

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **8th June 2021**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllrs. Burgess, Hayward, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger, Mulholland.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Blanford, Chilton, Farrell.

Also Present:

Allan Baillie, Skills and Employability Manager, KCC
 Mike Rayner, Principal Lead – Post 16 Education, KCC
 Trudi Short, Partnership Manager for Ashford & Folkestone

Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications, Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Policy and Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

42 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of this Committee held on the 13th April 2021 be approved and confirmed as an accurate record.

43 Youth Unemployment in Ashford

Allan Baillie, the Skills and Employability Manager from KCC introduced the first presentation, which gave details on the following themes:

- Ashford Unemployment
- Youth Unemployment in the South East
- Ashford Wards (figures)
- Adult Skills Levels
- Ashford Employment (figures)

The presentation was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- A Member asked about young unaccompanied asylum seekers in various wards around the Borough and in particular whether the figures would include those people. Allan said that the figures in the presentation gave a broad

summary and young refugees could be contributory.

- The Chairman asked how skills were measured within the presentation figures, and it was confirmed that a sample of data from the Office of National Statistics recorded in October 2020 was used.

Mike Rayner, Principal Lead – Post 16 Education at KCC delivered the next presentation, which provided data and information about NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) analysis, training providers by area and the reasons for the decline in training provision.

The presentation was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- Members queried the impact of the pandemic upon 16-18 year olds, including the transition to virtual learning during the lockdown periods. Mike explained that in one way, because GCSE'S in 2020 and 2021 were teacher assessed grades, this worked in their favour since they were marginally higher than if exams had been sat. Schools and Colleges had also tried to encourage the pupils to stay in further education. The downside was that there had been little face-to-face interaction, not just in terms of education, but also apprenticeships and work placements, since the staff were not in the office to provide on the job training. In addition, this group may struggle in further studies, since they had not experienced the traditional GCSE learning experience.
- The Committee went onto discuss the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, including retail, engineering and construction. Retail was the biggest employment sector for young people, and it was important to bear in mind that the detrimental effects of the lockdown and temporary closing of shops would continue far into the future as retail owners struggled to keep their business afloat. Mike Rayner spoke about a report recently published that outlined the growing demand for construction workers, particularly in the South East where large housing developments and projects were planned. He added that up to 50 % of construction workers in London had been lost because of Brexit. A further difficulty when trying to recruit to construction apprenticeships was that many building contracts were specialist and/or short-term.

Trudi Short, the Partnership Manager for Ashford & Folkestone then spoke to the Committee about the work the DWP had undertaken. She explained that their team of 11 Youth Unemployment Coaches offered claimants face to face and telephone appointments, and were currently trialling a video call appointment service. They liaised with local businesses and companies about the government's Kickstart Scheme, which provided funding to employers to create jobs for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit. She outlined the various agencies they worked with including the National Citizens Service and the Princes Trust.

The Committee then discussed and the following questions and points were raised:

- The Chairman asked for a better understanding of the barriers preventing young people from taking up jobs. Trudi explained that some young people were not willing to travel further for work, and that certain roles were not appealing to them. The need to re-skill and retrain was highlighted, particularly for young adults. Many NEET individuals came from disadvantaged backgrounds; data showed 53% were eligible for free school meals. This could sometimes lead to disengagement and apathy regarding training for employment.
- The Committee went onto consider what the Council could do to help fill the gaps between education and employment for young people. A Member pointed out that several charities in Ashford ran mentoring and buddy schemes, and these could be encouraged. Ashford continued to be an area that attracted businesses, and one silver lining from Covid was that Local Authorities had formed better relationships with local businesses. Therefore the need to continue to engage with local businesses and strengthen working partnerships would in turn help to provide more opportunities for young people.

The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications then gave a final presentation on ABC support for educations, skills and training in Ashford. This illustrated the following subjects:

- ABC's role and local projects and initiatives
- Our Corporate Plan 2022-24 objectives
- Community Renewal Fund Bid
- Reconnect Programme
- Our role in local projects and initiatives

The presentation was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- Mike Rayner spoke about the issue of bridging young people to their first job. He considered a young people's recruitment scheme in line with the academic year would be beneficial. This would involve local businesses preparing and organising vacancies for entry at key times of the year. Schools would be able to work in line with the annual cycle.
- The Chairman asked whether a work stream within Aspire had been developed and it was confirmed that certain roles had been recognised. Work experience placements had been declining but were defined as a vital introduction for young people into the world of work. The Chairman explained that work experience needed to be reinvigorated again.

Resolved

That the presentation be received and noted by the Committee.

44 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer introduced this item. In response to a query asking whether hybrid style meetings would be implemented, the Chairman confirmed that a trial hybrid meeting was scheduled to take place next week. The main obstacle was the restricted IT provision within the Council Chamber itself and a number of solutions were being explored.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.