

COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 12 March 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Campbell (Chair), Sinclair (Vice-Chair), Altaf-Khan, Baxter, Hazell, Jones, Khan, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Sanders, Wilkinson and Young.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lois Stock (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer) and Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer)

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received from Councillor Mary Clarkson

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

28. SELECT COMMITTEE - SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORK.

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) giving the background of this Select Committee. Councillor Jim Campbell introduced the report and explained how this part of the meeting would work.

This meeting was the start of the Select Committee that would look at supporting young people into education, training and work. He thanked Lead members Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan and Councillor Altaf Khan for their work on this matter. Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan would chair the meeting whilst the Select Committee was in action.

The Committee welcomed the following guests:-

- Ruth Ashwell – Oxfordshire County Council Youth Engagement and Opportunities Service Manager, Early Intervention – Children, Young People and Families;
- Sarah Burrows – Oxfordshire County Council - Manager of the East Oxford Hub;
- Riaz Ahmed – Chair of the Stanley Road Mosque;
- Khalid Shariff – SportsBox;
- Sharon Highton – CfBT Education Trust (Oxford Includes);

- Amir Hamza;
- Jawaid Malik;

Introduction

The guiding question for the Committee was:-

To understand and review what organisations, agencies and the voluntary sector do to communicate with and support young people into education, training and employment. To consider data and evidence from young people and agencies concerning the effectiveness of these strategies.

Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan explained that this was an important piece of work for the Council. He outlined to the guest speakers the areas upon which they were invited to focus:-

For agencies:-

- Where and what were the issues?
- What do you do in relation to the issues, both formally and informally?
- What outcomes are being achieved?
- What do you see as the barriers to better outcomes?

For young people (and other guests):-

- What are your ambitions for work, training and education?
- What do you see as the issues and barriers to your achieving your ambitions?
- What help have you had – and did you find it effective?
- What do you, and others, need to do in order to move forwards?

Councillor Altaf Khan reminded the Committee that there was concern about GCSE results within the City. Without good results, young people would find it even more difficult to move into work, education or training. The issue of educational attainment, and its relevance to the issue currently before the Committee, should not be overlooked.

First Witnesses: Ruth Ashwell and Sarah Burrows

Ruth Ashwell explained that she was responsible for youth engagement opportunities, and that she and her team are responsible for tracking young people from aged 16 plus in order to see how they are progressing.

Figures show that the situation for young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Oxfordshire was not as bad as nationally, and that the County was doing quite well. Information from Job Centre Plus showed that there were now 35 fewer young people on Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA). However, there were a percentage of young people for whom there was no information available and this was reflected in the adjusted figure on the graphs that Ms Ashwell supplied to the Committee.

Ms Ashwell and Ms Burrows then answered questions and supplied the following information:-

- The figures for young people who were NEET were 8.3% worse in Oxford than the County average;
- The biggest issues were for the 18/19 year old age group;
- Young people were NEET for an average of 4 to 6 months;
- NEET figures varied across the City wards. It should be noted that some of the smaller wards, even if they had fewer individual young people who were NEET, had a higher percentage of young people who were NEET;
- The highest number of young people who were NEET were those with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD). Some of these disabilities were quite mild. People with severe disabilities were not included in the LDD figures. Many young people who are LDD have left school with very few or very poor GCSE results;
- Ms Ashwell was satisfied by the accuracy of her figures – they were tracked regularly and were supplied to the Department of Education;
- 420 young people aged 16 to 24 year olds in Oxfordshire were claiming JSA;
- A pilot scheme at St Gregory's School was screening young people to assess who amongst them was most likely to become NEET. Having a sustained relationship with a positive adult made a difference to young people's chances in life. Being LDD increased the likelihood of becoming NEET. If the pilot was successful, it was hoped to roll it out more widely;
- Young people were classified as NEET if they worked less than 16 hours per week, but there those who worked perhaps 20 hours or more and who still required support;
- There was concern about efforts to remove some young people from the LDD register. This would increase the likelihood that a young vulnerable person could be missed;
- All young people at Meadowbrook College are to be referred to the Early intervention Hubs from Year 11, as they have a high risk of becoming NEET;
- Some young people found work experience to be a valuable experience, others less so. Young people say that they want work experience that leads to a proper, paid job
- It was acknowledged that young parents faced particular challenges and were a hard group to work with. Help was available; Oxfordshire County Council had a contract for special work with young mothers, and "Care to Learn" grants were also available. The rate of teenage conceptions in Oxford had fallen slightly;
- Early Intervention was a service that ran between 0 to 19 years and began with the Children's Centres. Any young woman below the age of 18 who was pregnant would have a common assessment framework prepared for them;
- The Hubs aimed to pick up vulnerable people, who were sometimes identified by other agencies (for example Health Visitors). Teams worked with families and children, and could offer a range of services dependant on individual need. Whole family intervention could be expensive, but in the long run could save much more money than it cost;
- There were young people who have worked and then, for whatever reason, lost their job; but who are confident about gaining another job and knowledgeable about how to search for one. Other young people were not

so well equipped for job hunting. It should be remembered that there was a broad spectrum of young people who were NEET

Second Witness: Riaz Ahmed

Mr Ahmed introduced himself as a Community Pharmacist and Chair of the Stanley Road Mosque.

He had seen young people suffering the same problems and issues over very many years and acknowledged that this was a difficult issue for authorities to resolve.

Mr Ahmed felt that young people should be seen as a community asset and there should be a willingness to invest in them for the future. He tried to help young people, as they lost so much of their life searching for work. Parents want their children to do well, they want them to do better in life than their parents; but there are, even today, barriers to success that should not be there.

Third Witness: Khalid Sharif

Khalid Sharif explained that he represented Sports Box, a youth charity that used sport as an intervention measure.

Many young people slipped through the net and were not picked up by the statutory authorities. There were many marginalised young people in East Oxford, some of whom were homeless, others had drugs issues, and some were from an asylum background.

Sports Box had a structured outreach programme, and it tried to help young people into higher education as well as signpost them to the correct agencies to help them. Sports Box used football, cricket, boxing and other sports to try to engage young people, and there was a great deal of good work going on.

Young people were subject to a lot of peer pressure, not all of it positive; and some lived a nocturnal lifestyle which meant that they did not access daytime services. For this reason, he worked later shifts in order to meet young people when they were around. It was important to know and understand family and cultural perspectives. Religious buildings could be used to help bring about a change.

Fourth Witness: Jawaid Malik

Jawaid Malik introduced himself as both a Magistrate and someone working in East Oxford. He was also part of a pilot scheme for mentoring young people at the Oxford Spires Academy. Mentoring of young people and the provision of positive role models could make a difference.

He pointed out that it would be vital for the Committee to speak to young people, in places and situations that were comfortable for them. Councillor Campbell agreed that this was important and that the Select Committee was just starting its work, it would be meeting and speaking to young people in the future.

Mr Malik added that it wasn't just young people leaving school who faced problems with being NEET. Many young people had problems, and young people from the black minority ethnic (BME) community faced particular problems. According to the Guardian newspaper, unemployment for BME young people nationally had doubled in the last 3 years and was now about 59%.

Fifth Witness: Sharon Highton

Sharon Highton explained that her group, Oxford Include, was based at East Oxford Community Centre and worked with year 11 students.

She felt that many young people's issues were the result of today's society – there were many issues that would be hard to pull back. Young people needed to recognise their own abilities and their own responsibilities. Many issues were a result of young people emerging from schools with a poor education.

Sarah Burrows agreed that there was a need to pick up on issues affecting children when they were in school years 7 and 8 as early intervention was important.

Sixth Witness: Amir Hamza

Amir Hamza explained that he had been unemployed for a long time. He left school at the age of 18 but felt unsupported and lost. As a young person, he did not think that there was any one solution for the wide variety of problems.

He had originally wanted to enter a profession such as medicine or law, but was now trying to get into construction or skilled trades. He would be happy to have any career that would enable him to live a normal life.

Mr Hamza made the following suggestions:-

- Young people needed things to help them get out of a rut – perhaps short courses;
- More workers like Khalid Sharif were needed – he had been very supportive and helpful. He was a member of the community, lived and worked in it, and knew people;
- Outreach work, such as that provided by Sports Box, was important

Other information provided by all the witnesses during discussion

- It was hard to tell whether or not someone was genuinely interested in a job. Many young people bounced in and out of work for a variety of reasons;
- There were apprenticeships available in Oxford, but many tended to be at too high a level for young people who were NEET. Lots of employers only wanted to employ people who already had a level 2 qualification as apprentices, and this was a very real barrier for many;
- Young people wanted high quality advice and guidance;
- Mentoring really did make a difference;
- Partnership working amongst authorities really could help. There was a City-wide NEET action group that existed to do just this.

Funding

Sharon Highton's group was funded by CfBT, an educational trust.

Sports Box was a local community organisation which kept costs to a bare minimum and ran very much on donations.

Further Information

The Committee asked each guest speaker to supply the following information:

- *What do you think are the current barriers for young people, especially those who are NEET? Please can you list them, and pass them to Lois Stock, who will circulate them to the Committee.*
- *What **one thing** would you like the City Council to do in order to help alleviate the present situation?*

Next Steps

- 1 Councillors Campbell, Altaf Khan and Lloyd Shogbesan will jointly review the comments made at the meeting and prepare a list of key points for the rest of the Committee;
- 2 Officers to gather information from guests (outlined above);
- 3 Gather together a list of agencies and individuals who work with young people in the City – help from the guests in its compilation would be welcome;
- 4 Arrange to meet with young people in order to gather more information from them.

The Committee thanked all guest speakers for the attendance at the meeting and their valuable contribution to the discussion.

29. SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH - DRAFT REPORT

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended). Councillor Jim Campbell introduced the report to the Committee.

Councillor Graham Jones, as one of the two Lead Members, commended the report to the Committee, and thanked Lois Stock and Pat Jones for all their support and enthusiasm for this project. The recommendations that were before the Committee were felt to be deliverable, affordable and measurable. Councillor Van Coulter (Board Member for Leisure) had been involved with discussions around the recommendations and had been very supportive and helpful. Should City Executive Board (CEB) accept the recommendations,

Councillor Jones felt that the Committee should keep a watching brief on them, and meet during the year to assess how well implementation of the recommendations was progressing.

Councillor Dee Sinclair, the other Lead Member, observed that, of the three recommendations, it was the final one – the “Community Mum” – that had presented the biggest challenge. She and Councillor Jones, with support from officers, had refined all the ideas down to what they felt the City council could reasonably do, using its own resources. She felt that the ideas were deliverable.

Pat Jones commented that this, the first Select Committee, had been a learning experience, and in future, the work would benefit from being carried out over a longer period. The three recommendations were chosen from a long list (which had been appended to the report); but she felt that Councillor Coulter had been supportive during the process and she was hopeful that the report would receive a good hearing from CEB. The “Community Mum” idea had indeed been a challenge, but there were projects elsewhere which delivered a similar type of work, and it was hoped that CEB would work with Scrutiny to persuade the Oxfordshire PCT to develop this idea. It is a new idea, but also an important idea.

Councillor Jim Campbell added that he had tentatively floated the idea of a “Community Mum” with his Health Centre, as there were a number of retired health professionals living in the City and it would be useful if they could be persuaded to come on board with this.

Councillor Wilkinson pointed out that not all deprived areas were within regeneration areas, and it was important that they were not overlooked.

Two small amendments were made to the report:-

- (1) Health Bus – need to recognise that Cherwell DC was providing some funding for this;
- (2) Difference in life expectancy across the City – need to check figures as the Committee felt that the disparity between north and south was greater than 5 years.

With those amendments, the report was APPROVED to be sent to CEB.

30. WORK PROGRAMME AND REPORT BACK ON COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Pat Jones introduced this item to the Committee.

As members of the Committee were aware, work on the next Select Committee had started at this meeting, and would continue over the next few months.

She also reminded committee members that a reception was to be held for some young people from the “Positive Future” project with whom she and other officers had been working on a different project. This would be held on 27th

March starting at 6pm in the Mayor's Parlour, and it was hoped that as several members of the Committee would attend.

The Committee asked that Sharon Highton and Khalid Shariff should be invited along if possible.

31. MINUTES

Resolved to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 14th December 2012.

It was noted that Dr Peter von Eichstorff is one of the Oxford Leads on the Clinical Commissioning Body.

32. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved to note the following date:-

2nd April at 6pm

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.05 pm