

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held REMOTELY on THURSDAY 26th APRIL, 2021 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Crosby, Mann, McDonough, McKeith, Mordey, Samuels, Scanlan and Tye together with Ms Anne Blakey and Ms Jackie Graham.

Also in attendance:-

Ms Jill Colbert, Chief Executive, Together for Children
Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate
Mr Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial, Sunderland College
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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Hunt and F. Miller.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 4th March, 2021

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 4th March, 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Apprenticeships Update – Sunderland College

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with a background on the operation of apprenticeships in the city and introduced Mr Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial, Sunderland College, who was present to brief the Committee on the current position.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Chair welcomed and introduced Mr Nixon who provided the Committee with a detailed power point presentation informing the Committee of :-

- i) the make-up of the Education Partnership North East and the Campuses it operated from.
- ii) the key sectors for apprenticeships i.e Construction, Health and Life Sciences, Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, the Public Sector and Finance, Professional and Business Services. There was a cross cutting focus on digital skills across all these sectors.
- iii) the development of Apprenticeship schemes from 2016/17 to date.
- iv) the number of apprenticeships operating across the North East Local Economic Partnership area by provider, together with those located specifically in Sunderland.
- v) Apprenticeship achievement in the City. Sunderland's success rate for 2019/20 was 76.3 % compared with 64.2% nationally.
- vi) the impact of COVID 19. This included:-
 - A fall in apprenticeship recruitment in certain sectors
 - Employers not investing in training
 - Employers not recruiting or delaying recruitment
 - Apprentices being furloughed or put on a Learning Break
 - Redundancy and changes in employer / job
 - Apprenticeship end point assessments delayed
 - Confusion around the Government offer to employers
 - There had been some benefits including increased Government incentives to employers, an accelerated development and delivery of remote learning and reduced travel providing a financial and environmental benefit.
- vii) the introduction of the 'fix it, grow it' stage of the apprenticeship offer including initiatives to increase take up.
- viii) the options available for young people and adults at 16 years old, post 19 and post 24.

The Chair thanked Mr Nixon for his presentation and invited questions from Members.

Councillor Tye relayed his own experiences from the point of view of an employer in the Tees Valley area. He was interested to hear Mr Nixon's view on the issues from the perspective of the College and Councillor Tye believed that as an employer he largely shared the same concerns. One of his main concerns was a lack of tutors in respect of the traditional trade skills such as plastering and carpentry. As result colleges were dropping these courses locally and Councillor Tye's organisation was having to send young people to the College of Construction in Leeds to learn these skills. He also cited a reluctance of colleges to take on more apprenticeships despite there being a demand, because of current difficulties in resolving end point

assessments. In conclusion Councillor Tye highlighted the rigidity of the college course timetables that dictated a September start date.

In response, Mr Nixon highlighted the current difficulty of recruiting to certain positions within higher education. This was generally in areas where salaries were higher within the industries concerned than within the education sector and it was the construction trades and engineering that were most impacted. He believed that colleges could try to address this by growing their own tutors and targeting people looking for a career change and who were thinking of leaving the industry or alternatively, looking to the industry to deliver technical aspects of learning on behalf of the colleges. The situation in respect of end point assessments was challenging both in terms of the financial burden for colleges and also in tackling the backlog caused by the Covid lockdowns. With regard to course start dates these were traditionally in September. Trials were being undertaken with more flexible 'roll on roll off' courses, however as with any business, colleges required the availability of a viable cohort to make courses financially worthwhile.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Crosby, Mr Nixon advised that European ESF funding could not be used to support apprenticeships. Other funding was available and new sources were being provided such as that to support the Kickstart initiative.

Councillor Mann stated that securing engagement was a big concern. She also referred to the Kickstart initiative and questioned whether it would give a young person a good grounding going into employment, given that it was just a six month programme. Mr Nixon replied that it was very early days with Kickstart however he hoped that it would be a seamless journey. The challenge would be filling the opportunities that existed. The benefit of the programme was that there was a grant available to the employer to support training and the individual concerned was paid essentially by the Government via DWP rather than the employer. It enabled an employer to fill a vacancy in a new placement, that given the economic climate they would not have been in a position to create otherwise.

The Chair enquired as to what support had been made available to disadvantaged young people and to those with special needs? Mr Nixon replied that one of the specialisms of Sunderland College was in special educational needs so there was a lot of support made available for SEN students who wanted to take up both full time and part time courses. In terms of linking that with apprenticeships, a high percentage of placements would go to students classed as being disadvantaged given the number of areas of multiple deprivation within Sunderland. For apprentices with special needs these would be assessed prior to and in the very early stages of their placement with appropriate support put in place.

The Chair referred to paragraph 3.6 of the report which stated 'The organisation and delivery of apprenticeships has changed considerably over recent years with a greater emphasis placed on the role of employers in shaping courses and improving the quality of courses on offer.' She was really pleased to read this and hoped it would address the longstanding complaint of employers that educational establishments were not providing industry with enough people with the right qualifications and skills required in the workplace.

There being no further questions for Mr Nixon, the Chair thanked him for his attendance and it was:-

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

Together for Children Performance – Update

The Chief Executive of Together for Children presented a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an overview of performance against TfC's contractual indicators with Sunderland City Council based on the February 2021 performance data and which set out the:-

- Six key contractual performance targets with the Council;
- Table of the supporting measures reported to the Council;
- Service commentary for any supporting measure reported as amber or red, and
- Summary table showing the RAG rating of all contractual performance targets and supporting measures.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor McDonaugh referred to the supporting indicators detailed on page 15 of the agenda and in particular SM5 (% of Child in Need assessments authorised within 45 wds – shown as 89.7%) and asked why the figure was dropping. He quoted a figure of 97.8% contained in the December 2019 committee report as a comparison and also a more recent figure of 93%. Ms Colbert replied that she didn't fully agree that it was a diminishing or deteriorating performance target. It wasn't technically an imperative figure from an Ofsted point of view. This was because they had better ways of understanding the quality of the outcomes secured for children. There were a number of critical milestones within the 45 working day period and a small proportion would fall outside that period. The Ofsted feedback from previous monitoring visits was that it was better to do it right than to do it quickly.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Mann, Ms Colbert explained the typical scenarios involved that may lead to a Cared for Child receiving 3 or more placements during a 12 month period.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Crosby regarding future plans, Ms Colbert advised that TfC's direct delivery services would not be moving to the new City Hall as it made no sense to centralise services that were locality based however some of the staff based at the Stanfield centre such as the finance team would relocate. Ms Colbert then briefed the Committee on the performance of the Liquid Logic system in response to an enquiry from the Chair.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chair thanked Ms Colbert for her report, and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2020/21

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with details of the Committee's final work programme for the municipal year 2020/21

(for copy report – see original minutes)

There being no questions or comments, it was :-

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 8th April, 2021.

(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, they should contact Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

There being no questions or comments, it was :-

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

There being no further items of business, the Chair closed the meeting having thanked members and officers for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.