

**At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 10<sup>th</sup> JANUARY, 2019 at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Hodson, Hunt, F. Miller, O'Neil, Rowntree, Samuels, Scullion and Tye together with Mrs. A. Blakey

**Also in attendance:-**

Ms. Jill Colbert, Chief Executive, Together for Children and Director of Children's Services, Sunderland City Council

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Sir Paul Ennals, Independent Chair of the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board

Mr. Joshua McKeith, Sunderland Youth Council

Ms. Jacqui Reeves, Services Manager, Washington Mind

Ms. Gillian Robinson, Area Coordinator, Sunderland City Council

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

Ms. Jane Wheeler, Quality Assurance and Performance Manager, Sunderland City Council

The Chairman opened the meeting and introductions were made.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Francis and K. Wood and also on behalf of Ms. J. Graham.

**Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2018**

Councillor Rowntree referred to the first paragraph on page six of the minutes and informed Members that the reference to paragraph 3.4 of the report and the comments made had been made by herself and not by Councillor Hunt as set out.

1. RESOLVED that subject to the above comment the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

There were no declarations of interest made.

## **Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) Annual Report April 2017 – March 2018**

The Chairman of the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) Annual Report 2017-2018 to provide assurance on the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements for children in Sunderland.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Sir Paul Ennals, Independent Chairman of the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board, presented the report advising that an annual report must be published in the effectiveness of child safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the local area. Submissions of the annual report to the Committee should provide assurance that the SSCB is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities.

Sir Paul Ennals gave Members an overview of some of the key highlights which had been identified within the Annual Report and what actions had been undertaken since its publication, drawing their attention in particular to the key sections; Section 1 – Foreword by SSCB Independent Chairman and Section 145 – How safe are children and young people in Sunderland?

Councillor Tye commented that it was refreshing to hear the comments of the SSCB and their confidence in Together for Children services being on the road to improvement, with the appointment of the new Chief Executive and the improvement in performances made so far. He then referred to the SSCB Board Membership and queried the inclusion of representatives from Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust. Sir Paul Ennals advised that the 0-19 children's health services was contracted out and that this was no longer provided by South Tyneside but that services delivered in the city were commissioned by Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust and that this was the reason for their inclusion in the membership of the board.

Councillor Tye referred to the information around the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and commented that he would like to see this strengthened further in the next annual report and advised that he continued to remain concerned about these services. Sir Paul Ennals advised that this was an area they would continue to monitor and that he would take on board Councillor Tye's comments when producing the next annual report.

Councillor Tye also commented that it had been unfortunate that Sunderland had been unsuccessful in their bid to be named as one of the twenty five Trailblazer areas in the country for children's mental health and wellbeing.

Councillor Tye raised concerns with regards to safeguarding in general and in particular the voluntary and community sector picking up the gaps left by the removal of service areas which used to be provided by the local authority and commented that he did not think that the SSCB were picking this up. For example, he referred to the verification of safeguarding measures and stated that the inspection regime now had completely gone. He advised that at the youth centre in his area they would get approximately 80 young people in attendance, and that 20% of those were looked after children, and there were no formal links between youth providers and Children's

Services. In the past each Area Committee had a Children's Services Officer link and that role had now gone, and he asked how those links were now being provided between safeguarding, Children's Services and the youth groups in the city.

Ms. Jill Colbert, Executive Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive of Together for Children, advised that she was currently in dialogue with the Chief Executive of the Council around strengthening the commissioning function and she realised the need to understand the quality and performance of safeguarding measures with all providers working with children in the city. Representatives from the voluntary and community sector do meet with officers from the Council and Together for Children and have routine conversation and dialogues but there was a need to have an infrastructure in place as this was not as robust as it could be. It was important to have an umbrella over the voluntary and community sector that could offer guidance and advice to them. Ms. Colbert advised that Simon Marshall, Director of Education, and his team would be happy to look at visiting any voluntary and community sector groups where Members may have issues or concerns and she was happy to discuss individual cases outside of the Committee.

Sir Paul Ennals commented that the SSCB had felt a real need to streamline the SSCB agenda in the first instance and had felt that it was necessary to deal with the highest priority issues facing services and be in a comfortable position that they were improving. The Committee were informed that it was now felt that the Board were in a position to be able to legitimately challenge groups and look into how well they were being monitored and oversee the safeguarding responsibilities of groups working with young people in the city and he was happy to take this back to the SSCB.

Councillor Rowntree referred to only 24% of schools in Sunderland having rated themselves as fully compliant within the SSCB Section 157/175 audit and commented that this seemed quite low. Sir Paul Ennals commented that this was an area the Board had identified they were uncomfortable with but that it was all around the quality of interaction with schools. The Committee were informed that when schools were faced with having to make budget cuts then they would look to protect the curriculum and in turn could lose the level of pastoral support they could offer to vulnerable families; further cuts were making it more difficult for schools to engage fully. Members were advised that it was difficult for the schools to measure their compliance but were assured that not a single school in the city had failed an Ofsted inspection based on their safeguarding standards.

Councillor Smith advised the Committee that Mr. Marshall, Director of Education, was invited to a future meeting of the Committee and they could look to raise this issue with him directly at that time also.

Councillor Hunt referred to the rate of children who were being electively home schooled and asked how services were looking to engage with those families as they could be from the most vulnerable families. She asked in particular how schools were looking to engage with those children and was informed by Sir Paul Ennals that every local authority in the north east was seeing an increase in the number of children and young people being home-schooled and it was of ongoing concern to Board members. Members were advised that there had been a Government consultation undertaken with the expectation that new guidance was to be published in September, 2018 but as to date it had not been published and therefore they may

need to start working on their own arrangements to investigate the issue and the reasons behind the choices being made by parents to home school.

In response to concerns from Councillor Bell around the migration of residents in the city onto Universal Credit, Sir Paul Ennals advised that the Secretary of State had recently announced a pause in the roll out of the Universal Credit programme and therefore it was evident that some problems must have been identified. Members were advised that the first evidence of the impact on residents in Sunderland had been more positive than expected. The roll out of Universal Credit had caused massive problems elsewhere in the country but due to the planning that the Council and partners, such as Gentoo, had undertaken, the data and evidence was showing that it was not as big a problem in the city as first may have been feared.

Councillor Smith referred to the increase in the numbers of children and young people attending accident and emergency departments for self-harm incidents and was informed that the way in which the data was coded and recorded had changed and made the numbers look completely out of trend, almost tripling some figures. Work had been carried out and the data had been refreshed and the numbers were beginning to reduce but this was still an area that the SSCB needed to monitor. Ms. Colbert also commented that the reduction in numbers could have some correlation between the reduction in waiting times for young people accessing CAMHS; as a result of this could be that young people are less likely to present at one of the urgent health facilities having self-harmed.

There being no further questions or comments the Chairman thanked Sir Paul Ennals for his attendance and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

### **Voice of Child – Participation and Outcomes for Children**

The Chief Executive of Together for Children submitted a report (copy circulated) advised Members that Ms. Jane Wheeler (Quality Assurance and Performance Manager) would provide a presentation on the action being taken to hear the voice of children and young people in the city.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Wheeler provided Members with a comprehensive presentation advising that every child or young person who comes into contact with their services should have the opportunity to express their views and that they engaged with young people through a range of methods and tools to gather these views; such as through looked after reviews, viewpoint questionnaires, Mind of My Own (MOMO), the complaints and compliments service and focussed engagement groups. The presentation provided the Committee with information around the gender and age breakdown of the young people using the particular tools and the general themes of the statements made. Ms. Wheeler informed the Members that these tools do not replace contact with the children and young people but enhances the range of methods that they have to engage with services.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

Ms. Wheeler advised that she was happy to meet with any Members individually to take them through the MOMO app if they wished to see what the children and young people experienced when using it. In relation to a question under the previous item around the monitoring of youth services she advised that this would be something that the service would be happy to look into undertaking as they used to perform a similar function when those services were commissioned by the Council.

Councillor Rowntree commented that she was really encouraged to hear that the voice of the children opportunities were being taken up by children and young people and acted upon in a positive manner and went on to ask what provision there was for the views of children and young people with profound disabilities or sensory issues to be gathered and was informed by Ms. Wheeler that the Children's Disability Service were looking at alternative ways for those children and young people to engage and share their views and have their voices to be heard also.

Councillor Rowntree asked if she could receive more information on this issue when available and Ms. Wheeler advised that they were committed to listening to the needs of those children and young people through their Educational Health Care Plans; but that she would continue to update Committee Members as further work was undertaken on alternative ways for them to engage and share their views.

Councillor Samuels referred to the number of statements being received being lower than the number of young people and worker accounts in the MOMO app and asked what was being done to increase participation. Ms. Wheeler advised that workers opened accounts originally and allowed young people to use their account to make statements if they did not wish to open their own. Workers would support the child or young person if they wished to then open their own account but it was always the choice of the young person and not mandatory that they had one. The Committee were informed that some young people open an account and then never felt the need to use it but they are reminded that it is there if they wished to engage in that way. Other young people may have only used the application once over the two years it had been available and then not needed to use it again but their account would remain open so the option was there for them if they wished to access it in the future.

In response to a query from Councillor Miller regarding what was done for those children and young people who may not have access to the app, Ms. Wheeler advised that social workers, schools and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) were all aware of and briefed on the system so they could help support the young person if they wished to make a statement using the MOMO app.

Councillor Smith referred to the Engagement Groups set out within the presentation and referred to the City Equals group, which had been a group of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Ms. Wheeler advised that all youth groups the services engaged with aimed to have representations from young people with disabilities or learning difficulties and they were also included through the local offer.

Councillor Tye asked when the Youth Parliament had changed their name to the Youth Council and was advised that the young people had not liked the term 'Parliament', so had agreed to change it approximately eight months ago.

Councillor Tye asked how the service were looking to capture the voices of a wider range of young people in the city and Ms. Wheeler advised that they continued to also work with the Youth Offending Services and the Youth Drug and Alcohol Project and all of the youth groups wishing to engage. She explained that they looked to capture as many views and opinions as they could but ultimately they could only work with those young people who wished to work with them.

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

3. RESOLVED that
  - the information contained within the report be received and noted; and
  - the Quality Assurance and Performance Manager provide further detail to the Committee on the work of the Children's Disability Service as discussed when it is available.

### **Compliments, Complaints and Feedback**

The Director of Quality and Performance submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with information regarding compliments, complaints and feedback received by Together for Children.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Jane Wheeler, Quality and Performance Manager presented the report advising that it presented an overview of complaints and feedback received by the Council for the period April – September, 2018.

Ms. Wheeler took Members through the report advising of the number of complaints at stages one, two and three which had been received during the quarters one and two period and informed the Committee of the main themes of the complaints. Members were informed that the overall responses to complaints was improving and the number of complaints made by young people had decreased by 70.6% compared to the same period in 2017.

In relation to pre-complaints, the Committee were informed that through responding to issues or concerns at the outset, services had helped customers to receive satisfactory resolutions informally, with just three of the forty received pre-complaints progressing to a formal stage one complaint.

In closing, Ms. Wheeler advised the Committee that it was important to recognise positive feedback to inform service development and best practice and 125 compliments had been received compared with 46 in the same period in 2017 which showed a 172% increase.

The Chairman having thanked Ms. Wheeler for her report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the information contained within the report be received and noted.

## **Annual Work Programme 2018/19**

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 for the 2018/19 municipal year.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor Tye referred to the number of items outstanding in the work programme to be considered over the remaining three meetings of the municipal year and asked if it may be beneficial to schedule an extraordinary meeting of the Committee. Ms. Gillian Robinson, Area Co-ordinator, advised she would discuss the work programme with the Chairman and come back to the Committee in due course.

### **5. RESOLVED:-**

- that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted;
- the Area Coordinator discuss the remainder of the work programme with the Chairman and advise the Committee accordingly.

## **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships 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 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2018.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

### **6. RESOLVED that the Notice 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.