

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Friday 26th January 2024

Present: Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor John Lawson
Councillor Eric Firth
Oliver Gibson, Co-optee

In attendance: Kieran Lord, Service Director (Resources, Improvements and Partnerships)
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director (Learning and Early Support)
Cllr Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children's Service

Apologies: Councillor Paul Moore
Councillor Ebrahim Dockrat

1 Membership of the Panel

Apologies were received from Councillor Moore and Councillor Dockrat.

The Panel noted the change to the membership of the Children's Scrutiny Panel and welcomed Cllr Eric Firth to the Panel.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meetings held on the 22nd September 2023 and 1st December 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No questions were received from members of the public.

7 Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE Guidance)

The Panel considered a report on Working Together to Safeguard Children which advised that in December 2023, the Department for Education published new statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help protect and promote the welfare of children.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 26 January 2024

Kieran Lord, Service Director for Resources, Improvements and Partnerships, presented the report.

Kieran Lord highlighted the following key points from a presentation entitled "Working Together to Safeguard Children" –

- The full published document could be viewed at [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_statutory_guidance.pdf)
- A £47,300 grant had been issued which needed spending/offset by 31st March 2024 to support Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships (LSCPs) with implementing the new guidance;
- Practitioners working with parents and carers should show effective partnerships and build strong, positive, trusting and co-operative relationships; respectful, clear and inclusive verbal and non-verbal communication; and empower parents and carers to participate in decision making;
- The Head of each statutory safeguarding partner would be referred to as the Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP);
- Local Education and childcare providers would be included in local arrangements and the LSCPs would include voluntary, charity, social enterprise organisations, childcare settings and sports clubs in their arrangements;
- Professionals should assess whether a child who was experiencing, or was at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home was in need under section 17 or 47 of the Children Act 1989;
- The Children's Service within Kirklees was in a strong position to work towards the new arrangements outlined within the guidance, as planning had already taken place before it was published;
- The Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Partnership (KSCP) would have to publish an updated Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) document by December 2024 and KSCP would publish an Annual Report providing an update on this work within the coming months.

In response from the Panel to a question asking if the new guidance was being implemented by all Local Authorities and Practitioners in the country, Kieran Lord advised that the guidance had come about on the back of a review carried out by Josh McAllister (the Chief Executive of Frontline) a few years ago, which suggested a number of these changes and Kirklees had been waiting for the government response. The Panel was informed that a number of Local Authorities across the country, including Kirklees, had been working up these changes in anticipation and in some places changes had already been made.

The Panel asked if the Independent Scrutineer, Julie Sykes, could come to a future meeting to discuss how Kirklees was dealing with the new arrangements, Kieran Lord advised that Julie Sykes (who was a former Senior Police Officer) had been working with Kirklees since 2011 and that she would be happy to come to the Panel and discuss the reflections on the changes and how Kirklees had acted as a multi-agency safeguarding partnership. Kieran Lord explained that Julie Sykes' scrutiny had been valued by partners.

Jo-Anne Sanders advised the Panel that an Annual Report was produced by the Safeguarding Partnership and that it would be useful to share this with the Panel to see a full explanation of the work that had been undertaken. The Panel was informed that the DfE guidance was a summary of changes and Kirklees was starting from a very good baseline due to the work that had started in Kirklees back in 2011.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 26 January 2024

In response to a question from the Panel asking how they could be kept informed of the key elements of the changes and new arrangements in particular in relation to implementation and good practice, Kieran Lord advised that there were a number of sub groups that fed into the KSCP, that scrutiny could broadly review some of the changes being implemented and that there would be opportunities for the Panel to attend and observe meetings and events. The Panel was informed that the Independent Scrutineer and partners would very much value the input from the Children's Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the report and thanked Kieran Lord and Jo-Anne Sanders for their contributions.
2. That Julie Sykes, Independent Scrutineer, be invited to a future meeting of the Panel during the 2024-25 municipal year to discuss and reflect on the new arrangements and changes and how the service has acted as a safeguarding multi-agency partnership.
3. That the Panel receive a copy of the latest Kirklees Safeguarding Partnership Board Annual Report to see the work that was being undertaken.
4. That the Panel be invited to attend appropriate meetings and events to observe the key elements of the changes and new arrangements on working together with a particular focus on implementation of the new service and good practice.

8 Performance Data (Children's Services) - verbal update on highlights

The Panel received a verbal update on performance data for period ending November 2023, which was provided by Kieran Lord, Service Director for Resources, Improvements and Partnerships in Children's Services.

Kieran Lord highlighted the following key points for Family Support and Child Protection on behalf of Vicky Metheringham (Service Director):-

- Rates of referrals were significantly lower in Kirklees than England;
- Contacts receiving a decision within one working day had increased to 69.8% which was where it was this time last year;
- Re-referrals remained stable at 19.9% and the 12 month average was 19.2%;
- Timeliness of risk assessments had improved, 17 remained overdue as a result of enhanced oversight;
- Looked after children (LAC) reviews held on time was 97%; numbers of children in care had stabilised; 90% of visits to children had been made in line with practice standards; numbers of children in an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) had reduced from last month to 168 and this time last year this figure was 165;
- 99% of care leavers had a pathway plan, with 93% of these being up to date, 95% in touch and 91% were in suitable accommodation;
- Numbers of children with a Child Protection Plan had increased again to 475 which now exceeded the England average;
- A small number of children were in unregulated settings, however, oversight was robust and numbers were reducing;
- The numbers of children with an adoption plan was half that of statistical neighbours, but conversations were ongoing with neighbouring partners with regard to adoption support;

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 26 January 2024

- Seeking to improve the quality of pathway plans for care leavers and improving the opportunities for education and training;
- Working with partners regarding care leavers working in the community and following a visit from Mark Riddell (National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers from the DfE) the service were working through the suggestions and recommendations from his report.

The Panel asked about caseload management and fluctuation of the numbers, how this was being managed and what measures had been put in place to keep this stable, Kieran Lord advised that there were a number of vacancies in a competitive market for social work staff but the Service were still not seeking agency support which provided stability. The Panel was informed that all of the Social Worker vacancies had been filled as of yesterday and the Service was very proud of the progress made on the plan of action which did not include agency workers. The Panel was informed that the Children's Service had a retention and recruitment working group in place to ensure that the Service was able to moderate some of higher and fluctuating caseload averages. Kieran Lord explained that there was also a Recruitment and Retention Strategy in place which focussed on succession planning and making sure that the Service was retaining and maximising the skills. The Panel was informed that due to the success of recruitment, renewed focus was now being given to the retention practice going forward, which would hopefully ensure greater stability for staff. The Panel noted that wellbeing of staff was paramount and that the Service wanted people to be part of Team Kirklees and feel valued and see opportunities for development. Initiatives had been taking place across the Children's Service on time to talk sessions with Senior Officers and Cllr Kendrick (Cabinet Member for Children), where there was the opportunity to listen to staff about the things that mattered to them most.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the meaning of Section 47, Kieran Lord advised that in the Children's Act 1989 were a number of mandated sections that as a Local Authority the Service needed to be able to provide to the children and population of Kirklees. Two key parts of the Act were Section 17 which was the Council's need to legally provide appropriate levels of support to children defined as being in need of additional support and Section 47 was where that support required an assessment to see if further intervention was required in the form of a Child Protection Plan.

The Panel asked about placement and accommodation for care leavers and what was classed as unsuitable accommodation, Kieran Lord advised that –

- each individual young person had different circumstances and some children were not in the most appropriate settings, but that the data did include young people who did not want to engage with the Council as a service provider;
- As corporate parents, the Children's Service were working closely with colleagues in Housing to ensure that care leavers had the correct housing provision, but that it could be a complicated scenario in terms of accommodation capacity and it did sometimes mean a delay to ensure that the most appropriate accommodation was provided;
- temporary arrangements were not ideal, but the Children's Service were confident that appropriate oversight was in place and that the young people were living in safe environments.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 26 January 2024

The Panel noted that the data showed that 28% of care leavers were not in education, employment and training (EET) and asked if a breakdown could be provided, Kieran Lord advised that –

- the Service worked very closely with all the care leavers but did not insist that they undertake a certain path which might not be meaningful to that young person at their stage of life, some children could have been subjected to trauma and they had their own level of volition to be involved and engaged;
- the Service was trying to understand the EET offer and to learn from the maturity of other Corporate Parenting Boards to develop more formal plans to identify at an early opportunity what was needed and to encourage engagement by care leavers;
- all care leavers had access to a Personal Assistant to provide support and would continue to monitor the care leavers on a 1-1 basis.

Kieran Lord advised that the Service would not rest on its laurels until every care leaver was making the very most of the opportunities available to them.

The Panel asked about the long wait for neuro-development pathway support and what action was being taken to reduce the wait, Kieran Lord advised that –

- this was a partnership approach and it was an intensive process to carry out assessments which required appropriate skilled clinicians and practitioners to undertake it;
- there was a national shortage of clinical and educational psychologists, psychiatrists and speech and language therapists that were involved in the formal assessments;
- Kirklees Council had already taken some significant strides forward and worked closely with colleagues to identify this priority in leadership forums and leadership partnerships, but also getting it on the agenda of the Starting Well Board and one of the initiatives taking place was ensuring that those who were waiting had an initial neuro-development assessment which could mean that they did not get the diagnosis, for example autism or ADHD;
- a new triage system had been implemented based on formulation that helped to understand the needs of young people so support needs could be diverted as early as possible and children and young people were 'waiting well';
- the Service would continue to have conversations about diverting some of those on the waiting list to the right level of support, for example, early or family support or additional educational support in anticipation of the later assessment to ensure they were 'waiting well';
- in order to minimise the assessment required, the Service continued to try and support with health colleagues to fill in some of the capacity needs in terms of the some of the priority professions;
- focus was on ensuring that those on the waiting list got the right support at the right time, rather than waiting for the diagnosis which they would get at a later date.

The Panel agreed to receive a future update on the new triage system for the support being put in place to meet the needs of children and young people to ensure they were waiting well whilst their assessment took place.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 26 January 2024

In response to a question from the Panel asking if the main reason for wanting the assessment was as a key to opening educational support, Kieran Lord advised that there were different pathways within the assessment itself, the neurological pathway traditionally followed a route into the more medical model diagnosis such as ADHD and Autism, but not to discount that they may fall within an Education Health and Care Plan; given that some of the diagnoses that may fall from this, cannot be assessed until adulthood and it might seem frustrating that there was an extended period of time before assessment, quite often there were more indicators about future need rather than something which would result in a diagnosis and immediate treatment, for example, medication or a change in educational provision.

The Panel asked about the level of requests for CAMHS support which seemed to be very low, Kieran Lord advised that the investment the Council has had with partners (Northorpe Hall, Locala, colleagues in Integrated Care Board (ICB) and South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SWYFT), had recognised that ensuring the right triage and support was in place at the right time, officers were working on the 'Keeping in mind' model which would develop this triage process further. The Panel was informed that the CAMHS pathways still existed and colleagues were dealing with the children in terms of appropriate support and investment continued in those areas.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding at what stage children were identified as having ADHD or Autism and did some slip through the net or have it identified later in school years, Kieran Lord advised that nationally it was felt that there might be some over identification of people who presented with the type of behaviours that may fall in line with a diagnosis of ADHD but did not actually meet the criteria and similarly with Autism it was a spectrum of conditions which might be high functioning and pronounced in terms of the disabilities, abilities or behaviours. The Panel was informed that there was a fine line between necessity to have a diagnosis to get the right opportunities to get access to services, balanced against making sure that professionals were capturing the needs of the young people and matching that against the right support at the right time, irrespective of when the diagnosis would be made.

The Panel asked who would make a referral for an assessment of ADHD or Autism, Kieran Lord advised that it could come from a range of professionals or individuals and as well as the formal Local Authority Assessments and health partner routes, there was also a private route which a number of parents, adults and young people chose to take. The Panel was informed that the numbers of people who sought a private route for a diagnosis for ADHD and Autism tended to have a higher percentage which came back with a diagnosis, than those which went through the more statutory NHS and Local Authorities mandated areas. Kieran Lord explained that the Service would not want to put off any parent or school professional from having the conversations in the first place to ensure that the triage was undertaken as quickly as possible so that the right assessments and support could be put in place.

RESOLVED –

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 26 January 2024

1. The Panel noted the report and thanked Kieran Lord and Jo-Anne Sanders for their contributions.
2. The Panel agreed to receive a future update on the new triage system for the support being put in place to meet the needs of children and young people to ensure they were waiting well whilst their assessment took place.

9 **Pre-decision scrutiny - Cabinet decisions on the horizon**

No items of pre-decision scrutiny on forthcoming Cabinet decisions were reported.

10 **Feedback from Panel Members on issues considered by Corporate Parenting Board**

The Panel noted that there had been some duplication of areas discussed at the meeting today, that had also been considered previously at the Corporate Parenting Board, however, agreed that slight overlaps were sometimes necessary and welcomed to ensure the right level of scrutiny took place.

Kieran Lord advised that Joel Hanna, Head of Corporate Parenting, would appreciate the fact that the Panel were discussing matters more broadly and that there would be a refresh of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, which would include engagement with Members this year, so the overlap by Scrutiny was welcomed to focus on the vulnerable groups of children and young people. The Panel noted that further discussions could take place in the future if required, to avoid any unnecessary duplication at the relevant forums.

The Panel noted that all Councillors were corporate parents and Kieran Lord and Cllr Kendrick confirmed that there was a planned piece of work to reinforce this during future discussions at each political group. The Panel was informed that Joel Hanna would shortly be contacting the Group Business Managers of each political group to set up these discussions and that this work would be incorporated into the refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The Chair of the Panel, Cllr Cooper, advised that the new Lead of the Local Government Association (LGA) had asked every Local Authority Policy Board to consider what they might do to help Councillors in their corporate parenting role and that it was reassuring to note that this was being considered at a national level.

RESOLVED –

The Panel noted the updates from the Corporate Parenting Board and thanked the Cabinet Member for Children and Kieran Lord for their contributions.

11 **Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2023/24**

The Panel considered the work programme and agenda plan for the 2023-24 municipal year.

The Panel noted that the report on Post 16 Home to School Travel had been deferred for consideration by the Panel on the 26th March 2024.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2023/24 be noted.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 26 January 2024

2. That a report on Post 16 Home to School Travel would be considered by the Panel in March 2024.