SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Children, Young People and Family Support
Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 27 September 2012

PRESENT: Councillors Gill Furniss (Chair), Andrew Sangar (Deputy Chair), George Lindars-Hammond, Talib Hussain, Karen McGowan, Mohammad Maroof, Lynn Rooney, Nikki Sharpe, Stuart Wattam, Rob Frost and Clive Skelton

Non-Council co-optees   Jules Jones, Paulette Kennedy and Alison Warner

1.   WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

1.1   The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and outlined the housekeeping and fire evacuation arrangements. Members welcomed Paulette Kennedy to the Committee, as the newly appointed Parent Governor Representative.

2.   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

2.1   Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Keith Hill and Colin Ross, and also from Joan Stratford and Gillian Foster (co-opted members). No substitutes were appointed.

3.   EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

3.1   No items were identified.

4.   DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

4.1   There were no declarations of interest on agenda items.

5.   MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

5.1   The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28th June 2012 were approved as a correct record, and there were no matters arising.

6.   PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

6.1   There were no public questions or petitions submitted to the meeting.

7.   RAISING OF THE PARTICIPATION AGE

7.1   The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, with regard to the Raising of the Participation Age. In attendance for this item was Tony Tweedy (Sheffield City Council), and Andy Barrs and Lynne Hilson (Sheffield Futures).

7.2   Mr. Tweedy outlined the significant changes which were planned around

information, advice and guidance available to students around careers advice in schools. This service would now be bought in by individual schools and would vary across the City. He outlined several key changes which had either occurred recently or were planned to go ahead, such as the abolition of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (E-Bac).

7.3   Mr. Tweedy stated that it was felt by some that the current 5 A*-C GCSE grade standard demotivated young people who were not very academic, and the E-Bac would focus more upon a young person's employability, rather than just on their academic credentials.

7.4   There had been changes seen in post-GCSE trends already, with fewer students who achieved the required grades taking up University places, largely (it was thought) due to the fees increase.

7.5   Sheffield already boasted the largest vocational programme in the UK, and now there was a national drive to promote apprenticeships, especially in small to medium sized businesses, as currently only 10% of this sized business offered the opportunity of an apprenticeship. Members felt that often these businesses did not know enough about apprenticeships in order to make them available, and that more information for employers was required in this area.

7.6   There was a rising level of young people nationally who were not in education, employment of training (NEET), although the term 'NEET' was being phased out, as young people did not want to be categorised in this way. It was not yet clear what NEETs would be called in the future.

7.7   It was noted that it would be compulsory for young people to be in some form of education or training until they were 17 by 2013, and this would increase to 18 years of age by 2015. It was essential that there were enough training/ apprenticeship/ educational places available in the system in order for this to be feasible. A figure of 98% of young people engaging with this by 2013 had been set locally in Sheffield. It was noted that Dee Desgranges, Sheffield City Council, had been leading on this strategy at a national level.

7.8   It was essential to understand the NEETs cohort and analyse the reasons why these young people became NEET in the first place. It was essential to get the mix and balance of provision right in order to offer suitable places.

7.9   Mr. Tweedy detailed several groups who were at risk of becoming NEET and who were identified in the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI). This included young people with learning difficulties, teenage parents, young carers, and young people who had suffered major trauma. It was essential to identify young people in these categories at an early stage in order to put appropriate interventions in place.

7.10   Schools were now responsible for buying in their own careers guidance services, and Sheffield Futures were currently offering one 'free' day per week per secondary school, although the funding for this offer was due to terminate at the end of March 2013. Members wished to know what was in place for when this

offer ended.

7.11   Members commented that although the careers service was 'information rich', it was often 'guidance poor, with students coming home with vast quantities of information, but almost too much to digest and make the best decision. This information overload could be overwhelming for young people.

7.12   It was also noted that the Secretary of State had recently removed the obligation for schools to offer work experience to Year 10 pupils, and that the work experience offer now varied dramatically across the City.

7.13   It was noted that additional information sessions were being commissioned through Sheffield Futures' Community Youth Teams for young people from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) as the NEET cohort in Sheffield had a disproportionately large number of young people from BME backgrounds. Sheffield Futures were also developing a parents' guide advising parents on the type of questions they should be asking with regard to careers guidance for their children. In terms of schools receiving high numbers of 'new arrivals' especially from the Roma/ Slovak community, increased dialogue was required to ensure that these schools had sufficient resources in place in order to handle this influx of students.

7.14   Members asked whether any action would be taken against young people who did not engage with education or training up to the new age of participation, and it was confirmed that if the NEET level was unacceptably high, the Department of Education would intervene, although fines for parents had been stopped.

7.15   Members were keen that user-friendly terms were adopted to replace confusing acronyms such as NEET and RONI. With regard to NEET figures, Mr. Tweedy confirmed that the number of NEETs had decreased year on year until 2007, whereupon the numbers had started to increase, largely due to the global recession, and locally, the disassembling of Sheffield Futures. Sheffield Futures was now being reconstructed with a more streamlined structure; although it was acknowledged that a great deal of expertise had been lost from the organisation in the process. These Community Youth Teams had a named worker per secondary school in Sheffield.

7.16   Members wished to know how the 'quality assured providers' referred to in the report were defined, and Mr. Tweedy outlined the process which Sheffield City Council followed in order to ensure these quality providers, which included specific tender requirements and careful management of all contracts. Ofsted had commented that Sheffield had very rigorous and robust structures in place for this process.

7.17   It was also hoped that, in future, there would be an improved procedure around managed moves from one work placement to another, if a young person's placement was not working out for some reason.

7.18   It was emphasised that the Raising the Participation Age strategy was not just about retaining young people in education; it was also about finding suitable

training, volunteering and work experience placements.

7.19   Members wished to know more about the potential impact of the Baccalaureate, and requested that the Committee keep an eye on these developments.

7.20   It was clarified that there was already a great deal of work taking place City-wide to utilise the two City Universities as resources for learning mentors, and some A-level engineering courses were already being delivered by the University of Sheffield.

7.21   Members asked about the creation of 'free schools' across the City and it was confirmed that these free schools were a Coalition Government initiative which were outside of the control of the Local Authority.

7.22   Members were concerned that the removal of EMA would deter young people from staying on into further education. There needed to be a robust system in place to ensure that this did not happen.

7.23   It was confirmed that Sheffield Futures had specialist staff working within the teams to deliver services to school children with learning difficulties and special educational needs. Members requested a breakdown of information to show what all schools across the City were providing in terms of information, advice and guidance.

7.24   It was confirmed that the City Wide Learning Body (CWLB) were keeping a watching brief upon the topic of information, advice and guidance in their work programme, and this would also be a topic to be considered by school governing bodies.

7.25   Andy Barrs extended an invite to all Members to come and see the work of the Community Youth Teams out in local areas.

7.26   **RESOLVED:** That the Committee

(a) requests the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families to provide a table of information upon what all schools across the City are currently doing about developing their own information, advice and guidance provision, and

(b) requests the Scrutiny Policy Officer to circulate a formal invite to all Members from Sheffield Futures for a visit to Community Youth Teams.

8.   FOSTERING AND ADOPTION

8.1   The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, with regard to the latest developments in the area of Fostering and Adoption. In attendance for this item were Jon Banwell and Liz Spaven, Sheffield City Council.

8.2   Mr. Banwell reported that the Government were making changes nationally to adoption processes, in that the Government wanted to see the process speeded

up. A new 'adoption score card' had been produced for this purpose.

8.3   Members requested to see a copy of the new score card, and were also keen that the success of adoptive placements was not compromised by trying to rush adoptions through. It was essential not to introduce situations where adoptive placements may break down just to hit Government targets. Sheffield currently had a very low number of adoptive placement breakdowns, and Members were very keen that this success continued.

8.4   Mr. Banwell reported that no placements would be compromised just to meet targets, and that Sheffield had very robust processes in place, with no issues being picked up by Ofsted. He added that all permanency case plans were monitored on a monthly basis, and that the tracking of each case was very clear.

8.5   Mr. Banwell added that 2011/12 had been a fairly poor year in terms of adoptions, and that this could potentially be linked to the global recession. Nationally, there was a shortage of adopters, although Sheffield had a high number compared with other cities across the UK. A local campaign was to be devised to increase numbers of adopters, and Members wished to input into this.

8.6   Some Members were disappointed that the role of the Adoption Panel had been diminished, as it had previously comprised ten members, and now had a quorum of just three. Mr. Banwell said that the situation was not ideal, but that he was still confident Sheffield had sufficiently robust systems in place in order to effectively approve adoptive placements.

8.7   It was noted that children who were in custody were now classed as Looked After Children (LAC). It was hoped that Sheffield could retain as many of its LAC within the City boundaries as possible, to save money and provide better support to them.

8.8   Work was taking place to increase awareness of adoption/ fostering amongst BME communities, such as a recent event held at the Pakistani Muslim Centre. It was also noted that the religious and cultural wishes of the children were always respected throughout adoption. Increased awareness work around single people being able to adopt was also ongoing.

8.9   There was also an increased level of support being put into place to provide help to birth parents post-adoption.

8.10   Members mentioned that potential adopters/ fosterers may be put off by the 'red tape' involved with the process, but Mr. Banwell stated that a lot of this red tape had now disappeared, and he encouraged anyone to get in touch with the service who may be an interested party. He added that he and Ms. Spaven would be very pleased to come and talk to any interested groups.

8.11   It was noted that potential adopters with medical/ mental health problems did not preclude them from adopting, but that all factors would be taken into account in assessment, on a case by case basis.

8.12   It was confirmed that some foster carers who had previously been registered with external agencies were now coming back into the Sheffield 'in house' team, as better support was in place.

8.13   Members requested information about what was required by Sheffield City Council in terms of potential adopters/ fosterers.

8.14   Members thanked the officers for their update and the excellent work achieved by the service.

8.15   **RESOLVED:** That the Committee requests that the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families;

(a) provides a copy of the adoptions scorecard;

(b) provides statistics about national trends regarding adoptions;

(c) follows up a request from Members to have an input into the next recruitment campaign for adoptions, and

(d) provides further information about what Sheffield City Council are looking for in potential adopters/fosterers.

9.   POLICY UPDATE

9.1   The Scrutiny Policy Officer, David Molloy, provided a detailed policy update for Members upon school funding reforms, and the new arrangements which would be put into place for 2013/14.

9.2   He also commented that Members had requested a joint Scrutiny meeting with the Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee to discuss the future role and development of apprenticeships in the City.

9.3   There had also been a request from the Youth Council to attend the Committee on an annual basis.

9.4   James White, Assistant Director, Policy and Performance, then provided Members with an update about the controversy surrounding the marking of some GCSE papers over Summer by the AQA examination board. He stated that it had not been decided as yet whether there would be a legal challenge by Sheffield, but he would keep Members posted on the situation.

9.5   A further issue was raised by a Member regarding child sexual exploitation and safeguarding issues in Rotherham, and whether there were any links to Sheffield.

9.6   **RESOLVED:** That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be requested to;

(a) investigate the need for a joint Scrutiny meeting with the Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee to discuss

the future role of apprenticeships in the City;

(b) facilitate a request from the Youth Council to attend the Committee on an annual basis;

(c) keep Members posted on the situation regarding the AQA examination remarking, and

(d) further investigate an issue raised by a Member regarding child sexual exploitation and safeguarding issues in Rotherham, and whether there were any links to Sheffield.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

10.1 All to be held at 2.00 pm in the Town Hall- 25 October 2012, 22 November 2012, 24 January 2013 and 28 March 2013.

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