

Children & Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children & Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 15th July, 2020.

Present: Cllrs Carol Clark (Chair), Barbara Inman (Vice Chair), Clare Gamble, Ray Godwin, Tony Hampton, Ross Patterson, Maurice Perry (sub for Andrew Sherris), Sally Ann Watson

Officers: Martin Gray, Vanessa Housely, Jackie Ward (CS), Judy Trainer, Rebecca Saunders-Thompson, Michael Henderson (DS)

Also in attendance: Cllr Luke Frost, Dave Pickard (SLSCB Chair), Lorna Nicoll (Children North East), Liam Twizell (Healthwatch)

Apologies: Cllr Andrew Sherris

CYP 47/19 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

CYP 48/19 **Minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CYP 49/19 **Stockton Local Safeguarding Children Board - Annual Report 2018/19 - Dave Pickard (Chair of the Board) to introduce**

The Select Committee received a presentation from Dave Pickard (Independent Chair) on the Stockton-on Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2018/19.

The Stockton and Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Boards had adopted a co-ordinated way of working and the alignment of the priorities of the Boards had facilitated a smooth transition to the new Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership. Much of the work in 2018/19 was invested in helping to design, test and challenge the new Partnership arrangement which went live in April 2019. The new Partnership had a greater emphasis on scrutiny.

The Annual Report reflected the impact of austerity and poverty and highlighted the record levels of children in care; neglect being the main category for a child protection plan. Tees-wide work to tackle domestic abuse was also highlighted.

Members also discussed the definitions and prevalence of child poverty referenced in the Annual Report.

AGREED that the Annual Report be noted.

CYP 50/19 **Progress Update - Scrutiny Review of the Child's Journey**

Jackie Ward outlined the progress update for the Scrutiny Review of the Child's Journey.

In response to Members' questions, officers confirmed that they were working closely with schools on this issue.

AGREED that the assessments of progress be endorsed.

- CYP 51/19** **Scrutiny Review of School Uniform**
- To consider updated scope and project plan
 - To receive a background presentation from Vanessa Housely, Chief Adviser, Education Improvement Service
 - To review background documents sent out with agenda
 - To receive a presentation from Children North East (to follow)
 - To review research on Stockton School Uniform policies
 - To receive feedback from the Closing the Gap Session held on 9 July

The Scrutiny Officer presented a revised scope and project plan for the review which reflected issues arising from COVID-19 and revised timescales.

Vanessa Housely (Chief Adviser, Education Improvement Service) and link officer for the review gave a background presentation to provide context for the review. The presentation covered:

- DfE Guidance 2013 – this highlighted that it was for the Governing Body to decide whether there should be a school uniform policy and how it should be sourced
- DfE Guidance strongly encouraged schools to have a uniform as it could play a valuable role in contributing to the ethos of a school and setting an appropriate tone.
- The Children's Society Report 2018 The Wrong Blazer highlighted national variation across key phases, schools, policies, uniform requirements, costs, student voice and parent/carer voice. The report also highlighted the impact of cost nationally.
- The impact of COVID-19 on household finances – research indicated that low income families had been much more adversely affected by the pandemic

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- COVID-19 – requirement for more regular washing of uniform
- The need to balance cost with quality – good value was needed
- The significant difference in cost between specialist suppliers and supermarkets.
- Sew on badges was one way that schools could keep uniform costs down

Lorna Nicoll (Children North East) gave a presentation on their Poverty Proofing the School Day work. The Charity's programme was founded on children's comments that "school was the worst place to be poor". Their aim was that:

“No activity or planned activity in schools should identify, exclude, treat differently or make assumptions about those children whose household income or resources are lower than others.”

The presentation covered:

- What is poverty proofing?
- Children North East work in Stockton
- Why do we have school uniform? What are the benefits?
- What are the issues around costs?
 - o Being obliged to buy specific items from specific suppliers
 - o Transport / delivery costs also to be taken into consideration
 - o Quantity of items required
 - o VAT adult sizes
 - o Branding of shoes and bags
- What is the national and local picture?
- Roles and responsibilities
 - o Keep uniform and logos to a minimum
 - o Avoid specifying suppliers
 - o Pay attention to what is required for PE uniform (indoor/outdoor)
 - o Avoid different requirements for different year groups
 - o Consider how spare uniform is administered
 - o Avoid sanctions
 - o Consider providing uniforms to those unable to afford them and arrangements for washing them
 - o Continue to identify and eradicate barriers and to raise awareness of the issues involved: Poverty proof all schools
 - o Undertake reviews in those that have been audited
 - o Training for all staff AND those in initial teacher training
- Are uniform costs a barrier to children taking part in the full curriculum?
- What are the opportunities to mitigate costs?
 - o Provision for used uniform
 - o Sew-on badges
 - o Payment plans
- How is the impact of cost mitigated for the most vulnerable?
- Is there any evidence of their effectiveness?

The main issues discussed were as follows:

- Uniforms could play a role in ensuring that those living in disadvantage were not identifiable by what they were wearing.
- Uniform exchange – need to consider quality; scope to deliver in community settings.

- Any scheme to mitigate costs needed to be developed with children and parents to ensure that it was appropriate and met needs.

The Scrutiny Officer outlined the key points from the following documents which had been sent to the Select Committee with the agenda papers for the meeting:

- DfE Guidance on School Uniform 2013.
- House of Commons Briefing Paper – December 2019 – School Uniform Costs in England.
- The Children's Society Report: The Wrong Blazer 2018: Time for action on school uniform costs.
- Explanatory Notes – Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniform) Bill.

The main issues highlighted were as follows:

- DfE Guidance stated that Governing Bodies should give high priority to cost considerations and that school uniform should be easily accessible for parents to purchase and schools should select items that could be purchased cheaply, for example, from supermarkets.
- The Wrong Blazer Report highlighted that the high cost of uniforms could be put down in part to school policies that made parents buy clothing from specialist shops.
- There had been discussion in Parliament about putting school uniform guidance on a statutory footing and the Private Members Bill was seeking to achieve this.

The Scrutiny Officer presented an anonymised summary of school uniform policies across all Stockton primary and secondary schools. Key issues highlighted were as follows:

- The majority of schools in the Borough required parents/carers to purchase uniform from specialist suppliers.
- Several schools required uniform to be purchased from a specific supplier or two/three suppliers. This placed further restrictions on uniform choices.
- In Primary schools - The cheapest sweatshirt available from a supplier was priced at £6.25 for a 'budget crew neck sweatshirt'. The most expensive was priced at £16.50 for an 'adult size knitted jumper'. Alternatively, one supermarket offered a set of two jumpers from £4.
- In Secondary schools – The cheapest blazer available from a supplier was priced at £23. The most expensive was priced at £44.04 for a 'larger size jacket'. Alternatively, one supermarket offered a school blazer from £10.
- Information had been obtained about uniform recycling schemes and the availability of secondhand uniform in schools. However, in general it had been very difficult to find this information on school websites.

The Scrutiny Officer reported that feedback had been sought from schools attending a Closing the Gap session on 9 July. Schools felt that there would be support for a short school survey in the autumn to gather examples of best practice into how schools were helping families who might be struggling to meet school uniform costs.

Feedback provided at the Closing the Gap session included:

- Uniform should be available from supermarkets (not specialist suppliers)
- Have a large stock of uniform (including PE kit) kept at school to sell to parents at cost price.
- Don't demand uniform items to have a logo
- Provide uniform and PE kits to pupils transferring in-year
- Have spare PE kit in school and washed in between uses.
- Utilise family fund to purchase uniform to help out those families who are struggling.
- Children North East Poverty Proofing Audit had highlighted a number of issues and was very useful
- Have a uniform for PE kit
- Uniform Exchange Schemes
- Provision of warm winter coats and shoes where needed via family fund
- Tutors to have an extra stock of ties
- Have a large supply of school shoes available to be handed out.

AGREED that the information be noted.

**CYP
52/19** **Chairs Update**

The Chair had no update.

**CYP
53/19** **Work Programme 2020/21**

The Scrutiny Officer advised that an additional meeting of the Select Committee had been scheduled for Wednesday 26 August 2020.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.