

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on THURSDAY 2nd FEBRUARY 2023 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mason-Gage in the Chair

Councillors Dunn, Crosby, Guy, S. Johnston, Samuels and Thornton.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities & Enabling Services.

Ms Lorraine Hughes, Public Health Consultant.

Ms Karen Lightfoot, Public Health Practitioner.

Mr. David Noon, Principal Governance Services Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities & Enabling Services Directorate.

Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator, Law and Governance, Smart Cities & Enabling Services.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Cllrs Burrell, PWL Gibson, McKeith, P. Smith and Tye.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 5th January 2023

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 5th January 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Wear Here 4 You – Prevention Bus

The Chairman advised that she wished to defer consideration of the report to a future meeting to allow for an invitation to be extended to representatives from partner organisations involved in the operation of the Bus and also to allow for a discussion in the context of wider youth provision.

2. RESOLVED that consideration of the report be deferred to a future meeting.

Childhood Obesity in Sunderland

Ms Lorraine Hughes, Public Health Consultant introduced a report of the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities (copy circulated), presented by Karen Lightfoot, which provided the Committee with an update on the National Child Measurement Programme and the whole systems approach to childhood obesity, through the 'maintaining a healthy weight' agenda in Sunderland.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Chair thanked Ms Lightfoot for her report and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor S. Johnston highlighted the 'alarming' finding that almost two thirds of Sunderland's school children had been bullied because of their weight and that a lot of this activity was being carried out on line. He asked if there was anything that could be done to proactively to counter this and promote body positivity. Ms Lightfoot replied that there were some really positive initiatives around mental health and wellbeing. This included carrying out anti-bullying work with schools via the Anti Bullying Charter Mark, the receipt of Trail Blazer funding for 'Healthy Heads' and the Kim Lawson work around 'What is Normal'.

Ms Hughes added that it was about feeding into mental health and wellbeing and supporting young people to feel good and positive about themselves. She acknowledged that this could be very challenging, because while it was often social media that was driving the issue, it had to be accepted that it was also what young people used to obtain information and communicate with each other. It boiled down to how could Public Health and TfC use these platforms to provide a more positive impact. Work was ongoing with NHS providers to use social media to signpost young people to online services with information about both mental and physical health. It also involved dispelling myths around unrealistic body expectations caused by social media and normalising different feelings young people may have. This included, normalising the fact that it was sometimes okay to be a little bit unhappy, and that you're not going to feel happy all of the time.

Councillor Johnston referred to the issue of sports pitches and expressed his disappointment that the priorities of Active Sunderland did not include team sports. He asked Ms Hughes and Ms Lightfoot if the priorities could be reassessed. Ms Hughes advised that Victoria French lead on the Active Sunderland programme and she would feedback Councillor Johnston's request. In addition, she informed the Committee of the Play Fund which could be used to target areas lacking in provision to develop sports pitches with the Community and which would be available to be booked by local groups. A local organisation would take on the management of the facility which would be seen as a community asset.

Councillor Crosby welcomed the taster sessions available with Everyone Active but recognised that it was a business and asked if there anything that the local authority could do to help families maintain their access to fitness and leisure facilities. Ms Hughes advised of initiatives such as the Access Fund and Change for Life. The city was also lucky given its number of parks and beaches. The Council's resources were finite however, and they needed to be targeted towards those who were most in need.

Councillor Samuels stated that Southwick was an area that had benefitted from this type of targeted approach via the work carried out through the Sara Project. She asked if there was comparative data available in respect of childhood obesity in Sunderland on a ward by ward basis. Ms Lightfoot confirmed that there was and that she would circulate it following the meeting.

In addition, Councillor Samuels asked if there was one single thing that could be done to address the issue what would it be? Ms Hughes replied that she wished there was a golden bullet. In contrast to other factors impacting on public health such as alcohol and smoking, people needed to eat to live. Unfortunately, the cheapest food often tended to be least nutritious. The most effective solution was starting a preventative approach at the earliest possible stage. The sad fact was that if a child was overweight at 13 years of age, there was a 67% chance that they would remain obese throughout their adult life. There was no easy or simple answer.

Councillor Guy welcomed 'The Bread and Butter Thing' initiative and looked forward to seeing how it developed as the hubs opened up across the City. He appreciated it was still in the early stages but asked if there was any initial feel regarding how the hub was operating currently and if they would provide data in the future?

Ms Lightfoot advised that people needed to register for the scheme so there would be a certain level of data collection including the number of times the scheme was accessed. She would check and report back on the type of data that could be made available. One of the positive aspects of the scheme was that in paying for food through 'the Bread and Butter Thing' applicants retained a sense of dignity while at the same time receiving more food for their money. The initial feedback from the first of the Hubs to open had been very positive.

There being no further questions for Ms Lightfoot and Ms Hughes, the Chairman thanked her for her attendance and it was:-

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

Annual Work Programme 2022/23

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the developed of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2022/23 and appended a copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer 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.

It was anticipated that the next meeting would include items on TfC's Meaningful Measures, a Schools update from Simon Marshall, the deep dive on Cared for Children and potentially the Prevention Bus.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator 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 4th January, 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.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Crosby, Mr Diamond advised that he would check if there was further detail available in respect of item 221101/750 – 'To consider the outcome of the review of the governance and contract arrangements for Together for Children Sunderland Limited and approve the recommended next steps'.

5. 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) K. MASON-GAGE,
Chairman.