

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Friday 22nd September 2023

Present: Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor John Lawson
Councillor Ebrahim Dockrat

In attendance: Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning & Early Support
Vicky Metheringham, Service Director – Child Protection and Family Support
Kieran Lord, Service Director, Resources, Improvements & Partnership
Nina Barnes, Post 16 & Adult Learning Strategic Lead
Emma Brayford, Senior Kirklees Learning Partner
Narinder Kaur, Kirklees Learning Partner
Councillor Elizabeth Reynolds
Councillor Viv Kendrick

Apologies: Councillor Ammar Anwar
Councillor Paul Moore
Oliver Gibson (Co-Optee)

1 Membership of the Panel

Apologies were received from Councillor Anwar, Councillor Moore and Oliver Gibson (co-optee).

The Panel noted the changes to the membership of the Children Scrutiny Panel and welcomed Cllr Lawson and Cllr Dockrat to the Panel.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declaration of 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.

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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 performance data for July 2023, which was provided by the Service Directors in Children's Services.

Kieran Lord, Service Director, Resources, Improvements & Partnerships explained that:

- There had been a progressive increase in the timeliness of initial child protection case data,
- There had been a reduction in the timeliness of initial health assessments,
- There had been an increase in foster care placements for children and young people looked after within family arrangements,
- There had been an increase in placements provided by independent foster carers,
- There had been a decrease in CAMHS and Neuro Developmental referrals, but an increase in timeliness of both areas.

In response to a question around caseloads slowly increasing and work practice of staff, their workloads and wellbeing, Vicky Metheringham advised that caseloads were being monitored closely. The Panel were informed that staff had an average caseload of 19.7, weekly oversight of caseloads for social workers was carried out which was analysed. Senior Managers were assured that social workers were able to see children frequently and that staff were appropriately supported and received case supervision. In terms of social workers feeling supported, a range of mechanisms had been introduced where managers were visible and were reaching out on a frequent basis. Vicky Metheringham further explained that a range of opportunities had been introduced to engage positively with social workers and to reward them for the things they were doing really well and to thank them for the steps they took, and resources were being utilised to support social workers with their emotional wellbeing and resilience on a frequent basis. A number of other mechanisms were in place to ensure managers were able to speak to practitioners.

In response to a question regarding in house provision, and what was done to keep social workers engaged within Kirklees, Vicky Metheringham advised that Kirklees did not use agency workers but there were some vacancies. The Panel was informed that very few vacancies resulted in social workers leaving Kirklees, vacancies were generally relating to promotions, or transfers to another part of the service. Kirklees valued the importance of having a structure which was consistent, and that engaged with social workers, was rewarding, and made them feel valued. Vicky Metheringham further explained that Kirklees took an approach to growing their own social workers and engaged with the front-line programme, this enabled the employment of a number of unqualified social workers who had access to front line social worker graduates and wanted to become a social worker. The Panel noted that 10 front line practitioners had moved into social work teams and 10 had been recruited onto the frontline programme. There were apprenticeship opportunities which were available to employees across Kirklees.

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In response to a question regarding the increase to section 47 referrals, Vicky Metheringham explained that when referrals were received where it was considered a child was at harm, a strategy meeting took place within 24 hours of the referral to consider the next steps. One step was the section 47 assessment, which included gathering additional information from a variety of agencies which needed to be completed within 5 working days of the assessment. The section 47 assessment would then be referred to the child protection conference. The Panel was informed that officers felt there were too many section 47 assessments happening unnecessarily and the service had looked at the reasons why, it was recognised there was some learning from the outcome.

Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning & Early Support, advised that a process was ongoing to look at last year's Outcomes Data which included exclusions and attendance. Cllr Elizabeth Reynolds advised that improving outcomes and building on challenges of Covid and the effect this had on children, that there was a real commitment from schools to get the best outcomes.

A question was asked by the Panel regarding young people attending university and the reduced numbers, and what the impact was on vocational courses. Nina Barnes advised that a number of post 16 institutions were revising their curriculum offer with a number of vocational qualifications due to finish this year, which meant there was the option of A levels or T levels only. Apprenticeships was another option but not in post 16 sixth forms. The Panel was informed that traditionally, 70%-80% of A level routes taken moved onto university places.

In response to a question regarding unauthorised absences and data that monitored the absences, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that robust monitoring was in place where a dashboard monitored attendance daily. Examples of the areas the dashboard showed were, vulnerable people, the curriculum year, or geographical areas of Kirklees. The Panel was informed that the previous academic year highlighted that the highest percentage for absence was illness, followed by unauthorised absence which included unauthorised holidays. The service worked closely with the school system and had a strong educating safeguarding offer. New attendance duties for the Local Authority had come into place in September 2023, once data had been gathered it would be shared with the Panel.

In response to a question regarding nursery provisions impacting on early years, where some schools fed into the system, Emma Brayford advised that data was available on how children progressed through the school system, and that officers wanted to look closer around the impact of mobility when children moved from early years settings into mainstream schools and the academy system.

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

8

Pre-decision Scrutiny - Cabinet decisions on the horizon

Kieran Lord advised the Panel that a paper was to be presented to Cabinet on the 26th September 2023, regarding consultation on the redesign of short breaks and respite facilities for children and young people and their families where their children

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had disabilities. Kieran Lord explained that Pre-decision scrutiny had not yet been sought due to this being a consultation exercise.

In response to a question regarding the young people that used the service, and what the impact of the decision would be, Kieran Lord advised that the request to Cabinet was to seek permission to consult. Officers hoped for a better integration of services that was in line with council's place based approach, with services that met the needs of children and young people and their families in a locality that was better to access and at a time that was convenient for them, whilst simultaneously looking to make efficiencies by way of integration of services.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the items for pre-decision scrutiny and thanked the officers for their updates.

9 **Feedback from Panel Members on issues considered by Corporate Parenting Board**

Councillor Cooper advised the Panel that Corporate Parenting Board last met on 12th September 2023. At the meeting an update was provided on how looked after children, who were for the first time going into their own homes and being part of the community, were supported to manage their own life and be part of the community.

There was also an update regarding children's residential homes and how they were inspected, along with the way that was measured.

Councillor Cooper advised the Panel that he had suggested a representative from Kinship Carers be a member of the Corporate Parenting Board.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the updates given regarding matters considered by the Corporate Parenting Board on 12th September.

10 **Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2023/24**

The Panel considered the work programme and agenda plan for the 2023-24 municipal year.

Cllr Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Learning and Aspiration, raised some queries regarding items on the work programme.

RESOLVED: The Lead Member agreed to meet with the Cabinet Members for Learning and Aspiration and Children to discuss the work programme for 2023/24