

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 30th MARCH, 2017 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Smith in the Chair

Councillors Beck, Bell, Francis, Hunt, Jackson, F. Miller, O'Neil, Stewart and Tye together with Ms. A. Blakey, Ms. R. Elliott and Mr. S. Williamson

Councillor Farthing – Lead Members for Children's Services Portfolio

Also in attendance:-

Mr. Alex Hopkins, Executive Director of Children's Services
Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer
Ms. Karen Davison, Head of Early Years Help
Ms. Vanya Ellis, Complaints and Feedback Manager – Children's
Ms. Rhiannon Hood, Assistant Head of Law and Governance
Mr. Leon Hussain, Youth Almighty Project
Ms. Bella Johnston, Sunderland Youth Parliament
Ms. Joanne Laverick, Pennywell Youth Project
Mr. Simon Marshall, Director of Education
Ms. Ruth Oxley, Southwick Neighbourhood Youth Project
Mr. Ryan Parker, Youth Almighty Project
Mr. Liam Richie, Sunderland Youth Parliament
Mr. Alan Rowan, Business Relationships and Governance Manager
Mr. Steve Ryland, Bluewatch
Ms. Janette Sherratt, Senior Commissioning Manager (Children's) Sunderland CCG
Ms. Joanne Stewart, Principal Governance Services Officer
Mr. Daniel Storey, Youth Almighty Project

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Scullion and N. Wright

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 14th February, 2017 and the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd March, 2017

Subject to Ms. R. Elliott's apologies being removed from the minutes of 2nd March, 2017 as she was also recorded in the attendance, it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 14th February and of the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd March, 2017 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Item 4 – Youth Offer Update

Following advice from the City Solicitor, Councillor Smith made an open declaration in the above item as she had been involved in decisions made when in her prior position as Cabinet Member responsible for the Children's Services portfolio and left the room during consideration of the item at the juncture set out within the minute.

Councillor Tye made an open declaration in the above item as reference was made to an organisation that he had used to support.

Item 6 – School Admission Arrangements 2018

Ms. Blakey and Mr. Williamson made open declarations in the above item as the Headteachers of St Benet's RC Primary School and Northern Saints Primary School, respectively and advised that should discussions refer to their schools directly then they would leave the meeting to allow discussions to continue.

Councillor Bell made an open declaration in the item as a Governor of Northern Saints Primary School.

Youth Offer Update

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update on Sunderland's youth offer for children and young people and the future provision of the service.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Members were reminded that at their meeting held on 14th February, 2017 the Committee had received a report on the youth offer for the city and the work that would be undertaken in 2017/18 following the cessation of the commissioned funding to the voluntary sector and the XL provision from 31st March, 2017. Members of the Committee had requested that Councillor Farthing, Portfolio holder for Children's Services, be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to provide further information on the background to the decision and the future provision of the service. Councillor Farthing was in attendance alongside, Ms. Karen Davison, Head of Early Years Help to answer Members questions.

Ms. Davison took Members through the report, providing an update to Members advising that since their last meeting, to partially mitigate for the reduction in funding a sum of £100,000 would be available to the voluntary and community sector to support activities and that this could be accessed by going through the normal process of applying for funding from the Area Committee but that it was intended that this funding should be used for new and innovative projects.

Mr. Williamson referred to the timeline of events for the cessation of funding as there had been disparities between the information provided to Members by Officers and that received from those within the voluntary organisations. Councillor Farthing advised that organisations had been commissioned to undertake the youth offer on behalf of the Council for a three year period and that this had been extended for a further two years to end 31st March, 2017. The difficulty faced by the Council was that they were not aware of final settlement figures from government until late in the year and once received it was more severe than expected. Continued financial pressures and the requirement to make significant savings resulted in the position whereby the XL provisions and the provider contract would cease as of 31st March, 2017. Voluntary organisations received formal notification of this in December, 2016. Following the consultation on the budget which outlined the reduction in youth funding, the Leader of the Council put pressure on the Treasurer to find additional funding and the sum of £100,000 had been allocated to partially mitigate this reduction in funding.

In relation to the funding being for new and innovative projects, Ms. Davison advised that the understanding was that the funding would be applied for through the Area Committee process and not to be used for projects that were already on-going but for new initiatives and that it should not be used for a continuation of a project or to pay salaries.

Councillor Hunt referred to the issue around the physical assets as raised at the last meeting and Councillor Farthing advised that they had an itinerary of items currently owned and that she would be happy to have this shared with Members and the voluntary organisations. Discussions needed to be undertaken in more detail with the current providers, offering them the opportunity to look at the equipment and discuss in more detail how larger pieces of equipment may be used for the wider good of communities. The Committee were advised that the Council were not looking for monetary return on the equipment but that the Council would hold no liability and would have no responsibility for any repairs or maintenance of the equipment.

In relation to any youth projects that were directly at threat of closure or where any providers had advised that they would now be unsustainable, Ms. Davison advised that they were working with providers and to date she was not aware of any that had advised that they were to definitely close. They were working with providers to direct them towards alternative funding streams and having spoken with young people they had found that some were not aware of other youth services and provisions that were also available within the city.

Councillor Tye referred to the extraordinary meeting of the Committee that had been held and the comments made by Mr. Hopkins whereby he implied that Officers take no responsibility for the city having no youth work or provision. He commented that this was not Councillor's understanding as Officers put together the reports which were considered by Members and Councillors felt misled as to the information provided to them then and what was now in the public domain. Conversations with Councillor Farthing had implied that the decisions taken around youth provision in the city were not undertaken whilst she was in her role as Lead Member for the Children's Services Portfolio and sought clarification as to when and by whom the decisions were made.

At this juncture, Councillor Smith sought advice from the City Solicitor who advised that as the Committee were looking to consider matters which may have been made during the time she held the position of Lead Members for Children's Services that she should consider declaring an interest. Councillor Smith made an open declaration in the item and left the meeting during consideration of the remainder of the item and Councillor Francis took the chair.

Councillor Farthing responded, advising that she could not answer in all honesty who the decisions had fallen to but that the budget considerations would have been discussed with her predecessor but they would have been adversely affected by not having had a Director of Children's Services at the time but that she did recall questions being made at a meeting when they had been shown the severity of the cuts and the effects they would have. She advised that consultations had been carried out and responses taken consideration of but that the budget had to be managed to allow the Council to try to offer services on a much smaller amount of funding.

The austerity measures placed on local government by central government were challenging and looking into the future would continue to be made and the Council were in a position where difficult decisions had to be made. At this time it was most important to continue to address any safeguarding issues and it had to remain a number one priority for the Council and the costs related to this had to be tackled, such as the recruitment and retention of more social workers; these areas were being addressed but were not complete and would be on-going issues for Children's Services.

In closing, Councillor Farthing advised that the Council would continue to face difficult decisions given the austerity measures that were to come and that because of the cuts in funding that had been made the Council could not continue to provide all of the services that they had in the past or that they wanted to continue to.

Councillor Tye accepted the severity of the pressures that were being put on to local authorities by government but stated that it was 'our' gift as to how the allocations of funding were made around Children's Services and suggested that short term savings in removing funding from the local authority to partner agencies would only see rises in various issues around the city. He referred to another meeting he had attended whereby public health had advised that the removal of funding was to see the shop in the city centre closed which was one of the biggest providers of the C-Card in the voluntary sector. The removal of funding; and therefore services; within youth services would have far greater consequences on the city than the approximate £400,000 that was needed to continue with the provision.

Councillor Farthing advised that unfortunately difficult decisions had had to be made and discussions had been held with the newly formed Children's Company and as there was not enough funding to provide all of the services then it would be even more difficult to look to find a further £400,000 funding to continue to provide the commissioned youth services and XL provision. She completely understood where Members of the Committee were coming from but the funding was not available and there were other youth provision and services available around the city that were not commissioned through local authority funding and would continue. Councillor Farthing also referred to alternative funding streams that were available and other ways in which the voluntary sector could look to continue to offer youth provision

through other ways of funding. Discussions were held with the voluntary organisations as to how to access alternative funding streams through the set up consortium and they were also looking at other ways of providing youth services, through those provided by the uniformed services for example.

Councillor Tye referred to the provision of youth activities by the uniformed groups, such as Scouts, Brownies, Cadets, etc. and commented that there were sometimes substantial costs associated with taking part in these activities, meaning a proportion of society would never be able to access this provision. He had been made aware that one service were charging £15 per head, per session once you incorporated the cost of uniform and equipment, etc and this would see the provision completely inaccessible to a lot of deprived communities. Councillor Francis asked if detail of the group that charged this could be provided to him outside of the meeting as he worked with a number of the uniformed groups and was not aware of any charges of this amount.

Councillors Tye and Hunt also raised concerns around the use of the voluntary sector to pick up provision in the areas where the reduction of youth services through commissioned provision were as they felt it was totally unachievable to rely upon those groups. Councillor Hunt commented that the voluntary sector needed support to be able to provide youth work and the work that they undertook to nurture and engage with young people in the city was priceless but they needed an infrastructure in place to support them to be able to continue to do this.

Councillor Bell commented that everyone knew why the Council were in the position they were due to the sever cuts in central funding and that area budgets had already been cropped in the past to help to provide youth provision on an area basis. He commented that he could foresee that in some areas of the city the loss of the commissioned youth services could see mayhem ensue and stated that in the past some youth providers had offered great services for young people in their area but that some provision had been questionable and could have been improved upon.

Mr. Williamson sought clarity around the issue of the removal of the youth offer as there were very mixed messages being provided from Officers and Councillors and in the midst of this the young people of the city were asking what they had done wrong to have all of the provision taken from them. He referred to two examples whereby conflicting information had been given; namely, the Children's Commissioner had advised them that youth services would not be touched and that this was clearly not the case; and also the cost of the youth provision in the city, Officers had quoted £1,000,000, the initial budget consultation had it at around £450,000 and then they had heard from the voluntary sector a figure of £700,000. He asked if the Lead Member would accept that those mixed messages made it difficult for the voluntary sector and Councillors to plan and make decisions upon.

Councillor Farthing commented that it was her understanding, as it had been before she was in the Lead Member position, that providers had been informed of the two year extension to the contract with a view to it ending March, 2017. She personally had spoken with the provider in her area who were made aware in April, 2016 that they needed to diversify their income streams and looked to become less solely reliant upon the Council for funding. She had sounded out other Members and departments of the Council and she understood that overtures had been made to the Leader of the Council and it had been thought that would be some level of reduced remuneration still available for the youth services offer. Unfortunately the settlement

figure that the local authority had been made aware of in December, 2016 had been considerably worse than that expected and the proposals discussed had to be revisited. Councillor Farthing advised that she had not been party to those discussions at that time but that she had been informed was what had happened and as far as she was informed Officers had continued to have regular conversations around this with the commissioned providers.

Mr. Williamson advised that at the last meeting this was not the case and the Committee were advised that conversations were not held to that level of detail. One of the providers had advised that they had been informed that there may be a percentage reduction in funding, but not outright, and the Commissioner had advised that youth provision would not be touched, and yet it was. With the mixed messages on the reductions to be made in funding, he could see how it could breed resentment.

Mr. Williamson referred to a previous meeting of the Committee, where experts in Mental Health had commented that the removal of youth services in the city would have a detrimental effect on the mental health of young people and yet Central Government were asking local authorities to make mental health in young people a priority. The decision to remove funding for the youth offer in the city was going to have much further reaching consequences in relation to mental health and crime, anti-social behaviour, etc and asked the Lead Member if she could accept that there would be a potential for increases in these areas?

Councillor Farthing accepted that the youth offer provided support to young people in the city and she had been very involved with the services and was a great advocate for the services they had provided. She commented that there may be some providers who were not able to continue to run in the same way as they had before without the Council funding but there had been no evidence of this as yet.

The XL villages had undertaken great outreach work around the city and the loss of that provision could have an adverse effect in some areas but services would have to look to be more targeted than ever. She commented that they were at the point now where the severe cuts to funding that had been made over previous year was really starting to have an effect on the services the Council could provide and although the decisions made were very difficult to make, there was no alternative.

The Council had previously been an employer of 10,000 people and it was expected that this would continue to reduce until it was only 1,000 by 2021. Education providers had diminishing resources whilst costs continue to rise and the Council were at a point where it was really difficult to continue to deliver the level of services they had in the past on the reduced funding they had and she was under no illusion that the loss of services may have an adverse effect.

Ms. Ruth Oxley, SNYP, spoke to the Committee on behalf of the commissioned youth providers and asked for assurances that the youth providers could continue to use the IYSS system, currently held by the Council, and also sought clarity on what the future would hold for continued support and access to these systems and was informed by Ms. Davison that there was no problem in the first instance in providers continuing to access the system. She would need to have further discussions as to how long this provision would be available for and what it would look like in the future but it would not be a case of the service would stop being accessible from the end of contract, i.e 31st March, 2017.

Members, having fully considered the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- the update on the Youth Offer be received and noted and a further update on the position be received by the Committee in three months time;
- clarification be sought to the long term access to the IYSS system and shared with the Committee and youth providers; and
- information around the cost for the storage of and/or disposal of physical assets; including a list of available assets which may be available for youth providers; be provided to the Committee and Youth Providers.

Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Transformational Plan Progress Update

The Senior Joint Commissioning Manager, Sunderland CCG, submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided a progress update on the implementation of the Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Transformational Plan 2015-2020 and set out the 2016-2018 priorities,

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Jeanette Sherratt, presented the report advising the Committee of the background to the report and taking them through the implementation of the Sunderland Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Transformational Plan 2015-2020, informing Members of the progress and achievements made to date and the priorities for the forthcoming year.

In response to a comment from Councillor Miller around an article published by the British Psychological Society on CAMHS and concerns around the short term costs associated with hitting targets, Ms. Sherratt advised that there were certain targets around developing specific services available but that the issue was around maintaining the wider picture of what was available. She advised that some groups of children, for example, those diagnosed with attention deficit disorders did not respond well to some services that were offered and it was about managing the support available so that the workforce was right to meet demands put upon it and that they should only engage those families with therapies that were fit for them and that they wanted to partake in.

Ms. Sherratt went on to advise that with the CAMHS service they already looked to provide services to young people in the environment they preferred and that the issue in the future would be what the service offer would look like and where they were based so that they could look to more innovative ways of how to better provide a wide range of shared services.

In relation to a further question from Councillor Miller around the issuing of cinema passes and other activities to young people from the youth offending services, Ms. Sherratt advised that this was not a service that the CCG commissioned and that they must be provided through one of the other partner agencies. The CCG supported the youth offending service in Sunderland and a practitioner visits the service to give advice in term of the mental health services but they were not

involved in the scheme the Councillor as referring to so should could not advise further as to how it was run.

Councillor Jackson commented that she was very interested in the systemic approach to dealing with mental health in young people and asked how well staff were prepared and resourced in the area. Ms. Sherratt advised that training was provided and on-going for staff and that there were a number of members of staff who had received basic level training in the systemic approach but that there were members of staff who had received training on the approach at a significant level within CAHMS and Northumberland Tyne and Wear Children and Young People's Service.

Mr. Williamson referred to value for money of the CAMHS service and asked when delivering the transformational plan, how they could judge whether the service was offering good value for money and delivering services and if not, how quick the service could respond and was informed that there was further work to be done to set out robust KPI's within the transformational plan so that they could look at measures to score against and how it could be demonstrated that targets were being met. Ms. Sherratt advised that outcome measures were set and performance could be compared against other CAHMS services nationally to see how well the service was performing in relation to how much spend there was.

Mr. Williamson commented that as previously discussed they had seen the reduction of youth services funding in the Council's budget this year and that it could be that the same happened with CAMHS funding in future years so it was important that the service could absolutely demonstrate the impact and the quality of the services being provided.

Mr. Williamson spoke in relation to schools and the fact that they were facing a large number of budgetary cuts, in the region of 10-12% up to 2020, and commented that parts of the plan related to work being carried out within the school environment and asked who would be looking to ensure this could be provided when schools would be cutting specific roles which they could no longer look to fund, such as family workers, mental health worker, etc. He went on to ask if the plan was adequately prepared for the changes that were imminent as he would not want to get to the point where the plan doesn't hit performance targets because of external cuts that were being made in partner agencies.

Ms. Sherratt commented that these were issues of concern but that schools would look to manage their budgets and that they could look to provide the minimum requirements or more as they saw fit within the resources they had.

Mr. Marshall, Director of Education, advised that there was a lot of good practice in dealing with mental health issues with young people within the schools in the city and it was about how these practices could be shared around the city. It was about driving from the forefront and getting schools to best recognise and understand the needs of their pupils and responding more effectively for the children and their families and thinking of more creative ways of how to best spend their resources so that the reductions in funding did not automatically mean a reduction in services. The earlier the intervention then the more savings it would create on services that may need to get involved if an issue is not picked up and dealt with. The key was early identification of need and intervention to stop issues in young people progressing.

Members having fully considered the report, and having no further questions or comments, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the progress of the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Transformational Plan and priorities for 2017-2018 be received and noted.

School Admission Arrangements 2018

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached for Members consideration a report on the proposed maintained school admission arrangements for the academic year September 2018-2019 and proposed amendments to the published admissions numbers for the same academic year, as considered by Cabinet at their meeting held on 22nd March, 2017.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Alan Rowan, Business Relationships and Governance Manager, presented the report advising that Cabinet at their meeting on 22nd March, 2017 had approved the following in relation to the 2018-2019 academic year:-

- the admission policy and procedures associated with the co-ordinated scheme of admissions;
- details of the oversubscription criteria for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools; and
- published admissions numbers (PANs).

Ms. Blakey referred to requests from parents of summer born children seeking deferral of their child's admission to primary schools and advised that she had received three applications this year so far and she had concerns over whether parents had thought their requests through as in the future children may need to jump a year should any changes be made to policies by government. Mr. Rowan commented that he would like to think that any change would see central government honour a policy for those children that would be affected by a change but that there was no guarantee that this would be the case.

There being no further comments or questions for Mr. Rowan, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report on the school admission arrangements 2018 be received and noted.

Overview of Progress Against the Learning and Improvement Plan for Priority 7

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an overview of progress made against priority seven within the Learning and Improvement Plan.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Alex Hopkins, Executive Director of Children's Services presented the report (copy circulated) advising that notable progress had been made against priority 7 and that services and outcomes for children and young people were continuing to improve because of the effective management and governance systems that had put in place. Members of the Committee were informed that whilst much progress had been made since the 2015 inspection there was more to do to ensure that the service continued to learn, improve and make the required process.

Mr. Hopkins advised that the full Learning and Improvement Plan was attached to the report for Members information.

Councillor Smith referred to the case file audit report and the conclusion that overall the majority of audits completed had required improvement or been inadequate and asked if this was the result that had been expected or better or worse than predicted and Mr. Hopkins advised that they had expect to see variability within the results which they had. He advised that the audit findings reflected a variability of practice within the service, ranging from 3 of the 142 audits completed within the period being outstanding to 31 inadequate. The action plan had been updated to address themes identified in that period and to drive forward the improvements identified through the audit process.

In relation to supervision, Mr. Hopkins advised that supervision was being undertaken but that the recording of it was still variable and that this needed to continue to improve. Some supervision practices were very good, whereas other areas were not paying as much attention to it as necessary and this was one of the issues they were looking into to understand why this was the case and how to improve it.

Councillor Smith asked how long it was expected to allow change and improvements to be made as it did not appear to be improving quick enough and was informed that where it was identified that there was an issue, managers were given the opportunity to improve using techniques and training available to them and if, having accessed them, improvements were still not made then alternative action would be investigated.

Councillor Smith advised that she looked forward to further audit reports continuing to be submitted to this Committee to allow them to continue to monitor the improvements within services.

Members having fully considered the report, and having no further questions or comments, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the progress made against priority seven of the Learning and Improvement Plan be received and noted.

Complaints and Feedback – Children's Services Issues

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with information regarding complaints and feedback received by the Council in relation to Children's Services issues.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Rhiannon Hood, Assistant Head of Law and Governance, took Members through the report advising that Members had asked to be provided with more regular reports to ensure that the most current monitoring information was available to them. The report was therefore an extract about Children's Services complaints taken from the joint quarterly report submitted to the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee in February, 2017 and was supplemented with further detail in response to the comments of Members and covers the quarter period of October – December, 2016.

Ms. Hood introduced Ms. Vanya Ellis, to the Committee who had recently taken up the post of Complaints and Feedback Manager – Children's and would be attending future meetings of the Committee to present this report.

Councillor Tye referred to the costs incurred by the commissioning of independent investigating officer and independent persons at stage 2 complaints, there had been four stage 2 complaints during October – December with a cost for investigations of £29,398.88, and asked if it was not easier for the Council to settle complaints at stage 1 if savings could be made. Ms Hood advised that there was not a direct correlation between the live complaints during October – December and the costs incurred during the same timeframe as the costs related to all on-going complaints at that level and not just those progressing. She went on to advise that resolutions were made at stage 1 where it was felt necessary and Mr. Hopkins advised that sometimes you would never be able to successfully remedy a complaint at stage 1 as the complainant would want that independent person involvement.

Councillor Tye went on to ask if all costs were included within the figures set out in the report and Ms. Hood advised that it was simply the costs outlaid for the independent review and did not include costs incurred by the Council such as Officer time, etc.

There being no further comments or questions for Ms. Hood, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the report on complaints and feedback in relation to Children's Services issues be received and noted.

Draft Annual Report

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) which asked the Committee to approve the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee report as part of the overall scrutiny annual report 2016/17 that would be presented to a future meeting of Council.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report advising that, as in previous years, the annual report would be a single combined report of all four scrutiny committees and outline the development in the scrutiny function and provide snapshots of the outcomes achieved during the last 12 months.

Members having fully considered the report, and having no further questions or comments, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee report for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2016/17 be approved.

Annual Work Programme

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out for Members attention the current work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

There being no further comments or questions for Mr. Diamond, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the information contained within the work programme be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from the 21 February, 2017.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Members having fully considered the report, it was:-

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

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.