

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 12TH NOVEMBER, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, G. Hall, Oliver, and D. Richardson together with Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. M. Harrop, Mrs. C. Hutchinson and Mr. S. Laverick

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Francis, Kelly, I. Richardson, Snowdon and Tye and on behalf of Mr. H. Brown, Mr. M. Frank, Professor G. Holmes and Mr. D. Snowdon

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 15th October, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 15th October, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor G. Hall declared a personal interest in Item 5 – Young Persons Supported Housing Project.

16 – 19 and Post 19 Education and Skills Reforms

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which set the scene for a review by members of the Committee of the transfer of responsibility for commissioning of learning for 16-19 year olds.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Lynda Brown, Head of Standards gave a presentation (copy circulated) which provided information on the 16-19 changes and what they will mean for all stakeholders, the Council, the learners and the providers with regard to the

dissolution of the Learning Skills Council (LSC) and with the transfer of responsibility for the funding of 16-19 learning in the North East.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

In response to a query from Councillor Hall regarding the building of a skills college, Mr. Laverick advised that this would no longer be going ahead due to the LSC's budget being greatly overspent.

Councillor Hall then asked how the demand by employers for skilled workers was going to be met and Mr. Laverick advised that the Sector Skills Council dictated the qualifications that were on offer for young people. If there was a need for certain skills the Council could be contacted to raise their awareness of the need and Mr. Laverick stated he was willing to help out with this is necessary. When asked Mr. Laverick confirmed that employers were also aware of this.

Ms. Brown commented that this was one of the most difficult areas to get right, matching the right level of skills to the needs of the city. With economic engagement and working with Vince Taylor on the Economic Masterplan would provide a more effective, related match between skills offered and the needs of the city. She also advised that local developments had been made and the city were now offering a diploma programme which would help in the future.

Councillor Oliver referred to the transfer of staff from the LSC to the authority and asked if this team would meet the needs of the service. Ms. Brown advised that there were 6 posts, with 5 transferees and 1 vacancy. The vacancy was for a senior post, which they hoped to appoint and have fully integrated into the team by 1st April 2010.

He went on to ask if the resources available would be sufficient to deliver and was informed that it had been identified that although they were working with a sloping budget, it would be suitable to support the service.

In response to a question from Councillor Stewart regarding the relationship between the local authority, the college and the Skills Funding Agency, Ms. Brown advised that the whole system had changed particularly with regard to provision for 14-19 year olds. If the service were made aware of concerns with a school they could resolve the issue early, where with the colleges they don't have that level of quality assurance procedures in place. She informed Members that Dorothy Smith of the Young People's Learning Agency, who would set a national framework for 16-19 commissioning, had worked closely with Sunderland providers so good relationships had been built.

Ms. Brown explained that as yet she did not know the exact level of involvement, but that there was to be a stakeholder group meeting in the near future where it would be discussed and she would extend the invitation to Members of this committee.

Councillor Stewart commented that he was aware that Family, Adult and Community Learning had introduced fees and asked if this situation would be reviewed.

Councillor Gofton advised that there was a charge being levied but was aware that there had been a number of reasons behind the decision.

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

Young Persons Supported Housing Project

The Executive Director Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with information relating to the Centrepont Supported Housing Scheme which was the subject of a report to Cabinet on 7 October, 2009.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Pauline Blyth, Acting Head of Housing, Meg Boustead, Head of Safeguarding and David Smith, Housing Strategy and Operations Manager, presented the report and highlighted that a new site for the project had been sought to the north of the City Centre and a site identified at Dundas Street, Monkwearmouth, in order to provide a purpose built building for the project. He explained that Centrepont was currently based in Mowbray Road, Hendon and that the building was not 'fit for purpose' due to the layout of the accommodation, size and condition of the building, in respect of the office accommodation, treatment/support rooms on site and the building's general maintenance.

Ms. Blyth advised Members that the report had been approved by Cabinet on 7th October, 2009 and had also been considered by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee. Following approval by Cabinet a robust risk assessment had been carried out by Children's Services, Health, Housing and Adult Services and Centrepont to ensure that the needs of the young people who would use the scheme and those in the adjacent Children's Home are safeguarded. No major issues had been identified.

Mrs. Hutchinson expressed her initial disappointment in the decision as she felt the site was in an impoverished community and asked if this was deemed to be the best site, what others had been considered.

In response to a query from Councillor Stewart regarding the shortlist of sites and the rationale behind deciding upon them Mr. Smith advised that following a decision by Cabinet in 2005 an interim site had been utilised by Centrepont in Hendon. They had looked at service providers and found six areas which met the criteria that had been set. Of the six identified Dundas Street best met the criteria in terms of the size, access to the city centre, etc. A lot of background work had been undertaken by a steering group and colleagues in the Council before Dundas Street was highlighted as the optimum location.

Mrs. Hutchinson asked if young people had been consulted when making the decision and was advised that they had not been directly consulted with but that a lot

of background work had been carried out with officers from Children's Services who would have been in contact with similar young people.

Mrs. Hutchinson commented that the Committee had previously worked with disadvantaged young people and she was of the impression that people like this needed to be housed in a solid community environment offering good role models for them to feel involved and included and to want to improve their life chances. She did not feel that the site at Dundas Street offered this.

Mr. Laverick raised a concern over safety in the area on an evening and was advised that crime levels had been included when doing background research on the shortlist of areas and that there was a hostel currently in the area also.

Councillor Hall raised a number of concerns with regards to the following issues:-

- no consultation with Ward Councillors or residents until 2 weeks prior to the announcement being made;
- the numbers of reported serious crimes in the area over the last 18 months and within 300m of the proposed centre site;
- the area being in the top 5% of deprivation in the country and young people will not be helped by being placed in the area; and
- Ward Councillors receive regular phone calls from concerned residents in the area and at a public meeting residents commented that the development would be adding troubles in the area that already exist.

Councillor Hall welcomed the need for such a project and recognised the value of the provision but was convinced that the agreed site of Dundas Street was not right. He stated that this was not a case of NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) as he endorsed the work of Centrepont and would support a facility in the St Peter's ward but in the right location.

Mrs. Burn expressed her concerns over the consultation not being 100% and in particular the lack of consultation with young people. She asked if there were any plans to improve on this and ask young people where they would like to be housed. Ms. Blyth commented that as soon as she had taken over the post she realised that Ward Councillors had not been consulted with. Ms. Boustead explained that there had been some consultation carried out with the young people in the temporary hostel and with those in the nearby children's home. As the centre would be used as emergency accommodation there was no way to ask those young people who may use it in the future.

Ms. Burn commented that there was a need for a general youth hostel and asked if a centre of this kind could be considered as an option as it would help vulnerable young people to integrate. Ms. Boustead agreed there was a need for a wider range of provision in the city but they were looking to spread provision around the city which is why Dundas Street was seen as a potential location.

Councillor Oliver agreed with the general comments that were made and asked if residents would have the opportunity to raise their concerns as part of the planning

process. Mr. Smith advised that the application would go through the proper planning application process and residents would be welcome to put in any objections to it. Councillor Oliver stated that it was essential that residents and Ward Councillors were informed of the details of the planning application and how to object.

Councillor Bell commented that there were a number of sites in the city that he could think off that would be ideal for the project, none of them being in the shortlist within the Cabinet report. He went through each of the areas advising of problems in and around them and felt that there were other better suited places for it to go.

Councillor Stewart reiterated that the Committee welcomed the project and wanted it to be up and running as soon as possible to stop the need for vulnerable young people having to stay in Bed and Breakfasts and Guest houses but again questioned the rationale and policy that was used to produce the shortlist of sites.

Members asked that a report be submitted back to the next meeting of the Cabinet with the Committee's views and concerns.

Ms. Boustead advised that part of the project was to be funded by the Supporting People Fund and if the project did not go ahead as planned, the funding may be lost.

The Chairman having thanked the Officers for their report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that the Committee's comments be submitted to the December meeting of the Cabinet for their consideration.

Audit Commission School Survey 2009

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented a high level summary of the 2009 Audit Commission School Survey results.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sandra Mitchell, Head of Performance Improvement and Policy, presented the report to Members advising that the survey had been streamlined this year to provide a more focussed review of local services and the result would cover the next two years.

She advised Members that the two workshops planned for the 10th and 12th November with Headteachers had taken place and they had received some valuable feedback from them. Headteachers had been keen to offer their views and explained that there wasn't the opportunity to leave a question blank, a response had to be given rating from one to four and this could be having some impact on the overall results. They also explained that there had been confusion around some questions where they had been unsure how to answer them. Overall, the sessions had been a successful tool to gather information to make an action plan around.

Councillor Stewart asked if a detailed report on the findings of the workshops could be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

In response to a question from Ms. Hutchinson, Ms. Mitchell clarified that the workshop sessions had been for all Headteachers and not just those that had completed the surveys.

Mr. Laverick asked if it was always the Headteacher of the school that completed the survey and was advised that the cast majority of the time it would be the Headteacher that completed the survey but on some occasions it could other members of staff such as the SEN co-ordinator. Mr. Laverick suggested that it may be better that the senior team within the school complete the form collectively to get a wider view of how everyone in the school thinks.

Councillor Bell referred to paragraph 2.3 of the report and the fact that the point scale had changed and commented that altered scoring could skew the results. He also stated that for the past couple of years reports had come to the Committee where scores in the surveys did not resemble feedback received through other avenues, where positive work was being undertaken and commended.

Ms. Burn referred to survey question 6.15 relating to provision for pupils out of mainstream schools, which was rated as adequate and asked if ways to improve provision would be looked at as a result of the score. Ms. Mitchell explained that there was already significant work being undertaken but it hadn't all been embedded as yet. Officers were comforted that they were aware that there were a lot of things in place to respond to the score as it was an area that had already been identified as needing improvement.

Ms. Burn then asked if youth facilities were asked to fill in the survey and was advised that it was only schools and the pupil referral unit that would have been consulted.

Councillor Stewart was pleased to see that survey question 6.17 referring to the Council's educational psychology support was improving.

Councillor Stewart raised that there was still an issue around the number of completed surveys that were being received, 34 out 115 schools this year. Ms. Mitchell explained that it was a low response rate and advised that the results would be considered as part of the Council's CAA Score.

Mr. Laverick commented that a lot of results didn't line up with information they were given and asked if the forms were being completed correctly. He felt that the importance of the forms needed to be raised with the Headteachers.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and a further report following the detailed discussion with schools be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Annual Libraries Conference – Feedback Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing feedback from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Annual Conference 'Impact, Inclusion, Information: The Value of Libraries in the Lives of Communities'.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Councillors Tom Martin and Graham Hall had attended the conference and gave their feedback to the Committee through a written and verbal report, respectively.

Councillor Hall advised that it had been a knowledgeable and enjoyable conference and asked that the staff of Sunderland Libraries be congratulated on the work they do.

Ms. Allison Clarke, Principal Librarian and Ms. Julie McCann, Performance and Resources Manager, advised that the conference had raised some interesting discussions around the impact libraries have on local authority outcomes and that they had been presented with some good examples of young people volunteering in the library service and then taking up employment with them after leaving education.

Councillor Hall also commented that there had been discussions over the funding structure of libraries and how some local authorities were charging a levy on new developments in a similar way to the way Section 106 agreements were carried out with regard to planning applications.

Ms. Clarke invited the Scrutiny Committee to take a tour of the library facilities in Sunderland so they were up to date with what the libraries were providing in local communities.

5. RESOLVED that the feedback report from the delegates be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 November 2009 – 28 February 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 November 2009 – 28 February 2010.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

6. RESOLVED that the report 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.

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.