

## Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee

18 July 2016

Present: Councillor M Thirlaway (In the Chair)  
Councillors K Bolger, K Clark, M A Green, A Newman,  
P Oliver, M Rankin and J Walker.

Mrs J Little	Parent Governor Representative
Mrs M Ord	Parent Governor Representative

### **CES11/07/16 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Austin, P Brooks, J Cassidy and M Madden and Mr G O'Hanlon and the Rev. M Vine, both Church Representatives.

### **CES12/07/16 Substitute Members**

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

Councillor L Spillard for Councillor P Brooks.

### **CES13/07/16 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made or dispensations reported.

### **CES14/07/16 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 June 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CES15/07/16 Work Programme 2016/17**

The sub-committee received a report which detailed its proposed work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year. This report had been deferred from the 20 June 2016 meeting.

The sub-committee was informed that the process of establishing the 2016/17 work programme had begun in February 2016 with an email to Cabinet Members, Councillors and Tier 1, 2 and 3 managers seeking topics in relation to policy development for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Sub-committees to examine for the year ahead. In March the Senior Leadership Team identified key policy areas for scrutiny to focus on and also the Scrutiny Chairs and Deputies discussed the ideas which had been put forward. An article on the role of the scrutiny committees and inviting suggestions for the work programme was published in the March edition of Our North Tyneside resident's magazine.

Topics for regular monitoring or reports for information had been scheduled to particular meetings for the year ahead with some background information provided on the topics selected as potential in-depth investigations (school system changes and home education) to give Members an idea as to what the sub groups would be examining.

As the *Education for All Bill* was still in its early stages and the appointment of a new Prime Minister and Cabinet could have an impact on what changes were proposed, the sub-committee was recommended to undertake the Home Education Review first and consider at its completion whether it was an appropriate time to examine the proposed school system changes in January 2017 or if other subjects had a greater priority.

Members discussed the proposed work programme and considered what other topics would be suitable for an in-depth review. This included a suggestion from the Scrutiny Chairs and Deputy Chairs' meeting regarding the support available for looked after children, particularly disabled looked after children, when they transitioned from children to adult services. It was explained that a report on Corporate Parenting was proposed to be submitted to the October meeting and the presenting officer would be informed that the report should include this information.

Members also expressed concern regarding the school system changes and the increased focus on academisation but accepted that insufficient information on the proposals was likely to be available prior to January 2017 and that it would be appropriate to consider the position again then.

It was **agreed** to approve the proposed work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year.

### **CES16/07/16          Child Sexual Exploitation Update**

The Interim Manager for Safeguarding and Placement Services attended the meeting to provide the sub-committee with its regular update on the work being undertaken to tackle child sexual exploitation (CSE) in North Tyneside, in particular the report provided information in relation to individual cases; what work was being undertaken across the council; and what work had been undertaken with partners.

The sub-committee was informed that currently 18 young people were identified as being at high risk of child sexual exploitation. The review of the MSET (Missing, Sexually Exploited and Trafficked) panel had concluded and one of its findings had been that the work of the panel was not always reflected in the agreed care plans and support for these children. As a consequence, the Risk Assessment tool for child sexual exploitation would be updated to ensure information was holistic and detailed with regard to the risks and needs for each young person.

SCARPA (a collaborative project in Newcastle from The Children's Society, Barnardo's and Save the Children) was the predominant service for young people and provided support and intervention in respect of healthy and safe relationships and the issues of CSE. Work was undertaken on a one to one basis and SCARPA have recently begun some group sessions with local education providers. There was capacity within this work to engage young people from the age of 10 into adulthood which was of significant benefit and value for transition work into adulthood. SCARPA also ran advice surgeries and workshops on a fortnightly basis with social care staff on engaging young people who were at risk, internet safety and responses to going missing.

In relation to the implementation of the sub-committee's recommendations on CSE, it was reported that progress was being made. The contact group, established to consider what awareness and action was required in all service areas, had concluded its work with identified actions being taken by individual services or as part of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children's Board (NTSCB) multi-agency sexual exploitation action plan. CSE was included as part of new Members' induction and was included in safeguarding training; a quarterly programme of CSE training was being delivered to taxi drivers and questions on CSE were now included in the taxi driver knowledge test.

The social work secondment to Operation Sanctuary was still in place and local schools had seen the drama "Chelsea's Choice" as part of the work undertaken by Bright Futures providing support and education to young people on a range of vulnerabilities. The joint sub group of the Adult's Safeguarding Board and the Children's Safeguarding Board on sexual exploitation was meeting bi-monthly and would be agreeing its strategic action plan later this month.

Members sought clarification on what questions were asked by the CSE toolkit; which children were assessed against the toolkit; what care plans involved; the number of children at risk who were also looked after children; and the work schools were undertaking to be aware of CSE themselves and to raise the awareness of their pupils.

Members were informed that the toolkit was effective as it gave an indication as to what was going on in the young person's daily lives and showed where there was risk, for example school attendance and who their peer group was. Not every child had been assessed, if a child had been identified to children's services through the Front Door service and the assessment suggested there might be a CSE risk, the toolkit was then used. It was acknowledged that there would be children at risk who were unknown to the local authority. Only children deemed at 'high risk' are considered by the MSET panel and a multi-agency plan put in place; this included creating a 24/7 picture of the young person's life and then formulating a plan to reduce their risk and identifying an officer from SCARPA to work with them on an individual basis. Of the 18 currently at high risk some were looked after children and some were in families, each case was different. Schools played a major part in oversight and planning intervention and the NTSCB provided quarterly briefings to school staff.

It was **agreed** (1) to note the updated information on the work being undertaken to raise awareness of, and protect children from, sexual exploitation and the implementation of the recommendations from the sub-committee's Child Sexual Exploitation Sub Group; and (2) that more detailed information regarding the children at high risk of sexual exploitation be included in the next update report to the sub-committee, expected on 21 November 2016.

## **CES17/07/16 Elective Home Education**

Home Education had been identified as a suitable topic for an in-depth study by the sub-committee. The topic was timely as the policy was being reviewed and the access and placement services had been restructured around the statutory responsibilities. An investigation into this topic would allow for engagement with residents and also potentially improve the service available to residents. The subject supported the Our People theme in the Our North Tyneside Plan, in particular B - Be supported to achieve their full potential, especially our children and young people.

A report providing background information on elective home education was submitted to the sub-committee to inform its decision making on the remit of the sub group. The Senior Manager for Facilities and Fair Access, the Access and Placement Services Manager and the Access and Placement Services named officer for Elective Home Education attended the meeting to answer any questions.

Elective home education (EHE) was the term used to describe parents' decision to provide education for their children at home instead of sending them to school. The sub-committee was informed that the responsibility for a child's education rested with their parents, education was compulsory but school was not; parents were not required to register or seek approval from the local authority to educate their children at home and assumed financial responsibility for all aspects of their child's education.

Local authorities did not have a statutory duty in relation to monitoring the quality of home education on a routine basis but could intervene and serve a School Attendance Order if it appeared that parents were not providing a suitable education. Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 required efficient, full-time education to be received by every child of compulsory school age. "Efficient" and "suitable" were not defined but, due to case law, "efficient" was broadly described as an education that "achieves that which it sets out to achieve", and a "suitable" education was one that "primarily equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member, rather than the way of life in the country as a whole, as long as it did not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other form of life if he wishes to do so." The difficulty was in having sufficient information upon which to make a judgement that the child was not receiving a suitable education. Parents were under no duty to respond to informal enquires from the local authority and education officers cannot insist on seeing a child or entering a home to ascertain what education the child was receiving. However, the local authority did have a responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are electively home educated.

North Tyneside Council had a named officer responsible for ensuring the authority's statutory responsibilities for EHE were fulfilled who also gave advice to parents' on EHE; a copy of the guidance booklet given to parents was included as an appendix to the report. In April 2016 there were 42 children electively home educated, with 19 of these moving to be home educated during the current academic year. This number did fluctuate and there were a number of reasons children were electively home educated for a short period of time, for example if they had been ill for a number of months, but it had been increasing due to a greater awareness that this was a legitimate option for parents.

Members asked questions relating to identifying children who were being electively home educated; what methods of quality control were used; what services were offered to electively home educated children; and how the relationship with parents was managed.

In reply, Members were reminded that parents did not have to inform the local authority that they were educating a child at home; therefore if a child was not registered with any agency (e.g. doctors or dentist) they could be completely unknown to the local authority. The Attendance and Placement team were sometimes informed by health professionals if a school aged child did not appear to be going to school. If a child had attended a nursery or had been on a school roll at any point, the child would be known to the authority and enquiries would be made as to whether the parent had chosen to electively home educate the child and to offer the family advice and guidance. The Attendance and Placement team always approached the decision by a parent to electively home educate in as positive a manner as possible to develop a relationship and to keep the lines of communication open. If the family stopped being co-operative then the team would work informally to try and resolve

any issues and try and ensure the voice of the child was heard. Lots of children had a great experience of being home educated and were at no risk. If there were concerns and a family had stopped communication with the Attendance and Placement team, they would ensure these concerns were passed to the appropriate safeguarding team or family partner, if there was one; there was no protocol for informing family doctors or other agencies which might have contact with the family that a child was being electively home educated.

Of the families currently electively home educating, twelve were currently classed as non-cooperative on a RAG rating but the children had been seen. Officers wrote to families at least once a year and there was an intention to increase this for the new academic year in September. Parents had assumed all financial responsibility for the education of their children by choosing to electively home educate, this included exam entrance fees and any other education provision the parents may want to access for their children.

During discussion on the remit of the sub group Members referred to cases they knew; their concern regarding checking the quality of the education being received by the children and the apparent contradiction of being responsible for children's welfare and safety but not having a right to visit their homes to establish if they were receiving an efficient and suitable education.

An initial scope for the sub group had been drafted and key questions to be answered included:

- What were the key motivations for parents wanting to home educate their children?
- Is the increased demand on schools places impacting on the number of parents/guardians that choose to home school?
- Do parents feel supported by the local authority in their choice? Do they require any additional assistance?

Added to the remit was a question regarding whether Government should be lobbied to change the law to permit local authorities access to elective home educated children, to advise the officer team on the authority's policy statement on elective home education which was being revised and what networks could be established to reassure Members that all children being electively home educated were known about.

Councillors M A Green, A Newman, M Rankin, M Thirlaway and L Spillard volunteered to serve as members of the sub group. Mr G O'Hanlon had also volunteered to serve on the sub group, if its establishment was approved, prior to the meeting.

It was **agreed** (1) to establish a sub group to understand what elective home education was undertaken within the borough and examine the local authority's policies and procedures for children who were electively home educated;  
(2) that the sub group would hold its first meeting in September 2016; and  
(3) as the sub group would not begin its work until September, members availability to be sought immediately to ascertain whether the sub group would meet during the day or the evening to enable Members who had volunteered for the sub group to know whether they would still be available to serve.