

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 26th November 2013 at 6.00pm in Room E201, Telford College of Arts & Technology, Haybridge Road, Wellington, Telford TF1 2NP.

PRESENT: Councillors M. Ion (Chair), G. Green, T. Hope, A. Mackenzie, J. Pinter, C. Turley and Co-optees R. Aveley, S. Harris and M. Ward.

Attending: Bev Jackson, Assistant Principal – Learner Services, TCAT; Cllr. S. Davies; K. Callis, Assistant Director Development, Business & Employment; S. Marston, Skills Service Delivery Manager; A. Cooke, Achievement & Standards Service Delivery Manager; A Mason, Chair Local Children Safeguarding Board; S. Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

CYPSC-19 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 23rd September 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CYPSC-20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. J. Loveridge and Co-optees S. Ali, A. Atkinson and S. Rayner.

CYPSC-21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CYPSC-22 TACKLING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND NEEDS

At the invitation of the Chair, Bev Jackson, Assistant Principal – Learner Services, opened with a presentation about Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) which highlighted the following:

- The size of the budget (£32.6m in 2012/13) and establishment (largest in Shropshire, 637 staff of which 335 lecturers and assessors, 20 apprentices)
- The ethos as a college in the community “Where Great Futures Begin, Every Learner Matters”
- The number and types of learners (430 14-16, 1350 16-18, 5300 apprentices, 14 subject sectors, full-time, part-time, short courses, top-ups)
- Examples of training and programmes to improve employability and help bridge the gap between qualification and work mindset e.g. Positive Pathways focused on 17 year olds at risk of becoming NEET; employer-led qualifications for Balfour Beatty; the retail academy developed in conjunction with the Council; a pilot programme with REED to deliver bespoke support packages and access to client

vacancies.

The Chair thanked Ms. Jackson for the informative presentation and remarked on the significance of TCAT as an institution with the size of budget and number of learners and staff, and as a key partner to the Council. He recapped progress on work programme:

- a) The review of the Children in Care Placement Strategy had been concluded and recommendations were being monitored
- b) The review of arrangements for the Planning and Provision of Primary Places was underway and would be drawn to a conclusion after the next meeting in December.
- c) Attention would now turn to the next in-depth review on the Youth Offer, focussing today on youth unemployment. The Cabinet Member and officers had been invited to set the scene by setting out the level and nature of the challenge in the borough and how the Council was supporting young people aged 16-24 looking for education, employment or training. Over the coming months the Committee would be looking at what was being done and the impact, what was being planned, and what else should be done. Scrutiny's role was to check whether resources were having an impact and benefitting young people, or if the money could be better spent in other ways.

Cllr. Davies made the following opening points:

- He had been appointed as Cabinet member with responsibility for employment and skills. Telford and Wrekin was above national and regional averages in terms of youth unemployment and he wanted to understand why when there was nothing wrong with young people in Telford and Wrekin. The skills team had been moved from education (under Jim Collins) to development and business support (under Kate Callis) to correlate skills development with business need. The advantage was in knowing what investment was coming into the borough so that skills development programmes could be planned to match demand – for example the retail academy had been set up to help fill vacancies in the Southwater development.
- The Council was running some really successful programmes. The Job Junctions were performing better than the national Work Programme for a fraction of the cost and if the government gave 1% of the national funding to the Council they could make an enormous difference.
- Detailed data had been compiled and broken down by ward. This showed youth unemployment was not just an issue in areas traditionally associated with higher levels of unemployment but also affected other areas where there had not been a problem in the past. The Chair asked how the data had been compiled and Cllr. Davies said it had been challenging. ONS data had a +/- 9% margin of error and Jobcentre Plus would not share information because of data protection issues. The only way around this had been to second an officer from DWP to the Council to allow data to be shared but this had cost £50k. It meant that the Council now had the names and addresses of over 300 young people who could be targeted directly, but this situation clearly showed the pressing need to break down national barriers to sharing information. The ward data would be forwarded to members

following the meeting.

- He was very proud of the team at Telford & Wrekin which had received a national award, but financial support was needed to tackle the issue. Youth unemployment was increasing when unemployment was reducing and there had to be more that could be done by working together to benefit young people. His aspiration was to be able to guarantee a job or training offer to all young people.

The Skills Manager and Assistant Director gave a presentation on Youth Unemployment in Telford & Wrekin. In addition to the information in the slides, the following information was provided:

- **Update on unemployment levels within the borough**
 - Data showed the unemployment rate at 10.7% and youth unemployment rate (16-24 year olds) at 32.1% were above regional and national rates. 22% of JSA claimants aged 18-24 had been signing on for over 12 months which was an issue because the longer a person signs on the further away they get from the job market and the more likely they are to suffer from mental health problems or be involved in anti-social behaviour.
 - In July 2013, 6.8% (368) of young people aged 16-19 were not in education and training (i.e. NEET) from a cohort of around 6000. The data set and way of reporting changed in September when the age of participation (i.e. in education/training/employment with training) increased to 17. NEETs are still reported as those who were not engaged at all, but participation data would report on those who were engaged in activity that met certain criteria e.g. if you are in a job without training this is not counted as participating.
- **Understanding the youth unemployment data**
 - There were data collection and tracking issues especially post-19. The 32.1% rate of 18-24 year old employed equated to 3,700 young people. Local authorities have a statutory duty to track young people to age 19 – the team constantly keep in touch up to age 19 and are confident they know who is in this set. They are less confident about the post-19s where there is no statutory duty to track.
 - The secondment from DWP had been useful for identifying the 1400 18-24 year olds who were signing on. They had been contacted to ask permission to share their data so that the Council and partners could start working with them to support them back into education/employment. There was a resource issue with tracking everybody so the approach was to focus activity on those closest to the labour market first to move them into employment and then move on to people who needed more intervention to enable them to be job ready.
 - Work had been done to identify barriers to employment –the top 4 barriers were no qualifications, poor educational experience, no work history and no confidence. Resources would be targeted at removing these barriers.
 - Work had been done to understand why job-ready young people were unemployed. Many had become totally disengaged and the approach would be to re-engage them by providing one on one support - knocking on their door, making contact and offering support. By understanding the reasons for youth unemployment better, better interventions could be put in place.

- **Employer's views on skills and young people**

The rationale for moving the service was to align skills with business need. A lot of businesses were cynical about young people and their skills and these businesses needed to be engaged or we would fail. An employer skills survey had been done in January 2013 – the key findings were:

- Skills are top of the investor shopping list – the Invest in Telford campaign focussed on the central location and connectivity but more had to be done to link potential investors to the local workforce with the right skills. This was essential to win investment and jobs.
- Only 20% saw apprenticeships as a way to fill vacancies. A number of reasons were cited; it was too complicated, employers don't know how they work, there was too much paperwork. This highlighted the need to streamline the process and remove administrative burdens, especially for SMEs with less resource. One option being looked at was shared apprenticeship schemes. There was also a need to demonstrate the long term success of apprenticeships.
- Lack of basic employability skills was a recurring theme – the lack of soft skills (punctuality, personal presentation, being able to work with a team, being engaged with tasks) was a key gripe. There was a huge amount of work to do to support some young people.
- A lot of businesses use agencies even though there is a cost which limits the recruitment pool and a lot has to be done to educate businesses.

- **Current interventions for young people**

A massive amount of work had been done historically to address issues. The slide listed the range of providers, programmes and interventions which had grown up over time. There was so much happening that it was confusing for young people and for businesses and the offer needed to be made easy and coherent. The Council had a lead role to play as an employer (e.g. developing the apprenticeship programme) and as a facilitator and broker bringing partners together to bring coherence to the picture.

- **Suggestions for scrutiny support**

The AD suggested three areas where a scrutiny review could add value: why youth unemployment in the borough is so high; best practice in other areas; working with external partners.

Members then discussed the information presented and asked questions as follows:

- Mrs. Ward asked how a young person under 18 actively looking for work and not signing on would know where to go to tap into help and how their parents would know where to go. Cllr. Davies agreed this was an issue. The Council had set up one-stop-shops for businesses and for Town and Parish Councils, and there needed to be a one-stop-shop for young people with cross-referrals between partners. The message also needed to get out to young people that there is help for them. Ms. Ward asked how they would know now which door to knock on and Cllr. Davies said this was exactly the problem. There are young people leaving school at 16 or 18 who are known not to be going to college, university or into work

and they are tracked until 19 but then disappear off the radar and providers need to take responsibility for tracking young people through to age 24. There is a practical issue with resources – the Department for Education (DfE) cut the funding for the Connexions service, there is no duty to track 20-24 year olds unless they have learning difficulties or disabilities, responsibility is on colleges and other post 16 providers to move young people on to a positive destination. The Council launched the FutureFocus service to replace Connexions and has allocated funding to track young people to 19 when they move over to the national careers service. The AD said it was also critical to dispel myths around career pathways – some people think just getting a qualification will secure employment but that is not necessarily the case and there needs to be pathways and routes into work.

- Mr. Aveley commented on the use of agencies by young people and was concerned that they do not offer the right training as a route to careers and this could deter people.
- Cllr. Mackenzie questioned the process for getting accurate information from schools about excluded pupils. Cllr. Davies assured him that if a young person was excluded they may no longer be the responsibility of the school but they are still a young person in Telford and Wrekin and the Council has a duty to care for that young person and no one would be written off. The Achievements & Standards Manager clarified that all schools sign-up to an Access Protocol under which they agree not to suggest to parents the removal of a child, but to bring cases to the Access Panel to put measures in place to support the child. If as a last resort a child is excluded, there is a Pupil Referral Unit based at TCAT which supports the child and provides opportunities for them to take vocational programmes to stop them becoming NEET.
- Cllr. Davies said he had spoken to employers on the Telford Business Board who said young people do not always know how to behave, for example shaking hands. Sometimes this was a straightforward matter of business etiquette which could easily be addressed but other problems were not so straightforward.
- Another issue raised is that Jobcentre Plus (JCP) requires people to show they are actively seeking work and requires people to attend interviews even if they do not want or are not suitable for the job otherwise their benefit will be sanctioned. This wastes employers' time and means people are turned down when they were not suitable for the job in the first place and this knocks their confidence. Cllr. Pinter asked whether JCP were still mandating people to attend training (e.g. with a provider in Halesfield) and the Skills Manager said JCP mandate people to training or other elements of the work programme or their benefit is sanctioned. A lot of young people do not sign on because JCP rules make it too difficult, but they are still looking for work.
- Cllr. Green asked whether public transport was a barrier to employment and what happens if a young person is offered a job that they cannot get to on public transport. She wondered whether a minibus service to the retail parks was needed. The AD replied that the team had done a lot of work to look at the

barriers to jobs. 29 possible barriers had been identified but transport was low down the list and only cited as an issue once a job was secured. The Skills team work with transport officers to help young people with transport problems e.g. with shared journey schemes, bicycles etc. Cllr. Davies pointed out that there were no buses into Hortonwood for night shifts and the jobs were too low wage for taxi fares and he felt that transport in the borough was not good in terms of helping people into jobs. Cllr. Green suggested that groups of companies could get together to look at the option of a shared minibus. Cllr. Turley raised a specific issue about a company offering jobs but expecting people to travel a long way for only a few hours work and Cllr. Davies said he was aware of the issue and that they could try to work with companies (or colleges with a similar issue) but he repeated that the young people had not identified travel as a particular issue.

- Cllr. Pinter raised the issue of agencies offering zero hours contracts. Cllr. Davies agreed this was an issue for people claiming JSA who cannot work one day on and one day off and these kinds of contracts offered no incentive to come off benefits. The Assistant Principal emphasised that there were a lot of reputable agencies and a lot of young people use them to access work and it is important to work with the reputable agencies. She also brought members' attention to the fact that some apprentices only earn £90 per week but unlike people in education they are not eligible for bus passes.
- The Chair remarked that there were no surprises in the results of the employer survey. He questioned what accounted for the high youth unemployment rate in the borough – the differential in the unemployment rate in Telford and Wrekin compared to regional and national rates was relatively small but the differential in youth unemployment was high and he was struggling to understand why. He also wanted to know, of all the current interventions, which were having the greatest impact and which had the least impact. Cllr. Davies said the underlying reasons for youth unemployment were a European issue - the current 16-24 generation was most likely to be out of work and worse off than their parents and this presented huge structural problems. Locally, there was very good support for unemployed people. The Job Junction was a really good model and Cllr. Davies said if he had more money to invest, he would put it into the Job Junctions. They were walk-in centres for local people, based in non-traditional settings in local communities i.e. not schools or places of authority. A list could be provided to scrutiny. In Brookside, a cleaning company needed staff and people were trained up for one week to NVQ L1 in return for a guaranteed interview and the trainees were offered jobs. This was an example of how the Job Junctions worked by offering tailored support. If the Council had a fraction of DWP funding, they could really make a dent in the figures. The challenge is how to make Job Junctions appeal to more young people as they are for all ages.
- The Chair asked about the outcomes of the other programmes. Cllr. Davies said they were all good but very targeted. FutureFocus focuses on engaging and turning around NEETs. There was a nationally funded bid for youth engagement activity but this was limited in what could be delivered by its funding rules. Job Junctions have limited staff. Four staff provide intensive support to a small caseload of ALD. So there are some very good programmes but they need more

resource. The Chair asked if resources are limited whether we should do more of one thing and less of another to have greater impact. The Skills Manager said the thing that has the greatest impact is one-to-one support but they have to bid for resources and cannot deliver everything. The AD agreed that with limited resources it was a priority to make sure they were getting it right and a report was being prepared for Cabinet with some new and innovative proposals based on what the young people said they want. The problem is that funding comes from different external sources and is ring-fenced for particular activities so they cannot just stop some programmes and start others because the flow of funding doesn't work in that way. Cllr. Davies said local authorities have a statutory duty for young people and DWP should realise that JCP is not the only department who can help.

- Mr. Mason picked up the issue raised by businesses about the lack of soft business skills (for example eye contact, handshaking) and wanted to know if there were any low cost ways of addressing this and whether schools across the board offered this kind of training. Cllr. Davies said there was no across the piece offer and it was up to individual schools but their priority would be GCSE results and Ofsted inspections.

When there were no further questions the Chair thanked Cllr. Davies and the officers for an informative presentation and they left the meeting.

CYPSC-23 UPDATE ON INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE

This item was deferred until the next meeting due to the Assistant Director being unavoidably detained in a previous meeting.

CYPSC-24 EDUCATION RESULTS FOR THE BOROUGH

The Achievement & Standards Manager presented the analysis of the 2013 un-validated education results for the borough circulated as Appendix C. The data was un-validated i.e. it was the initial release and open to appeals and re-marking so it was subject to change before final validation in January/February 2014. The government had introduced new measures in education and lot of the indicators were new and could not be compared with previous results.

The following points were highlighted from the report and in response to questions:

- Early Years Foundation Stage (age 5, end of reception year) – 45% in Telford and Wrekin had achieved the good level of development measure, below regional and national averages. This tells us that early development before school, in early years settings and in reception class, is behind peers across the country. This is a new measure so there is no pattern.
- Phonics screening check – this has been run for 2 years for year 1 pupils. 67% had reached the required standard which was a significant improvement over 2012

(51%) and narrowed the gap against national average. This was pleasing and meant there was an improved standard moving into Key Stage 1.

- Key Stage 1 – children are assessed at age 5, 6 and 7 (before children in some countries have even started school!). Children achieving a Level 2 in reading increased from 85% in 2012 to 89% in 2013. Writing improved from 81% in 2012 to 86% in 2013 (1% above the national average). Speaking and listening results had improved by 3% points to 89%, matching the national average. Maths had improved by 2% points to 91%, matching the national average. The results showed Telford and Wrekin closing the gap nationally.
- Key Stage 2 – assessments are done in year 6, age 11. This is a key measure to show how children have progressed over the whole time in primary school. The government had brought in a new measure of reading, writing and maths combined (the previous measure was maths and English combined). English had been broken down into reading and writing and children had to do well in both for the school to do well. This could be a challenge because some children “click” in some subjects but struggle with others so the right support needs to be put in place. Telford and Wrekin was broadly in line with national (1% below) and regional (1% above) averages. Attainment of a Level 4 in reading was 1% below national. In writing children making 2 levels of progress had improved by 2% and was above national. Maths was less good – children attaining Level 4 was 2% below national and children making 2 levels of progress was 3% below national.
- Schools below floor (primary) – the threshold had changed and three schools were below floor. Previously there were no schools below floor. They were looking at how to support the schools which had fallen below. The threshold was: 60% achieving L4+ reading, writing and maths; 90% achieving 2 levels of progress in reading; 94% achieving 2 levels of progress in writing; 91% achieving 2 levels of progress in maths – all had to be met to be above floor. Ladygrove and Wombridge were not far off floor for reading and writing but both were significantly below for maths. One of the schools had just had an Ofsted inspection but the report had not been published. Ofsted has 4 grades: 1 = Outstanding; 2 = Good; 3 = Requires improvement; 4 = Inadequate. Schools judged Inadequate have serious weaknesses or need special measures. The three schools below floor were more likely to fall into grade 3.
- Key Stage 4 – these are secondary school assessments. A key indicator is attainment of 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths. Telford and Wrekin had shown steady improvement over the last four years closing the gap against national averages and last year had been above national. The headline was that the figure had dropped from 61.3% in 2012 to 58.3% in 2013 and had fallen below the national average. The position may improve when the validated data is released. The English results had been hit by the grading change. There was a cohort of students achieving low Level 4s in English trying to convert to GCSE but now the boundary mark had changed they were just falling short and programmes needed to be put in place to help them make the jump. Telford and Wrekin was above the national average for attainment of 5 A*-C GCSEs not including English and Maths, and had been above for some time, which showed that the breadth of

education was good and was opening doors to post-16 provision.

- Schools below floor (secondary) – there were 2 schools below floor. Lakeside was below for the first time and Phoenix was below for the second year. As part of the government’s agenda around academies, both schools had converted under the Multi-Academy Trust alongside Wrokwardine. A lot of work was being put into supporting the Multi-Academy Trust and DfE were due to visit both schools before Christmas and they would need to demonstrate the right interventions were in place. In reply to an observation about failing schools going into a downward spiral as perceptions affect admissions, the Manager said that Phoenix was making good progress and the new building had had a big impact on applications and admissions which had increased.

When there were no further questions the Chair thanked the Manager and said the Committee looked forward to receiving an update when the validated results were out.

CYPSC-25 REPORTS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION

An update on the Ofsted Fostering Action Plan and feedback from the children’s care home provider conference had been circulated as Appendix D1 and D2. The Chair asked members if there were any issues they would like to bring to a future meeting. No issues were raised.

A report on the Leaving Care Grant was tabled in response to the Committee’s recommendation to uplift the grant to £2,000 inline with national best practice. The report explained that it was not possible to increase the grant in-year as there was no allocated budget, but a proposal to uplift the grant would come through the budget proposals for implementation in 2014. The Chair welcomed this as a positive step.

The report also stated that it was not possible to provide scrutiny with historic data on spending on the Leaving Care Grant requested at the August meeting due the amount of staff resource it would take to pull the information together. The Chair asked members for their views on this, and it was agreed that scrutiny was prepared to forego the historic data but that an update should come to the next meeting to explain how the grant would be administered in future and how it would be audited. It was agreed the Scrutiny Officer would request this for the next meeting.

CYPSC-26 WORK PROGRAMME AND CHAIR’S UPDATE

The Chair reflected on the joint meeting with the Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee on 22nd October and the joint recommendation to increase the children in care placement base budget to reflect the priority the Council places on children in care as corporate parents.

The agenda for the next meeting on 13th December would include a presentation on youth offending and services for young people in the youth justice system as part of the review of the Youth Offer. Philip Wood from the National Governors Association

would attend to speak about the role of head teachers and governors in the admission and appeals process. The committee would need to conclude the review of provision of primary places and the aim was to draft a report in January.

The meeting ended at 8.00pm.

Chairman:.....

Date:.....