

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 28th July 2021

Present: Councillor Andrew Marchington (Chair)
Councillor Elizabeth Reynolds
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor Paul White
Councillor Jackie Ramsay

Co-optees Dale O'Neill
Linda Summers

In attendance: 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
Ophelia Rix, Head of Service (Children in Care, Children looked after and Care Leavers)
Chris Jessup, Head of Educational Outcomes
Phil Mark, Head of Post-16, Progression and Partnership
Emma Brayford, Acting Senior Kirklees Learning Partner, Learning and Early Support

Observers: Cllr Viv Kendrick
Cllr Carol Pattison

Apologies: Councillor Joshua Sheard
Toni Bromley (Co-Optee)
Mel Meggs, Director of Childrens Services

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Toni Bromley and Councillor Joshua Sheard.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on the 25th February 2021 were agreed as a correct record subject to the wording of paragraph 2 on page 4 which should read "The panel requested an update at a future meeting which would give a

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narrative to explain how and when a family of 4 (2 working parents and 2 school age children) on a minimum wage would be able to access help from the hubs when they needed it”.

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on the 25th February 2021 be agreed subject to the change to paragraph 2 page 4 which should read “The panel requested an update at a future meeting which would give a narrative to explain how and when a family of 4 (2 working parents and 2 school age children) on a minimum wage would be able to access help from the hubs when they needed it”.

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

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 Ophelia Rix, Head of Service (Children in Care, Children Looked After and Care Leavers).

Ophelia Rix highlighted the following key issues:-

- The number of children in care since January 2020 had decreased and was now 650 (which excluded any looked after children receiving only Section 20 short term breaks) alongside the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Work had been undertaken to allow children to remain with families and there was a high number of children successfully living with connected.
- Special Guardianship Orders - there was a policy in place which provided financial support and practical support to family and friends and had a positive impact for connected families;
- The largest age group for boys in care was 10-15 years with 153 children and the largest age group for girls was 10-15 years with 121 children;
- Ethnicity changes – there had been an increase in the percentage split from June 2021 and the same point 12 months ago.
- In June 2021 there were 5 young people who were recorded as entering care in the month at the point of data extraction all of whom were of White ethnicity;
- There were 72 children placed more than 20 miles outside Kirklees – there had been a decline in the number placed outside Kirklees since 2017; The majority of Kirklees children and young people placed out of area were placed in foster care, the remainder were placed in children’s homes, semi-

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independent homes, a small number in youth custody or other specialist settings;

- Kirklees provided 18 placements to young adults over 16 who lived in supported accommodation; 6 young adults were placed outside of the Local Authority.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding infants taken into care and how that compared with other Local Authorities, Elaine McShane, Service Director, Family Support and Child Protection advised that the information would be provided in a future meeting and that Kirklees had a 26-week decision making period which included a second review at 3 months. The decision making would comprise either the child being returned to parents, allocated with a foster carer, or put up for adoption

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the reduced number of children taken into care in Kirklees compared with statistical neighbours, Ophelia Rix advised that the offer from other Local Authorities was around financial support and did not include early support which allowed Kirklees to plan with families and parents to allow children to remain with families. Elaine McShane advised that work had been completed across West Yorkshire regarding Special Guardianship Orders which included financial and practical support.

In response to a question from the panel regarding semi independent accommodation, Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources, Improvement and partnerships) advised that this type of accommodation was for over 16's and if was a supportive environment where young people came for independence. The Panel was informed that semi-independent accommodation was not regulated by Ofsted. Elaine McShane further explained that whilst in semi-independent accommodation the young person was able to work with different providers to gain support and guidance, this could be a bespoke package for an individual or could be to seek help and support on housing options.

In response to a question from the panel on ethnicity changes in looked after children and if it reflected the child population in Kirklees, Ophelia Rix advised that further work would be required and could be presented at the next scrutiny panel.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report on Number of Children in Care be noted and the panel thanked Ophelia Rix for her contributions.
2. That the Panel consider future information explaining the reasons for differences in numbers of children in care for Kirklees compared to statistical neighbours.
3. That further information be submitted to the next scrutiny panel relating to ethnicity changes in Looked after Children and how it was reflected in the child population in Kirklees.
4. That further information be submitted to a future Panel relating to children under 1 and how that compared with other Local Authorities.

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The Panel considered a verbal update on the Youth Justice Plan presented by Ian Mottershaw, Head of Service, Contextual Safeguarding and Youth Engagement Service relating to the Youth Justice plan 2021-2025.

Ian Mottershaw outlined the following key points –

- the Youth Justice plan was currently on route to Lead Members and Cabinet which outlined the ambition and intention in taking the Youth Justice Service forward.
- The purpose of the plan was to provide an overview of the service, annual performance and priorities for the next 4 years.
- The priorities were to reduce the number of first time entrants, reduce re offending, reduce the use of custody, improve participation of Children and Families to develop approaches and desistance, tackle disproportionality and reduce serious youth violence.
- The way in which the priorities would be approached would be through People, Partners and Places. Disproportionality was a priority within the plan and tackling inequalities was a theme through the entirety of the plan.
- The plan was created and aligned with the wider council priorities and plans with reference to Vision, Approach and Values.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding how the priorities for the next 4 years were different from before and how the longer term differed, Ian Mottershaw responded to advise that this was now a long-term vision whereas before they were annual plans, the longer-term vision was less reactionary and more sustainable. The Panel was informed that the longer-term vision dovetailed with the Youth Engagement Service to work around young people that were pre and post criminal space and the principles and ambitions did not change.

In response to a question regarding one of the objective tackling disproportionalities, Ian Mottershaw responded to advise that disproportionality was the disadvantage, the inequalities, plus the ethnicity and the demographics of the community who were getting involved in criminal justice and who received the services. Tom Brailsford, Service Director, Resources, Improvement and partnerships advised there were a number of groups that were over-represented within the Youth Justice Service, for example, children and young people with learning difficulties and mental health. The Panel was informed that children and young people often had speech and language therapy needs which were occasionally overrepresented and that there were a number of inequalities which were being addressed.

RESOLVED-

1. That the Panel noted the verbal update on the Youth Justice Service and thanked Ian Mottershaw for his contributions.
2. That the Panel would revisit the Youth Offending Team to follow up on their previous visit made in 2020.

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9 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2021-22

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

Cllr Marchington advised that he had a meeting with Cllrs Kendrick and Pattison to consider their Cabinet priorities. A number of priorities were hi-lighted, as follows:-

- Development of Family hubs - The Panel agreed to consider information around families and children's engagement with the hubs and feedback from Councillors who were involved with the hubs;
- Multi Systemic Therapies - The Panel agreed to consider an update around the new children's home which had a link to Multi Systemic Therapies;
- SEND - the Panel agreed to consider a future report on how the recommendations of the report had been implemented including a progress update, and seek feedback from parents who had been consulted as part of the Adhoc Panel;
- Relationship with Academies and Multi academy trusts – the Panel agreed to consider a report on relationships with Academies and Multi Academy Trusts and consider how the panel could influence the work they do to improve educational outcomes.

Cllr Marchington advised that he had attended the Futures Expert Strategy Group on the 30th June 2021 which received very positive engagement from school leaders and officers. It was confirmed at the meeting that all information had been investigated and that they had found that no children were at risk.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Work Programme and Agenda Plan for the 2021/22 municipal year be noted and updated as agreed.