

## Children & Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children & Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 16th September, 2020.

**Present:** Cllr Carol Clark(Chairman), Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Sally Ann Watson

**Officers:** Martin Gray (CS), Sophie Haste, Sarah Robinson (Community Engagement) Peter Bell, Judy Trainer, Rebecca Saunders-Thompson (DS)

**Also in attendance:** Janine Browne and Rhys Stephens (SDAIS)

**Apologies:** Cllr Tony Hampton, Cllr Ross Patterson,

### **CYP      Declarations of Interest**

**15/20**

Councillor Sally Ann Watson declared a personal non-prejudicial interest as neighbours owned Motif8 clothing who supply school uniform to Stockton Schools and their business uniforms.

### **CYP      Minutes of the meeting held on 26 August 2020**

**16/20**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 August 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CYP      Scrutiny Review of the Cost of School Uniform**

**17/20**

The Scrutiny Officer reminded the Select Committee about the scope of the review and advised that this meeting would be focusing on wider community support available.

Members received information on Stockton and Billingham Foodbank Uniform Recycling Scheme. The main issues were as follows:

- 70 families had been provided with school uniform during August 2020. Items of uniform were still available so this number will increase in future
- Families did not need a voucher to collect uniform from the collection point in Billingham Precinct
  - Uniforms could be collected by parents, grandparents or carers
- The usual days for uniform collection were Tuesdays and Thursdays but extra days had been added during August to provide families with more opportunities to collect uniforms
- The uniform was separated into different boxes according to item of clothing. For example, short sleeved girls' blouses
- The foodbank also held items of 'Logoed' uniform from a number of secondary schools in the area.

A representative from Catlegate Shopping Centre had sent a written statement for the Select Committee to consider about the Uniform Exchange that had operated in 2019. The key points were as follows:

- The uniform exchange had received plenty of positive press and were donated enormous amounts of pre-loved uniform with plenty of praise from businesses and shoppers. However, there was some negativity on social media from people who felt that the scheme should be open to everyone
- A grant of £2,000 had been received from Thirteen to buy new uniform which was sold for £1 a piece and the high-quality donated uniform was sold for 50p a piece
- When the shop was opened it was clear that there was a lot of people who didn't want to be seen to buying discounted uniform. This was quite a significant problem and new ways to promote the shop to the target audience were needed. To do this the shop was made more of a place where children could do crafts, get their faces painted and read books. When the parents brought their children into the shop for the activities, the discounted uniform for sale was brought to their attention
- Low income families were targeted through Facebook and word of mouth and staff knew the right people to talk to
- At first shoppers were asked to prove that they were on low-income e.g. JSA booklet or letter but over time staff built up a rapport with shoppers and this wasn't felt necessary
- To start with, the exchange were selling uniform basics – i.e: polo necks, trousers, summer dresses etc. However, more requests were received for branded uniform so a rail for local schools was introduced. This led to a lot of phone call for bespoke items for local schools
- The uniform exchange was a success and raised £750 for charity, helped 500 families and sold 1000 pieces of uniform
- In 2020 the scheme could not run due to the pandemic. A new venue to run the scheme might be needed due to plans to demolish the Castlegate Centre in 2022

The Select Committee received evidence from representatives of Stockton Citizens Advice Bureau. The main issues from their presentation were as follows:

- CAB had published a national report highlighting the impact of school uniform costs on families. This was particularly a problem for secondary in cases where purchase was compulsory from a limited number of suppliers for bespoke items of uniform
- Badged items were much more expensive. Where schools used branded items, it was especially important that they offered recycling schemes

- There was a vast difference in cost between items from specialist suppliers and items which could be bought in supermarkets or value stores
- For many families, the cost was a headache that they worried about all summer
- Foodbank recycling did not go far enough and a more co-ordinated approach was urgently needed with more input from schools who were best placed to identify those families most in need
- For the first time, CAB had been approached by a local school to provide advice to families. It was felt that this showed a worsening of the situation
- The debt team worked with families who were struggling to buy the basic essentials. They were aware of two cases where doorstep money lenders had been used to source the money specifically to buy school uniform
- Predictions were that there was going to be a 60% increase by the end of 2021 in people that could not afford to buy the basic essentials
- Uniform exchange was inconsistent across the Borough with some school uniform being harder to source than others
- Any schemes needed to find ways of getting over the stigma or parents collecting second-hand uniform

Stockton's Community Engagement Team highlighted the work of the Tees Credit Union and arranged to send a video clip to Members about the support they offered. The team had worked with a wide range of organisations, agencies and charities (including CAB, Tees Credit Union and foodbanks) on collections and recycling boxes and a "Pay as you Prom" saving scheme. Although, these schemes had not been specifically aimed at school uniform, similar approaches to help with school uniform costs could be an option.

The new Community Partnerships which were about to be launched could also be involved with work on this issue.

From their previous work in this area, the team commented that where second hand uniform was provided, this needed to be in good condition and packaged appropriately. The growing use of children's initials on uniform items was a particular problem as this prevented perfectly serviceable uniform being passed on to other children even within the same family.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that in addition to evidence being presented at meetings, a school survey was being undertaken to understand the support offered directly through schools. This would be incorporated into the summary of evidence which the Select Committee would be discussing in October.

AGREED that the information be noted.

**CYP      Select Committee Work Programme**

**18/20**

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

**CYP**

**Chairs Update**

**19/20**

The Chair had no update.