

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 7th FEBRUARY, 2019 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Francis, Hodson, Hunt, F. Miller, O'Neil, Samuels, Scullion, Tye and K. Wood together with Mrs. A. Blakey and Mrs. J. Graham

Also in attendance:-

Ms. Sue Carty, Director of Quality and Performance, Together for Children
Mr. Richard Cullen, School Improvement Service Manager, Together for Children
Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council
Mr. James Harrison, Sunderland Echo
Ms. Sheila Lough, CWD Strategic Services Manager, Together for Children
Mr. Joshua McKeith, Sunderland Youth Council
Mr. Simon Marshall, Education Director, Together for Children
Ms. Gillian Robinson, Area Coordinator, Sunderland City Council
Ms. Joanne Stewart, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

The Chairman opened the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Rowntree and also on behalf of Ms. Jill Colbert, Chief Executive of Together for Children and Executive Director of Children's Services

Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 10th January, 2019

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 10th January, 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Change in Order of Business

At this juncture the Chairman proposed that the order of items on the agenda be changed to:-

- Item 6 – Overall School Performance Data for the 2017/18 Academic Year;
- Item 7 – Schools Exclusions and Attendance;
- Item 5 - Social Care Workforce Update;
- Item 8 – Together for Children – Quality Assurance Framework;
- Item 4 – Corporate Parenting Annual Report.

Overall School Performance Data for the 2017/18 Academic Year

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members of the Committee on the verified overall school performance data for the academic year 2017-2018.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Simon Marshall, Director of Education and Mr. Richard Cullen, School Improvements Services Manager presented the report advising that the Council had a statutory responsibility under the Education Act 1996 to promote high standards in schools and to raise attainment. The report provided an overview for members across the range of academic outcomes and the key priorities for the school improvement service.

Mr. Marshall commented that the themes remain quite consistent, with the early years and primary phases performing either in line with or above the national average but that the level of progression at secondary education was not continuing. Mr. Marshall advised that this was not just an issue in Sunderland but that it was a regional issue. To look to address this, the Department for Education had appointed Lord Theodore Agnew to undertake a new government initiative, North East Challenge, whereby £24 million would be pledged to tackle these issues in the region. The Committee were informed that £12 million would be allocated towards training and development of teachers to improve the quality of teaching and that £12 million would be invested to target the transition between primary and secondary education, both initiatives to look to drive up standards and improve outcomes for young people in the region. Mr. Marshall advised that he would keep the Committee informed accordingly as the initiative progressed.

Councillor Tye referred to the Council's statutory responsibility to promote high standards in schools and raise attainment and asked how they carried this out and got schools to comply with them with so many Academies, especially at secondary school level, in the city. He commented that he was sick of discussing the same issues over again and it was imperative that a piece of work was undertaken to drill down to the root cause and get an absolute honest view of the work at Key Stages and consider how to get schools working more closely together to improve results at Key Stage 4.

Councillor Tye stated that the majority of secondary schools in the city were single academy schools and therefore insular, without the support they need to be able to share examples of best practice. It was vital for the Committee to have these discussions with the Regional School Commissioner and therefore he proposed that an invite should be extended to her to attend a future meeting to discuss the educational outcomes of the secondary schools in the city.

Mr. Marshall agreed that it was frustrating for them to continue to discuss this issue and agreed that stand alone academies would find it more difficult by not being part of a larger multi academy trust that could help in providing training and guidance. He informed the Committee that they continued to work with the secondary schools to encourage them to link up and build relationships with other secondary schools in the city and that there was a meeting of secondary Headteachers held regularly whereby they could discuss common issues and themes. There was a drive around academies joining multi academy trusts and Mr. Marshall advised that within the city he found that the primary stand-alone academies continued to remain very closely linked.

In relation to the Regional School Commissioner being invited to a future meeting of the Committee, Mr. Marshall explained that he could convey the wishes of the Scrutiny Committee and the concerns they had around results at secondary school level not improving when he met with the Department for Education.

Councillor Francis asked how Sunderland looked to attract teachers in specialist subject areas where there may be a shortage in the secondary sector and was informed by Mr. Marshall that particular subjects could offer an attractive starting salary for teachers but that sometimes it was more about teachers choosing not to work in some of the more challenging schools. He went on to comment that there were two issues, namely; how to train and attract people into particular specialist subject areas and then once individuals were qualified, how to get them to work in a struggling school.

Mr. Marshall advised that it could be a challenge to secure highly qualified staff in the subjects of English and Maths and explained that they were working with the University of Sunderland on a career progression offer, whereby a bespoke package could be offered to professionals around offering a Masters course in their preferred subject. Unfortunately, the Committee were informed that when budgets were tight within schools then one of the first savings that could be made would be around training and development when in the long run this could prove to be a false economy for schools.

Mr. Cullen informed the Committee that there was expected to be a change in the Ofsted regime in the future with schools no longer being measured on data alone. Members were advised that if this became the case then this would really allow the secondary schools to look at their curriculum provision in another way and be able to offer a wider curriculum that more met the needs of the individual and allow them to see what their future education and career path could look like. The English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) was a good programme for young people to become trained and prepared for higher education but it could be a struggle for some individuals who may not perform well in the narrow range of subjects it covers. If the new Ofsted inspection was to be brought in it would then look to see if a school met the needs of all the children on roll and would allow the curriculum to be changed to offer bespoke opportunities for underperforming pupils. This change may also see improvements

in the links between primary and secondary schools and help in designing a curriculum that met the needs of the individual young person and of the city.

Councillor Hodson asked if the data on teacher recruitment and retention over the last few years would be available for Members and Mr. Marshall advised that he could provide it for maintained schools but that it may be more difficult to provide for academies as they managed their own human resources information.

Councillor Hodson also asked if data was available for the attainment of pupils for who English was not their first language, how many pupils this affected and how they were supported and monitored, and was informed by Mr. Marshall that this information could be provided on a city wide basis. Mr. Cullen advised that there was quite a small cohort of pupils, based around 3-4 schools and informed Members that they worked closely together and with the community so they had a relatively high performing group but advised that this could be set out within the data provided.

Mrs. Graham referred to the 89% of secondary schools within the city being academies and asked how many of those chose to buy into the school improvement service? Mr. Cullen advised that very few bought into the service, and Members were informed that the service would not design a team unless commissioned to do so to meet the particular needs of a school as they could not have a standing service always available to schools.

In response to a question from Councillor Hunt as to how the maintained secondary school compared with academies, Mr. Cullen advised that it was safe to say all secondary providers faced the same difficult challenges in relation to performance and that they were comparable across the city. Councillor Hunt commented that it was horrendous to see that the rank position of the authority dropped 93 places from 39th out of 152 authorities for Key Stage 2 to 132nd out of 152 authorities for GCSE results.

With regards to a question from Councillor Miller around how the new government initiative would work, Mr. Marshall advised that it would be up to the board that was to be set up as to who they would commission to undertake the school improvement work within the identified schools. He advised how the school improvement service would usually undertake a review of a maintained school before reporting back to the governing body their findings and working to support a core group through regular intervention and challenge to see improvements and progress being made. With regards to academies they did not have the authority or responsibility to undertake these services unless they were bought in to and therefore should an academy be identified as part of the initiative it would be for them to decide how the work should be commissioned.

Councillor O'Neil further referred to the new initiative and the £24 million and asked if Sunderland schools were guaranteed a share of the funding? Mr. Cullen advised that it was expected to be split between thirty schools in the North East region but that it was still to be decided which schools these would be, although Officers did not see any reason why Sunderland schools would not be included.

In relation to a query from Mr. McKeith as to how many young pupils currently sat the Ebacc, Mr. Marshall advised that all pupils were encouraged to take the Ebacc and in some schools they had set out a firm commitment that all of their pupils would sit those examinations. In other schools it may not be seen as the best curriculum

option for some of their pupils and some young people from vulnerable groups where they may not be achieving at a relevant academic level.

In a follow up question Mr. McKeith asked if schools were penalised if young people did not sit the Ebacc and he was informed by Mr. Marshall that this was not the case at the moment and schools were merely tasked with having as many of their pupils as possible take the Ebacc route.

There being no further questions or comments the Chairman thanked Officers for their report and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report be received and noted;
- ii) the Regional School Commissioner be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the educational outcomes of secondary schools in the city;
- iii) the Committee be provided with information on teacher recruitment and retention, where available; and
- iv) the Committee receive further information on the attainment of children in the city who have English as a second language.

Schools Exclusions and Attendance

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an overview of both fixed term and permanent exclusions in Sunderland for 2018-2019.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Marshall, Director of Education, presented the report which provided an overview of information relating to referrals for placements by the Central Provisions Panel (CPP), fixed term and permanent exclusions, managed moves and in year fair access requests.

Mr. Marshall advised that services were facing real challenges, particularly in relation to permanent exclusions in the city, and informed Members that after six days following a permanent exclusion of a pupil, the local authority had the responsibility of picking up the education of that young person. This was putting a strain on provision as it meant that the Link School was at capacity with permanently excluded pupils and therefore referrals from the CPP for 12 week placements had nowhere to be placed.

Work was being undertaken with schools and Headteachers to look at earlier intervention works and put the challenge back onto schools to come up with a plan to help support young people and their behaviours to allow them to remain in mainstream school and not be at risk of permanent exclusion.

Mr. Marshall advised that this was a very complex process and having looked into the reasons for permanent exclusion it was mainly due to persistent disruptive behaviour by the pupil and in particular males, although there was no geographical area or age bracket highlighted as a trend. There were concerns over the number of

vulnerable children, quite often with some level of special educational needs being excluded, which could be down to the school being unable to meet the needs of the individual and their behaviours worsening to the point where the schools were left with no option than to permanently exclude.

Mrs. Blakey commented that something had to be done to address the levels of permanent exclusions as using the link school and other provisions was stopping other providers being able to access those services for pupils who may need a placement. She commented that there needed to be thresholds set so that all schools could ensure they were dealing with pupils and their behaviours in a consistent manner to other schools in the city as it was unfair to the young person if they were not. Mrs. Blakey commented that she understood the pressures placed on schools and the limited resources with which they have to work with but this area was too important not to look to address.

Mr. Marshall commented that there were thresholds set out and sometimes it could be that a child is not in the right education provision but cannot move into a school that will be able to meet their needs. He advised the Committee that one of the schools in the city that had the lowest number of fixed term exclusions was serving one of the most challenging communities in the city but yet another school in a similar position had over 2,000 fixed term exclusions and it was about ensuring that schools were dealing with pupils in the same manner. He did inform the Committee that the data contained within the report was historic and that some improvements had been made in relation to the large number of fixed term exclusions for that school which had seen a rise in that particular year.

Councillor Tye referred to the data set out within the report and in particular School J, which had over 2,000 fixed term exclusions for 2017/18, and asked why this school had not been named as he felt it was the Officers duty to keep the Committee duly informed. Mr. Marshall commented that he was happy to discuss the particulars around any individual school outside of the Committee meeting but explained that through partner working with the schools they were hoping to improve those behaviours. He advised that naming a particular school in the meeting was not the best way for Officers to look to develop good working relationships and they had to build trust and confidence.

Councillor Tye commented that the information was available in the public domain and he did not think it was right that the data within the report should be anonymised and if it was presented to the Committee they should be able to pull out and scrutinise the data. If Members drilled down into the data provided it showed that the exclusion rate of School J was 50% and Councillor Tye asked where the line was set where the school was bordering on to criminality, stating that it was absolutely unacceptable.

Councillor Tye referred to the previous item on the agenda whereby the Committee had been looking at the reasons for performances dropping at Key Stage 4 level and felt that 6,500 days lost to fixed term exclusions had to have some bearing on that. He stated that it was the role of the Scrutiny Committee to expose those schools in the city.

Councillor Smith commented that Mr. Marshall had advised Members that he was more than happy to have discussions outside of the meeting around individual schools and provide a more detailed briefing to Members if necessary.

Councillor Hunt referred to 50% of the 28 permanently excluded pupils being registered on the SEN code of practice and that only one of those pupils had attended a placement at the Link School or PRU and asked how many of those children had it been deemed should not have been placed into mainstream schools. Mr. Marshall advised that he did not have those exact figures to hand but could provide them. He explained that it may not be a case of a young person being placed incorrectly into mainstream provision but that that child's Educational Health Care Plan had not identified them as requiring an alternative school. When a child is placed into the Link School or Pru it can be quickly identified if their needs warranted a school that could specifically support their level of SEN. Mr. Marshall commented that there were massive pressures on the number of pupil places available in specialist provision schools in the city and he would look to provide further information to Members.

Councillor Bell referred to managed moves and commented that some schools were happy to be involved in the process whereas others may be reluctant and this did not help other schools in the city as the same schools could be requested to take difficult pupils time and again. Mr. Marshall commented that there was an expectation that all schools involved would agree to undertake managed moves where deemed appropriate but commented that moves could fail where pupils and families do not agree to them.

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

3. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the information contained within the report be received and noted; and
- ii) the Director of Education provide a briefing to the Committee to consider the issues and concerns around the level of fixed term and permanent exclusions from schools within the city; and
- iii) further information be provided to the Committee on the numbers of pupils permanently excluded who were on the SEN code of practice.

Social Care Workforce Update

The Chief Executive of Together for Children submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided for Members a position update on the mechanisms put in place to secure the stability of the Together for Children workforce against the context of continued regional and national recruitment pressures.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Sue Carty, Director of Quality and Performance presented the report advising that the Together for Children Social Work workforce was increased in 2015 at the recommendation of Ofsted who identified that higher than average caseloads had results in an unsafe practice. Together for Children had produced a Social Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy in 2017 which identified a number of mechanisms to reduce reliance on agency social work staff and since its publication considerable work had been undertaken to meet identified targets and achieve greater stabilisation.

Ms. Carty informed the Committee that as a result of that work Together for Children were now exceeding national target across all areas with the percentage agency work rate having decreased from 37.7% to 13.5% as at the end of December, 2018.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith regarding additional costs which Together for Children may have endured to get them to this position, Ms. Carty advised that she did not know the actual figures but would think that in the long run it would see the company make saving as the use of agency staff was extremely expensive so in reducing the number of agency workers and stabilising the workforce, savings would be made in the long term.

Councillor Francis asked if retention figures in relation to the position in 2015 compared to the current day could be provided and Ms. Carty agreed to circulate that information to Members.

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

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

Together for Children – Quality Assurance Framework

The Chief Executive of Together for Children submitted a report (copy circulated) requesting Members to consider a presentation on the development and operation of the Quality Assurance Performance Framework developed by Together for Children to improve social work practice and the quality of the service provided.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Sue Carty, Director of Quality and Performance gave the Committee a presentation which provided details on the Quality Assurance framework which offered a comprehensive view of service through the triangulation of multiple sources of evidence at a point in time and made recommendation to drive improvement.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

Members were taken through the presentation being advised of why the Assurance Framework had to change as there was too much emphasis on data and that there needed to be a more holistic approach with a stronger emphasis on quality rather than data. The Committee were advised that areas of risk were identified from the Business Plan and then areas were 'temperature checked' at any point in time. The three areas of defence used would be managers assurance, quality and assurance reporting and assurance and validation from external sources.

In closing, Ms. Carty advised that there was a quarterly programme of work and that reports were provided to the board and the Council as part of the contract with them, where key areas of further development would be outlined. This would then form part of the self-assessment for Ofsted monitoring visits.

Councillor Smith asked how this framework would impact on the performance monitoring information the Committee currently received and was advised that the

data would still be produced in line with the key performance indicators, as this was part of the company agreement to report to the Council but Together for Children would now be able to give a more in depth and fuller picture in any of the particular service areas.

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

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

Corporate Parenting Annual Report

The Director of Children's Social Care submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented the Corporate Parenting Annual Report to provide assurance on the effectiveness for corporate parenting arrangements for children and young people in Sunderland.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Sheila Lough, Looked After Services Strategic Service Manager, presented the report which set out the work of the Corporate parenting Board 2018 advising that the Board take lead oversight in exercising the Council's responsibilities as Corporate Parent and ensuring that all Council policies reflect that.

Ms. Lough advised that the annual report had been published before the outcome for both the adoption and fostering services had been received from Ofsted and advised that since the publication of the annual report she could inform the Committee that both services had received a judgment of 'good'. She commented that this was the first time the services had been judged in their own right as an independent service within Together for Children and it was credit to both teams that they had achieved a 'good' judgement.

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

6. 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)

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report, advising Members of the Committee of the following two events for their diary:-

- i) meeting with Together for Children Staff at the Hetton Centre on 26th February, 2019; and

- ii) consideration of an item on apprenticeships at the Economic and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee at the City Campus, Sunderland College on 12th March, 2019.

Councillor Smith advised that she was still conscious that there were a number of items to be considered by the Committee over the remaining two meetings of the municipal year and that she would monitor, with the Scrutiny Officer, if a further extraordinary meeting was required.

- 7. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted.

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 15th January, 2019.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, advised that item no. 190103/323 – to approve the Together for Children Business Plan for 2019 and the future governance arrangements had been deferred from the notice of key decisions and that the decision would not be made at the meeting of Cabinet on 13th February, 2019.

Councillor Tye commented that he had thought that Members would be involved in the discussions around this item and Ms. Carty confirmed that they were looking to establish a Member Reference Group to consider the plan and Members would be invited accordingly.

- 8. 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.