

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

Present:-

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Foster, Francis, Hunt, Jackson, O'Neil, Scullion and Tye

Also in attendance:-

Councillor Dianne Snowdon, Vice Chairman, Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

Mrs. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships, Sunderland City Council

Mr. Richard Cullen, Support and Intervention Officer – Secondary, Together for Children

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr. Luke Hall, Sunderland Youth Parliament

Mrs. Rhiannon Hood, Assistant Head of Law and Governance, Sunderland City Council

Mrs. Irene Lucas CBE, Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council

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

Ms. Linda Mason, Youth Offending Service, Together for Children

Mr. Thomas Newton, Sunderland Youth Parliament

Ms. Gillian Robinson, Area Coordinator, Sunderland City Council

Ms. Joanne Stewart, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Apologies for Absence

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

Together for Children – Update – Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council

The Chairman welcomed the Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council to the meeting who was in attendance to discuss any issues or areas of concern Members had raised in relation to the Together for Children Company and the recruitment process for the new Chief Executive following the resignation of Mr. Alex Hopkins.

In relation to questions from Members around their involvement in the recruitment process of the new Chief Executive of Together for Children, Ms. Lucas advised that she had circulated an email to all Councillors on 14th December, 2017, advising that under the conditions of the contract with Together for Children and agreement with the Department of Education a tripartite recruitment process involving representation from the three organisations would take place. This commenced in January 2018. The advert for the position was due to be published the following week with a closing

date for applications of the 28th February, 2018, when applicants would be shortlisted and as previously, there would be involvement with a number of stakeholder groups including elected members.

Councillor Bell raised the issue of the social work team and their workloads and commented that upon the roll out of Universal Credit in Sunderland, which was expected in June/July, 2018, this would only see further pressures on their workloads as problems were exacerbated with families. The Chief Executive advised that she had seen a very informative presentation which had been given by Ms. Joan Reed, Strategic Advice Services Manager, on the impact and mitigations of the welfare reform and how the roll out of Universal Credit could impact upon families and children in the city, which was now expected May-July. She commented that it may be beneficial for Ms. Reed to attend a future meeting of the Committee with the presentation so that Members may understand the implications further.

In relation to comments made by Members around the need and importance for more robust scrutiny of the information presented to them from Together for Children, the Chief Executive advised that she had copies of the 'Guide to Governance and Contractual Arrangements between Sunderland City Council and Together for Children' to circulate to Members which was quite a lengthy document setting out the governance and assurance arrangements and showing how the company were held to account through a suite of key performance indicators.

The Chief Executive took the Committee through the political accountability flowchart which showed how the assurance and performance information was shared and scrutinised through a number of key stakeholder groups including this Committee but explained that this was only the first year of the company having been in existence and nothing was cast in stone as to how it was best to report to Members. Members were also reminded that at any point elected Members could raise concerns regarding the transferred functions and services through the Lead Member or with Together for Children through an identified email address.

When asked if the Chief Executive could be confident that Together for Children were protecting the children of Sunderland, the Chief Executive commented that if the Committee were to look at the situation prior to the commencement of the company then it could be seen that there was a clear demonstration of improvement made in sixteen of the twenty key performance indicators. Members were advised that nine of the performance measures which were agreed the company would be measured by were considered regularly by the Operational Commissioning Group and the Performance Clinics and she provided a table which set out the position against those performance measures.

The Chief Executive advised that there had been six independent Ofsted Monitoring Visits between August, 2016 and January, 2018, looking at different elements of the service on each occasion and following each visit feedback had been that improvements were being steadily made in those areas. Overall, the position was improving and the monitoring visits were independent assessments that this was the ongoing trend.

Councillor Francis referred to the many tiers of scrutiny and review that Together for Children faced and asked if this was made clear to the Chief Executive of the company, both in the past and would it be with future applicants. The Chief

Executive advised that it was vitally important that the Chief Executive of Together for Children was experienced in being involved in the scrutiny process and understood the perspective that it could bring to service provision and whether outcomes were inspiring for our children. If lack of involvement with scrutiny was an issue of concern for Members then this could be a key question area for challenge as part of the interview process.

Councillor Tye commented that it was fundamentally key that the new appointment to the Chief Executive position understood the important role that the scrutiny function played as the Committee had found it frustrating in the past when continually asking for information and then items being deferred to come back to the Committee but then never being submitted. As Members they were being advised of how operational matters were working in reality from professionals in their field but when approaching Officers from Together for Children it was felt that they were not being provided with the information they were requesting and this had been one of the fundamental issues from the initial commencement of the Together for Children company and the previous Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive stated that she felt scrutiny and challenge played a key role in continuing to drive forward improvements to services and outcomes in Together for Children. There were good signs of improvements being made and everyone acknowledged that it would not be an easy journey and that it would be a lengthy process but that it was about getting services right for the children of the city and not just finding a quick fix. There were encouraging signs and it was expected that these would continue but it was paramount that the right support was in place.

Councillor Bell advised that there were pressures being placed on all services and the Council could not control some of these due to cuts in benefits for families and people who did not understand welfare rights or the language being used requiring extra help who were then turning to the Council to help support them. He felt that it would be beneficial for all Members of the Council to receive the presentation on the impact of imminent changes to the welfare system and the Chief Executive agreed that it may be appropriate to have a briefing held before a future meeting of the full Council. She advised she would speak with Councillor Bell directly to ensure the presentation covered all of the points that were needed.

Members raised concerns around the provision of youth services within the city and acknowledged that although the Council no longer provided funding for commissioned youth provision, the provision of youth services was still a topic for discussion. Sunderland had a very positive youth service provision and youth and drug and alcohol project (YDAP) and why wasn't the good work around the city being recognised and reported.

The Chief Executive advised that it had not been easy for the Council over recent years due to the extreme budget cuts that had had to be made and ultimately decisions had had to be made which had seen some fantastic services no longer being able to be provided by the Council. The Council continued to strive to produce a balanced budget whilst managing to address some of those problems which were of the biggest concerns to the wider community.

In closing, the Chief Executive thanked the Committee for the opportunity to attend and have discussions with them and it was:-

1. RESOLVED that:-

- i) The information provided within the Together for Children update of the Chief Executive be received and noted; and
- ii) The Strategic Advice Services Manager be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to provide and update on the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit on families in the city;
- iii) Copies of the Governance and Contractual Arrangements document and the Performance Monitoring Information as provided by the Chief Executive be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- iv) The new Chief Executive of Together for Children be advised of the importance of working with the scrutiny function be highlighted during the interview process for candidates and once appointed be introduced to the Scrutiny Committee as soon as possible; and
- v) Arrangements be made for all Members to receive a briefing on the implications of changes to welfare benefits prior to a future meeting of the full Council.

Minutes of the last ordinary meetings of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 30th November, 2017 and 4th January, 2018

Subject to the references to 'Sir Ennals' being amended to 'Sir Paul Ennals' throughout the minute of 4th January, 2018, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meetings of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 30th November, 2017 and 4th January, 2018 (copy circulated), be deferred to the next meeting.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Youth Justice Plan

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought the advice and consideration of the Committee on a report which was considered by Cabinet on 10 January, 2018 on the Youth Justice Plan 2017/2018.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Linda Mason, Youth Offending Service, presented the report outlining the background, purpose and intentions of the Plan. The Committee were advised that Cabinet had agreed at its meeting held on 10th January to note the contents of the report and the Youth Justice Plan 2017/2018 and agreed that it be referred to this Committee for further advice and consideration. In addition, the Cabinet gave delegated authority to the Director of Children's Service, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, to accept any amendments to the plan prior to it being referred to Council for final approval.

Councillor Francis referred to paragraph 4.3 of the Cabinet report and asked if the Officer could explain how restorative justice worked and how its performance could

be measured. Ms. Mason advised that it could not be a distinctive measured outcome due to the very nature of restorative justice and explained to the Committee that there were a number of types of actions which could be undertaken; for example it could be that the young offender would contact victims of their offences and offer them the opportunity to engage with themselves using restorative justice interventions which were based on their individual wishes. This could then take the form of a range of actions; for example, it could be offering to meet with the victim to allow them to voice their feelings or having the young offender write a letter of apology to the victim. If the offence was against a corporate business rather than an individual the offender could offer to carry out repairs on any physical damage to assets they may have caused.

The Officer advised that there were very different measures of success in relation to restorative justice; they could ask the victim if they were satisfied following interventions, or they could measure if they felt that the young offender had learned lessons and understood the impact of their actions and the offence. There had been a lot of research undertaken around the subject and it was felt that face to face mediation between the victim and the offender gave victims a feeling of satisfaction which they would measure as being a success.

Councillor Tye noted that since June, 2016 the Chairman of the Youth Offending Service Board had been the Chief Executive of Together for Children and asked how many meetings of the Board he had attended, or if he had missed any of them and was informed by the Officer that she would have to check previous minutes of the meetings, but that from memory she could only remember him missing a single meeting.

Councillor Smith referred to the staff headcount of the YOS having further reduced and asked how the service were managing following these reductions. Ms. Mason explained that a number of staff had left but that the service maintained its core staffing resources in relation to the full-time staff and multi-agency secondees and was therefore compliant with the minimum staffing requirements. She explained that it could be very difficult and very challenging and that resources were tight but that they managed to continue to provide services and drive forward improvements.

In relation to a further question from Councillor Smith as to how partnership working was going with the current team, Ms. Mason advised that the multi-agency board remains an identified significant partnership for the city and partnership working continued to strengthen. She explained that a lot of work had been undertaken over the last five to six months between Early Help, the Council and Northumbria Police to help identify and address young people at the risk of offending earlier, offering a more holistic offer to young people and it was felt overall that partnership working was much better and continuing to improve.

Councillor Hunt referred to the excellent performance of Sunderland YOS and commented that it would be nice in future to have data included within the report so that they could clearly identify and analyse how and where improvements had been made year on year.

Mr Newton referred to the YOS continuing to push ahead with innovative and creative practices and asked for examples of this. Ms. Mason advised that the YOS had to continue to work with partners to try and reduce the numbers of young people who were offending for the first time and entering their service so a lot of the

practices they undertook were about how best to engage with those young people at risk of offending. They were hoping to look to improve practices in relation to offending within other settings, such as schools, very much in a similar way to that which they had done in Children's Homes. The Youth Justice Board continues to promote good practice of what works in Sunderland and to learn from other areas around the country.

In response to a question from Councillor Francis around the newly developed Early Help offer, Ms. Mason advised that the YOS continued to work with a 'whole family' approach. The newly developed joined up approach across Early Help to consider what the appropriate services were to work with young people and families was being received positively. She gave the Committee the example that should Northumbria Police have to make overnight arrangements for a young person, that young person would then be allocated to a YOS member of staff who would look to make contact with the family as soon as possible. The reason would be to talk about doing a brief assessment of any needs the young person or family may have and to date the take up by families had been very good. It was felt that this was down to the quick response times, which was ensuring that initial contact was being made with the family within 24 hours of the young person having been released. As the family were contacted quickly staff had found that they were much more receptive to getting involved and accessing the early intervention services. This was something the YOS and partners were keen to continue.

Members having no further questions and having fully considered the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the Committee welcomed the Youth Justice Plan 2017/2018 and supported it being referred to Council for final approval.

Overall School Performance Data for the 2016/2017 Academic Year

The Director of Education submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on the verified overall school performance data for the academic year 2016-2017.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Simon Marshall, Director of Education and Mr. Richard Cullen, Support and Intervention Officer, took Members through the report advising that the key messages from the information provided was that the primary schools in Sunderland continued to do very well and were ranked 14th in the country, which was testament to the hard work and commitment of the schools and staff. There was still work to be undertaken with secondary partners to continue to try and improve outcomes as could be seen by the Committee through the data set out within the report.

Councillor Tye commented that the content of the report was set out very well for Members and stated that it would be interesting to read the data within this report alongside that of the exclusions report which had been considered at a previous meeting of the Committee to see whether those schools that had good outcomes also had high levels of permanent exclusions. He commented that central government having brought in a completely new revised method of grading GCSE English and Maths and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate was completely unfair on young people and threw their lives into complete turmoil having already set

out on preparing for examinations and grading under a different curriculum. He commended the work the service were doing in trying to improve the current position and outcomes of the secondary schools and academies and hoped that improvements would be made; but commented that permanently excluding pupils should not be used as a way of getting the performance levels up if this was the case.

Mr. Cullen advised that secondary Head Teachers were now working more closely together, holding monthly meetings to information share and advise each other of examples of good practice and performance. Mr. Marshall informed Members that they had worked really hard to get these meetings up and running and now every secondary Head Teacher was attending and happy to share clear performance data from their schools and Officers would continue to support colleagues in this role.

Councillor Tye also commented that they had to try and address top ranked, good teachers leaving schools that may be struggling to take up positions in higher performing schools whilst the outcomes of others may continue to worsen.

Councillor Bell referred to pupil premium payments for schools and commented that he was aware that some schools were not receiving payments for pupils that they should as parents were reluctant to fill in the free school meals applications due to the stigma that may be seen to be attached and therefore the schools ultimately were missing out.

In relation to comments regarding the change in the examinations systems in secondary schools, Mr. Marshall advised that they should always strive for each and every pupil to get the best outcomes from education as they could. He informed Members that there were some unbelievable children and schools in the city, who despite the odds were coming out with some of the best results. There was work to be undertaken to raise the aspiration of pupils and to ensure that pupils and schools could see prospective outcomes and goals. Conversations had to be held with wider partner groups to ensure there were potential opportunities for pupils to aspire too and this was not just the role of schools alone. There were some massive opportunities and investments being made in the city and it was about ensuring that the young people of the city were prepared and shown direct routes into how to access those opportunities that would be available to them in the future.

Councillor Jackson referred to the disparity between the results at Key Stages 2 and 3 and the standard of the monitoring of teaching assessment at those levels and was advised that Key Stage 2 results were sent to be marked externally so there was not a case of teachers possibly being too easy or moderate on pupil assessments. Mr. Marshall also advised that it had been known for assessors to randomly turn up on the day of SATs exams to monitor them being carried out.

Mr. Marshall commented that the good results were more a result of the excellent and talented primary practitioners that they had in the city which may go under the radar by being at smaller schools but who were continuing to perform well over long periods of time. All nursery schools within the city were either ranked as good or outstanding by Ofsted and the primary schools were ranked in performance in the top fifteen of the country and sometimes the city failed to celebrate the good practices that were in the primary schools and learn more from them.

In response to a question from Councillor Francis as to whether there was a shortage of specialist staff, Mr. Marshall advised he would not have exact staff levels information as most of the secondary schools were now academies and responsible for the recruitment of their own staff but as far as he was aware there was no significant shortage of staff in any key subject. The recruitment of staff for English, Maths and Science was always challenging, both locally and nationally, and unfortunately, these were also the subjects which were most scrutinised by external bodies.

Councillor Smith asked what the findings of the Tees Valley partnership report were which was referred to at paragraph 11.2 of the report and the Committee were advised that Officers had looked into the findings of the research that had been carried out and would look to learn from their process and adapt it for schools in Sunderland. The research was around looking to narrow the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils by using pupil premiums for those schools with the greatest gap. The concept had been introduced to their schools and it had been up to them if they wished to take advantage of the project. Officers would continue to monitor the impact it had as they continued to move through the academic year.

Members having fully considered the report and having no further questions for Officers, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the information provided regarding school performance data be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2017/18

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

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report advising that there were still a considerable number of items in the remainder of the 2018/2018 work programme and suggested that Members may wish to review the composition and priorities of the work programme for the remainder of the year.

In light of earlier discussions, Members had agreed that an update on information around the thresholds for permanent exclusions be included in the work programme, which would include inviting secondary Headteachers to attend to have discussions with the Committee around particular issues they may have and the strategies they were putting in place to deal with those.

Members discussed the remainder of the work programme and the possibility of providing written updates to Members directly on the new special education school and the university technical colleges or the possibility of having an extraordinary meeting scheduled to ensure that all of the items remaining on the work programme were covered.

Members having discussed the work programme, and it was:-

5. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the information contained in the work programme be received and noted;
- b) the Scrutiny Officer have discussions with the Chairman to consider the work programme items for the remainder of the municipal year to balance the workload taking into the consideration the comments from the Committee; and
- c) the Scrutiny Officer include the item of the Impact of Universal Credit in the work programme.

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 9th January, 2018.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

6. RESOLVED that the Notices of Key Decisions be received and noted.

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

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.