

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

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

Meeting held 19 November 2020

(NOTE: This meeting was held as a remote meeting in accordance with the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.)

PRESENT: Councillors Mick Rooney (Chair), Mike Levery (Deputy Chair), Julie Grocutt, Francyne Johnson, Alan Law, Anne Murphy, Joe Otten, Kevin Oxley, Colin Ross, Jim Steinke, Alison Teal, Garry Weatherall and Cliff Woodcraft

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

Sam Evans, (Diocese Representative - Non-Council Voting Member)
Peter Naldrett, (Parent Governor Representative - Non-Council Voting Member)

.....

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mike Chaplin, and from Alice Riddle (HealthWatch Sheffield, Observer).

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15th October 2020, were approved as a correct record and, arising therefrom, further to the resolution in Item 6 (Return to School in Covid-19 – Update on Schools Fully Opening), the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) reported that, (a) with regard to the request for the Executive Director, People Services, to examine matters which were of particular concern to the Committee and to report back thereon (paragraph 6.51 (c)), she would pursue the issue regarding the clarity in relation to the exams and assessments for pupils and students in primary and secondary schools, (b) with regard to paragraph 6.51 (d), it would be pertinent to wait until after this meeting for the Chair and Deputy Chair to write to the Sheffield Members of Parliament on the issues of concern raised at the meeting on 15th October 2020, so that the issues raised by the members of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet could be included and (c)

with regard to paragraph 6.51 (e) she had received the information concerning the return to school in the pandemic, including the webcast of the meeting, and would circulate this to all Members of the Council as soon as possible.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. SHEFFIELD YOUTH CABINET - IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHEFFIELD

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people in Sheffield, and setting out specific areas for recommendations from the young people.

6.2 In attendance for this item were five members of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet - Jude Smith, Nye Roberts, Rikzar Amin, Niamh Bailey-Smith and Isaac Wood, and Laura Hayfield (Head of Service, Youth Services), Emma Hinchliffe (Involvement Lead, Youth Services) and Sarah Stevens (Participation Development Manager, Youth Services). Councillor Jackie Drayton (Cabinet Member for Children and Families) was also in attendance.

6.3 Jude Smith stated that his constituents had raised two main concerns relating to accessibility to education and the pressures and stress they faced regarding their education. He stated that many pupils did not feel as though they were receiving adequate guidance or support when being set work online, and when either schools were closed or when pupils had been forced to self-isolate, and considered that teachers needed to be more hands on in this respect. He highlighted the problems faced by some pupils who, for whatever reason, found it more difficult to access the work online as a result of not having adequate IT provision, or who faced other problems, such as having to share rooms or equipment with siblings, or who lived in houses where they were affected by noise nuisance. In terms of their exams, Jude stated that many pupils were struggling for a number of reasons, such as increased pressure in terms of their own, and the teachers' expectations, particularly when having missed a large part of their studies. This was resulting in some pupils suffering stress and/or mental health issues. Although there was still a lot of uncertainty regarding exams, he considered that teachers were not preparing sufficiently in terms of the Central Assessed Grades (CAGs), and for all these reasons, many pupils believed that exams should be cancelled until after the pandemic, when they were in a position, in terms of adequate tuition and preparation, to start sitting them again. There were additional problems for Y11 pupils in that some were having careers interviews in and around the time they were sitting their mock GCSEs, and this presented a problem in that they struggled with which to prioritise.

6.4 Rikzar Amin referred to the problems being faced by those pupils who were having to make choices in terms of university, indicating that the deadline for applications, through UCAS, was 27th November 2020, which put a lot of pressure on them. Rikzar stated that due to the current situation, many pupils were being forced to

change their preferences due to not having the relevant grades. She added that, given the current situation regarding universities, in the light of the pandemic, some pupils were finding it difficult to decide whether or not they wished to go. She stated that some pupils had found the university open days very confusing, which had not helped, particularly given all the other difficulties faced in connection with the step up from 6th form to university.

- 6.5 Isaac Wood stated that pupils needed a lot more guidance at the present time particularly with regard to work experience as this was vital to help them with their progression from school to adult life. Isaac believed that many young people may suffer if they were not equipped with the necessary life skills, particularly with the current employment situation. Young people needed more and better careers advice regarding careers and higher education. Some pupils had not been able to apply for college due to them having to leave school earlier than planned due to the pandemic.
- 6.6 Niamh Bailey-Smith stated that many schools appeared to be focusing on pupils in Y10 and Y11 only, in connection with preparing pupils for their GCSEs, and not all schools were offering practical lessons, which would have an adverse effect in terms of the pupils' choices regarding further education and/or employment. Pupils, including herself, who wanted to take practical subjects, such as food technology, were being particularly affected, and were having to reassess their options. Niamh considered that pupils needed more guidance and support in terms of helping them choose their future options. She stated that some teachers were finding it difficult, in the circumstances, to provide the relevant support to pupils, for which she had sympathy. Niamh referred to the issue of many pupils suffering from stress and mental health issues due to the current situation, particularly those pupils who were not able to attend practical lessons, and stressed that more support was needed for such pupils.
- 6.7 Nye Roberts stated that some pupils were not only suffering due to problems of accessing on-line material, but some were suffering more than others in terms of the levels of support they were receiving from their parents and/or carers. Some pupils' parents and/or carers worked long hours, and were not able to help or encourage their children, and this made it very difficult for such pupils, particularly those whose mental health had been affected, to self-motivate themselves, which had an adverse effect on their progress.
- 6.8 Members of the Committee responded to the comments made/issues raised by the members of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet, as follows:-
- There needs to be more focus on pupil progression and guidance for pupils. Some pupils had fared worse than others in that some had spent more time out of school than others, and therefore suffered more due to the lack of practical tuition and guidance. This would also create disparity in terms of their ability to sit exams. University Open Days were crucial in providing the relevant advice and guidance for pupils wanting to make important decisions in terms of their future studies. Schools needed to provide better support and guidance to pupils to try to mitigate the many problems and disparities which

had been brought about by the pandemic. In addition, schools needed to start preparing verifiable evidence in terms of pupils' grade assessments in case exams are cancelled again.

- Several pupils had been put in a very difficult position in that they had not been able to attend any practical lessons at all. Young people learn in different ways, but the majority have a preference for practical tuition. Schools had been forced to implement a number of measures, such as additional cleaning and enabling social distancing, to enable practical lessons to continue during the pandemic. It was also acknowledged that it had been difficult for some pupils to get information and advice from some universities, and university staff needed to spend more time in schools to provide guidance and support to those pupils hoping to progress to university. Pupils should be assured that most universities had implemented extensive measures to provide a safe learning environment for students. The concerns raised with regard to the disparity in terms of pupils' home learning environment and IT provision were acknowledged.
- A number of City Councillors worked as School Governors, therefore could refer the issues now raised to future Governors' meetings. City Councillors could also raise the issue of pupil wellbeing and mental health with relevant partner groups and organisations.
- The apparent lack of planning by the Government in terms of exams was very concerning, and could result in having a major, adverse effect on pupils' wellbeing and mental health. It was unfair that some pupils may have to sit the same exams as others before them, without having received the same level of tuition. The Committee should be talking to Learn Sheffield and other relevant partner groups and organisations, in connection with highlighting this issue with the Government.

6.9 Members of the Sheffield Youth Council Cabinet reported further, and responded to questions raised by Members of this Committee.

6.10 Jude Smith welcomed the comments raised regarding the City Council working with relevant partners to highlight the severity of the issues facing pupils at the present time, and requested that the Sheffield Youth Cabinet be involved in such discussions. He considered that, in his opinion, pupils grades being solely based on exam results this academic year would not be fair, and suggested that pupils should be graded based on 50% on exam results and 50% on their coursework. Many pupils struggled with exams as it was, with the current situation only making this situation worse for them. Jude considered that, whilst the current system of CAGs was not ideal, the idea of pupils being graded based on their levels of tuition and how much disruption to their education they had experienced would be too complex a process.

6.11 Emma Hinchliffe raised an issue on behalf of a member of the Youth Cabinet who could not attend the meeting, indicating that pupils were facing problems in that they were not receiving adequate resources and learning materials when they

were forced to self-isolate. This also impacted on tests and revision across all year groups, not just Y10 and Y11.

6.12 Nye Roberts stated that there was a disparity between the levels of support for pupils at different schools. He was aware, when schools had been closed, of some teachers ringing their pupils at their homes, to help them plan their work, which helped the pupils considerably. Many pupils' sleep patterns were being adversely affected, particularly those who had been forced to self-isolate, which was making it very difficult for them when returning to school.

6.13 Rikzar Amin stated that many pupils were struggling with the dilemma of how much revision to undertake for exams, when not knowing whether they would be going ahead or not. There was a difference in requirements for those on traditional A-levels, which created added pressure.

6.14 Members of the Committee made further comments, as follows:-

- It was apparent that pupils were not receiving an adequate level of help and advice in connection with their studies and exams. There was an issue with pupils in Y9, in that they were still having to sit their mock GCSE exams, having missed six months of tuition.
- Members of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet should be invited to a meeting with representatives of Learn Sheffield and Chairs of School Governors to provide them with an opportunity to put forward their views, and such as to suggest possible solutions.
- Given the current employment situation, it was highly unlikely that pupils would be able to take part in any work experience schemes.
- The lack of certainty regarding the exams was a major cause of the stress for pupils, therefore it was important that a decision was made on this issue as soon as possible. It was important that schools shared knowledge with regard to the provision of support and guidance for those pupils who had been forced to study at home, in terms of best practice. This issue also needed raising with Learn Sheffield.

6.15 Councillor Jackie Drayton expressed her thanks to the members of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet and to this Committee for the opportunity to attend this meeting to listen to their views. She stated that, whilst the issues raised had been well documented in the media, it was very positive to hear from the students themselves. She stated that she would feed the comments raised back to Councillor Abtisam Mohamed (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Andrew Jones (Interim Director of Education and Skills) and Stephen Betts (Chief Education Officer, Learn Sheffield). Councillor Drayton also wished to express her thanks to Laura Hayfield, Sarah Stevens and Emma Hinchliffe for all their work in supporting the Youth Council.

6.16 In response to a further question raised by a Member of this Committee, Jude

Smith reported that there was a considerable amount of third party resources online which pupils could access, with some being available via their respective school subscriptions.

6.17 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet now submitted, on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people in Sheffield, together with the comments now made and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) expresses its thanks and appreciation to the members of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet, and the staff attending in support, for expressing their views so eloquently and candidly; and
- (c) requests that arrangements be made for the Chair and Deputy Chair, and the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) to meet with members of the Sheffield Youth Cabinet to agree on a set of outcomes based on the comments and views now expressed, as well as the suggested recommendations set out in their report, and to report back thereon to this Committee.

7. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

- 7.1 It was agreed that the draft Work Programme be circulated to Members of the Committee, and they be invited to comment there on, and such comments be incorporated in the draft Work Programme to be submitted to, and considered at, the next meeting of this Committee.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 8.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 21st January 2021, at 10:00 am.