

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 5th MARCH, 2020 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Crosby, Francis, Hunt, Mann, McKeith, F. Miller, Samuels, Scanlan, Tye and K. Wood.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Chris Binding, Local Democracy Reporter, Sunderland Echo
Mr Martin Birch, Director of Children's Social Care, Together for Children
Ms Jill Colbert, Chief Executive Together for Children and Director of Children's Services
Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate
Ms Lorraine Hughes, Public Health Specialist, Public Health
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 Jane Wheeler, Service Manager Early Help – Prevention and Innovation, Together for Children.

The Chairman opened the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Rowntree and on behalf of Ms Graham, Ms Blakey and Mr Luke Hall

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 6th February, 2020

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 6th February, 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

No declarations of interest were made.

Voice of the Child – Participation and Outcomes for Children.

The Chief Executive, Together for Children, submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a presentation which demonstrated TfC's commitment to ensuring that all children, young people and their families had the opportunity to actively participate in decisions that affected their lives, in the delivery of the services they received and in the development of the policies that impacted upon them.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes.)

Ms Jane Wheeler, Service Manager Early Help – Prevention and Innovation, Together for Children provided the Committee with a detailed powerpoint presentation showcasing the various participation and engagement activities undertaken during the period April 2019 – September 2019 and addressed questions and comments from Members thereon.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Tye as to how TfC engaged with looked after children, Ms Wheeler explained that the door was very much open however TfC would always focus its engagement with the young people in its care in the first instance. Councillor Tye noted that as part of the Let's Talk exercises lot of young people had commented on their wish to help in shaping and delivering the embedded services provided for them and other residents of the city.

Councillor Samuels referred to the reference in the presentation that 324 individual children and young people aged 10-25 had been involved in participation activity and asked if this cohort referred to children in the city as a whole or just LACs. Ms Wheeler confirmed that the figures related to the wider population being over and above TfC's statutory responsibility which was specifically confined to LACs.

Council Mann commended the Service in respect of the work it was undertaking in relation to SEND.

Councillor K. Wood referred to the apprenticeships that been provided for care leavers and expressed regret that these had been advertised only on the North East Jobs site. She had hoped that the positions would have been given to the voluntary sector to promote and asked that consideration was given to this in the future.

Councillor Francis congratulated the Service on everything that it did however he stated it would have assisted the Committee members understanding of the issues involved if there had been detailed in a report circulated in advance with the agenda papers.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Francis regarding Makaton, Councillor Mann explained that it was a simplified version of British Sign Language for young people with learning difficulties. It was an effective tool and was the preferred means of communication for children who had limited verbal communication and was used widely in SEND schools.

Councillor Francis welcomed the renaming of the Contact Centre to the far less remote and impersonal Bramble Centre.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Francis, Ms Wheeler detailed the types of engagement undertaken but stated that ultimately you could only engage with someone if they wanted to engage.

In response to an enquiry from the Chair regarding whether the optimum use was being made of technology, Ms Wheeler advised that TfC's efforts in this direction centred on the Mind of My Own App however there was an increasing rejection of the use of Apps among young people who just wanted to be able to talk.

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

2. RESOLVED that the contents of the report and presentation be received and noted.

Public Health Outcomes for Children and Young People

The Director of Public Health submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a powerpoint presentation to update the Committee on the ongoing work being undertaken to improve the health outcomes for children and young people in the city.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes.)

Ms Lorraine Hughes took members through a comprehensive presentation which briefed Members on:-

The Marmot Review 10 Years On
An Overview of the key public health outcomes
Areas of progress made and challenges to be faced
Local action being undertaken

Councillor K. Wood noted that in terms of the key public health outcomes, it appeared that those areas traditionally viewed as being deprived seemed to be out performing some of areas that were viewed as more affluent. Cllr Hunt asked if this could be down to the fact that those areas in which a Children's Centre was located appeared to be faring better? Ms Hughes replied that she couldn't say for certain that there was a correlation however there was evidence to show that the provision of early help assisted in improving the health outcomes for children and young people.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Tye regarding what was being done to deliver an improvement in respect of teenage pregnancy outcomes, Ms Hughes briefed the Committee on the positive effect of the Teenage Pregnancy Early Intervention Pathway.

The Chair welcomed the work being undertaken in respect of speech therapy as it was something the Committee had championed for many years.

Councillor Crosby advised that at the start of her teaching career, foetal alcohol syndrome was only just being recognised as a rising problem and asked if it was still the case today. Ms Hughes replied that it was still a problem however national

figures were not available. It was a priority area however for maternity specialists in the region.

Councillor Tye speculated whether the comparative figures for hospital admissions for mental health conditions in respect of the city and England as a whole could be taken as evidence that mental health services for young people in Sunderland were failing. He referred to the category in the Child Health Profiles named 'Hospital Admissions Caused by Unintentional and Deliberate Injuries and asked for clarification. Ms Hughes replied that it did not relate purely to self-harm and the majority of incidents were trips, falls, burns etc.

Councillor Tye stated that Sunderland had long had a problem with child alcohol admissions and that the current figures were still a huge concern. Ms Hughes replied that it remained an issue and whilst the figures for admissions in Sunderland were declining this was also the picture nationally and the city was therefore unable to close the gap. Work was continuing to address this issue both from the Public Health perspective and via Licensing with the greater use of enforcement powers. Councillor Mann asked if details were available regarding the numbers involved and where the cases originated in the City. Ms Hughes advised that the incidences were mapped across the City and that she could share these with members if necessary. The numbers involved were relatively small with only 47 admissions over the previous year.

Councillor Hunt stated that as with the previous presentation it would have been useful to have had the information in advance. The information was so comprehensive it was difficult to give it due consideration hearing it for the first time and given the time constraints of the meeting. The Committee members concurred with this point of view.

There being no further questions or comments for Ms Hughes, the Chairman thanked her for her presentation and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the contents of the presentation be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2019/20

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 2019/20

(for copy report – see original minutes)

There being no questions or comments, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the work programme be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator 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 24th February, 2020.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

There being no questions or comments, it was:-

5. 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.

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.

N.B. Following the closure of the formal business the Committee received a short briefing from Ms Colbert and Mr Birch on the positive nature of the most recent Ofsted monitoring letter.