

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 20th March 2023

Present: Councillor Andrew Marchington (Chair)
Councillor Elizabeth Reynolds
Councillor James Homewood
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor Paul White

Co-optees Oliver Gibson

Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources,
Improvement and Partnerships)
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning & Early
Support
Vicky Metheringham, Service Director – Child
Protection and Family Support
Stewart Horn, Head of Children's Integrated
Commissioning
Kelsey Clark-Davies, Head of Educational
Safeguarding & Inclusion
Matt Brayford, Strategic Lead, Education Safeguarding
Councillor Carole Pattison
Councillor Viv Kendrick

Apologies: Toni Bromley (Co-Optee)

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Toni Bromley (Co-optee).

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3 Interests

No Interest were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

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6 Public Question Time

No questions were received from members of the public.

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

The Panel received a verbal update on the performance data which was provided by the Service Directors in Children's Services and the following areas were highlighted:

Recruitment and retention of staff in Children's Services

Vicky Metheringham, Service Director for Child Protection and Family Support explained that the number of Looked after Children in Kirklees was stable and had been over the last 12 months, with other authorities experiencing an influx in the number of children that went into their care. The number of children leaving care in Kirklees was high, due to several reasons which included special guardianship orders and permanent arrangements being made with family members.

The Panel was informed that there was an increase in the number of vacant social worker posts across the service, when data was analysed, it showed that social workers were not leaving Kirklees but were moving into alternative posts within Kirklees Children's Services, such as advanced practitioners. The vacancies meant that a Social Worker's case load had risen. Although Kirklees had not used agency workers for a number of years, it was noted that agency workers may need to be employed on a short-term basis in accordance with the memorandum of understanding which had been agreed across the Yorkshire and Humber region. Diligent checks would be undertaken for any agency social worker employed with references being provided from previous employers and not the agency. It was noted that there would be a rise in available social workers coming into the authority through the step up to social work programme, the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) scheme and apprenticeships scheme.

Initial Child Protection Conferences

Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources, Improvement and Partnerships) explained that the percentage of initial child protection conferences which had to taken place within 15 days had decreased throughout December and January. The service had worked collaboratively with multi agencies to improve their systems to start to improve numbers of initial child protection conferences and improve percentages. Where children weren't seen at an initial child protection conference within 15 days, the social worker teams, and other professionals involved closely monitored the children and young people through safety planning, to ensure they were safe until the initial child protection conference took place.

The Panel was informed that the service had taken part in practice learning days where professionals were involved in certain areas to look at issues and practice. A practice learning day had taken place to look at the impact of neglect on children and young people through child protection conferences and impact on domestic violence. It was noted that three deep dives had taken place on decision making, and step up and step down arrangements, and the service continued to be assured that these arrangements were working well.

Improvement in Practice Standards

Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director, Learning & Early Support explained that the service had looked in detail at work that the family support service for the council and partners undertook. In Kirklees there were early support consultants which worked in the front door and in local areas giving support to schools and professionals. An average case load for a family support worker was 15 to 16 children per full time equivalent. Practice standard assessments had been completed, 62% were completed within the agreed timescales, which was a 14% increase over the last 12 months. It was for the local authority to set practice standards and Kirklees turned around the assessments within 20 days. This was a significant improvement to 2020 where the assessments took place within 45 days and compliance was 32%. The improvements were due to an investment in workforce and training.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted and that officers be thanked for their contributions.

8 Exclusions & Suspensions in Kirklees Schools

The Panel received a report on the current context around exclusions and suspensions in Kirklees and planned actions to support work in reducing them which was presented by Kelsey Clark-Davies, Head of Educational Safeguarding & Inclusion.

The Panel was informed that every year 8,000 children in the UK were permanently excluded from school. Often children ended up in alternative provisions and not back in mainstream education. School exclusion was directly linked with poorer life outcomes, these factors alongside school exclusions put some of the most vulnerable children and young people at greater risk of criminal exploitation. These children deserved and needed the best possible support that could be provided. They were more likely to live in poverty, have special educational needs or be looked after by the state.

Kelsey Clark-Davies explained that there had been an increase in permanent exclusions and suspensions across Kirklees which applied mainly to boys and secondary schools. The main reason for exclusion and suspensions was around persistent disruptive behaviour. It was noted that reducing exclusions and suspensions in Kirklees was a priority, with both the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) transformation plan and the Our Kirklees future learning strategy outlining a number of key actions underway. The Panel was informed that there was a need to refresh the approach to identify and support the needs of children and young people at a much earlier stage. Projects were being implemented to develop specialist placements across the alternative provisions sector and wider special educational needs and disabilities sector along with training, learning and upskilling.

In response to a question from the Panel, which asked if a zero-exclusion policy within Kirklees was realistic, Kelsey Clark-Davies advised that it was Kirklees ambition to have zero exclusions, but there may be an instance when there was a need for the sanction, there would be enough support at the right place at the right time to prevent any sanctions. It was noted that schools for children with special needs had not experienced any exclusions for a number of years.

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In response to questions from the Panel, on the number of academies which excluded children, compared to community schools, and how confident the service was that the same standards was applied across academies and community schools, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that a breakdown of information on the proportion of schools that were primary academies, compared to secondary academies would be beneficial to the Panel, as they were different.

In response to a question from the Panel, which asked what the progress was in the additionally resourced provisions, Kelsey Clark-Davies advised that there were 5 additionally resourced provisions were due to be opened in September 2023, which included –

- two primary social emotional and mental health provisions
- one primary cognition and learning resource provision
- one primary communication and interaction provision and
- one secondary communication and interaction provision

During a discussion regarding the progress on the cultural change towards supporting schools in developing a trauma informed approach and how progress would be measured, Kelsey Clark-Davies agreed that a report would be provided to future panel meetings to show how progress was measured.

During a discussion around ethnicity breakdown, living in wards and high risk of criminality, Kelsey Clark-Davies advised that living in wards was in reference to a cluster of schools in which the young people attend within that ward. The report provided information where there were higher exclusions or suspensions for ethnicity groups, and national research showed there was a risk of criminality from young people who had been excluded from school.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That further information be provided to the Panel on the proportion of schools that were primary academies compared to secondary academies.
- 2) That a future report be provided on how progress was measured on the cultural change to supporting schools in developing a trauma informed approach,
- 3) That Officers in Children's Services be thanked for their presentation.

9 Stable Homes Built on Love

The Panel received a report on the Government's response to the McCallister, National Care Review which was published in May 2022.

Vicky Metheringham, Service Director for Child Protection and Family Support explained that on 2nd February 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) issued its response to the independent review of children's social care, the child safeguarding practice review panel's inquiry into the murders of two children and the competition and markets authority's study of the children's social care market in three consultation documents. The consultations closed on 11th May 2023 and the outcome would inform future planning within Children's Services at both a local and national level.

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In response to the McCallister report of 2022, the DfE set out an initial response for addressing a range of issues that impacted children's social care services. The following key areas that were covered as part of the consultation period were:

- **Funding** – The DfE committed to providing £200m in funding over two years which was below the recommendation by the Care Review,
- **Social Work and Training** – An early career framework was to be established, replacing the assessed year in practice,
- **Social work recruitment** – The DfE was to explore ways to support the recruitment of up to 500 additional child and family social worker apprentices,
- **Agency social work** – The DfE proposed bringing in national rules to reduce the cost and use of agency social workers in children's services.
- **Social Worker Pay** – The DfE rejected the care review recommendation for national pay scales for social workers on the grounds that this risked destabilising the local government pay system for insufficient benefit,
- **Social Worker Registration** – The DfE had rejected the care review proposal for all registered social workers, including managers and academics, to spend 100 hours in direct work each year to remain close to practice,
- **Family Help** – The DfE had confirmed that out of the £200m a figure of £45m would be allocated for up to 12 'families first for children pathfinder' areas to trial the care review proposal to introduce multidisciplinary family help services, to provide non-judgemental, joined up support for families affected by issues such as domestic violence or poor mental health,
- **Child Protection** – It had been proposed that children protection lead practitioners, who would receive advanced specialist training would be appointed to lead safeguarding cases in the pathfinder areas, as called for by the care review,
- **Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Conference Chairs** – The DfE had rejected the care reviews proposal to abolish the independent reviewing officer role,
- **Involving Family Networks** – The 12 pathfinders would test using family group decision making, such as family group conferences, at an early stage to support parents minimise risk to children. In addition, seven areas would test providing family support network packages providing resources to help families care for children and avoid them going into care,
- **Kinship Care** – A kinship care strategy to be published in 2023 while £9m to be spent on improving training and support to kinship carers,
- **Foster Care** – Of the £200m set aside for this work, it was agreed that £27m would be spent on a carer recruitment and retention programme over the next two years focussing on shortage areas, such as sibling groups, teenagers, unaccompanied children, parent and child placements and children who had suffered complex trauma,
- **Commissioning Care Placements** – The DfE had backed the care review's proposal to transfer responsibility for the commissioning of care placements from individual council to regional groupings of authorities. Regional care co-operatives would initially be tested in two pathfinder areas before being rolled out,
- **Financial Oversight of Providers** – The National body would also introduce a financial oversight regime for the largest children's home providers and

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independent fostering agencies, similar to that for adult social care, by reducing the risk of providers exiting the market suddenly,

- **Relationships for Children in Care and Care Leavers** – The DfE had made the commitment of £30m which was to be spent on family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes for looked after children and care leavers, to help them find and maintain relationships,
- **Support for Care Leavers** – The suggested grant made available to children leaving care would increase from £2,000 to £3,000, while the bursary for those undertaking apprenticeships would rise from £1,000 to £3,000,
- **Care Experience** – The DfE had rejected the care review's call for care experience to become a protected characteristic under equality law, which would have required public bodies to tackle inequalities facing those with care experience and prohibit businesses and employers from discriminating against them,
- **National Standards and Outcomes** – The DfE would consult on a children's social care national framework, as proposed by the Review.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and that officers be thanked for their contributions.

10 **Educational Wellbeing and Mental Health provision for Children and Young People in Kirklees**

The Panel considered a report describing currently commissioned emotional wellbeing and mental health services, including recent developments, and outlined challenges currently being faced.

Stewart Horn, Head of Children's Integrated Commissioning explained that following the covid pandemic there had been effects on children's emotional health and wellbeing. Early years provisions, education, schools, colleges and activities had been disrupted, leaving them without their usual support networks and social contact. Some children thrived in the home learning environment, particularly where going to school contributed to anxiety, but many suffered from isolation and loneliness. The youngest children lived through the pandemic at a vital time in their development, missing out on important learning and social experiences, which for some had a significant impact upon speech, language and communication skills, as well as socialisation and regulation. Stewart Horn further explained that schools and early years settings reported that some children were less well prepared for school than in previous years. In common with other areas, in Kirklees there had been rising demand for all mental health, learning disability and autism services. This demand was extremely challenging to address, due to the current financial situation and workforce availability. The report introduced proposed developments for services and gave the current waiting list figures for each service area. The Panel agreed to receive future information regarding the fluctuation in the waiting times and trends.

The Panel fed back on their visit to the Mental Health in School's Team and had witnessed some really good partnership working between the Council, SWYFT and Northorpe Hall. The Panel also visited Hillside Primary School and had found it interesting to hear some of the anxieties from year 6 children about their transition to year 7 at secondary school.

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RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted and that officers be thanked for their contributions.
- 2) That a report be provided at a future meeting on the fluctuation in waiting times and trends for children's emotional health and wellbeing.

11 Pre-decision Scrutiny - Cabinet decisions on the horizon

The Panel noted that there were no new areas of pre-decision scrutiny this municipal year.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted

12 Feedback from Panel Members on issues considered by Corporate Parenting Board

Councillor Marchington advised the Panel that a Corporate Parenting Board meeting had not taken place since the last meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Panel on 23rd January 2023. The next Corporate Parenting Board was scheduled to take place on 28th March 2023 and Panel members would feedback to the next Panel meeting on any key areas of focus.

Councillor Marchington provided an update from the Children's Ambition Board which fed into the Corporate Parenting Board, one of the key focuses was on apprenticeships post 16.

RESOLVED: That following Corporate Parenting Board in March 2023, Panel Members feedback on any key issues to the next Panel meeting.

13 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme 2022-23

The Panel considered the work programme for the 2022-23 municipal year.

Councillor Marchington advised that a number of visits had taken place since the last Panel meeting which was part of the focus of the work programme.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Panel noted the Work Programme and agenda plan for 2022-23,
- (ii) That a visit be arranged to the Mental Health in School's Team at a secondary school and post 16 college,
- (iii) That the Panel will be invited to the Our Kirklees Future event on 27th June 2023,
- (iv) That Panel Members and Officers be thanked for the work they undertook throughout the municipal year,
- (v) That Parents and young people were thanked for their participation with the Panel throughout the municipal year.