regarding the operation of the service, Ms Wheeler advised that the service was specifically targeted. It would sit down and talk with the young person, draw up profiles, develop options, prepare for interventions, find funding for interventions and take a young person to visit colleges etc. In essence the team would do whatever that young person required help in doing. Ms Colbert advised that the eight Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance would be followed in each case.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Guy regarding the work experience offer, Mr Marshall advised that this was an area in which TfC wanted to do more for its young people. The main focus of the work centred on the potential employer rather than the child itself to ensure the work environment was safe and risk assessed. This was proving to be a challenge.

There being no further questions for Ms Wheeler, the Chairman thanked her for her attendance and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that consideration of the report be received and noted.

Update on Training and Apprenticeship Access for Care Experienced Young People and Measures to Reduce the Number of NEET Cared for Young People in Sunderland Together for Children Meaningful Measures

Mr Simon Marshall Director of Education, TfC, presented a report of the Director Children's Services (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on current training and apprenticeship access for care experienced young people, (including Virtual School's support), to reduce the number of NEET cared for young people.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Marshall presented the report advising that the type of information it contained was regularly reported to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Committee was informed that all the measures taken to reduce the number of NEET cared for young people put the young person first and worked backwards from there. The work was all about personalisation, challenge and occasionally pushing the young person. A number of years ago an employer had offered 10 apprenticeship places to the Authority's cared for young persons. On the start date only 3 turned up. The Council undertook a review to find out why. The reasons the young people gave included they didn't have good clothes to wear and they didn't know how to get there. As a result the current support system was put in place. It was a steep learning curve. The work of the team was extremely intensive, included knocking on doors and it required having the right people in place to do it.

The challenge facing TfC was how such intensive support could continue to be financed once the current grant funding ceased. Succession planning was also vitally important. The Team currently had two or three brilliant members of staff. What would happen if they left tomorrow?

Mr Marshall referred to the figures detailed in paragraph 3.2 and advised the 18 NEET cared for young people, comprised 5 unaccompanied young person asylum seekers all of whom had no English (the situation was exacerbated by a shortage of teachers specialising in English as a second language), 1 young person who was missing and 1 young person who was pregnant and wanted to focus on the child. The remainder of the cohort presented various challenges in relation to their mental and were receiving 1 to 1 support to assist them.

In conclusion Mr Marshall drew the Committee's attention to Appendices A and B containing case studies which illustrated the practical application of the measures to support young people and in particular the second case study which had resulted in some brilliant outcomes and demonstrated the importance of a focus on building relationships and ensuring everyone was on the same page.

The Chairman thanked Mr Marshall for his report and invited questions and comments from Members.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Gibson, Mr Marshall confirmed that in cases where a young person had been identified as at risk of becoming NEET, the virtual school would engage with pastoral staff in the particular secondary school. In addition, Mr Marshall confirmed that the virtual school would hold a school to account in respect of the personal support detailed in the young person's Personal Education Plan.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Crosby, Mr Marshall advised that the R.A.G. ratings reflected the Red, Amber and Green of traffic signals and were used to provide a quick illustration of the status of particular indicators.

Councillor Guy referred to post 16 guidance in Residential Homes and asked if there was a qualified person in each home to provide this? Ms Colbert replied that there wasn't and that the accountability for this sat with the Virtual School. Ms Wheeler advised that there was a member of staff within TfC's Careers and NEET Service who maintained links with the homes.

Councillor Guy referred to the issue of Unaccompanied Young Person Asylum Seekers and a previous conversation regarding good practice around this in East Durham. He asked if it was possible to work with students at the University to provide links with the young people. In reply, Ms Colbert informed the Committee that as a part of World Social Work Day, TfC had provided an example of the work it had undertaken with a young person from Afghanistan. He had been teamed him up with a mentor from the University who had introduced him to his host home in Newcastle and to the Muslim Community in Sunderland. Mr Marshall explained that the issue was a challenge for TfC as it received no grant funding and relied heavily on the voluntary sector.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Guy regarding placements, Ms Colbert advised that there was no overall strategy and it was based on the different relationships with employers generated through TfC. Mr Marshall confirmed that the attitude within TfC was to build relationships with employers that were trusted.

Regarding an enquiry from Councillor Guy on the possibility of ring-fencing positions within the Council for Care Experienced young people, Ms Colbert advised that there was an overall piece of work being done on apprenticeships within the Authority. In addition, the Regional Care Experienced Board was investigating the barriers to employment faced by Care Experienced young people in terms of poverty, transport and functional skills.

Councillor Gibson commented that report reflected the impressive progress being made, however the fact that 20% of Cared for Children had become NEET in 2022/23 compared to 4.8% of the overall school population showed the size of the challenge being faced.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Mr Marshall for his attendance, and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Annual Report

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) seeking Members approval of their annual report as part of the overall scrutiny annual report 2022/23 prior to its presentation to Council.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Diamond presented the report and advised the Committee 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, the Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee report would be included in the Scrutiny Annual Report and presented to a forthcoming meeting of the Council.

There being no questions or comments, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be approved for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/2023.

Annual Work Programme 2022/23

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the development of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2022/23 and appended a copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report and provided the Committee with a final position statement for the 2022/23 municipal year. The Chairman took the opportunity to thank the Committee for their work stating that she appreciated everyone's useful and constructive contributions in what had been a really positive year for the Committee.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

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 15th March, 2023.

(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, (that were within the purview of the Committee), they should contact Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Smith regarding item 230213/783 – ('To make a decision relating to an exchange of land to facilitate the rebuild of St Patrick's RC Primary School), Mr Marshall advised that details of the proposals could be obtained from Alan Rowan and confirmed that the rebuild would be carried out on a new site.

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

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

(Signed) K. MASON-GAGE,
Chairman.