

Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee

18 March 2019

Present: Councillor M Thirlaway (Chair)
Councillors L Bell, P Brooks, J Cassidy, C Davis,
J Kirwin, M Madden, A Newman, J O'Shea, P Oliver
and S Phillips.

Rev. M Vine Church Representative

CES35/03/19 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Brockbank and K Clark and Mrs M Ord, Parent Governor Representative.

CES36/03/19 Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's Constitution the appointment of the following substitute member was reported:

Councillor J O'Shea for Councillor K Clark.

CES37/03/19 Declarations of Interest

Councillor P Brooks declared a non-registerable personal interest in relation to item 7 - Support for Foster Carers (minute CES41/03/19) as she was a Foster Carer for North Tyneside Council.

Councillor C Davis declared a registerable personal interest in relation to item 7 - Support for Foster Carers (minute CES41/03/19) as she was a member of the North Tyneside Adoption Panel.

CES38/03/19 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 January 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CES39/03/19 Employment and Skills Strategy

The Sub-committee received an update on delivery of the North Tyneside Employment and Skills Strategy in 2017 and 2018. This report provided information on the changing strategic context for employment and skills; the current position in North Tyneside; the work undertaken and progress made on the priorities for action since January 2017.

Nationally there were record levels of employment, pressures on demand for skilled labour

and shortages in construction and technology, this combination did constrain growth and led to greater disparity between high and low skill workers. There were challenges around in-work poverty and progression and the uncertainty of Brexit. Regionally the focus had been on employer led training (apprenticeships and T-Levels); the North East Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and its focus on 'More and Better' jobs; and the creation of the North of Tyne Combined Authority.

In North Tyneside business support had focussed on inward investment; the Business Factory; the North Tyneside Business Forum and recruitment support. The Borough had high employment but there were skills gaps and skills shortage vacancies. Other issues were concentrated pockets of worklessness; dispersed deprivation; in-work poverty; and progression.

The Sub-committee was informed that the Employment and Skills Service consisted of a number of key services including Connexions, employability projects and the Adult Learning Service. The Employment and Skills Strategy 2018-2021, *Raising Aspirations and Realising Ambitions*, priorities for action were:

- Delivery of a universal offer for young people
- Delivery of a targeted offer for young people and adults
- Delivery of a universal offer for employers
- Delivery of a targeted offer for employers
- Trying to be an exemplar employer
- Influencing the local, regional and national picture

It was reported that NEET rates continued to be low (2.9% in 2018) and 89.9% of schools were rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted with 86.9% of pupils in Good or Outstanding Schools. More work was needed on Secondary performance but progression rates were good. There was targeted support for SEND, Looked after Children and Care Leavers with a high participation rate (91%) for vulnerable groups and an increasing number of Apprenticeship starts. Adult learning delivery was cost effective, high performing and the Employability Partnership delivered a range of projects to support the unemployed.

There was business engagement in schools via the North East LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership), the Authority and North Tyneside Learning Trust (NTLT) with annual recruitment events across the Borough and targeted training to support particular sectors. Work with STEM businesses to identify and address demand was on-going but there was high participation in learning rates with targeted support to improve skills and to support particular employers and sectors. All contracts procured by the Authority included a requirement to identify additional social value and the Authority had an established apprenticeship recruitment and training offer.

The Authority had a lead role in the development and delivery of the Inclusive Economy portfolio for the North of Tyne Combined Authority, including the provision of local data intelligence and were members of local and regional policy forums. The Town Centres Task Group was chaired by the Deputy Mayor to support economic prosperity within the town centres. The group included representation from the three town centre chambers of trade, the shopping centres and other key stakeholders.

Members congratulated the service on its NEET rates and clarification was sought on what follow up action was taken if a young person left a course half way through. Members were reassured that each Connexions officer had a case load of children between the ages of 16-

18 and 'kept' the children when they left school. If a young person left a provider they would notify the service and the case worker would get in touch with the young person and offer help. The cut off for this support was their 18th birthday.

Reassurance was sought that the findings of the Hays Global Skills Index that there was a growing talent mismatch between the skills workers possessed and those required by employers (with an overall talent mismatch at its highest point since the index began in 2012) was being monitored, particularly in light of recent developments in Artificial Intelligence and driverless vehicles. The Sub-committee was informed that a Digital Inclusion Officer had begun work on how the Authority used technology to deliver learning and was in the early stages of engaging with universities and partners about future developments and the future world of work.

Members enquired whether the 16% of apprentices that did not gain employment after the conclusion of their apprenticeship were all from the same area of work and what policies and/or procedures were in place to allow small, local business to be able to compete in the social value aspect of a procurement exercise against a larger regional or national company. The officer did not have the details to hand and undertook to provide the answers in writing. The Senior Manager from Employment and Skills stated that he knew that work about engaging with small businesses and the voluntary and community sector had begun and the team were aware of the success of Preston City Council in this area.

The Chair thanked the Senior Manager from Employment and Skills for his presentation and attendance at the meeting. He was also requested to convey the Sub-committee's thanks and best wishes to Angela James, the Assistant Director for Education, Skills and Employment, who was retiring from the Authority.

It was **agreed** (1) to note the information regarding the provision of Education in North Tyneside; and
(2) that the additional information requested above be obtained and sent to the Democratic Support Team and circulated to all Members of the sub-committee.

CES40/03/19 Prevention and Early Help

The Sub-committee received a report from the Senior Manager Prevention and Early Help on the work of the service and an update on the Troubled Families Programme and the objectives for the final 12 months of the programme.

The Troubled Families Programme had not only been about how the Authority had shaped the identification of, and intervention with, the most vulnerable families; but it had also enabled the Authority to look at how it could work with partners in a different way to ensure that support was offered to these families at the earliest opportunity. It had been used to inform and improve the approach as well as the use of data.

The Prevention and Early Help Service's aim was for all children, young people and parents to be confident and independent through their own personal resilience and the support of social networks. This was not always possible without support provided by a range of services delivered by a variety of partners which were available to all (early years, health services, schools, play and youth provision) and effective, accessible, targeted or specialist services when needed.

This complemented the signs of safety (SofS) approach in terms of focussing on a families' strengths and networks to find resolution in the difficulties they faced. This approach had been embraced by the Locality Teams and they had already received positive feedback from families who were engaging with the process and evidencing outcomes. Part of this work had required an update to the Early Help Assessment (EHA) to ensure it had a SofS focus, which has been in place since September 2018 and was being used by all partners across North Tyneside. The EHA was a key document for all partners; it was not always an officer from the early help team who was the lead on an EHA; 46% were led by Family Partners and the Locality Team, 41% were school led and the remaining 13% were led by other partners.

The service had worked with school improvement within the 'Keeping Children in School' workstream and now sat on the school panel to suggest alternative support that could be put in place to prevent managed moves and/or exclusions. Schools were expected to have engaged in the EHA process before coming to the school panel to demonstrate all support avenues had been tried. Paediatric clinics were supported to ensure families' where children have additional needs were offered holistic support at the earliest opportunity through the EHA. In addition housing partners had been engaged to identify and support families' at risk of eviction early to provide a proactive support approach; this was being piloted in Howdon. A Young Carers Needs assessment had been developed and rolled out to all partners to ensure all Young Carers were offered a needs assessment with a plan to support any identified need. There had also been a review and update of the Early Help Pathway and the Drug and Alcohol Pathway.

In relation to the Troubled Families programme the Sub-committee was informed that as of 26 February 2019 the service have identified and attached over the expected number of families with 1,969 families attached to the programme. 'Additional' families would still be supported in the same way as this was how the service would demonstrate how it had mainstreamed the approach and how using the Early Help Assessment would continue to evidence positive outcomes for families.

The Authority had currently claimed for 750 families (51%) with a trajectory of claiming 100% of the 1480 by March 2020, the end of the programme. The most vulnerable families above this number would continue to be supported as this was the most important outcome regardless of the target attachment figures. With the programme ending in 2020 the on-going focus would be how the Authority continued to intervene and evidence the impact of the work with families beyond 2020. This would be evidenced through the continued use of EHA's and the impact of the changes and the interface with Children's Social Care and statutory assessments. Work would continue to ensure families' in the borough received the most appropriate support possible at the earliest opportunity.

Members sought further information regarding the work with schools around exclusions and managed moves and the level of support from the schools with this process; the counselling and mental health support available in schools for children; the support available to young carers and how they were identified; and whether there was any indication about further funding to continue the work of the troubled families programme going forward. All queries were answered by the Officers.

The Chair thanked the Senior Manager for Prevention and Early Help.

It was **agreed** (1) to note the progress of the work undertaken to date to achieve the Troubled Family Programme outcomes;

- (2) that the Sub-committee was satisfied as to the effectiveness of the approach and ability to demonstrate improved outcomes for families; and
- (3) that a report on Behaviour Management and Exclusion policies in North Tyneside be added to the provisional work programme of the Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee for the 2019/2020 municipal year.

CES41/03/19 Support for Foster Carers

The Sub-committee received a report which provided information on the recruitment of foster carers and the support provided to them.

The Sub-committee was informed that a key priority of the Authority's Reducing Children in Care strategy was to support children that need its care within the Local Authority, keeping children close to their family, friends and community networks rather than externally outside of the Local Authority boundary. The in-house offer was more efficient and effective than other forms of care however the service was currently experiencing some challenges in both recruiting and retaining foster carers.

As of February 2019 North Tyneside Council had corporate parenting responsibly for 288 children; of these 228 (79%) were placed by the fostering service. The target was to achieve 90%. The highest proportion of children in a foster care placements were aged 11 – 15 years; with 85 (37%) falling in that age band, of those 11 (13%) were placed with external agencies.

Placement stability was a key priority and in North Tyneside placement stability for children who had 3 or more placements in a 12 month period had marginally decreased from 12.9% in February 2018 to 12.2% in February 2019; however North Tyneside continued to have a higher percentage year on year against regional comparators and the national average.

Recruitment in North Tyneside remained an on-going issue; with foster carers being swayed by the enhanced terms and conditions being offered by neighbouring Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). North Tyneside Fostering Service are supported in their recruitment strategy by the Authority's Communications and Marketing Team and since April 2018 Officers had worked on a marketing strategy to increase foster carer recruitment. A recent development was the establishment of 'Fostering Road shows' which were 'pop-up' recruitment events. These were being piloted within leisure centres, alongside the more formal evening events.

The Fostering Service had a two stage recruitment process for potential foster carers. This strategy sustained a consistent approach for all applicants throughout the recruitment process, from the point of initial interest, through the assessment and to the point of recommendation at the Fostering Panel to the Agency Decision Maker for approval. The Fostering Service continued to meet the expected timescale of stage 2 of the assessment process within 4 months at 100%.

The core courses that all carers were required to undertake within a three yearly cycle were: Protecting Children Safeguarding Foster Carers course One; Protecting Children Safeguarding Foster Carers course Two; Recording; Attachment; Equality & Diversity; Solihull; Paediatric First Aid; Health and Equality Refresher; Child protection; Health and Wellbeing; Health & Safety; and Court Skills.

Alongside the Core Skills Training, bespoke training opportunities were now being afforded to carers as and when needed, rather than waiting for scheduled training. Examples of this included sessions in care homes on specific contact issues, behaviour management and attachment issues.

Work had begun on implementing a new financial model to encourage and support growth in internal foster care. Currently foster payments were made using a series of rates, which were aligned to need, age or related circumstance. The proposed fostering framework would include a new fee structure, alongside an enhanced offer of support to carers, which would streamline the current foster carer payment structure, address historic anomalies and where appropriate provide an enhanced offer. The new structure would pay for skills and incentivise foster carers to learn and develop in the role by introducing a payment structure linked to competency, skills and training; with Pre-Accredited, Accredited, Advanced and Specialist bands.

The Fostering Framework would also provide enhanced training opportunities for foster carers managing complex placements alongside increasing the number of foster care support groups. The Youth Offending Team, RHELAC (Raising Health and Education for Looked After Children) service and Health partners had all provided specialist training to carers. The REHLAC service also offered emotional support including counselling, drawing and talking and therapy in addition to support including analysis and advice around strategies to manage more challenging and complex behaviours. More formal training was also being offered as an option with some Carers completing diplomas in both level 3 and 5 in Children and Young People Workforce.

The Fostering Service was working towards going out to consultation to foster carers on the new framework in April 2019 with, subject to the outcome of consultation, implementation of the agreed changes in June 2019. Work on enhancing the offer over the last year had also led to North Tyneside foster carers being eligible for priority Ease cards and work was ongoing to explore whether foster carers could have their 'bedroom tax' paid for if the spare rooms available in their home was used for fostering.

It had been recognised that the transferring of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Assessments and post SGO support to the Fostering Service in January 2018 had significantly impacted on service delivery. The service has commenced some engagement activities with kinship carer groups to explore development of the offer to Special Guardians. This work was a priority for the service over the next 6 months.

In response to questions the importance of the borough's children being looked after by the borough's carers was reiterated and that the new fostering framework would increase stability for young people as once a match was made the carers get the support and development they needed to be able to cope with any difficulties in the future. The support and training available to foster carers was seen as more important than the fees they might get paid. In North Tyneside all foster carers received all the information the Authority held on a child before a placement was agreed to and a placement would not take place until a certain amount of information was known. New information could come to light after a placement had begun but the Authority would not withhold any information it has about a young person from a potential foster carer; the 'right match' applied to all parties. The support provided to foster carers when an allegation had been made against them was also explained and it was confirmed that their payments continued while the investigation took place and they had access to an independent social worker for support.

The Chair thanked the Fostering Service Team Manager for her presentation and attendance.

It was **agreed** to note the information from the Fostering Service Team Manager on the recruitment, retention and support for Foster Carers in North Tyneside.

CES42/03/19 Collaborative Working Sub Group Report

The Sub-committee received a report from the Collaborative Working Sub Group which had reviewed the collaborative working practices of the Authority to ensure they were fit for purpose and improving outcomes for children and their families.

The Sub-committee was requested to endorse the report and its recommendations and agree for it to be submitted to the next meeting of Cabinet on 1 April 2019.

The Sub Group had began its work in the early Autumn and had met with many organisations and officers to seek their views and to hear what was and wasn't working within the Authority and what improvements could be made. Evidence gathering had been finished in December 2018 and eight recommendations had been put forward.

The Sub Group had enjoyed meeting everyone who assisted them in their work for the report and were delighted with the commitment and enthusiasm shown. The Sub Group noted that overall the Authority had very good collaborative working relationships with its statutory partners, its neighbouring local authorities and internally. That there was some scope for improvement was reflected in the recommendations but in a challenging environment with competing demands the Sub Group was satisfied that collaborative working was providing benefit to the Authority. Overall the balance between collaborative working and ensuring the service for North Tyneside residents was the best it could be was right and the effort taken to achieve this balance should not to be underestimated.

It was reported that the usual procedure was that once a Sub Group report had been agreed by its parent sub-committee it would be submitted to Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development (OS&PD) Committee for its endorsement for submission to Cabinet. As the next scheduled meeting of the OS&PD Committee was not until 17 June 2019, the Chair and Deputy Chair of Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee had proposed that this report be submitted straight to Cabinet without first being endorsed by the OS&PD Committee. The OS&PD Committee's Terms of Reference allowed this. Paragraph 13 stated that the Committee had the responsibility to:

“Consider and either approve or reject any reports and recommendations made by a sub-committee for submission to Cabinet, Council, an individual or outside organisation unless:

- a) in exceptional circumstances, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee agree otherwise...”

By agreeing to submit the report to Cabinet directly the Sub-committee could expect Cabinet's response to the first scheduled meeting of the 2019/20 municipal year on 11 July 2019. If the sub-committee followed the usual procedure, the report would not be considered by Cabinet until 24 June 2019 and the response from Cabinet would not be reported back to the Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee until its meeting on 12 September 2019. The Chair and Deputy Chair of Children, Education and Skills Sub-

committee considered this to be an unnecessary delay and had sought OS&PD Committee's view on the matter.

It was reported that at the meeting of OS&PD Committee held on 4 March 2019 it was agreed that the Chair of the Committee could agree that any completed studies be forwarded directly to Cabinet once agreed by the necessary sub-committee. The Chair of the OS&PD Committee had read a copy of this report and agreed that it should be submitted directly to Cabinet.

The Chair thanked Councillors Cassidy, Davis, Madden, Oliver and O'Shea for their work and attendance at the meetings.

It was **agreed** to endorse the report and its recommendations and approve its submission to Cabinet on 1 April 2019.

CES43/03/19 Chair's Announcements

The Chair thanked Councillor P Brooks for her service to the Sub-committee and the Council as she was standing down from her position as Councillor for Preston Ward.

On behalf of the whole Committee, the Chair thanked Ms Elizabeth Kerr, Democratic Services Officer, who was leaving the Authority after thirteen years' service and wished her well in her new role at the North of Tyne Combined Authority.