

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 1 March 2023

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Colin Foster (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Linda Holt (Vice-Chair); Councillors Shan Alexander, Lou Ankers, Dickie Davies, Sue Glithero, Georgia Lynott, Becky Senior and Frankie Singleton.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 18 January 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interest which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

The following interest was declared:-

Personal Interests

| <u>Councillor</u> | <u>Interest</u> |
|--------------------------|--|
| Linda Holt | Agenda Item 5 (Minute Item 6) – ‘Portfolio Performance and Resources Report: Quarter 3 Update’ by virtue of her work for the Ministry of Justice which was referenced within the report. |

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. PRESENTATION - STUDENTS EQUALITIES COUNCIL

Members of the Equalities Council comprising students from Stockport College, Cheadle College and Marple Sixth Form College attended the meeting and provided a presentation to the Scrutiny Committee in relation to the benefits of and factors that affect the Association of Colleges ‘mind the skills gap’ and the role of further education including social mobility, skills development, statistics and how further education acts as a gateway of higher education and how further education acts as a gateway to the labour market.

Members of the Equalities Council highlighted a number of concerns associated with each of the chosen topics, and provided possible solutions and actions.

Further education statistics

- There are 277 colleges in the UK and 232 colleges in England, 163 of those are general further education colleges.
- In the Greater Manchester area there are around 10 colleges which provide further education to students at all ages.
- According to the annual report of Trafford College group for the year 2021, the achievement rate of aged 16 to 18 students and 19 plus students are 81.7% and 84.7% respectively.
- In Cheadle College and Marple Sixth Form College there are 925 and 574 students respectively.
- In Stockport College there are 2659 students in total including 1451 students aged 16 to 18.
- In 2019, of the 16 to 18 students in full-time education around 47% continued to general further education or other specialist colleges.
- 80% of students within the local colleges within the area continue onto further education, apprenticeships or employment. Of this more than 50% of the students continued onto further education and 21% secured employment.
- Within Stockport there are three types of further educational placements, school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and colleges.

Skills development

- Sectors which face a skills shortage include construction, health and social care services, hospitality and education.
- Before Brexit organisations were able to employ skilled workers for these sectors from the EU countries. However, after Brexit due to immigration laws the UK must now develop people faster and more efficiently to meet this skills shortage.
- Due to the pandemic many workers are opting for early retirement or leaving the sector due to burnout.
- That the career pathway for many of these sectors requires a university degree.
- Further education can act as an alternative or gateway to higher education.
- Vocational subjects allow students to enter the job market earlier with more specialised skills, however this can depend on the strength of the relationship between further education institutions and the industries.
- It is difficult to gain placements, internships and work experience as students are expected to find their own placements and some do not have the connections and some industries are averse to offering these opportunities due to risk.
- All colleges in Greater Manchester and the surrounding areas should open coherent learning pathways for students to have more options.
- Some students want to enter the job market without attending universities and should be able to complete apprenticeships through their local college who should have strong relationships with local and national industries.
- The Trafford College Group are working towards developing options for both more academic and more skilled routes.
- That whilst Traffic College Group has grown to offer many options, more growth was needed and with the help of the council we can inform, establish and offer more partnerships that can help widen the pathway for our students to thrive.

- That the council be asked to value the provision of further education and to include it in a three year skills improvement plan.

Social mobility

- Social mobility is a change in a person's and their families social-economic situation.
- There is upwards social mobility such as getting a university degree, downwards social mobility such as bankruptcy or losing your job, intergenerational mobility such as getting an unexpected inheritance and intragenerational mobility such as where you leave business success or legacy for your family members.
- In general students who study at level 2 or equivalent to A-levels and other courses may be more likely to receive higher wage returns than those who have not achieved this level of education.
- The Office for National Statistics report that in 2021 the median weekly earnings for full-time employees in the UK were £593 for those with no qualifications, compared to £710 for those with Level 2 qualifications or above.
- It is not possible to make a definitive statement about the wage returns of Level 2 students compared to GCSE level students without considering additional factors such as specific qualifications obtained, the industry and location of employment, and individual skills and experience.
- Further education can provide significant opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds by offering them access to higher education, vocational training and skill development that can help them secure better jobs, higher salaries and greater economic mobility.
- Further education institutions provide financial support to disadvantaged students to help them cover the cost of tuition, textbooks and certain living expenses such as transport making further education more accessible.
- Further education institutions often offer vocational training programmes and apprenticeships which can be beneficial for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have had access to the same level of work experience or training.
- Further education can provide students with access to networks and connections that can help them secure employment after graduation.
- Further education can provide the knowledge, skills and confidence required to pursue career goals and achieve a person's full potential.

Opportunities provided by college

- There are many activities and clubs provided by the college such as debate club, green college assembly, workshops with Stockport Council, Carbon Literacy course, internal event planning, student leaders, work experience support, student conference and 'Welcome Wednesday' with Age UK.

Why further education is important

- Further education colleges offer a wide variety of courses including higher education level diplomas and level 2 and level 3 courses specialised in specific roles.
- Further education sector has been identified as a potential solution to the UK labour market challenges.

- Further education provides routes to higher level study for young people from any background.
- Further education helps to develop your study skills like managing your time and developing your learning strategies for independent studies which will improve your confidence, help you success in higher education and enable you to work more effectively.
- Further education can offer vocational courses that lead to specific jobs such as hairdressing, plumbing and engineering.
- Further education can offer learning for leisure courses part time or in the evening which can help develop an area of interest or a hobby.

How further education acts as a gateway to the labour market

- We are expected to wear uniforms which will help with strict working environments where we are forced to wear a dress code.
- We are expected to act professional in all our lessons at college as our college offers a commercial salon for clients.
- For level 2 vocational courses and above, we are expected to complete 30 to 36 hours of work experience which prepares us for future employment.

The following comments were made/issues raised: -

- Committee welcomed the presentation and the individual contributions together with the honesty regarding their experiences across a variety of courses and personal lives.
- It was noted that the Committee has previously inquired in relation to the experience of young people in further education and their career and development pathways.
- The Committee commented on the importance of work experience and asked whether this was proving difficult for students.
- In response, it was stated that work experience within your subject area was important as it gave students an insight into the roles and helps determine whether this was the right career area, however a number of businesses were not offering work experience opportunities due to lack of space or resources.
- Thanked representatives for their feedback and were pleased to hear about the variety of support that the colleges offered.
- It was suggested that the experiences of the Student Equalities Council be shared with GCSE students to get them excited about studying.
- It was queried how apprenticeships have helped the students.
- In response, it was commented that the apprenticeship programme gave students the opportunity for both theoretical and practical study alongside paid employment.
- It was noted that the council was a major employer in Stockport with links with employers across the borough and could develop opportunities for enhanced work experience placements for students.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked the representatives of the Student Equalities Council for highlighting their concerns but also for providing possible solutions and actions that could be considered and actioned accordingly.

RESOLVED – (1) That the members of the Students Equalities Council be thanked for their attendance and presentation.

(2) That officers be requested to develop a work experience policy and implementation plan with partner organisations and local colleges.

5. ADJOURNMENT

At 6.47 pm it was

RESOLVED – That the meeting be adjourned.

The meeting reconvened at 6.50 pm

6. PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES REPORT: QUARTER 3 UPDATE

A representative of the Corporate Director of People and Integration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing the Quarter 3 Update Portfolio Performance and Resource Report (PPRR) for the Children, Families and Education Portfolio. The Quarter 3 update focussed on highlights and exceptions in relation to delivering the portfolio priorities since the Mid-Year Report presented to the committee on 23 November 2022 and included forecast performance and financial data (where this was available) for the portfolio, along with an update on the portfolio savings programme.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- In relation to the increase in exclusion rates, it was queried how the rates would be impacted by the plans for resource bases.
- In response it was acknowledged that the rates were too high and had been impacted by the pandemic as needs had escalated and linked to the key challenges relating to suspensions and absence rates from school. It was noted that this was a national trend and necessitated that need was identified by professionals at the earliest opportunity. In relation to the resource base places, the service was mindful not to too closely link the two issues as whilst placements were important so was the quality of the practice.
- It was noted that suspensions and exclusions exposed young people to a plethora of issues such as crime, substance misuse and marginalisation.
- It was commented that the data was caveated by the impact of Covid.
- In response, it was commented that the impact of the focus on the issues could be seen in the data as the outcomes were more resilient in Stockport through the pandemic than observed in other areas which was a testament to the quality of school leadership in Stockport and quality of work that had been done.
- Welcomed a focus in relation to the performance of disadvantaged pupils.
- In relation to the mental health in schools programme, Members requested additional information around the Stockport Asset-Based Assessment and queried whether the mental health in schools programme would be expanded to all schools in Stockport.
- In relation to the Safer Streets programme and Targeted Youth Support, Members requested additional information around the number of young people that had benefitted from the programmes.

- Welcomed the recruitment of the staffing vacancies in Adoption Support and queried whether the staffing issues were linked to the low number of looked after children adopted.
- In response, Members were advised that the two issues were not linked and whilst the numbers were low, the figures were inline with the national picture. It was commented that all efforts were made keep children with their immediate or extended family.
- In response to a comment relating to the increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders, it was stated that this was linked to the work to identify all available options for children where they were unable to remain in the care of their parents and it was considered a good option for ensuring that the child was not in the looked after system.
- It was queried when comparative data would be available. In response, it was commented that it would be easy to compare next years data with this years, whereas comparing 2022 data to 2019 was difficult. It was noted that there was a delay in the availability of national data sets and the impact of Covid would be seen throughout children's educational lives.
- Congratulated officers for their successful bid to be a 'Staying Close' pilot to support children leaving residential care and moving to independent living.
- Concerns were raised in relation to the number of 5-16 year olds in Stockport that were not achieving the minimum levels of activity and welcomed the focus within the Active Lives Implementation Plan to increase levels of physical activity
- In relation to the SEND Transport budget, it was queried why there had been an increase in SEN pupils requiring SEN transport.
- In response it was noted that the increase in and need of the SEN pupils had been accelerated by Covid and the increase observed in Stockport was inline with national trends. The transport requirements were also impacted by sufficiency and appropriate local placements would be beneficial for the young people and have the added benefit of reducing the transport costs.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

A representative of the Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining what Safeguarding Partners had done as a result of the arrangements, including on child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements had been in practice.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Commented on the importance of the Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report as the statement of children's social care in Stockport.
- Raised concerns in relation to the lack of clarity in adult safeguarding procedures and reference that Stockport was extremely low, in comparison with other similar areas in that the number of Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SAR), referred and undertaken.

- In response, it was stated that the service had undertaken through the Adults Partnership a review of the safeguarding reviews and data to understand the issues. The service had identified a need for more awareness raising with its partners when considering if a matter required a review and if learning was required.
- Congratulated the service for a comprehensive report summarising the good work across Stockport.
- In relation to the rise in presentations of looked after children at hospital in relation to their mental health, it was noted that there had been a challenge for CAMHS to recruit a psychologist for children in care and queried why the post had been vacant for 18 months.
- In response, it was commented that nationally there was a challenge in the recruitment of clinical psychologists, particularly for children, however the post had now been filled and the postholder was due to start within the month. It was noted that there was clinical psychologist support within children's social care at Stockport Family who were able to provide support to children and young people when needed.
- It was queried why there had been a 44% increase of children subject to Child Protection Plans.
- In response, it was stated that Child Protection Plans were a statutory process where there was concern that a child was not safe or being safeguarded by their family, a section 47 investigation would be undertaken which may lead to an initial child protection conference which would determine whether a child required a statutory plan. It was commented the increase of children subject to Child Protection was linked to the impacts of Covid as more families had been identified as struggling with emotional mental health difficulties which had impacted on families ability to cope at home. It was noted that there had been a decrease in plans since the 2021/22 data within the report was collated.
- It was queried whether the increase in referrals were linked to better identification of the signs.
- In response, it was stated that referrals were made into the front door by people in the community such as schools, health visitors, midwives and the police and the number of referrals were linked with community and partner engagement to ensure that they were reporting concerns. It was noted that there was concern that during Covid there was a significant drop in the number of Child Protection Plans and as since coming out of the pandemic there had been an increase in child protection activity linked to the increasing complexity of need in the community related to the impact of Covid.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. IMPACT OF FAMILY NURSING PARTNERSHIP

A representative of the Director for Family Help and Integration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) demonstrating the impact of the Family Nurse Partnership programme within Stockport Family on the early developmental outcomes of children.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- It was queried how families were referred into the services.
- In response, it was commented that the service had good links with midwifery and received notifications for the young parents that had booked their pregnancy with their midwife which enabled the service to ensure that they were able to deliver the programme to the right people who needed it.
- It was queried whether the Family Nursing Partnership included the mother and baby home.
- In response, it was stated that as long as the family lived in Stockport they were able to access the service and there was a significant degree of flexibility in how the service was offered. It was commented that the nurses were skilled in their engagement and the service worked closely with Moat House as one of the key outcomes was to support the young families into work and education.
- It was queried whether any longitudinal work had been completed to understand the ongoing impact on the babies and their families.
- In response, it was commented that the report referenced data from 2018 which the service wanted to continue to understand the level of development of the children once they entered reception. However, due to Covid those children were unable to complete their assessments in school. As a result, the service was in the process of redoing for the 25 current age reception children.
- Thanked the service and noted the significant impact that it was having on young parents and children's development.
- Representatives offered Members the opportunity to meet the team and receive additional information in relation to the services that were offered.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. DRAFT FINAL REPORT: SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL - GROWTH IN FREE SCHOOL MEALS

The Chair of the Growth in Free School Meals Scrutiny Review Panel submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing the findings of the Scrutiny Review Panel around the Growth in Free School Meals aimed to understand the growth in children eligible for free school meals in Stockport and to assess its impact.

The Scrutiny Committee was invited to make amendments to the report prior to its submission to the Cabinet on 14 March 2023.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Welcomed the poverty proofing work and queried what steps were being taken to engage more schools with the project to ensure that all schools re-examine their offer by looking at their school day through the eyes of a child who is living in poverty recognising that no activity should exclude or treat differently children whose household income or resources were lower than others.

- In response, it was stated that the service would adopt the challenge to ensure that all schools across the borough have completed this poverty proofing work. It was commented that poverty proofing was a significant undertaking to create a participatory model as schools needed to enter into the work with the time and commitment to the task
- That thanks be extended to officers for their commitment and contribution throughout the review.

RESOLVED – (1) That the draft ‘Scrutiny Review Panel – Growth in Free School Meals’ be approved and submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

(2) That the thanks of the Scrutiny Committee be extended to all those who took part in the Scrutiny Review.

10. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the planned agenda items for the Scrutiny Committee’s next meeting and any relevant Forward Plan items.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.13 pm