

**At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CITY HALL on THURSDAY 5<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2023 at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor Gibson in the Chair

Councillors Crosby, Dunn, McDonough, Samuels, P. Smith, D. Snowdon, D.E. Snowdon and Thornton together with Mrs A. Blakey.

**Also in attendance:-**

Ms. Jill Colbert, Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive, TfC.  
Ms Karen Davison, Director of Early Help, TfC  
Ms Linda Mason, Targeted Youth Services Manager, TfC  
Ms. Majella McCarthy, Director of Children's Social Care, TfC  
Ms Ruth Neesham, Performance Manager, TfC  
Mr. David Noon, Principal Governance Services Officer, Smart Cities & Enabling Services.  
Ms. Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Coordinator, Smart Cities & Enabling Services.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Guy and Chapman.

**Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

There were no declarations of interest.

**Change in the Order of Business**

2. RESOLVED that Item 6 on the agenda (Together for Children Meaningful Measures September 2023) be heard at this juncture to allow the presenting officer to leave thereafter.

## **Together for Children Meaningful Measures September 2023**

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with performance information as at September 2023 in relation to the following Meaningful Measures: -

- i) I Feel Safer and Supported.
- ii) I Feel Happy at Home and Feel Connected to People that Matter to Me.
- iii) I Take a Lead in My Plans and TfC Makes Sure Workers can Support Me.
- iv) I Feel Healthier, Join Activities that are Fun and My Ideas Help TfC to be Creative

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Ruth Neesham, Performance Manager presented the report highlighting the processes involved together with any trends or themes arising and addressed questions and comments from Members thereon.

Councillor McDonough welcomed the continued improvement in respect of the '% Cared for Children who have experienced 3+ moves within the last 12 months' and asked how had this been maintained?

Ms. Majella McCarthy, Director of Children's Social Care, replied that adopting the Mockingbird Model had certainly helped maintain the improvement and it was hoped that the newly launched regional 'Foster North East' hub, would also provide support for the measure.

In addition, Councillor McDonough welcomed the continued decline in the '% Offending by Cared for Children' and asked how this had been achieved. In reply the Committee was advised that this was covered in detail in a later report on the agenda, however in short it had involved a lot of work in partnership with the Police Children's homes and Carers. There had been a great focus on the principles of Restorative Justices and a lot of Scrutiny undertaken.

Councillor McDonough then noted that elected Home Schooling had continued to rise at a consistent rate and asked if there was any specific reason for this. Ms Colbert replied that the Committee had discussed work programme items at its first meeting of the municipal year and had requested that a report on this issue be scheduled into the work programme. Ms Davison advised that in essence it was difficult to understand exactly why. Parents were under no obligation to inform TfC or the school of their reasons for doing so. From a safeguarding point of view, TfC would organise a meeting with parents, but some would choose not to engage. For those that did, a multitude of reasons were given regarding the choice to home school including the difficulty for the child in re-engaging with school following Covid, and personal lifestyle choices. Parents would also cite a range of dissatisfactions with the school environment including bullying, child mental health and unmet special educational needs.

Councillor Samuels asked if the demographics of home schooling were monitored and if the geographical locations of families that home schooled could be included in the future report to Committee.

Councillor Crosby referred to Measure MM2 and the spike in the number of cared for young people in their early teens and asked if the spike was caused by the increasing numbers of refugees arriving in the city? Ms Colbert replied that it was important to clarify that the young people referred to by Councillor Crosby were unaccompanied asylum seekers and were classed differently to refugees. There were currently 27 unaccompanied asylum seekers being cared for by TfC.

The Chair having thanked Ms Neesham for her report it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Youth Justice Plan 2021-2024**

Ms. Linda Mason, Targeted Youth Services Manager presented a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an opportunity to discuss the Youth Justice Plan 2021-2024.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was informed that the role and responsibilities of local Youth Offending Teams/Services (YOT/YOS) were set down by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. It also included the requirement for each local area to produce an annual Youth Justice Plan setting out how youth justice services would be delivered in the local area. The principal aim of the service was to prevent offending and re-offending by children and young people. In doing so, the service worked in partnership to deliver both statutory and non-statutory services to:-

- Young people aged 10-17 who, because of actual offending have 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; and victims of young people who have offended.

The ethos of the service was to always take a child centred approach in its work. Ms Mason then briefed the Committee on the achievements of the YOS in 2022/23 and the strategic priorities moving forward.

The Chairman thanked Ms Mason for her report and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Crosby, Ms Mason explained the difference between court disposals and out of court disposals. Much would depend on the gravity of the offence with some offences not being eligible for out of court disposal. Out of court disposals were part of a preventative approach to reducing offending by identifying young people in need of intervention to address their behaviour in a timelier way to avoid the possible outcome of a criminal record. A key factor had been the introduction by Northumbria police of the use of Outcome 22 as an option within the out of court process. This was used when the police had decided to defer prosecution until the young person had been given the opportunity to engage with a diversionary, educational or intervention activity.

Councillor Samuels commended the report and was pleased to see the recognition given to the SARA project for the part it played in the preventative approach. She was aware, having worked in Gateshead, of its Crime Prevention Team and asked if Sunderland operated a similar team. Ms Mason confirmed that it did and that it focused on taking a whole family approach through the 'Turnaround' scheme.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor David Snowdon regarding the funding structure for the service outlined on page 20 of the agenda papers, Ms Mason confirmed that it was a permanent arrangement.

Councillor David Snowdon referred to the Sunderland YOS Board Membership detailed on page 26 of the agenda and commented that it was very 'white British'. Ms Colbert replied that it was something TfC was very aware of and that it was a hot topic for it. An analysis of disproportionality had been undertaken and a fixed term post in relation to diversity and inclusion had been established to help the organisation better understand the issue. Councillor Snowdon asked further if the HM Inspectorate of Probation had raised the issue as part of its recent inspection of the Youth Offending Services in Sunderland? Ms Colbert advised that the question had been asked, however the Inspectorate were happy that the Board was aware of the issue and also acknowledged that the City's BAME community represented a small percentage of the overall population.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor P. Smith, Ms Mason advised that the volunteer mentoring scheme for NEETS no longer operated however they continued to receive specialist careers advice and guidance from the YOS team.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor McDonough regarding the Safer Transport programme, Ms Mason confirmed that she would approach the Violence Reduction Unit to see if data in respect of the recording of incidents / interventions was available.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor McDonough, Ms Mason advised that the rate of re-offending figure was not a good measure as it fluctuated so much. It was sourced from Police National Data which included adults. The reporting period over which reoffending was monitored from the original offence was 18 months.

With regard to recruitment, Councillor Dianne Snowdon asked if the YOS liaised with the University or attend its Jobs Fairs. Ms Mason replied that that the service met regularly with both the University and the College however not specifically in relation to recruitment. It did advertise vacancies through the University, but it did not formally attend its Jobs Fairs.

There being no further questions for Ms Mason, the Chair thanked her for her attendance and the valuable work undertaken by the Service.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of the Multi-Agency Response to Children and Families Who Need Help**

Ms Karen Davison, Director of Early Help, submitted a report (copy circulated) in respect of the above matter.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was informed that the Joint Targeted Area inspection (JTAI) was carried out by inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in January 2023. A report setting out the findings of the inspection was published in March 2023 and in response an action plan was developed. A copy of the inspection letter and the action plan were attached as appendices to the report.

The Inspection letter was a positive outcome and there was no judgement attached. The Action Plan had been submitted to Ofsted and the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership would have responsibility for monitoring it. There was a confidence that the actions were on track however some required a change in culture and attitudes for which there was no instant solution. It was important to note that Ms Davison and Ms Colbert could only address Member questions from the perspective of TfC. Police and Health partners were not present however it was hoped that their attendance could be secured when the next update was submitted to the Committee.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor P. Smith, Ms Colbert confirmed that the recruitment of school nurses was a problem for the health provider. TfC were in a conversation with the Director of Public Health to see if the Council could help bolster the service. It was often the case that pupils would only see a school nurse on a targeted basis.

In terms of what needed to improve, Councillor P. Smith noted that once again 'communications' had been highlighted. Historically this was something that had featured consistently in similar reports. In response to a further question from Councillor Smith, the Committee was advised that TfC had produced a very robust safeguarding training programme for schools, however not all schools bought in to it.

Councillor Samuels commented that it was a very positive report, and it was good to see that the strength of Early Help and the Multi Agency approach had been recognised. There was however a comment that the voice of the child wasn't always recognised. Councillor Samuels asked if this related to other agencies rather than TfC? Ms Davison advised that she didn't believe it reflected anything that had slipped in what TfC did. The issue probably reflected that the strength of the work undertaken wasn't always reflected in the case recording. Councillor Thornton added that with regard to the voice of the child, if you don't help the parent resolve their own issues you can't help the child. She asked if children attended their case reviews. Ms Davison replied that they did however it wasn't compulsory. The choice whether to attend or not was left up to the child.

Mrs Blakey commended the support that her school received from the Early Help Team at TfC. It was disappointing that Police and Health partners had not been able to attend to provide the Committee with their perspective on the report.

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

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

## **Annual Work Programme 2023/24**

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the development of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2023/24 and appended a copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Robinson Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Coordinator presented the report and briefed the Committee on the current position regarding those items already scheduled on the work programme and those waiting to be programmed in on a suitable date.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

## **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Coordinator 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 13<sup>th</sup> September 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.

7. 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) P. GIBSON,  
Chairman.