

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 6th FEBRUARY, 2020 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Crosby, Francis, Hunt, Mann, F. Miller, Rowntree, Scanlan, Tye and K. Wood together with Ms A Blakey.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Chris Binding, Local Democracy Reporter, Sunderland Echo
Ms Jill Colbert, Chief Executive Together for Children and Director of Children's Services
Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate
Mr. Luke Hall, Sunderland Youth Council Representative
Mr Simon Marshall, Director of Education, Together for Children
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
Ms Helen Taylor, NEET Project Coordinator, Together for Children
Ms Kelly Woods, NEET Project Coordinator, Together for Children

The Chairman opened the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor McKeith and Ms Graham.

Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 9th January, 2020

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 9th January, 2020 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Ms Blakey and Ms Graham in the list of those present.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Item 5 - Strategy to Reduce the Number of Children Looked After, Leaving Care and With Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Who are Not in Education, Employment or Training.

Councillor K. Woods declared an interest in the above item as she believed that the young person in the anonymised case study was known to her.

Learning and Development Plan – Current Status and Next Steps.

The Chief Executive, Together for Children, submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced the item and informed Members that in view of the timescales involved in the production and approval of the new Plan, a copy was not available for circulation with the agenda however it had been circulated prior to the meeting having been marked to follow.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Jill Colbert, Chief Executive, TfC presented the report drawing members attention to the circulated Plan. The Committee was informed that the Plan was a live document which had had many iterations. Subject to a couple of minor updates the Plan was as presented to and approved at last week's meeting of the Improvement Board. The Plan contained a combination of strategic and operational actions for both TfC and Partners.

In response to an enquiry from the Chair, Ms Colbert apologised that the glossary had been omitted from the document and advised that FGC referred to Family Group Conferencing. An FGC was a mediated formal meeting between family members and other officials such as social workers and police regarding the care and protection of a child. FGC had been developed in New Zealand as a device to enable the whole family, including extended family members, to help make decisions about the best way to support the family and take care of their child.

In response to a request from Councillor Mann, Ms Colbert confirmed that she would circulate the Plan's Glossary to the Committee.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Tye, Ms Colbert advised that the Plan would be formally ratified by Ofsted and they would use it as a tool to monitor and track progress however it wouldn't be their main priority. The focus of their attention would be an investigation on the ground to assess whether they believed improvement was happening.

The Chair referred to the following action on the Plan – 'Implement Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub arrangement to strengthen multi-agency information sharing and decision making' and the commentary which stated, 'MASH model is in place and partners continue to refine the processes around urgent decision making. Common issues remain: rapid access to partners information and volume of contacts'. The Chair asked where the issues lay in relation to the speed of the process? Ms Colbert advised that it centred on navigating the complex and diverse systems used within different departments of the NHS to store patient records. Gaining access to these records could be time consuming. Discussions were ongoing with NHS partners regarding establishing what information the MASH would require urgently during the initial 4 hour window and what could wait until later.

In response to concerns raised by Councillors Crosby and Francis, Ms Colbert explained the situation behind the different statutory offers in respect of children and

adults and how young people in the care of the City Council could remain in its care until the age of 25. She explained that there were different criteria and thresholds that needed to be met between a child and an adult in order to obtain support. Children's Services would work with Adults Services in respect of the transition however in response to a direct question from Councillor Francis she confirmed that it could be possible that someone with mental health problems may leave care and ultimately become unsupported. In offering some comfort to Councillors Crosby and Francis, Councillor K. Wood stated that in her experience the 'Next Steps Workers' would 'go the extra mile' to ensure that this did not happen.

Councillor Francis referred to paragraph 3.2 of the covering report which stated that 'It is imperative that a revised plan remains focused on the role partners play in delivering services to children and families across Sunderland, including the Council' and asked what this entailed. Ms Colbert advised that the safeguarding process worked but could be even slicker if the access to appropriate information could be made quicker. She confirmed that partners had a high level of commitment to the system, but the Council needed to help them to understand what was required of them. Councillor Francis asked that the Committee received update reports in respect of this and on any blocks preventing progress. Ms Colbert replied that such issues would be picked up in this report on a regular basis.

Councillor Rowntree referred to the following action on the Plan – 'Strengthen strategic governance and reporting mechanisms between the Council and TfC Board to ensure Board Members can exercise their accountability accordingly'. She asked why the action had been delayed and how it would help to improve performance going forward. Ms Colbert advised that the Performance Improvement Board was now in place and had held two meetings since its inception. The previous arrangements had been stood down. All representatives reporting to the Board did so on a granular level of detail. It would help generate improvement as it would corral resources and created an environment where partners could grasp a clear view of TfC practices.

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

2. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted.

Strategy to Reduce the Number of Children Looked After, Leaving Care and With Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Who are Not in Education, Employment or Training

The Chief Executive, Together for Children, submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a powerpoint presentation to update the Committee on the strategy to reduce the number of children looked after, leaving care and with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Ms Helen Taylor and Ms Kelly Woods, NEET Project Coordinators took members through the presentation. Members were briefed on a pilot scheme, the overall aim

of which, was to improve access to vocational education, training and employment for vulnerable young people who were looked after, care leavers or have special educational needs & disabilities (SEND); to increase participation and reduce the number who were NEET.

The pilot project had three workstreams:-

- i) Governance Group – which had responsibility for strategic planning and evaluation of the project.
- ii) Mapping/Networking Group – focussing on the mapping of current provision, identifying potential gaps, communicating opportunities and employer engagement.
- iii) Finance & Resources Group – tasked with identifying current funding and resources (taking a partnership approach) and how these could better support vulnerable young people across the city.

Members were briefed on what worked well (partnership working, developing links with employers, sharing information and responding to the young person's voice). In respect of the challenges being faced these revolved around developing a clear dataset, working with a complex cohort of young people and securing real commitment from all organisations concerned. Ms Wood then provided Members with an anonymised case study in respect of 'Ryan' an 18 year old care leaver who had benefitted from the initiatives in the pilot.

Councillor Wood advised that she believed that 'Ryan' was someone who was known to her and therefore wished to declare an interest in the item.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Crosby regarding the number of young people leaving care who were NEET, the meeting was informed that the exact figure was not to hand. Ms Colbert advised that the data was processed via a regional data hub and presented as a proportion. Mr Marshall advised that what was important was finding a way to expand from assisting the young care leavers to covering the wider cohort of NEETS in Sunderland.

Councillor Tye referred to the financial incentives available to employers who took on care leavers citing the £3,500 available in Redcar and asked if anything similar was available in Sunderland. Ms Woods replied that the scheme Councillor Tye referred to was a national one and therefore was available to Sunderland businesses also. What was important was being able to promote the offer so prospective employers knew it was available. In response to an enquiry from Councillor F. Miller, Councillor Tye advised that a young person would be paid the minimum wage on a sliding scale starting at £3.90 per hour in the first year.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Hunt as to whether the project was a pilot scheme or a permanent programme, Mr Marshall advised that the programme had been driven in response to the 16-18 and 18-21 inspections, the former had been good and the latter not so. Money had been found to second Ms Woods and Ms Taylor to deliver the project however the challenge was now to establish it as part of the mainstream. Mr Marshall advised that this was the intention even if it required cuts to be made elsewhere.

In response to an enquiry from the Chair as to how they intended to keep the Committee updated on the programme, Ms Woods and Ms Taylor advised that they would be happy to come back before the Committee whenever it wished as there were lots in the pipeline that they would like to share.

There being no further questions or comments for Ms Woods or Ms Taylor, the Chairman thanked them for their presentation and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the contents of the report and presentation be received and noted and that update reports be submitted to the Committee in due course.

Special Educational Needs Services - Update

The Chief Executive, Together for Children, submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an update on Special Educational Needs services within the city and the current position of preparations for the Local Area Inspection of SEN services.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Simon Marshall presented the report and drew members attention to the following 3 documents which had not been included in the agenda hard copies because of their size but had been made available electronically instead.

- i) the SEND update report presented to the recent TfC Improvement Board
- ii) the SEND Strategy document
- ii) the SEND Ranges Guidance document.

Mr Marshall advised that it was his intention to provide a workshop session for members to work through the documentation via an imaginary case study and in the meantime asked members to advise him of any additions or omissions they felt should be included.

Members were informed that it had taken a year to get to the current stage in the development of a SEND Strategy which identified the key priorities for the area and provided a framework for improvement. There had been a series of consultation events to support this activity providing children, parents, partners and other professionals from across the city with the opportunity to engage in the shared improvement work which was a key principle of TfC's ambition for co- production and ownership. Alongside the Strategy the SEND Ranges document had been developed to provide schools, multi-disciplinary services, colleges and others with detailed information on the 'graduated' approach to delivering the SEND Code of Practice.

Mr Marshall advised that a new online digital provision map was currently being trialled in 30 schools with the intention of making it standard across the city later in the year. The map enabled provision to be monitored much more closely and provided a transparent process with increased accountability for all.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Wood, Mr Marshall confirmed that the Service received a large demand from parents for their child to be 'labelled'. The

SEND ranges would provide a core framework for all professionals working with a young person and would give greater clarity for parents, families and carers in terms of what their child's needs were, and what each child was receiving. Councillor Wood welcomed the parental involvement and the use of technology.

Councillor Hunt referred to the consultation that had been undertaken with parents in developing the strategy and asked how parents with special needs themselves had been engaged. Mr Marshall advised that the Parent and Carer Forum were very good at this type of engagement and had undertaken a lot of this type of work on behalf of TfC. It had highlighted that what parents and children in this position wanted was information presented via short video clips with hyper links rather than having to wade through 200 page documents. Ms Colbert added that the Carer Centre had also been involved in this work and that Sunderland was lucky in having such great third sector partners.

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

4. RESOLVED that the information contained in the report be received and noted and that a members' workshop in respect of the SEND Rangers Guidance be organised in due course.

Annual Work Programme 2019/20

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with details of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2019/20

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Chair and Councillor Mann fed back to the Committee on the recent visit to Redhouse School and commented on the massive improvements made during a remarkable turnaround. It was noted that the behaviour of the pupils was exemplary.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Mann, Mr Diamond, Scrutiny Officer advised that a further visit to Sandhill was to be arranged on behalf of the Front Door Working Group. Councillor F. Miller advised that a colleague in Gateshead had offered to host a visit by the Committee to see the operation of the Front Door at Gateshead MBC.

5. RESOLVED that the work programme be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator 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 13th January, 2020.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor Francis stated that there were several pending decisions on the notice that could be of interest to the Committee. He advised that he would email the reference numbers to Mr Diamond in respect of those which he felt the Committee would welcome more information.

There being no further questions or comments, it was:-

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.

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.