

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 14th JANUARY, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Francis, G. Hall, Kelly, T. Martin, Oliver, D. Richardson, I. Richardson, Snowdon and Tye together with Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. D. Butler, Mrs. M. Harrop, Mrs. C. Hutchinson, Mrs. H. Kelly and Mr. S. Laverick

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Mr. H. Brown, Mr. M. Frank and Professor G. Holmes

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 10th December, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 10th December, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Commissioning of Youth Work

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report which updated Members with regard to the Commissioning of Youth Work provision from 2010 to 2013 to the value of £2.25m.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Kath Butchert, Integrated Youth Officer presented the report advising that there were twenty-four contracts out to tender, one for each ward with the exceptions of the Copt Hill ward and Houghton and Redhill ward and Castle, who would be sharing a contracted provision. In addition there would also be one citywide Black Minority

Ethnic contract awarded. The closing date for tenders to be submitted was early February, with assessments of them taking place on the 11 and 12 February.

Ms. Butchert advised that there was a minimum requirement to provide at least three youth session per week to cover each ward and that once the contracts had been awarded any gaps in provision would be filled with the use of the youth villages. She explained that they were building on the experiences of the last ten years where targets had been exceeded and that they had the same expectations for the new strategy which would be in place for April 2010.

Ms. Judith Hay, Head of Positive Contributions and Economic Well Being, informed the Committee that the Leader of the Council was keen to have Members involved as part of the appointment of contracts, where there were no conflicts of interest and as part of the legal process of tendering Members would need to have completed training before being involved.

Councillor Hall asked if Members would be involved on a ward or city level and was advised that this would be determined once the list of interested Member had been received. If only a few Members showed interest then they would spread out evenly across the city. If, on the other hand, there were a large number of Members wishing to be involved they would look at the best way to allocate Members to their most suitable areas of the city.

With regard to the amount of training involved, Ms. Hay advised that it was anticipated that two to three hours training would be required by Members and that she would speak with the training providers to ensure that there was the option to undertake the training at either a daytime or out of work hour's event.

Councillor Hall asked how the invitation to tender had been sent out and was informed that it had been published in the Sunderland Echo to invite any expressions of interest and then those people had been given access to a suite of documents including the specification of the tender. There had been a massive amount of interest from a wide range of organisations received.

In response to a query from Councillor Hall regarding the Citywide Black Minority Ethnic (BME) Contract, Ms. Butchert advised the citywide contract would ensure that the needs for the BME community were met but that within the specification of all of the neighbourhood youth projects it was indicated that projects must allow for full integration.

Councillor Hall went on to ask if the Council had attracted interest from organisations that had not previously been invited to tender and was advised that expressing an interest to tender was the first step and this had attracted a wide range of organisations, both those that were known to the Council and new organisations. She explained they were running a workshop to offer the opportunity to have questions answered on the tendering process and it would be interesting to see how many organisations following that submitted bids. For Members information the closing date for submitted bids was the 4th February, 2010.

In response to a question in relation to safeguarding from Mr. Laverick, Ms. Butchert advised that any organisation that won a contract had to demonstrate that they had a safeguarding policy which reflects that of the Council's. All staff, volunteers or members on their management committee must fit the same standard as the Council would expect of their own staff in the same position. Ms. Hay advised the Committee that last time around some projects had not been awarded to organisations because they did not have the relevant safeguarding policies in place.

Councillor Francis asked how many of the organisations were from outside the city and was advised that expressions of interest had been received from both regional and national organisations and that she would get a breakdown of the exact numbers forwarded to Members.

Councillor Tye commented that there had been a lot of good work undertaken in the last twelve months and asked how confident the service were in having the new contracts and projects in place for the target of 1st April, 2010. Ms. Hay advised that the only issue that may result in the target being missed would be if current providers did not secure the new contracts as there may be a need to transfer staff but even if this occurred they were still confident of hitting the target.

In response to a concern from Councillor Tye that Members could potentially bring personal views into the decision making process for the contracts, Ms. Butchert advised that following the training Members would receive they would understand that every submission was scored against a matrix of criteria by individuals and then the matrices brought together to ensure the procedure was fair for all.

Councillor D. Richardson referred to paragraph 2.1 of the report and the mobile youth provision and how he wouldn't want to see it go as it worked well. Ms. Butchert advised that the facilities would still be utilised in a different way but there would be more weekend events and mobile provision once the new projects were in place.

Councillor Stewart asked for the rationale behind combining two wards for one contract and if this would have any implications on the service. Ms. Butchert commented that both contracts would have been of value if separately provided in the wards referred to but to have separated the wards would be difficult down to boundary issues in those areas. Having the two wards under one contract would help to give a better level of service to the young people in those areas.

Councillor Stewart referred to the matrix and criteria for scoring received bids and asked if it would be clearly defined as to how to score and was advised that it was. He felt it may be beneficial for the Committee to have sight of the matrix. Ms. Butchert advised that any Members opting to be involved in the contracting process would have full information on this.

Councillor Stewart commented that in the past there had been issues around young people being counted more than once as being 'engaged' with a project therefore making the figures wrong and asked if this was better monitored now. Ms. Butchert advised that she had verified with Andrew Baker, Information Manager, that the

system that was in place now would only count each individual child once regardless of the number of projects they were involved with.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their report and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the Committee note and support the commissioning of youth work services within the five regeneration areas for a three year period from 2010 to 2013 and the further information requested be circulated to Members.

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) Performance April – September

The Chief Executive, Executive Director of Children's Services and Executive Director City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the findings from the inaugural Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and a performance update which included those areas identified by the Audit Commission (AC) as being the focus of improvement during 2010.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sandra Mitchell, Head of Performance Improvement and Policy presented the report advising that the figures in relation to NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) from November 2008 to November 2009 showed that the Council were the 5th most improved nationally which showed a strong improvement from last year.

In response to a query from Mr. Laverick, Ms. Mitchell advised that the number of young people falling into the 'not known' category in relation to NEET was very low at around 5%.

Councillor Francis referred to paragraph 5.1 of the report and asked how many young people the statistics actually referred to. Mr. Moore advised that there were currently just under 900 young people in the NEET category. The Chairman asked that the actual figure be sought and circulated to Members in comparison with similar local authorities and also in relation to previous years.

Councillor Richardson referred to the table at 5.2 of the report and asked why there were no figures for 2008. Mr. Andrew Baker, Information Manager, advised him that there was a national delay and other authorities had the same problem. He could inform the Committee the numbers were definitely reducing.

In response to a query from Councillor Kelly regarding the provision of additional training or education for young mothers, he was advised by Officers that the Council in partnership with other organisations such as Connexions offered various opportunities for young mothers like the B2B project to get them back into training and education programmes.

Councillor Hall referred to paragraph 5.1 of the report and noted that the percentage of NEET young people had reduced from 13.2% in 2008 to 9.7% in December 2009 and asked if the service knew where these young people had gone. Mr. Moore advised that they could have gone to a varying number of places such as training

courses within the colleges, or taken up an apprenticeship through targeted support from workplace providers and that the figures being calculated month on month were showing improvements.

In response to a further query from Councillor Hall regarding national initiatives Mr. Moore informed Members that Sunderland had been regarded as a NEET hotspot and received national advice on implementing strategies which had worked well.

Mr. Laverick asked if there were ways of factoring in the expected economic downturn with regard to the public sector and was advised by Mr. Baker that a lot of work had been undertaken collecting data from departments on a more regular basis and reviewing the NEET figure on a weekly basis. A lot of work was being carried out pulling all of the information and data together so that the service could keep up to date on tracking the current situation.

Councillor Oliver referred to paragraph 4.13 of the report and asked for further information on what was working or not with regard to reducing reoffending by young people in Sunderland such as the Phoenix Project. Mr. Moore informed Members that the Phoenix project was one which the Council had been involved with for some time and it was felt that the targeted approach helped young people understand the work of the Tyne and Wear Fire Service and gave them hands on experience of what fire fighters did, whilst the Youth Offending Service helped them understand the impact of their negative behaviour.

Young People who had taken part in the project commented that the taking part and practicing of the skills were what made the difference to them and the interaction with the fire service helped in changing their attitude. Councillor Oliver commented that he had heard it was a well disciplined project and that young people benefited from it greatly.

In response to a further query from Councillor Oliver regarding the NEET and the number of young people dropping out of education and training, Ms. Brown advised that one of the problems young people have is that they often make the wrong choice at the age of 16 so moving courses was an option to encourage less young people to drop out. Providers were supportive in helping young people to find the right choice of training or education for them and Mr. Laverick informed the Committee that the Connexions service were based in the college and worked carefully with young people to help them find the best fit for them.

Councillor Martin referred to the Phoenix project and advised that he had attended various events where the young people demonstrated what they had learned and were awarded with certificates. He had been impressed with their achievements and the team work and leadership skills they had shown and advised Members that the project allowed the young people to return to do a more demanding project up to three times if they had been successful in their first.

With regard to a query from Councillor Francis asking if young people were given a financial incentive to enrol on the project, the Officer agreed to write to him with further details.

Councillor Stewart referred to the number of permanent exclusions increasing from 13 to 22 and commented that it had previously been in single figures and asked if there was a reason behind the number creeping back up. Ms. Brown informed him that the number was still very low and that they worked hard with schools to ensure that permanent exclusions were a last port of call. She advised that all exclusions were carefully tracked and that the 22 exclusions were scattered amongst the Sunderland schools and not from one particular area.

Ms. Mitchell commented that compared to the regional and national figures, Sunderland's figure was extremely low but accepted that it looked like a significant increase in one year.

Councillor Martin commented that there had recently been an article in the Sunderland Echo where girls had been sent home from school for having the incorrect footwear on even though they had their school shoes in their bag to change into. Ms. Brown advised that Head Teachers could not exclude children on the grounds of uniform which the 2009 guidelines were very strict and clear around. Ms. Dorothy Butler informed Members that she was Governor of the school the article referred to and that she would check the details with the school.

In response to a question from Councillor Hall regarding the youngest child to be excluded in the city, Ms. Brown advised that a fixed term exclusion had been given to a 5 year old but that there were a number of strategies in place such as using nurture units for younger children so as not to affect them detrimentally.

Councillor Oliver asked if further information could be given to the Members around the numbers of fixed term exclusions being given by schools and on the number of exclusions pupils receive to see if there was a pattern of repeat offenders. Ms. Mitchell advised that a record was kept of every incident by schools so they would have that information to circulate. Ms. Brown advised that you were more likely to see a pattern emerging from the fixed term exclusion data whereas permanent exclusions tended to be for a one off extreme event.

Councillor Stewart referred to work the Committee had undertaken in 2002 on exclusions and asked the Assistant Scrutiny Officer to gather the statistics from then and break them down into primary and secondary schools and also geographical area to circulate to Members for information.

It was agreed that due to the number of requests for further information on both NEETs and excluded pupils that each topic would require a report to be included in the work programme at an appropriate time.

Councillor D Richardson advised that the fire service had a short 10 minute video about the Phoenix Project which the Committee may wish to see and the Chairman asked that it be fit into the work programme where appropriate.

The Chairman having thanked the Officers for their report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the continued good progress made by the council and the Sunderland Partnership, as described in the CAA reports be noted and those areas requiring further development performances be actively managed.

Termly Summary Report from Concerns, Shared Intelligence and Ofsted Inspections

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) after it was agreed that Members would receive a termly summary report from the Head of Standards, following the presentation to the Committee in October 2009 on the Framework for the Inspection of Maintained schools in England from September 2009.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Lynda Brown, Head of Standards and Mr. Chris Campbell, School Improvement Officer presented the report advising that more detailed information could not be included in the report so as not to single out or identify any of the schools.

Councillor Oliver commented that it was a useful report and asked if the Officer could further pinpoint any common issues suffered by the schools in question. Mr. Campbell advised that information was collated through the Shared Intelligence meetings and the most common issues raised were around attainment standards and progress, the quality of teaching and occasionally safeguarding. He also commented that the section tended to have internal intelligence around any financial implications the school may be facing.

Councillor Stewart asked how often the information was updated and was advised that the Shared Intelligence was monthly and that Human Resources fed information into this, with the decision then being made if there is a concern who is best to deal with it and follow it up to offer the best support.

Councillor Stewart asked if the report could include what the concerns were for each of the schools and asked if this could be done retrospectively for this report and in future reports.

4. RESOLVED that the report and the comments made by Members on the content of the future termly reports be received and noted.

Strategic Planning Process 2010/2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) apprising the Committee of the proposals for the strategic Planning Process 2010/2011 and the role of the Committee in the process.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Jon Beaney, Policy Manager presented the report identifying key points for Members to note and explaining that the first stage of the process had been undertaken by all Heads of Service completing self-assessments, which had identified any issues that would be of relevance to the Scrutiny Committee and would form part of the basis of the service improvement planning.

Councillor Hall was pleased to see that it was cross-directory working had been referred to as an important issue and felt that it was an area that had needed addressing. Mr. Beaney advised that it was a simple approach whereby a service was asked what they felt were cross-cutting issues for them so that they could be checked.

Councillor Hall commented that he would hope that further developing partnership working to deliver on behalf of the Council would offer value for money but not at the cost of a reduction in the quality of delivery as he knew of experiences where this had happened before. Mr. Beaney reassured Members that the quality of a service would be a priority to ensure that it remained the same, if not better and would be a key driver for any partnerships formed.

Mr. Laverick asked how best practice from other areas was included in the process and was advised that CIP template was made up of two sections, the first being information gathering and the second section being around actions on that information. He explained that they had requested examples of Government policies and a benchmark so that a service could provide evidence towards their information provided. Best practice had been shared with other local authorities and there was a facility set up by the Audit Commission whereby you could get in touch with other authorities as they were to ensure experiences were being shared.

5. RESOLVED that the report and the key issues identified by the self-assessments undertaken in respect of services of relevance to the Committee be received and noted.

Review of Councillor Call for Action Mechanism and Introduction of a Selection Criteria for Dealing with Issues of Local Concern – Further Revisions to Initial Proposals

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) seeking the views of the Committee on the proposed revision of the current Councillor call for Action mechanism and proposed introduction of a selection criteria for dealing with non-mandatory referrals for use by the Sunderland Partnership, Scrutiny Committees and Area Committees to address issues of local concern.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

In response to a query from Councillor Martin, Ms. Karen Brown, Scrutiny Officer advised that any request would not go to the relevant Area Committee as the legislation specifically stated that it would go to the relevant Scrutiny Committee who could then invite an Area Committee or Cabinet Member to investigate the issue

further. She advised that a form would be provided in the Scrutiny Handbook for Members to complete to make it easier to provide all of the relevant information.

Councillor Hall raised concerns over the length of time a Councillor Call for Action could take to be resolved if it went from one committee to another and then to a Directorate or Service for input also. He asked that Officers try to circumnavigate genuine calls for action from those issues that could be looked at and acted upon in a short space of time.

6. RESOLVED that the Committee considered and received the draft proposals as set out in the report.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 January 2010 – 30 April 2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider the relevant items of the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 January 2010 – 30 April 2010.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that the Executive's Forward Plan for the current period be received and noted.

Work Programme 2009/2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching the current work programme for the year 2009-2010.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

8. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted and items as discussed previously in the meeting be added where appropriate.

The Chairman then drew the meeting to a close having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and their contribution to the meeting.

(Signed) P. STEWART,
Chairman.