

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 3rd December, 2020.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Strutton

PART 1

20. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Kelly declared that he worked at Lynch Hill School, Primary Academy. There were no conflicts with any matters on the agenda and he therefore remained and participated in the meeting.

Councillor Basra declared that she worked at Khalsa Primary School. There were no conflicts with any matters on the agenda and she therefore remained and participated in the meeting.

21. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 October 2020

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October be approved as a correct record.

22. Member Questions

The responses to questions in relation to Minute 14 of the meeting held on 21 October 2020 (Community Learning and Skills) as set out below had been received:

- Further breakdown of the age groups of the 3,000 enrolled learners.
- Details of how grant funding of the service was split between Slough Borough Council (SBC) and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM).
- That further clarification as set out above be provided for Councillor Strutton and the Panel.

Further information had been provided to Panel members and Councillor Strutton by email for information.

Resolved - That the written responses be noted.

23. Creative Academy

The Associate Director Place Regulation introduced the 2019/20 Annual Report on the Creative Academy, which outlined the success of the academy and its positive contribution to Slough community.

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Members were informed that Creative Academy provided a dance programme at degree level and Slough Borough Council was the only local authority in the country that offered vocational professional dance programme from level 3 through to level 7 (masters programmes).

The Panel was shown a short video of dance performances that students at the academy had performed, including those at competitions and at talent shows. Students also regularly performed throughout the borough.

The Creative Academy Manager highlighted that academy had a unique partnership between Slough Borough Council and the University of West London. Creative Academy also worked closely with the Royal Ballet School, National Dance Company, the BBC, Chanel 4, all part of building relationship for students on the course.

From 2020 the Academy had been inspected as part of the University Quality Assurance Agency (similar to Ofsted). Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, 81% of students who graduated in 2020 had secured employment by September 2020. In addition, 8 had returned to join the Masters programme at the start of September 2020.

Members were informed that class sizes had been reduced from 15 to bubbles of between 6 and 10 students during lockdown with buildings split into different zones. Degree students worked well with local schools and Slough Sports Network. The Academy also provided Creative Saturday programmes offering young people aged 3 to 21 with free dance classes and 160 had participated over the last three terms.

The Chair invited comments and questions from Members.

During the course of the discussions, the following points were raised:

Members commended the video and welcomed that Slough would increasingly be renowned for the full-time nationally recognised vocational dance training degree programmes that were being successfully offered at Creative Academy. A member asked what percentage of the 2019 graduates who had gained employment were from Slough. It was noted that 20% (4) of the graduates had lived in and had attended schools in Slough but most had moved into Slough from surrounding boroughs. In respect of those who remained in Slough, it was noted that between 20%-40% had worked on cruise ships and at schools in Slough, teaching dance. Two of the graduates had also set up their own business in the borough. With regard to cost implications for Slough, it was confirmed that the cost was neutral to the borough as students were funded in the same way as courses offered at universities.

In response to a question as to whether the partnership with the University of West London was long term. Members were informed that a five year rolling contract was in place.

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Members asked about the various levels of qualifications. It was explained that the Academy started to offer a Foundation Year in 2020 at Level 3. Levels 4, 5 and 6 were equivalent to Years 1, 2, and 3 of a BA (Bachelor of Arts) degree with a Masters at Level 7. In response to the question as to how the students' fees of £800k forecasted for 2020/21 would be invested. It was explained that some would be invested in current on-going work with the Curve, students engaging with schools (13 schools visited each year) with the majority of the money being spent on teaching.

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

Cllr Strutton applauded the success of Creative Academy and asked about the number of businesses former students had set up in Slough. It was explained that 5 businesses had been set up in the last 10 years but the majority of students had gone into free lance employment. In relation to a query raised about courses on musical theatre, it was explained that courses in this area were currently not being offered as the Academy wished to maintain its specialism in dance. Critically, there was also little employment opportunities in musical theatre but three former graduates had been successful in gaining employment in a musical in the West End. With regard to a question about the working relationship with the Royal Ballet, the Creative Academy Manager confirmed that there was a good on-going relationship with the Royal Ballet which extended from before Creative Academy had started; the director had taught at Langley College in Slough.

A Member asked whether Creative Academy had any links with apprenticeships. It was explained that the scheme was being piloted this year and would be offering dance teaching to two students subject to the criteria being met. There had been early discussion with the university about funding the scheme continuously.

Resolved - the Creative Academy report be noted.

24. Slough Academy

The Slough Academy manager introduced a report which provided an overview of the Academy and the apprenticeship opportunities it offered to young people and Slough residents.

Members were informed that two apprenticeship schemes for aged 16-18 (Business and Administration) and 18-25 (Youth Work apprenticeships) had been in place from the end of 2018 and particular focus had been placed in supporting young people to apply and secure apprenticeship opportunities. Approximately 2 to 3 Care Leavers (CL) had been in the annual cohort of 20 young people in the past and despite pre-apprentice and ongoing support provided, the majority of CLs on the scheme had failed to successfully complete the apprenticeships.

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The Government had introduced a new apprenticeship levy designed to increase the number of apprenticeships on offer. The Council subsequently changed its approach to the provision of apprenticeships in the summer of 2018 in order to comply with the changes. The change had enabled the scheme to be broadened to a wider age group from 17 to 58 years. Slough Academy now offered over 25 apprenticeship programmes, which also enabled employees to be developed internally. It was explained that the roll out was being delivered over three phases with apprenticeships being the first, with 10 already completed successfully. Slough Academy worked with stakeholders to ascertain where career paths could be created and to ensure a business case for each apprenticeship (which must go through approval process with the Slough Academy Board).

Slough Academy had offered 2% of staff an apprenticeship compared to Government target of 2.3%, and 75% of apprentices were Slough residents. There were currently no children looked after (CLA) or CL apprentices due to low demand. Work was currently in progress with the Trust to ascertain the reasons for the lack of demand.

Recruitment job packs promoting Slough Borough Council (SBC) as an employer of choice had been created and all applications would be reviewed and scored. Candidates that met the requirement would be shortlisted for interviews, conducted by a panel consisting of stakeholders and staff from Slough Academy to ensure a fair process.

Various methods including apprenticeship awareness sessions had been delivered to head teachers at schools to support young people and to ensure they were well placed to secure apprenticeships with the Council. The Slough Academy website had also been created to provide support materials for different apprentice age groups. Further work was also being undertaken to find out what could be done differently. There were also proposals to provide baseline functional courses to enable young people to prepare and apply for apprenticeships.

It was highlighted that 75% of people on apprenticeships had indicated that they would be more likely to remain with SBC. Apprenticeships had also resulted in huge savings due to costs being redeemed against the Government levy and anticipated that succession planning would contribute to replace contractual workers.

A video presentation of the Slough Academy's First Birthday would be emailed to Panel members, as it could not be presented due to a technical hitch.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A query was raised as to why the apprenticeships target at 2% was lower than the Government target of 2.3%. It was explained that all local authorities were experiencing the same issue. The levy funded

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apprenticeship training costs and increased the range of apprenticeships that could be offered but did not pay for salaries.

- Members asked where the 75% of residents on apprenticeships were from. It was explained that they lived in the in the borough but none were CLAs. Applications from two CLAs had been received but were unsuccessful. One had failed the DBS check and the other had not met the minimum entry requirements. It was stressed that this was the reason why Slough Academy was keen to work with the Trust and the Council to encourage young people and to provide support in enabling them to complete the functional skills. Free courses would be provided, which when completed, would enable the young people to apply for apprenticeships. The Associate Director Place Regulation explained that a full report would be presented at the next Corporate Parenting Panel meeting (CPP) regarding this issue. Creating and improving opportunities for young people was being incorporated as part of the inclusive growth strategy.
- The Slough Academy manager agreed to email details to Panel members of the breakdown of the 27 apprenticeships in flight and the 19 pending as requested.
- In response to a question about the levels of apprenticeship that were currently being undertaken, it was explained that there were currently levels 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Vacancies would first be reviewed to see whether they could be offered on an apprenticeship basis before they were advertised. It was noted that although it did not include vacancies relating to the Trust, all Council vacancies would be advertised to the Trust. Members were informed that apprenticeship levy was linked to payroll and the Associate Director Place Regulation would discuss this issue further with the Interim Executive Director for Children/SCST Chief Executive (Both were on the Slough Academy Board).
- Members asked about the level of clawback that could be made. It was explained that the amount could vary between £3k and £5k which could be used to pay for apprenticeships in schools. It was requested for an approved list of providers to be sent to Panel members.
- Members asked about the level of pre-assessment of applicants. It was explained that learners were required to have a higher functional skills or academic level to show that they would be able to cope with the programme. Applicants would be required to take a test for some programmes, whilst others would be considered by a Panel. There were pre-apprenticeship programmes in place to support young people. The Slough Academy manager would provide the Panel with the list of qualifications required.

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

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Cllr Strutton asked why there was such a big gap in the apprentice gender split of 69 female to 31 male. It was explained that SBC generally had a higher rate of female employees and that the aim of the selection process was to get the best candidate for the job, which happened to be female. In addition, it also depended on the applications received for a post.

Cllr Strutton raised the issue of ring fenced apprenticeship for CLA, which the Corporate Parenting Panel believed was in operation but was no longer the case since the Slough Academy came into being. He suggested that CLAs should be targeted at an earlier stage to support them in making successful applications. The Associate Director Place Regulation explained that there had never been a quota or ring fenced apprenticeship programmes for CLAs but rather; the Council had a commitment to support young people and CLAs. The report to the Corporate Parenting Panel would also be looking at ways of building aspirations for young people and CLAs in order to ensure that they attained better qualifications.

Resolved:

- i) That the Slough Academy report be noted.
- ii) That the Slough Academy manager email the following details to Panel members:
 - a) Breakdown of the 27 apprenticeships that were in flight and the 19 pending
 - b) An approved list of apprenticeship providers.
 - c) A list of required qualifications for the various apprenticeship programmes

25. Youth Offer

The Associate Director Children and Family introduced a report that provided an overview of the work that had been conducted to refresh the Youth Offer, including the proposed development of a new youth centre.

A detailed presentation was given that outlined the work that had been undertaken and the work planned for the coming months to ensure delivery of the project. The Youth Offer Steering Group, chaired by the Chief Executive was set up at the early stage of the proposed new youth centre. The proposal was being widely promoted to increase engagement and support, and had already been presented to the Children and Young People's Partnership Board, shared with the Wellbeing board, Lead Members and including this Panel.

The Panel was informed that in the refresh of the existing youth offer, there had been discussions with the Place team about the progress on the design and build of the new youth centre. Further understanding had been sought from the 2040 Vision engagement project and from the Youth Service and Early Help. Young people had also been consulted about the current youth

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centre. The next step would be the scoping of the work within the youth centre work stream of the project.

Members were informed that the new youth centre would accelerate the refreshed Youth Offer and be a safe place for young people to visit, as well as being accessible for all those living in all parts of the borough. The refreshed Youth Offer would continue to enhance the lives of young people for the next five years and would be an integral part of the Council's localities agenda which included local youth provision.

As part of the forthcoming milestones, a report would be presented at the Cabinet meeting in February 2021 for approval. Ongoing running costs had been confirmed and aligned with Council's key priorities, and capital to build a new centre had been ring fenced.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members welcome proposal of the new youth centre but were concerned that the proposal for a hub for young people aged 10-21 may be too wide and age range to ensure that the appropriate offer was established. It was explained that the proposed new youth centre would not only be connected with the Youth Offer; it would also be linked to localities. Wider usage of the building would ensure efficient use through out the day. It was also envisaged that the building would be an asset that could be used seven days a week, managed by the Council and the voluntary sector. Provisions would be age appropriate and would have different offers including arts and cultural programmes. With regard to naming the building, work would be undertaken with young people to establish this.
- Members highlighted that safeguarding was paramount and particular attention would be needed with due consideration given in respect of young people with special needs and those experiencing mental health issues.

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

Cllr Strutton noted that £5m had been allocated towards the development of the youth centre and asked whether any site had been earmarked and how it was being funded. It was explained that capital funding had been allocated and ring fenced. The building would be located in the town centre but the precise site was not yet known, as the feasibility of sites were currently being explored, taking into account security issues and safe guarding to ensure the safety of young people and staff. The Associate Director Place Regulations added that exploration of the prospect of securing a partner that would sponsor a youth facility by way of securing revenue costs was also on-going.

Cllr Strutton asked whether officers were confident that £5m would be sufficient, as he believed that the building project was underfunded. It was

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confirmed that funding provision would be adequate based on similar building projects that had taken place around the country in relation to regeneration of the high street and provision of S106 planning obligation agreements.

A Member asked what mechanism had been put in place during the consultation for young people to make their preference for the building known. It was explained that currently, discussions were on-going with young people but there would be a consultation on the Youth Offer and the proposed new youth centre building. In response to a question as to consulting all schools, it was explained that the centre would be for young people and therefore consultation would be extended from Year 6 and school leavers.

Resolved – That the Youth Offer report be noted.

26. Ofsted Report on Social Care

The Interim Executive Director for Children /SCST Chief Executive provided an update of the Ofsted findings following the focused visit to Slough Children's Services in October 2020.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A member highlighted a long standing problem of failure in sending closing letters to schools and the issue of emails being sent via egress to the wrong schools. It was also suggested that there had been failure in referring Early Help referrals to the appropriate levels. In relation to Covid-19, there had been delays in schools getting PPE and teachers had been led to believe that visits by social workers had been replaced by telephone calls, thus compounding the feeling that social workers were off loading offers to Early Help. It was explained that schools were responsible for their areas of practice but the comments were noted. Issues relating to emails being sent to the wrong schools should be immediately reported directly to the Interim Executive Director for Children /SCST Chief Executive, so that they could be addressed speedily at the time of occurrence. The Associate Director Children and Family advised with regard to referrals by social workers to Early Help, advised that the issue may have arisen due to social worker being off but confirmed that the generally procedure was for there to be a discussion with the social worker responsible for the family before being referred to Early Help. In the absence of this discussion, the case would usually be referred back to the social worker. It could not be confirmed that circulation of PPE was slow but Members were reassured that visits were continuing to be made to children. It was highlighted that social workers in other parts of the country had not continued to make visits, whereas those in Slough had. In response to a question as to whether telephone calls were classed as a visit, it was explained that this was not the case. During Covid, risk assessments were made and where required, social workers made visits.

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- A Member asked what actions were being taken to address the issue of high staff turnover. The Interim Executive Director for Children /SCST Chief acknowledged that this was an issue of top priority. It was stressed that caseloads were very high and pressurised and therefore difficult to keep and recruit new staff. Three additional staff team members had been recruited and a bid had been submitted to the DfE (Department for Education) to set up a hub to develop career development and apprenticeships in order to increase recruitment and retention. It was stressed that the proposal would only be possible if the bid was successful, as no other additional funding was available. A decision on the bid was expected in approximately two weeks time. Members were informed that some agency staff had become permanent.
- A Member asked about the timescale of the restructure process in respect of child exploitation and the public law outline (PLO) process. It was confirmed that the restructure had been completed and stressed that the issue was not about restructure but rather the level of casework and the quality of the work relating to assessments and plans.

The Chair then invited Cllr Strutton to address the Panel under rule 30.

Cllr Strutton highlighted that the case loads were high and asked whether there were any figures in relation to the number of current case loads. The Interim Executive Director for Children /SCST Chief Executive agreed to email data as they were not available to hand but that the case load figures ranged from 18 at Children's Services and higher in Child Protection, which were sometimes in the range of 30 and over.

Cllr Strutton expressed concern about high level of case loads in the different areas and the need for agency staff to become permanent. It was explained that these issues/concerns had been acknowledged but stressed that Slough was not alone in this regard but rather a national problem.

Resolved:

- i) That the Ofsted Report on Social Care be noted.
- ii) The Interim Executive Director for Children /SCST Chief Executive to provide figures on the current social workers' case loads for circulation to the Panel and Cllr Strutton.

27. Forward Work Programme 2020-21

The Policy Insight Analyst presented the Forward Work Programme and updated Members on relevant items.

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The Panel was informed that Members had been agreed to focus on the following themes for 2020-21:

- i) Apprenticeship Skills
- ii) The Impact of Covid-19.

It was reported however, that seven additional items had since been raised as a result of further discussions that had taken place. An informal meeting would therefore be arranged for Members to discuss and agree to include the items on the agenda for this period. A list of the items would be sent by email to Members for information.

Members were invited to attend a meeting being arranged in January 2021 at which the terms of reference for a proposed Employment and Skills Task and Finish group would be drafted.

Resolved:

- a) That the Policy Insight Analyst be requested to arrange an informal meeting to discuss additional items for inclusion in the 2020-21 Forward Work Programme.
- b) That the proposed seven additional items be emailed to Members for information.
- c) That members be invited to the proposed Employment and Skills Task and Finish group meeting to be held in January 2021.

28. Attendance Record

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

29. Date of Next Meeting 4 February 2021

Resolved- That the date of the next meeting was confirmed as 4 February 2021.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.04 pm)