

# SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

## Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

**Meeting held 13 October 2021**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mick Rooney (Chair), Maroof Raouf (Deputy Chair), Mike Chaplin, Anne Murphy, Vickie Priestley, Richard Shaw, Ann Whitaker, Cliff Woodcraft and Ann Woolhouse

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

.....

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kaltum Rivers, Jack Scott and Sophie Wilson, and from Sam Evans (Diocese Representative – Non-Council Voting Member), Peter Naldrett (Parent Governor Representative – Non-Council Voting Member) and Alice Riddell (Healthwatch Sheffield, Observer).

### **2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

- 2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

- 4.1 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th February 2021, were approved as a correct record and, arising therefrom, the Policy and Information Officer (Alice Nicholson) stated that, with reference to (a) Item 4 – Elective Home Education, paragraph (c)(i), shortly after the Committee meeting, the Government had decided that all pupils' examination grades for summer 2021 would be based on teacher assessments, (b) Item 5 – Minutes of Previous Meeting, paragraph 5.1 (c), the more detailed information regarding the Amber Project had not yet been sent to Members, and she suggested that such information could be incorporated into the Annual Safeguarding

and Sexual Exploitation Reports, which were to be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee and (c) Item 7 – Multi-Agency Support Teams (MAST) – Update, paragraph 7.5, (c), she would seek clarification with regard to how the Committee could be involved in the review of early help services.

4.2 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th May 2021, were approved as a correct record.

4.3 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th July 2021, were approved as a correct record.

## 5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

## 6. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) containing the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2021/22.

6.2 Ms Nicholson reported that the Annual Adoption and Fostering Reports 2020/21 would now be considered by the Committee at its meeting to be held on 24th November 2021 and the Annual Reports of the Sheffield Safeguarding Children's Board and Sheffield Sexual Exploitation Service would be considered at the Committee's meeting to be held on 8th December 2021.

6.3 Members made suggestions in terms of issues to be considered by the Committee, which included (a) the effects of the cut in Universal Credit and the end of the Government's furlough scheme, on children and young people and (b) a review of Youth Services, after having been insourced for 12 months.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made; and
- (b) approves the draft Work Programme for 2021/ 22, with consideration to be given to the suggestions now made.

**7. SHEFFIELD YOUTH CABINET - IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHEFFIELD: REVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP TO YOUTH CABINET AND SCRUTINY WORK 2021-22**

7.1 The Committee received an introductory report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) containing details of the review and follow-up to the previous collaborative work undertaken by a Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group, with the Sheffield Youth Cabinet, on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people in Sheffield. Attached to the introductory report was a report of the Task and Finish Group and a report of the Council's Education and Skills Service on the survey of young people's experience of the pandemic.

7.2 Also in attendance for this item were Jude and Muneerah (Sheffield Youth Cabinet) who had been invited by the Committee to put forward their views how they, other members of the Youth Cabinet and other young people who attended youth clubs, had been affected by the pandemic. They were accompanied by Emma Hinchliffe (Youth Services, Libraries, Learning, Skills and Communities).

7.3 The Committee invited Jude and Muneerah to provide answers to the six questions which had been put to the Youth Cabinet at its meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2021, and also report on the responses from young people who attend some of the youth clubs in the city, as follows:-

7.3.1 Question 1 – Are you glad to be back at school and have you noticed any changes from the last school year?

7.3.2 Jude stated that he was really glad to be back at school, engaging with teachers and peers. He stated that whilst school was predominantly a place to go and learn, it was also a place to engage with teachers and peers. It was also a place for socialising, which helped young people develop, and assisted them when looking for apprenticeships and employment. Jude stated that he had struggled badly during the lockdowns, and did not have sufficient IT provision and the ability to engage, which had resulted in him suffering a drop in grades and sets. When pupils returned to school in March 2021, the situation had improved considerably, and whilst he had made some improvements in terms of his grades, he did not consider he had reached the grades he would have done if he'd been in school all the time.

7.3.3 In terms of comments of others, Jude stated that there had been a mixed response, with some pupils being pleased to be back in school, whilst others were not. Some pupils had expressed concern over Covid-19 in terms of group settings, a lack of adequate

ventilation and concerns travelling to and from school on busy buses, whereas those undertaking practical subjects were pleased to be back. Many pupils found it easier to ask for help in person, found the lessons easier than being online and welcomed the social aspect of being back with their friends. Some pupils were struggling with less sleep and others preferred studying at home as they felt shy in the classroom setting.

7.3.4 Muneerah stated that she had found the lockdowns quite stressful, with having to isolate resulting in an adverse effect on her mental health, with several of her friends and family suffering with anxiety issues. She made reference to the problems being faced by young people who had dyslexia, indicating that the break in education had resulted in their progress being badly compromised, partly to do with the lack of continuity and awareness from teachers.

7.3.5 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- Jude stated that in terms of the benefits of studying at home, he felt that things had improved when pupils started receiving more online calls from their teachers. This was during the first three months of 2021, and was the first time he felt he was properly engaging after the lockdowns, although he still considered that he was only learning around 50% than what he would have done in school. He believed that the majority of pupils found the online lessons less beneficial than face-to-face lessons in school. Muneerah concurred with these views, indicating that some pupils had adapted better than others. She personally considered it a negative experience and felt under-prepared/under-equipped.
- Accessibility to IT had improved during the pandemic, so schools and pupils would be much better prepared if there were any similar events in the future. It was acknowledged that several pupils suffered, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic, due to a lack of up-to-date IT. Through various projects and initiatives, schools had been able to acquire more laptops, which pupils had access to.
- Jude stated that he had been on the student Council at his school for six years, which met regularly, and held meetings with local community forums. There had not been much opportunity for pupils to voice their concerns during the lockdowns, other than the odd survey arranged by teachers. There were now many more opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions.
- Many pupils, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, suffered more during the lockdowns due to a lack of access to

adequate IT provision. As well as affecting their learning, some pupils' mental health suffered, particularly with regard to anxiety. Some pupils faced problems in finding a quiet space in their household to be able to study, which again caused stress. Pupils suffering with mental health issues found it difficult to get the help they needed, both due to them being afraid to speak out about it and to a lack of professional expertise within schools and colleges. Several pupils were affected by watching their parents struggle financially during the pandemic.

- Muneerah stated that she struggled during the first lockdown due to a lack of online learning available, with the pupils work not being assessed regularly enough. Throughout the pandemic, the online learning experience had improved, although a lot of students continued to struggle. Some schools had adapted quicker and better than others in terms of online lessons, with little interaction between pupils and teachers at some schools. Jude stated that he did not have any online lessons until three months into the pandemic, and found it very difficult to engage when such online lessons commenced on a regular basis. He stated that some of his friends, at other schools, had made much better progress during lockdown, which he believed was due to the style and quality of online lessons.
- The reasons why pupils had been asked to turn their cameras off during online lessons was simply due to safety concerns. Some pupils indicated that they would have found it easier to have their cameras on.
- Muneerah stated that she had struggled with her dyslexia whilst at secondary school, then the situation got even worse during the lockdown due to the loss of visual learning. She has since moved on from school to college, and had spoken to her lecturers at college in connection with what support she, and other students suffering with the condition, needed. For a number of reasons, mainly due to a lack of understanding, she had not felt as though she had received the support she needed.

7.3.6 Question 2 - Do you feel you have been given enough opportunity to catch up on your studies from lockdown? Why?

7.3.7 Muneerah stated that there was a mixed response to this question, with pupils in different year groups experiencing problems in different ways. Pupils in Y10 and Y11 had struggled due to it being their exam years, whereas pupils in Y7/8 and Y9 were struggling as they were being asked to do extra lessons in English and maths. Those pupils taking art subjects had also suffered in that the extra catch-up lessons in English and maths would often replace their

chosen art subjects. Several pupils were struggling to catch up on those subjects, which were traditionally more difficult than others, such as maths and science. Muneerah's view was that the catchup work by schools wasn't as effective as it could be. There was a view that catching up should mean that, and not going over large areas of work again as this would create stress for some pupils. Such catch-up lessons should only comprise small groups, and pupils should have the option of asking teachers to go over what they thought they needed to know, rather than going over everything again.

7.3.8 Question 3 - How are you feeling about the way ahead? Is there anything you, or young people you know need support with (eg mental health)?

7.3.9 Muneerah stated that some pupils had found it stressful not knowing how to revise, as they had never been taught how to do so. There were general concerns regarding students being off with Covid-19, and with it being treated like any other illness. Mental health still remained a big issue, with those pupils suffering believing that schools only acknowledged it during Mental Health Awareness Week. The Youth Cabinet was aware that not all schools had taken up the support offered to them by Kooth, the online mental health support scheme, originally commissioned by the Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group, available for all young people aged between 11 and 18. The Youth Cabinet would be contacting all schools, encouraging them to do this as they recognised the benefits this could have for young people.

7.3.10 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- The problems of young people having struggled during the pandemic had been replicated all over the country. More emphasis needed to be placed on the mental health needs of young people, and the message needed to be put across more forcibly. Many young people, particularly those suffering with mental health problems, found it very difficult to speak out about their problems. Some pupils had been forced to get part-time jobs to make themselves more self-sufficient and less reliant on their parents, some of whom were struggling financially due to the pandemic.
- The Youth Cabinet had met with Learn Sheffield on a number of occasions to discuss various issues, including access to part-time jobs and work experience. A number of pupils were concerned that they hadn't had the opportunity of getting work experience which would be an advantage when looking for employment.

- Jude stated that, in his opinion, there was a lack of mutual respect from some teachers. He also considered that there was a reluctance on some pupils to ask questions, partly due to the fear of being judged or ridiculed in front of both teachers and peers. All teachers should be more encouraging in terms of supporting pupils to ask questions.
- 7.3.11 Question 4 – For those who were due to take exams last year, how are you feeling now about the results you were given and what impact this has had on you?
- 7.3.12 Jude stated that most of the pupils and young people questioned had indicated that they were happy with the grades they had been given by their teachers. It was considered that the grading and assessment system had worked generally well.
- 7.3.13 Question 5 – For those who are due to take exams this year, how are you feeling about them?
- 7.3.14 Jude stated that there was some confusion amongst pupils in terms of what work they were going to be tested on, or what work they needed to do to catch up on. Some pupils considered that the Government needed to make decisions earlier in terms of whether they would be expected to be sitting examinations, as they needed to know which topics they should revise. Some pupils were both concerned and frustrated at the fact that they were being forced to sit exams whilst the year group before them had not had to do so, even though their education had still been disrupted.
- 7.3.15 Question 6 – Any other feedback from the young people about the impact of Covid-19 on their education and the support they feel they need now? What can schools do?
- 7.3.16 Muneerah stated that more work was needed in terms of raising awareness of mental health issues, and that teachers should receive more training on this issue. Jude made reference to Kooth, indicating that he considered all schools should be advertising this very useful service, particularly on behalf of those young people who did not wish to visit their GP or CAMHS for various reasons. The service had been advertised in youth clubs across the city.
- 7.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-
- (a) notes the information contained in the reports now submitted, the information now reported and the responses to the questions raised;
  - (b) thanks Jude, Muneerah and Emma Hinchliffe for attending the meeting, and providing the feedback now reported and responding to the questions raised; and

- (c) requests the Chair, in consultation with the Policy and Improvement Officer, to draft actions for the Committee, following the views now expressed, to be shared with, and agreed by, the Youth Council.

**8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 7.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee be held on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021, at 1.00 pm in the Town Hall.