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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 13 February 2023.

**PRESENT:** Councillors M Saunders (Vice-Chair), C Hobson, D Jones, M Nugent and G Wilson

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** E Craigie (Teesside Live)

**OFFICERS:** R Brown, C Cannon, K Dargue, T Dunn, I Hanif, G Moore and K Smith

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors D McCabe, A Hellaoui and T Higgins

22/40 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

22/41 **MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 16 JANUARY 2023**

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel held on 16 January 2023 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

22/42 **FREE SCHOOL MEAL PROVISION FOR NURSERY AGED PUPILS IN MIDDLESBROUGH**

At the Council meeting held on 30 November 2022, a Notice of Motion had been submitted, which requested that an assessment of the costs associated with an extension of Middlesbrough's free school meal offer (to include 3 and 4 year olds) be considered by the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel.

The Head of Achievement was in attendance to provide an overview of the proposal and the associated costs.

Members heard that the Government recognised the benefits of providing a healthy school meal to the most disadvantaged pupils. It was highlighted that the Education Act 1996 required maintained schools and academies (including free schools) to provide free school meals to disadvantaged pupils who were aged between 5 and 16 years old.

Members heard that in 2011 the pupil premium had been introduced to provide additional funding for local authority maintained schools in England, to increase the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers. Children eligible for free school meals also received pupil premium for their school. The funding was paid directly to the school as they were best placed to determine what additional provision was required.

The scrutiny panel was advised that from September 2014, Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) had been introduced for pupils in reception, year 1, and year 2.

In respect of the Notice of Motion, three lines of enquiry had been explored and those were outlined to the scrutiny panel:

1. It was advised that extending free school meal provision to ALL 3 and 4 year olds would have cost the Council £1, 748,000. The daily cost of school meals (£2.30) had been multiplied by the number of academic days (190) to give the price per head of £437 annually for 4,000 children (2,000 3 year olds and 2,000 4 year olds).
2. Members heard that extending free school meal provision to 3 and 4 year old attending maintained settings for both 15 and 30 hours of nursery provision, would have cost the Council £201,894. The number of pupils in the cohort was 462, however, the majority of those children only attended nursery provision for 15 hours.

3. It was advised that extending free school meal provision for those 3 and 4 year old attending maintained settings for 30 hours (49 children), would have cost the Council £21,413.

It was commented that the plans would have needed to be extended to include children in all types of provision, otherwise it would have left the Council open to being challenged for discrimination. It was advised that, to only provide free school meal provision to those attending maintained settings would have excluded a large proportion of Middlesbrough's children as those attending Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI), childminder and academy sector provision would not qualify or benefit.

The Head of Achievement advised that, given that proposal to extend free school meals to nursery-age children was highly expensive, it was not affordable at present.

A Member queried whether the costs outlined were purely for the meals or whether the logistics of serving those extra meals had also been considered. In response, the Head of Achievement confirmed that only the cost of the meals had been calculated.

A discussion ensued. The scrutiny panel recognised the key benefits of providing a healthy school meal, especially given the cost of living rise and the increased use of foodbanks. However, Members highlighted concerns that extending free school meal provision to only the 3 and 4 year old cohort attending maintained settings would have been considered discriminatory against those children attending Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) nurseries, childminders or academy sector provision. Subsequently, the scrutiny panel considered that the only option available would have been to extend free school meal provision to ALL 3 and 4 year olds and that would have resulted in the Council incurring significant costs (£1,748,000 in the first year). Therefore, given the Council's current financial position, the scrutiny panel supported the officer's recommendation - That the extension of free school meal provision, to include 3 and 4 year olds, would have been highly expensive and was not affordable at present.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the appropriate elected members would be notified of the scrutiny panel's comments.

## **AGREED**

**That the extension of free school meal provision, to include 3 and 4 year olds, would have been highly expensive and was not affordable at present.**

22/43

## **DRAFT FINAL REPORT - YOUTH OFFENDING AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH SCHOOLS**

The Democratic Services Officer presented a brief overview of the draft final report on the topic of Youth Offending and Partnership Working with Schools. The following information was provided:

1. The purpose of the review was to examine how the South Tees Youth Justice Service (STYJS) worked in partnership with schools in Middlesbrough to improve school attendance, educational engagement and attainment for those young people involved in the criminal justice system.
2. The terms of reference, for the review, were detailed at paragraph 3 of the report.
3. Evidence in respect of Term of Reference A was included at paragraphs 9 to 24 and provided details on the role of the STYJS.
4. Evidence in respect of Term of Reference B was included at paragraphs 25 and 35 and provided details on the barriers to young people in the youth justice system engaging in education, such as drug and alcohol issues, serious youth violence and complex needs.
5. Evidence in respect of Term of Reference C was included at paragraphs 36 to 61 and provided details on how the STYJS worked with schools and covered the support provided by the service's Education, Training and Employment Team, the

development of the Inclusion Pathway and the contextual safeguarding approach that had been promoted.

6. Evidence in respect of Term of Reference D was included at paragraphs 62 to 71 and provided details on national effective practice in respect of partnership working with schools, as identified by HM Inspectorate of Probation.
7. The report contained 7 conclusions, which were detailed in full at paragraph 77 of the report. The conclusions summarised the main points of the report and identified key areas for further consideration.

Following discussion, the following recommendations were agreed for inclusion in the final report:

- a) *That the STYJS supports Children's Services to undertake a review of Middlesbrough Council's contextual safeguarding/risk outside of the home approaches to ensure delivery of a robust and co-ordinated whole-system/multi-agency response to violence and exploitation; which:*
  - *allows schools and education providers to react swiftly and firmly to early signs of criminal behaviour;*
  - *improves ETE outcomes for young people involved in the criminal justice system; and*
  - *supports the work of the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV).*
- b) *That each young person who goes into custody is assessed to determine whether an educational psychologist should be allocated to them, to ensure their educational needs are being met (especially during the transition periods into and out of custody).*
- c) *That data is collected, analysed and evaluated to demonstrate the impact of the STYJS Inclusion Pathway on school attendance, exclusions and attainment.*
- d) *That a system, data management arrangements and information exchange agreements are put in place to ensure the STYJS can access a wealth of data and information, from partner agencies, to:*
  - *drill down to an individual level;*
  - *determine trends;*
  - *develop summary dashboards for key areas;*
  - *report on the progress of young people and their successes;*
  - *identify barriers and challenges; and*
  - *improve service delivery.*
- e) *That, in 6 months' time, the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel receives:*
  - *a detailed account of the work that has been undertaken to implement recommendations a) to d); and*
  - *an effective analysis of data from partner agencies (including schools), reporting on:*
    - *the profile of children/young people who come into contact with the STYJS, their needs, challenges and experiences of education; and*
    - *the STYJS's performance, specifically the impact of the STYJS Inclusion Pathway on school attendance, exclusions and attainment.*

## **AGREED**

**That, subject to the inclusion of the agreed recommendations, the final report on Youth Offending and Partnership Working with Schools be approved and submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for consideration.**

The Chair advised that on 12 January 2023, the Overview and Scrutiny Board had

considered:

- the Executive Forward Work Programme;
- an update on ongoing work and current key issues from the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Safety; and
- updates from the Scrutiny Chairs.

It was advised that the meeting of the Board that had been scheduled to take place on 8 February 2023 did not go ahead.

**NOTED**