

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 14th January 2021

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

Co-optees Dale O'Neill
Linda Summers

In attendance: Mel Meggs, Director for Children's Services
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director, Learning and Early Support
Tom Brailsford, Service Director, Resources, Improvement and Partnerships
Elaine McShane, Service Director, Family Support and Child Protection

Observers: Cllr Carole Pattison

Apologies: Councillor Yusra Hussain
Councillor Amanda Pinnock

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Yusra Hussain and Cllr Amanda Pinnock. The Chair advised that there was currently a vacancy on the Panel due to the resignation by Councillor Paul Davies who was now a Cabinet Member. The Chair placed on record thanks to Cllr Paul Davies for his valuable contributions to the Panel.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on the 9th November 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 petitions or deputations were received.

6 Public Question Time

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 14 January 2021

No questions were received from the public.

7 **Number and age of children in care**

The Panel considered a report providing an update relating to the number and profile of children in our care, including information related to the number placed outside of the District. The report also set out comparative data with statistical neighbours and was presented by Elaine McShane, Service Director for Family Support and Child Protection.

Elaine McShane highlighted the following key issues:-

- Number of children in care in November 2020 was 688 (which excluded any looked after children receiving only Section 20 short term breaks) alongside the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children;
- The largest age group for boys in care was 10-15 years with 150 children and the largest age group for girls was 10-15 years with 131 children;
- Children in care less than 1 year or 1-4 years might not need to stay in care for long and might return to the parent, relative or be adopted;
- Ethnicity changes – there had been a relatively small change in the percentage split over the last 12 months and there had been a slight increase in May to June 2020 which had stabilised;
- More than 50% of children in care were white and the next largest group was dual heritage;
- Children placed more than 2 miles outside Kirklees – there had been a decline in the number placed outside Kirklees; officers look to carers first and foremost and also try and maintain the young person's educational provision due to the support the child would get from stability and consistency and that all these issues were seriously considered before placements were approved;
- Seen a further reduction in the number of children in children's homes outside the district;
- Kirklees provided 13 placements to children in semi-independent living accommodation from other local authority areas.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the length of time young people stayed in semi-independent living accommodation, Elaine McShane responded to advise that some young people presented themselves as homeless and could live in semi-independent living accommodation or on their own without support. Elaine McShane further explained that Section 20 was necessary as the Council could not seek care orders post 16 years of age and that young people would come to the Council as they did not want to go into foster care. The Panel was informed that Section 20 was always explained to the young person.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Panel noted the report on Number of Children in Care and thanked Elaine McShane for her contributions.

8 **Emotional Wellbeing of Students**

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 14 January 2021

The Panel considered a verbal report on the Emotional Wellbeing of Students presented by Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning and Early Support. This report had been requested by the Panel.

Jo-Anne Sanders highlighted the following key issues:-

- Support would be put in place for young people as they returned to school post third lockdown as schools agreed it was critical to the emotional wellbeing of students;
- In May 2020 the Education and Psychology Team had worked hard to develop an offer of targeted support to help youngsters during the pandemic;
- Staff in schools had also been provided with guidance and support so they could in turn help children, complemented by the Education Health and Care Plan offer;
- A training package on emotional coaching had been sent to all school's prior to September 2020 with lesson plans which included direct resources that children could participate in;
- Further training for key staff in schools was available through the United Kingdom and was being developed for wider use;
- The Government had introduced a grant of £63,609 to support the wellbeing for educational return in September 2020; Education Leads were liaising with Public Health colleagues regarding the best use of the grant;
- A programme of resilience would be in place for children from March 2021;
- Help was in place for college staff to support the health and emotional wellbeing of their students;
- Training was available for key staff on how best to respond to young people who were anxious about school;
- Opportunities were being offered for additional SENCO support;
- More schools would be participating from February half term this year in the Alex Timpson Trauma in Schools Programme which had been underpinned by Oxford University, and would provide the best strategies to address the needs of vulnerable children who had been through trauma; positive feedback had been received from schools involved in the first waive of the roll out of this programme;
- The Mental Health Trailblazing programme was a national initiative and the Council had been successful in 2 bidding rounds and as a result 80 Kirklees schools had access to the additional support; The Council would like to sustain and widen funding opportunities already in place so these could be made available for all schools in Kirklees;
- A children and young people survey had been carried out by the Learning Service in May 2020 and another had been undertaken in December 2020 with public health colleagues and the results were currently being analysed;
- Schools had been very pro-active in working with early support colleagues to make resources available to support the health and wellbeing of youngsters.

A number of comments were made by members of the Panel, as follows:-

- The mental health of students was vitally important and concerns were raised relating to the high number of children currently attending school as their parents were classed as critical workers and whether everyone was following the rules relating to critical workers;

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 14 January 2021

- Concerns were raised regarding the number of children of critical workers who had to remain at home as their schools were currently closed and that greater consideration needed to be given to ensure these families received the support they required.

The Panel acknowledged the high level of work that had been undertaken by the Learning Service to provide schools with the funding, tools and training they needed to support children's health and emotional wellbeing during the pandemic. The Panel also noted that staff had been under huge pressures and were concerned that this could take its toll.

Jo-Anne Sanders advised the Panel that School Leaders were under a lot of pressure and that their work with school governors was important as the governing body had a role to play in supporting teachers. School Leaders had valued the support they had received from governors and teacher peer support was also very important. The Panel was informed that there were some strong Head Teachers in Secondary and Primary schools in Kirklees and good networks and peer support were in place.

The Panel was informed that there was a Head Teacher Wellbeing service in place in Kirklees which offered free coaching and support to our school leaders.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding whether attendance at school by children who had not returned following the lockdowns was in place, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that all attendance was tracked before, during and after COVID and that robust systems were in place for children missing in education. The Panel was informed that some children may have moved out of the area or parents had chosen to home educate.

In response to a question from the Panel asking if emotional coaching was tailored for children of all ages, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that emotional coaching was tailored to the age and stage of the young person and was research based.

In response to a question from the Panel asking if some things would continue in the future after COVID, Jo-Anne Sanders responded to advise that there were some challenges and opportunities being looked at by Senior colleagues in Learning with participation by School Leaders and was being led by Cllr Pattison, Cabinet Member for Learning, Aspiration and Communities.

In response to a question from the Panel asking if schools could access additional funding support during the pandemic, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that schools could put in a funding bid which enabled officers to work with schools that complimented the work ongoing within community hubs.

In response to a question from the Panel asking if schools would continue with some processes introduced during the pandemic, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that there had been challenges and opportunities as a result of COVID, and senior colleagues in Children's Services were working with school leaders to look at this and this work had been led by Cllr Pattison as Lead Cabinet Member.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 14 January 2021

RESOLVED –

1. That the Panel noted the verbal update on the Emotional Wellbeing of Children and thanked Jo-Anne Sanders for her contributions.

9 COVID Catch up Fund - update

The Panel considered a verbal update on the COVID Catch up fund, presented by Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning and Early Support.

Jo-Anne Sanders highlighted the following key points:-

- the Government had announced that for the academic year 2020/21 (September to August) they would be supporting all schools with £80 per pupil from Reception to Year 11 with additional premium to support catch up funding and special schools and pupil referral units were entitled to £240 per pupil; across the year that would equate to approximately £5m;
- the first grant received across the authority had been for £1.3m and since the census took place in October that would be the basis on which the allocation of funding would be passported out to schools and they know that they could plan on the basis of the allocation that they would be receiving;
- it was down to individual schools to determine how best to spend the additional resource to meet the needs of the youngsters in their schools;
- helpful information had been published for schools on the education endowment fund in terms of research-based opportunities that might support their thinking about how best to spend the funds;
- there was a National Tutoring Programme which would be able to complement what schools were able to do in terms of the catch up fund;
- the DfE had published a COVID-19 support guide for schools;
- Governors would be wanting to work with school leaders on how best to use this additional funding and school colleagues had attended the Governor Briefing early on in the autumn term as it was important that schools could articulate how they were going to be spending the money and the rationale underpinning that;
- the Council had been undertaking virtual visits to schools to talk to learning partners and asking how that funding was being spent and it had been a varied picture but was quite early days; schools had been asked to confirm how they had been spending catch up funding and they would have to articulate the rationale, what the implication was and the impact and Kirklees Officers would continue to review this but there was not a uniform approach and spending would be based on what was best for youngsters in individual schools.

Jo-Anne Sanders advised that it was too early to measure the impact in schools of the COVID-19 Catch up Fund and the Panel agreed to revisit this matter later in the academic year for 2021/22. The Panel was informed that were the Council had seen good practice they were encouraging collaboration and sharing of good practice.

The Panel acknowledged that significant pressure had been placed on school Leaders for the extra work undertaken during COVID and agreed to monitor how

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 14 January 2021

school's had been utilising funding, impact of COVID catch up funding, sharing good practice and learning points.

The Panel was informed that Ofsted was currently not inspecting schools but they were undertaking some assurance visits and looking at best practice and to support schools the DfE were putting together case studies and good practice guides available for school leaders.

Cllr Marchington, Chair of the Panel, advised that Educational Outcomes were a key area of focus for the Panel and looking at the longer-term impact of COVID. The Panel agreed that catch up funding needed to be in place to help the children of Kirklees and also look at how this complemented the pupil premium and SEND. The Panel agreed to focus on this area in their work programme and that a longer-term view was needed on the impacts of COVID for schools and the children of Kirklees.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Panel noted the verbal report on COVID Catch up Fund and thanked Jo-Anne Sanders for her contributions.
2. The Panel agreed that as part of the Educational Outcomes they would consider an update report later in the academic year covering the longer-term impact of Covid for schools and how long the Covid catch up funding needed to be in place to help children in Kirklees and how it complemented pupil premium and SEND. The Panel also agreed that it would be useful to look at how the schools had used the funding, how this was measured, the sharing of good practice and any learning points.

10 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2020-21

The Panel considered the Working Programme and Agenda Plan for the 2020/21 municipal year.

Cllr Marchington advised that he had been contacted by the Lead Petitioner of the St John's Petition and confirmed that he would be responding shortly.

The Panel was informed that the final report on Elective Home Education had been considered and agreed by Cabinet on the 15th December 2020 and that the recommendations had been accepted.

The Panel expressed their thanks and appreciation for staff working in Children's Services and Schools during the pandemic for their commitment and dedication to educating and supporting the children of Kirklees.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Work Programme and Agenda Plan for the 2020/21 municipal year be noted.