

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 12th APRIL, 2018 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Francis, Hunt, Jackson, F. Miller, O'Neil, Scullion and Tye

Also in attendance:-

Ms. Abbi Adair, MSET Coordinator, Together For Children

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr. Stuart Douglass, Lead Policy Officer for Community Safety, Sunderland City Council

Ms. Lorraine Hughes, Consultant in Public Health, Sunderland City Council

Mr. Simon Marshall, Director of Education, Together for Children

Mr. David Noon, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Ms. Gillian Robinson, Area Coordinator, Sunderland City Council

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Foster, Stewart and N. Wright and on behalf of Ms. A. Blakey and Mr. S. Williamson.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Responding to Child Sexual Exploitation Update

The Director of Strategy, Partnerships and Transformation submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update on partnership progress to tackle child sexual exploitation and the role of the City Council in supporting this.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Stuart Douglass, Lead Policy Officer for Community Safety, presented the report and addressed questions and comments from Members.

Councillor Hunt referred to the 697 assessments considered at pre MSET between January, 2017 and January, 2018 and asked how these were fed in. Mr Douglass advised that they would have been submitted by social care workers. Councillor Hunt then referred to the 40 cases deemed to be of high risk and asked what percentage would have proceeded to court. Mr Douglass replied that he did not hold that

information. In many cases criminal convictions would not follow for a variety of reasons. As a result an emphasis was placed on disruption tactics. The primary concern for MSET was the safety of the child and to this end it had the power to serve a Child Abduction Warning Notice on a person if the parents of a child were unhappy that it was visiting a particular property.

Councillor Jackson asked if there was any early intervention / help for parents whose children were exhibiting signs of concern. Mr Douglass advised that it was available but was depended upon parents making their concerns known. The Council was well aware of the circumstances of its own looked after children but would need to be made aware of any issues with children in the wider community. Mr Marshall advised that parents could refer directly into early help or do so via a school.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Francis regarding paragraph 3.4 and the learning from two serious case reviews, Mr Douglass advised that substance misuse had been identified as a tool used in grooming, however the most important learning aspect was that there was no single factor responsible for child sexual exploitation and that multi causal issues were at work.

Councillor Francis welcomed the £70,000 DCLG funding that the Council had successfully secured to help pilot a transitions programme for 12 months with Changing Lives. Mr Douglas advised that the pilot had focused on a number of child victims as they transitioned to adulthood. An end of project report highlighting key learning would be produced and he would be happy to submit this to the Committee.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Francis, Mr Douglass confirmed that the MSET Group meetings were well attended by all agencies concerned.

The Chairman referred to the review of the MSET arrangements and the resulting improvements to data recording systems to allow statistical analysis, trend analysis, interpretation of results, identification of community risk factors etc. She asked that this information was included in future reports to the Committee particularly in respect of the numbers of children deemed to be at risk and the location of the most vulnerable areas.

The Chairman referred to the training provided to taxi drivers and asked if it was going to be reviewed. Mr Douglas replied that the Council was investigating whether it could make the training mandatory, for example as a condition on the grant or renewal of a licence. If the Committee wished he could arrange for a representative from the licencing section to brief them on the matter.

There being no further questions or comments for Mr Douglas the Chairman thanked him for his report, and it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted.

Teenage Pregnancy Update Report

The Director of Public Health submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on progress with the teenage pregnancy agenda and current levels of teenage conceptions.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Lorraine Hughes, Consultant in Public Health presented the report and addressed questions and comments thereon.

Councillor Tye congratulated the Team on the successful re-launch of the C Card scheme, feedback from which had been very positive, particularly in respect of the consultation process and the training. He also believed that the decision not to turn 'a blind eye' in respect of 13 to 14 year olds had been vindicated. With regard to further enquiries from Councillor Tye, Ms Hughes confirmed that the postal service would only be available to those over the age of eighteen following registration and that the smart phone app was currently being refreshed.

On a less positive note, Councillor Tye was incredulous that a number of schools had opted not to take up the C Card. He believed it was bordering on criminal that school nurses would visit these schools but be unable to offer C Card advice.

The Chairman asked if there were any reasons why these schools declined to offer the service. Mr Marshall replied that it was usually related to the ethos of the school or whether it was a particular faith school. Parental pressure was also a factor and ultimately the decision whether or not to offer the service would be a decision for the Board of Governors. Mr Marshall advised that officers of his department were in a regular dialog with schools to ask and challenge them over their stance however progress was proving difficult. Ms Hughes asked Committee members who were school governors to consider using any influence they may have over their governing body to try to ensure that the C Card was offered in their particular school.

The Chairman asked Mr Marshall and Ms Hughes to revisit those schools who had opted not to promote the C Card, to seek definitive reasons why and to also ascertain the position of the two schools currently listed as 'Not known'.

Councillor Tye advised that there also needed to be a closer look taken at the availability of the emergency contraception service as he was aware of a number of instances where it had proved not to be available. Ms Hughes replied that as far as she was aware, emergency contraception was available in every pharmacy. Details were published on the Live Life Well website. She asked Councillor Tye to speak to her outside the meeting if he was aware of issues in respect of particular pharmacies.

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

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the information contained within the report be received and noted;
- ii) Members who were also school governors seek to influence their governing bodies to adopt the C Card scheme; and
- iii) Mr Marshall and Ms Hughes revisit those schools that had opted not to promote the C Card to seek definitive reasons why and to also ascertain the position of the two schools currently listed as 'Not known'.

Send Update

The Director of Education submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an update on preparations for the SEND inspection in the form of a RAG rating together with commentary on the ratings and next steps to achieve further Green ratings.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Marshall presented the report which followed up on the one previously considered by the Committee in December 2017. He advised that the two crucial elements that had been identified in the process were parental involvement in SEND and commissioning.

The RAG ratings indicated where Together for Children (TfC) believed it was in respect of its preparations for the impending Ofsted inspection. The red categories encouraged officers to work harder to address issues. There was a detailed action plan behind each RAG, holding stakeholders to account. There was a need to develop innovative ways of service delivery. The main challenge to be faced was that the Ofsted inspection would be of the local area as a whole and wouldn't focus solely on TfC and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

The Chairman then invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor O'Neil referred to parents who wouldn't engage and asked how this could be addressed. Mr Marshall advised that clarity was required in respect of what was often regarded as poor behaviour may in fact be an early sign of SEN. TfC had recently appointed to the Education Psychology Service which now had a complement of 4. The Team would assess and identify specific educational needs and mental health issues. Once any needs had been recognised it was about putting in an appropriate level of support for families to move forward.

Councillor Jackson informed the Committee that she had been approached by two young people in their early twenties who had received SEND assistance in the past and were now looking for additional support. Mr Marshall confirmed that the transition from child to adult could be challenging and asked Councillor Jackson to contact the SEN Team at TfC so they could understand the issues involved.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Mr Marshall confirmed that the appointment process in respect of the Participation Lead post was progressing.

There being no further questions or comments, Mr Marshall advised that he would continue to provide the Committee with a bi-monthly update report. The Chairman having thanked him for his report, it was:-

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

Consultation with Staff from the Early Help Team

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with the opportunity to consider feedback from

the Committee's visit to meet staff from the Early Help Team undertaken at Bede Tower on 26th March 2018 as part of the Committee's rolling programme of meetings with staff involved in each stage of a child's journey through social care. The visit had been undertaken by Councillors Smith, Hunt, and Foster and had involved an open discussion between Members and staff on the issues facing the service.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer introduced the report and briefly outlined the issues raised as detailed in paragraph 3.2. The Chairman stated that the comments from the YOT were interesting regarding the staff reductions and concerns that in the future the service could struggle to cope with demand. She stated that this was something that the Committee would need to continue to monitor.

Councillor Hunt stated that she would also like to see the Committee take action in respect of the concerns raised regarding the factors behind the increasing need for early intervention (domestic violence, mental health issues among young people and substance misuse), the gap in services for children who witness domestic violence and required specialist help to deal with the subsequent trauma and the growth in violence from young children towards their mothers and grandmothers.

Councillor Francis stated that it might also be useful to take representations from a client of the Youth Offending Team.

The Chairman stated that following the elections there would be an informal meeting to discuss work programme priorities for the forthcoming municipal year which could include the issues raised during the conversation with the Early Help Team.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report be received and noted
- ii) the issues raised during the conversation with the Early Help Team be considered at the informal meeting to highlight potential work programme priorities for the forthcoming municipal year, and
- iii) the implications of the staffing reduction in the Youth Offending Team continue to be monitored.

Annual Work Programme 2017/18

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the completed work programme for the Committee's work undertaken during the 2017/18 municipal year.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

5. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted;

Notice of Key Decisions

The Head of Scrutiny and Area Arrangements 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 27th March, 2018.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor Tye referred to the notice and posed the following questions:-

- i). Why the Together for Children (TfC) Business Plan wasn't included on the Notice of Key Decisions.
- ii). Why Cabinet were asked to approve the plan without costings and data
- iii). Why the TfC Plan was submitted in draft form and made no reference to Scrutiny
- iv). Why the appointment of the Chief Executive of TfC was not included on the Notice of Key Decisions

Mr Diamond Scrutiny Officer advised that he did not have the information to hand but would investigate the issues raised by Councillor Tye and provide him with a written answer.

6. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the Notices of Key Decisions be received and noted; and
- ii) Councillor Tye be provided with a written response in respect of the issues raised above regarding TFC.

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

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.