

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Friday 13th March 2020

Present: Councillor Andrew Marchington (Chair)
Councillor Paul Davies
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor Paul White

Co-optees Toni Bromley
Dale O'Neill

In attendance Julie Bragg, Service Manager (Children and Families)
Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources,
Improvement and Partnerships)
Ronnie Hartley, Head of Service Education Safeguarding
and Inclusion
Elaine McShane, Service Director - Family Support and
Child Protection
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning & Early
Support
Martin Wilby, Acting Deputy Assistant Director, LA
Statutory Duties Learning and Skills

Observers: Councillor Viv Kendrick

Apologies: Councillor Amanda Pinnock

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Amanda Pinnock.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on the 17th January 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3 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

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No questions were received from the public.

7 **Number and age of Children in Care**

The Panel considered a report giving the latest data on the number and age of children in care presented by Julie Bragg, Head of Corporate Parenting (Children in Care and Care Leavers).

Julie Bragg highlighted the following key areas:-

- The number of children in care at the end of January was 672; a number of these children were being closely monitored;
- In January, a number of sibling groups had come into care, 2 groups of 5 children;
- There had been an increasing positive trend in the number of children leaving care and in some instances children had returned to family members;
- It was unlikely that children under the age of 4 would remain in care and would have a permanence plan for adoption;
- The focus within the service for children in care aged 11 to 15 years, was on the reunification model where children returned to live with their parents and a thorough assessment was undertaken in these circumstances to ensure that this was the right decision for the child.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding concerns in relation to the rise in number of children taken into care under the age of one and the shortage of adoptive parents, Elaine McShane advised that the first and foremost priority was to ensure that children were safeguarded. The Board was informed that priority viability checks and assessments would be undertaken of extended family members to arrange for the child to stay with a family member before they were taken into care. Elaine McShane explained that the scheme for extended family members was called Special Guardianship and that this had seen a recent significant rise to 380. The Board was informed that meetings took place to consider the timeliness of the adoption process to ensure a child was not waiting an extended period of time. Elaine McShane also advised the Board that robust decision making was in place to ensure children were not kept waiting an unacceptable period of time to be adopted.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding how many children taken into care was due to domestic abuse, Julie Bragg advised that there could be multiple factors why a child was taken into care, for example, neglect, drug abuse, mental health, and it was difficult to be specific on one single factor.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the high number of children placed outside the district, Julie Bragg advised that the increase was due to the number of children in care looking for suitable matched placements and it was sometimes necessary to go to external foster carers. Elaine McShane advised the Panel that occasionally decisions were taken to place children outside the district, but these were well informed decisions and taken with the safeguarding of the child being the first and foremost consideration. The Panel was informed that significant consideration was given to placing children outside of the district and the decisions were not taken lightly. Elaine McShane further explained that she was involved in any decisions taken to place children over 20 miles outside of Kirklees.

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Tom Brailsford advised the Panel that a draft Sufficiency Strategy was now available. The Panel agreed to consider a future report on the Draft Sufficiency Strategy, which would include plans of how Kirklees was going to transform fostering locally.

Elaine McShane advised the Panel that work was currently being undertaken on the Post 16 Provision and looking at people who come and work in Kirklees to provide that provision. The Panel was informed that there was currently a tendering exercise being undertaken around post 16 provision within Kirklees, which would consider the vulnerabilities of young people. The Panel agreed to consider a future report on Post 16 Provision.

Cllr Marchington, Chair of the Panel, agreed to keep a watching brief on the rising trend of children in care and how this was being managed.

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the report on Number and Age of Children in Care and thanked Julie Bragg for her contributions.
2. That Councillor Marchington would keep a Lead Member watching brief on the rising trend of children in care and how this was being managed.
3. The Panel agreed to consider a future report on Post 16 Provision.
4. The Panel agreed to consider a future report on the Draft Sufficiency Strategy, which would include plans of how Kirklees was going to transform fostering locally.

8 Almondbury Community School update

The Panel considered an update on the implementation of the Council's decision to change the age range of Almondbury Community School (ACS) from the 1st September 2020 presented by Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director (Learning and Early Support) and Martin Wilby, Senior Strategic Manager (Education and Access).

Martin Wilby highlighted the following key points:-

- every pupil had been offered a matched preference where one had been made at their preferred school;
- a uniform support package was in place for families of children who had already transferred to a new school; a number of applications for contributions had been received and these were being processed;
- uniform vouchers were available for those children who had not yet moved school, to be able to claim free school uniform items from shops in Huddersfield;
- all staff had been aligned to either the primary or secondary phase based on where they carried out the whole or majority of their duties within school; staff had been given the opportunity to comment on the alignments which had now been confirmed;
- a review of the Primary staff at ACS had commenced and consultation was being undertaken with staff on the new staffing structure;
- a deployment process had been agreed with the partner schools to share suitable vacancies with staff before they were advertised;
- following the Ofsted monitoring visit at ACS on the 12th and 13th November 2019 the outcome had been published on the 19th December and the Inspector had

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concluded that leaders and managers were taking effective action towards the removal of special measures;

- The Academy Trust was the approved sponsor for ACS as a Primary School, Old Bank Junior Infant and Nursery School and Newsome High School; the other schools involved in the Academy Trust were outlined within the report;
- Feedback from parents and children was being captured so that lessons could be learnt for future school transitions and changes.

The Panel agreed to visit Almondbury Community School to help the Panel develop their understanding of the issues in relation to improving educational outcomes.

Martin Wilby informed the Panel that temporary admission arrangements had previously been in place for 2020-2021, consultation had taken place through the normal process from December 2019 to February 2020 to consult on making these arrangements permanent. Martin Wilby advised the Panel that the priority admission areas had been extended with the partner schools to cover the previous priority admission area covered by ACS.

The Panel was informed that each member of staff from ACS had been aligned to either a primary or secondary phase of ACS and the alignment had been carried out on where they spend the majority of their duties. Martin Wilby confirmed that a deployment process had been agreed with the partner schools and was being shared with ACS secondary school staff before the posts were advertised. Jo-Anne Sanders informed the Panel that Kirklees was working with partner schools for potential job opportunities and were supporting staff.

The Panel thanked officers for the support given to parents throughout and for the financial contributions made towards the cost of uniforms.

The Panel agreed to receive details of engagement events being organised by the schools for parents in order that members of the Panel could attend if available.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding transport issues, Martin Wilby advised that there was still more engagement work to do with a small number of parents regarding the existing procedures. The Panel was advised that there was a Transport Appeals process was in place where appropriate.

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the update on Almondbury Community School and thanked Jo-Anne Sanders and Martin Wilby for their contributions.
2. That the Panel visit Almondbury Community School to help the Panel develop their understanding of the issues in relation to improving educational outcomes.
3. That the Panel receive details of parent engagement events in order that Panel Members could attend if available.

9 Review of 2019/20 Work Programme and consider items for 2020/21 municipal year

The Panel considered the progress on the work programme during the 2019/20 municipal year and considered issues for inclusion in the Panel's work programme during the 2020/21 municipal year.

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Councillor Marchington thanked the Panel and Officers for their hard work and contributions to the 2019/20 work programme and outcomes.

The Panel noted that the following key areas had been the focus for the Panel during the 2019/20 municipal year:-

- Scrutiny of partnerships across different areas of the council;
- Visits had been undertaken by the Panel to the Single Point of Access at Northorpe Hall and the Multi Agency Meetings; Youth Offending Team (YOT); the Panel had met a young offender who was involved with YOT; The Panel had also attended the YOT Board;
- Data and performance reports had been considered at the informal meetings;
- The Panel had considered an update report on SEND at the informal meeting on the 13th March 2020 and seen how data was being collected to improve outcomes for children and young people.

The Panel agreed to carry over the following topics to the 2020/21 work programme:-

- Continue to scrutinise partnerships and boards during the 2020/21 municipal year, for example, Corporate Parenting Board and Health and Wellbeing Board and the Panel would look at how data was collected and used to improve outcomes;
- SEND and High Needs – 6 monthly reports to be considered by the Panel and visits would be arranged to some of the SEN Teams to corroborate the information in the presentations provided to Panel Meetings;
- Review of the Improvement Journey within Children's Services;
- Exploitation Strategy – the Lead Member agreed to keep a watching brief to monitor the impact on children and young people in the borough;
- Educational Outcomes – the Panel agreed to consider future updates to learn about what the educational impact had been for the children who had moved from Almondbury Community School and were they getting the right amount of results and opportunities; the Lead Member agreed to keep a watching brief;
- Number and age of children in care;
- Performance reports would be considered at Informal meetings;
- Youth Services and Initiatives.

Panel Members agreed to forward any further items for inclusion in the 2020/21 work programme to the Governance Officer.

RESOLVED –

1. That the progress on the 2019/20 work programme for the Children's Scrutiny Panel be noted.
2. That the items be noted for inclusion in the Panel's work programme during the 2020/21 municipal year
3. Panel Members agreed to forward any further items for inclusion in the 2020/21 work programme to the Governance Officer.
4. That the Governance Officer be authorised to liaise with officers on agreed actions.

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