

## Kirklees Council

### Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Lead Member: Cllr Andrew Cooper, Children's Scrutiny Panel

Period of Update: From January 2024 – March 2024

#### Panel Highlights

##### Bi-monthly Lead member briefings with:

Senior Officers in Children's Services

- Service Director – Learning and Early Support
- Service Director – Resources Improvement and Partnerships
- Service Director – Family Support and Child Protection
- Strategic Director for Children's Services

Cabinet Members

- Children (Statutory responsibility for Children)
- Learning, Aspiration and Communities

##### Panel Activity and meetings -

- Panel meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024 – Performance Data; Working together to Safeguard Children, an update on key issues considered by the Corporate Parenting Board and the Informal meeting considered an update on Corporate Risk.

#### Outcomes:

##### **Performance Data**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024, the Panel received verbal updates from Senior Officers in Children's Services on the key performance issues for the service for period ending November 2023. The following key issues were considered by the Panel:-

- 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;

- 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 questions relating to the following areas –

- Caseload management and fluctuation of numbers and how this was being managed and what measures were being put in place to keep it stable;
- What was a Section 27 and Section 17 of the Children’s Act 1989;
- Placement and accommodation for care leavers and what was classed as unsuitable accommodation;
- A breakdown of the data for care leavers in education, employment and training (EET);
- Waiting times for neuro-development pathway support and what action was being taken to reduce the wait;
- Was the main reason for wanting an assessment a key to opening educational support;
- What were the reasons for CAMHS support and levels of requests being so low;
- At what stage were children identified as having ADHD or Autism and did some slip through the net or have it identified later in school years;
- Who could make a referral for an assessment of ADHD or Autism.

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.

### **Working together to safeguard children**

The Panel considered a report on Working Together to Safeguard Children, advising 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 and the report will give a summary of the changes made.

The Panel asked questions relating to the following areas –

- Was the new guidance being implemented by all Local Authorities and Practitioners in the country;
- How could the Panel be kept informed of the key elements of the changes and new arrangements, in particular in relation to implementation and good practice.

The Panel agreed to invite Julie Sykes, Independent Scrutineer, to a future meeting 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. The Panel also agreed to receive a copy of the latest Annual Report currently produced by Kirklees Safeguarding Partnership Board, so that they could see the work that is undertaken.

The Panel agreed to attend appropriate meetings and events to observe the key elements of the changes and new arrangements on working together to safeguard

children, with a particular focus on the implementation of the new service and good practice.

### **Corporate Risk Update**

At the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee planning workshop in 2023, it was agreed that the Corporate Risk Register would be shared with Lead Members and discussed on a regular basis at the relevant Scrutiny Panels. In January, the Panel considered a Corporate Risk update report showing emerging risks for the areas of focus on the Work Programme for 23/24 and key areas of the Children's Service. Key points highlighted were:-

- Children's Services maintain a risk register that is reviewed and updated quarterly;
- Directorate and Service level risk registers are consolidated to produce a Corporate Risk Matrix and Emerging Risks list, providing a holistic view of the key risks across the entire breadth of Kirklees Council activities;
- The risk groups were broken down into financial sustainability, statutory obligations and safeguarding.

The Panel agreed to consider the quarterly updates on Corporate Risk at future Panel meetings.

### **Looking Ahead**

In March 2024, the Panel will consider reports on Post 16 Home to School Travel and Ofsted Inspection outcomes for Children's Residential Homes.

The Panel have agreed to carry forward a number of areas of focus into the new municipal year 2024-25 –

- Front Door Health Check – July 2024;
- Kirklees Safeguarding Partnership Board Annual Report;
- Educational Attainment Outcomes;
- Emotional Wellbeing Provision in Kirklees – “Keeping Kirklees in Mind” – July 2024;
- Care Leavers Provision Action Plan – July 2024

### **General Comments**

As usual I am impressed on the strong grasp that officers have regarding activity in the Children's Service as evidenced by the statistics and their informed commentary on them.

The report "Working Together to Safeguard Children" highlighted the benefits of partnership working and providing tailored support to give the most appropriate package for each child. It will be interesting to see how this new approach works for the children who will benefit from it.

The panel will keep a watch on the time it takes for children with neuro diverse conditions to get an assessment. This is of concern to many parents.

