

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 16th March, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Basra (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), A Cheema, Ajaib, Begum, Qaseem, A Sandhu and Sarfraz

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- No apologies had been received.

PART 1

39. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Basra declared an interest in item 7 as she was the Chair of the Covid- 19 Task and Finish Group. Councillor Basra remained in the meeting and participated in the item.

40. Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 February 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2021 be noted.

(With the agreement of the Panel, the Chair agreed to alter the order of the agenda).

41. Member Questions

Responses to Member Questions had been circulated to members by email.

42. Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

The Associate Director, Place Regulations provided the Panel with an overview of the Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in the context of the NEET comparison figures on pre-Covid-19 and during/post Covid-19.

The report focused on young people aged 16 to18 in line with the Raising Participation Age agenda and the statutory duties placed upon the Local Authority.

The following points were noted:

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported the latest quarterly increase in the number of NEET young people was the largest since July to September 2011 (not 2021).

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Local authorities were responsible to support young people to participate in education, employment or training (EET) until they were 18 years old and also required to track the participation of young people in Year 12 & 13. The Local Authority had a duty to provide them with the right opportunity if they were not in EET.

Monthly reports of NEET figures had been provided to the DfE (the NEET Not Known figures were also included collectively). The NEET and Not Know figure for Slough in December 2019 in the second quintile was 4.1% compared to 7.3% in England with a slight increase to 4.7% in December 2020 compared to 7.6% in the South-East and 6.3% in England.

Of the 136 NEET young people, there were 45 with an unknown status. During the Covid-19 period, the NEET Team had actively engaged with young people online and whilst social distancing safely, had used various methods including door knocking to track young people.

The proposal to remodel the transformation programme included the NEET team moving close to the Early Help team. The all-age Future Skills Hub would be going live at the end of June 2021 with a group of employers and delivery partners would be working together to look at a range of jobs and creating pathways for them. The Localities offer was also being developed to provide support and skills as well as encouraging young people to consider the types of careers they would like to pursue. The Early Help team and other services were working together jointly to support young people to get into education, employment and training. Work had also been on-going with schools to raise aspirations and building on apprenticeships with the aim of developing and growing 'Slough Borough's own' by investing in apprenticeship opportunities.

The Panel raised a number of issues during a wide-ranging discussion which are summarised as follows:

Members asked about the position of the 45 young people whose status were unknown. It was explained that it was not known where these young people were, and that some may possibly no longer live in the borough. However, the Council was required to provide evidence of where they were and investigations were on-going to find ways of tracking them, including knocking on doors and checking education institutions. Work would also be undertaken with voluntary partners to establish whether the children were accessing any of the services.

In answer to a Member's question, it was confirmed that ensuring that young people were in EET until they were 18, required them to be on a programme of education, employment or training as required by law. This was done by tracking and knowing where they were but was very difficult to enforce. It was

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noted that a lead youth worker who would build relationship with young people was being recruited for all localities in the Borough.

Concerns were raised about the limited number of local residents employed in regeneration programmes in Slough. It was explained that by law, the Council could not force contractors to employ local people but it was critical for a certain percentage of opportunities to be provided to local residence by developers.

Members requested to be provided a gender breakdown of the NEET figures.

Members asked about the number of employers that were on the steering group for the Future Skills Hub. It was explained that employers on the steering group, which included Heathrow, rather than employees. The Panel was informed that the NVQ Level 3 qualification had been an issue in the past and pathways were being reviewed to be able to support people to achieve this qualification.

In response to Members' query, it was explained that young people would not be forced into pursuing further studies but were required by law to be in EET until they were 18 as discussed earlier. However, they would be encouraged and supported into programmes which captured pupils who may potentially drop out to provide support to prevent them dropping out.

Members asked about provision of traineeships and it was confirmed that traineeships would be one of the pathways for employment and noted that Kickstart Scheme had been a preference for young people to traineeships.

Under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton commented on a number of issues including the need for the provision of career advisers in schools and for the Council to engage with career officers and local businesses.

Resolved – That the Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training report be noted.

43. Early Years and Children's Centre Services

The Associate Director, Children and Families introduced a report which provided an update on Early Years and Children's Centre Services.

Members noted that the Children's Centre had remained open throughout the Covid-19 pandemic from March 2020 to date, with the exception of Early Education and a range of family services, which had been discontinued in order to comply with social distancing measures. Targeted services had been provided throughout this challenging period to ensure the needs of the community were met. The lifting of restrictions from 12 April 2021 would enable the resumption of the offer of services to smaller groups.

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It was noted that the Children's Services Centres were used by partners to deliver a range of services, such as the Healthy Early Years Accreditation and worked with Public Health to encourage healthy eating and good health practices at an early stage. Funded early education entitlement and provisions for 3- to 4-year-olds had remained and would be resumed. However, there had been a significant decrease in the take up of 2-year-old funded early education places, mainly due to home schooling.

The Department for Education (DFE) funded holiday activities, food program and Winter grant scheme (£15 per week) had been on offer whilst the children had been at home during lockdown. In addition, children that were eligible for free school meals would receive a voucher for the Easter holiday period. Holiday activities and the food programme during this period would launch the focus on healthy eating, cooking on budget and encourage the move from sedentary lifestyle. The Easter programme would take place virtually and parents would be required to participate in physical activities.

It was anticipated that the summer holiday programme would be face-to-face and would be developed further to widen the opportunities to all providers and to extend the provisions so that they could be offered to all parents with eligible children, as well as those who were subsidised.

Further update would be reported to the Panel at the conclusion of the summer programme.

The Panel was informed that the curriculum for early years would be changing in September 2021 and seven schools in Slough had been taking part in an early year's documentary programme as part of a pilot scheme.

Online services as well as early years resources had been developed and available for all and responses to evaluation of the services provided had confirmed that the services had been well received. It was noted that the positive outcome should be attributed to the effective partnership working with private, voluntary and independent providers.

The Panel raised a number of issues during a wide-ranging discussion summarised as follows:

- Members asked whether the support programmes were only available to parents on low income. It was explained that the winter programme had been available to parents of children that were eligible for free school meals.
- Members noted that 5,000 children in Slough were eligible for free school meals and asked what support was being provided to schools that were providing breakfast clubs, as a high performing school was currently funding this provision from its school budget. It was explained that a large number of schools were providing breakfast but the Council could not mandate for that provision. Breakfast provision was very costly and therefore had challenging funding implications. The

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message to encourage the provision of breakfast would continue to be promoted.

- Members noted that up to March 2021, the Children's Centres had 85% occupancy rate and asked whether the centres were now providing all services. It was explained that occupancy rate had increased during Covid-19 and services such as mental health had seen an increase and continued to rise. When restrictions were lifted, provision of services such as occupational health would be resumed.
- Members raised concerns about the level of obesity which was higher than the national average and queried whether this was due to Covid-19 and asked what measures were in place to educate parents post lockdown. It was explained that data had yet to be published but suggested that the obesity level was likely to have increased. Plans were in place to address this issue as part of the Easter holiday activities which would be offered online. Online resources and the food programme, aimed at educating parents would also be available.
- Members asked whether children of parents not on low income could join the breakfast provisions and it was noted that many schools already allowed this, but may vary from school to school.

Councillor Kelly declared an interest as he worked for a school. He remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion.

- Concerns were raised regarding the thirty to forty early years children that were stranded abroad due to the pandemic. It was explained that this number of children was not considered to be an immense problem for the Council, as many of the children were accessing remote teaching. In response to better planning to take account of junk food outlets close to schools, it was noted that the Council was committed to addressing the issue of obesity. The Associate Director, Children and Families was requested to provide a list of 2-year-olds that were eligible to 30 hours pre-school.
- Members welcomed the high level of health visitor support and targeted parents but queried that dental health was not as well targeted. It was explained that extensive work had been done with parents who accessed the service but noted that it was more difficult to support those who were not accessing the service.
- In response to a query raised about Early Years school places being withdrawn from children who were still abroad, it was explained that places would usually be withdrawn as a last resort and that children in early years were not of statutory school age and would only be taken off roll if they had been off persistently.

In response to a question as to whether health and safety checks were being undertaken, it was explained that tooth brushing programmes were being delivered virtually in addition to videos. The Health and Safety team had also been working with providers and had distributed guides to ensure Covid compliance.

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The Chair then invited Councillor Strutton to address the Panel under Rule 30.

Councillor Strutton welcomed the virtual programmes that had been provided and the resources that could be easily accessed. He raised concerns about the 30% of 3-year-olds in Slough that had higher tooth decay compared to the national average, highlighting that 170 children had undergone major surgery in 2018. Councillor Strutton asked for further details on the number of families that had traveled abroad during Covid -19 and raised concerns about potential safeguarding issues. It was explained that substantial progress had been made in addressing the issue of tooth decay prior to the pandemic but progress may have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. A tooth brushing video had however been produced to encourage dental health. Children missing education was noted as an issue that would be addressed through a multi-agency approach.

Resolved – That the Early Years and Children's Services report be noted.

44. Parenting in Slough - Multi-Agency Strategy

The Associate Director, Children and Families, provided members with an update on the on-going progress of work undertaken as part of the Multi-Agency Strategy. The report provided a detailed overview of the key areas of development.

The Panel noted that the strategy now fully in place, covered provision for children from birth up to age 25, from universal to targeted provisions. Work had been undertaken jointly with parents, providers and commissioning.

Following the conclusion of the presentation, members discussed and raised the following points:

- Members asked what was being done to inform parents that may not be aware of the information available on the Council's website. It was noted that a soft and sensitive approach was being taken to launch the offer, also presented as self-serve. It was noted that all partners had been involved in the publicity to raise raising awareness of the parenting programme and would be rolled out from September 2021.
- In acknowledging the progress that had been made in targeting 211 families, Members asked about the number of families that were still requiring support. It was noted that the Troubled Families Programme was a national programme measured by the Government, and Slough had met its annual target of 211 families from April 2020 to March 2021 under the Strengthening Families Programme. There were currently 1600 children on the Early Help caseloads and just under 2,000 social care caseloads.
- Members asked whether schools would be encouraged to identify children where parenting had been identified as an issue. It was explained the offer extended across the children's services system in

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rolling out the parenting programme. There would be 6 levels of Trouble Families' criteria and success would be measured from the outcomes of the suitable actions taken with participation over a period of time.

- Members asked about the lessons that had been learnt from the key challenges that had been faced in successfully working with 877 families from April 2015 to March 2020 that could be applied to the current programme. It was reiterated that the Troubled Families was a national programme that was due to end in March 2021 but due to its success had been extended to 2022, which indicated investing in results. The programme was referred to in Slough as Strength and Families and it was expected that Slough would reinvest into the programme utilising the resources that had been established from the Troubled Families Programme.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton commented on a number of issues including the question of what was being done to maintain the progress of families that had been worked with successfully with under the Troubled Families Programme. It was explained that this was done through sustained participation and confirmed that there had been no duplication in the 877 families that had been worked with to date. It was also clarified that the Early Help caseloads (1600) were separate from the Children's Services Trust caseloads. Early Help used voluntary (for ages 1 & 2 children) and statutory (for children ages 3 & 4). Measures were in place to support families where repeat or unresolved issues had been identified in addition to work being undertaken through pathways via children's social care to activate statutory intervention.

Resolved – That the Parenting in Slough –Multi-Agency Strategy be noted.

45. Terms of Reference for Employment, Skills and COVID-19 Task and Finish Group

Councillors Ajaib and Qaseem declared an interest in item 7 as they were on the Covid- 19 Task and Finish Group. Councillors Ajaib and Qaseem remained in the meeting and participated in the item.

The Insight Analyst introduced the report which outlined the purpose of the Task and Finish group, set up to establish how Covid-19 had impacted on the skills and employment of residents in Slough. Membership of the joint working group consisted of 5 members from the various Scrutiny Panels in the Council.

The Task and Finish Group would essentially focus on identifying the current challenges to skills and employment in Slough due to the pandemic, particularly in relation to Heathrow Airport. It would investigate how to encourage residents to upskill by looking at the gaps that existed prior to and during the pandemic.

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Members were reassured that all areas, including deprived areas would be incorporated in the indicators gathered which would provide an overview of data by ward, but the main focus would be on Slough in general. The information would be gathered by the localities group. It was confirmed that work had already begun but had to be rescheduled to October 2021 due to Covid-19 restriction and the Council restructure programme.

Resolved:

That the Employment, Skills and Covid-19, Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference be noted.

Requested the Insight Officer to bring the need to produce data by ward, to the attention of the Employment, Skills and Covid-19, Task and Finish Group.

46. Forward Work Programme

Members reviewed the Forward Work Programme for the remainder of 2019/20 and agreed the items listed for the meeting on 20 April 2021.

Resolved – That the details of the report be noted.

47. Attendance Record

Resolved – That details of the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

48. Date of Next Meeting 20 April 2021

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 20 April 2021.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.32 pm and closed at 9.07 pm)