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## KIRKLEES COUNCIL

### CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

**Friday 8th August 2025**

Present: Councillor Itrat Ali (Chair)  
Councillor Richard Smith

In attendance: Tom Brailsford, Director of Children and Families  
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning and Early Support  
Joel Hanna, Head of Corporate Parenting and Looked After Children  
Councillor Viv Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children  
Councillor Jane Rylah, Cabinet Member for Education

Apologies: Councillor Tanisha Bramwell  
Councillor Hannah McKerchar  
Councillor Ashleigh Robinson

**1 Membership of the Panel**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Hannah McKerchar, Cllr Tanisha Bramwell and Councillor Ashleigh Robinson.

**2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2025 be deferred for approval at the next meeting.

**3 Declaration of Interests**

No interests were declared.

**4 Admission of the Public**

All agenda items were considered in public session.

**5 Deputations/Petitions**

No deputations or petitions were received.

**6 Public Question Time**

No public questions were received.

**7 Cabinet Priorities for the Children's Service in 2025/26**

The Cabinet Members for Children's Services and Education gave a verbal update on their priorities for the 2025/26 municipal year.

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Councillor Viv Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children and Families and statutory responsibility for children, outlined her cabinet priorities for 25/26 –

- **Sufficiency of places in homes** - for looked-after children and young people (fostering, special guardianship orders and residential care) was a constant challenge and the Service was looking to develop and increase places.
- **Homes for care leavers** – a recent partnership with Homes and Neighbourhoods had provided some homes specifically for care leavers and this would be developed further.
- **Sufficiency of staff** - including recruitment and development of social workers and monitoring of caseloads for Personal Advisors in the care leaving service.
- **Early support and intervention** - to provide the right support and prevention early in order to reduce disruption to families by not having to take children into care.
- **Support to Care Leavers** - trying to provide more support to our young people whether its work opportunities and finding ways to reduce financial challenges
- **Voice of young people** – continuing to develop the voice of young people particularly through the Kirklees Parenting Board
- **Implementation of social care reforms**

Councillor Jane Rylah, Cabinet Member for Education outlined her cabinet priorities for 25/26 –

- **Securing sufficient learning places** with a priority focus on SEND pupils.
- **Rebuilds of Special Schools** at Joseph Norton Academy and Woodley School and College and ensuring sufficient additionally resourced provision places were available for primary and secondary aged learners and ensure sufficiency of alternative pathways to support those children with more complex needs.
- **Post-16** - review and plan for opportunities post 16 including education, employment, and training.
- **Cluster working within schools** – continue to embed and develop in order to support greater inclusion and improve the pathways for young people in preparation for Adulthood
- **EHCPs** – continue to improve the quality of the EHCP Plans and the timeliness of the annual reviews.
- **SEND White Paper** - Preparing for the anticipated White Paper in the autumn regarding SEND reforms and consideration of this will be a priority

The Chair of the Panel confirmed that a number of the Cabinet priorities listed above were on the work programme for 25/26 for scrutiny and consideration by the Panel, in particular the CQC and Ofsted SEND Inspection and the Local Authority Action Plan. The Panel also noted that visits were planned to the Joseph Norton Academy and Woodley School and College when they were ready to view.

### **RESOLVED -**

That the Cabinet Members be thanked for the updates on their priorities for the year ahead and noted that a number of key areas had already formed part of the Panel's areas of focus on the Work Programme for 2025/26.

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

Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning and Early Support, and Joel Hanna, Head of Corporate Parenting and Looked After Children, presented highlights from the Performance Data covering the period ending June 2025.

Jo-Anne Sanders highlighted the following key points:-

- **Number of EHCPs** had increased by 495 in June 2025 compared to the same period in 2024.
- **EHCPs statutory compliance** Statutory compliance had been low in 2024 at 23% but had improved in June 2025 (as published in the SEN2); in the first 6 months of 2025 (measured at a cumulative rate) statutory compliance for initial EHCPs was at 47.2% which was in line with the national average; June 2025 data showed that 65.9% of EHCPs were compliant within 20 weeks and in July 72.7% of the plans issued were within the 20 week compliance, which was significantly better than the national average.
- **Suspensions and exclusions** – there had been a reduction in the numbers of suspensions and exclusions.
- **Inclusion Multi-Agency Panel** – had been in place for 12 months and the work of the Panel was having a positive impact and the Service had seen 500 referrals for access to one of the commissioned or additionally resourced places. Schools had been using this pathway to access this provision, for example for children with a medical need.
- **Cluster model** was embedded and had been in place for 12 months, a review had shown that the model was having a positive impact in supporting the child's needs at their local school.
- **Elective Home Education (EHE)** – there had been a rise in the number of children being educated at home this year and officers welcomed the planned visit by the Panel to meet with the EHE Team and there would be future opportunities to look at the types and reasons for families deciding to home educate.
- **Children Missing Education** – the number of children missing in education had been steady in June 2025 at 179 and the Service had not seen any significant increase or decrease since the same time in 2024. There was usually a spike at the start of the new school year in September, and the Team would be following up to make sure that all children were accounted for.

Jo-Anne Sanders informed the Panel that the Service had invested in EHCP's and were making improvements but were aware that there was further work to do particularly in respect of EHCP Annual Reviews, but the Service was now sustaining a good turnaround in terms of compliancy and quality.

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The Panel were informed that analysis of the suspensions and exclusions data would be undertaken to assess the main reasons for the reduction in numbers. Inclusion Managers were working closely with schools when notifications were received to explore opportunities for an alternative outcome and as a result of this several notifications had been withdrawn, for example, providing education at an alternative site for a cooling off period or where the child had an EHCP an earlier review would be arranged so that the needs of the child could be met.

The Panel had undertaken some visits to schools working in clusters and the Chair highlighted that during her visit to a local school, the cluster model was seen as exemplary compared to other local authority areas within Yorkshire, some of whom were reaching out to the Kirklees school for assistance and guidance which had been good to see.

Joel Hanna highlighted the following key points:-

- **Looked after children** – there had been a slight increase in the number of looked after children, but rates remained below national average. The service performed well at finding alternatives and supporting families to stay together.
- **Children in Need** - numbers remained low due to the strong early help offer and were still below the national average and statistical neighbours.
- **Child Protection Conference reviews** – most reviews were held within timescales - reviews of child protection conferences should be undertaken within 15 days.
- **Return Home Interviews** – these were offered for all children reported by the police as missing once they had returned and the missing episode had concluded. There had been a slight decrease in the numbers of return interviews that had taken place, and this could be due in some cases to the number of repeat episodes which had taken place since the first missing episode and had been covered by one return interview.

Joel Hanna advised the Panel that the Service was continuing to identify the right services for children and young people in need. There was strong quality assurance and decision making within the Duty and Advice and Assessment and Intervention Services to ensure that children received statutory responses when required and that the services and systems in place to support children and families in need were effective and robust. Quality assurance was in place to routinely review the quality of decision making.

The Panel was informed that when Child Protection Conference Reviews could not be held within the 15-day timescales, measures were put in place to safeguard the children whilst the conference was held. Joel Hanna further explained that the Service would also assess the reason for the child falling out of the 15-day timescale. Conferences were sometimes delayed to ensure engagement with parents could take place, that interpreters were booked or that papers had been circulated. Quality Assurance in this area took place which had confirmed that where conferences were outside of the timescales, there was no cause for concern in relation to risk or vulnerability.

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Joel Hanna informed the Panel that when a missing child had returned, as well as offering a return home interview, an independent person would also visit the young person to gain an insight as to any potential risk that could be learned from to try and prevent any further missing episodes. There were robust systems within the Youth Engagement Service to ensure that the service was aware of every child who went missing and where appropriate, return home interviews were offered. The Panel was informed that not all children would take up the offer of a return home interview and where that was the case, this would be reviewed and a decision taken as to what other ways and mechanisms could be more appropriate for engaging with the young person.

### **RESOLVED –**

That the verbal updates on performance data be noted and officers were thanked for their presentations.

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### **Pre-decision scrutiny - Cabinet decisions on the horizon**

The Panel considered potential areas of pre-decision scrutiny in accordance with any cabinet decisions which were on the horizon and related to children and young people.

Tom Brailsford, Director for Children and Families, advised the Panel that Jo-Anne Sanders would bring the Action Plan following the CQC and Ofsted SEND Inspection to the Panel in October 2025 and would welcome comments and contributions from the Panel in terms of pre-decision scrutiny.

### **RESOLVED -**

That the Panel would consider the Action Plan following the CQC and Ofsted SEND Inspection at their next meeting in October 2025.

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### **Feedback from Panel Members on issues considered by Kirklees Parenting Board**

Panel Members who attended the last meeting of the Kirklees Parenting Board gave feedback on key areas considered which were of interest to the Panel.

The Chair of the Panel advised that a young person had attended the last meeting of the Board and she had been very impressed by how engaged they were and how useful and constructive it had been to the work of the Board. The Panel was informed that the Board would be welcoming more young people to attend by holding some meetings later in the afternoon to enable Care Experience representatives to attend and contribute.

Councillor Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children, gave a summary of the key areas discussed at the last meeting of the Board –

- **Priority One - Supporting engagement and achievement in lifelong learning training and employment** - the Board received a presentation from the Virtual School Headteacher, Louise Hallas, on the work of the virtual school which was responsible for overseeing the learning of young people aged from 2 to 18 who were in care or a care leaver.

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- **Kirklees Family Business** - Louise Hallas also gave an update on the development of a sustainable model for the Kirklees family business, the aim of which was to improve the aspiration of children in care and care leavers from the age of 13. Board Members asked how they could support the delivery of a family business. Tom Brailsford agreed to liaise with Human Resources (HR) to ascertain if the Family Business Model could be embedded into the HR procedures.
- **Feedback from a Care Experience representative** - the young person who attended the Board raised the following –
  - Pre-Covid Apprenticeship Programme - asked if this could be restarted
  - Job Fairs for Care Leavers – suggested that these could be held at No 11 and No 12 hubs focussed on young people
  - Travel assistance – asked if this could be offered to Care Experience young people
- **Communication with children in care and care leavers** - improvements were needed in communication with children in care and care leavers

### **RESOLVED -**

That the updates from the Kirklees Parenting Board be noted.

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### **Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2025/26**

The Panel discussed the progress of the work programme and agenda plan for 2025-26 municipal year.

The Chair of the Panel confirmed that the Work Programme had now been finalised and asked if Panel Members could feedback with any comments, particularly those who had been unable to contribute at the workshop in June. The Chair thanked officers for their contributions and advised that the Panel valued the opportunity to undertake visits, which allowed them to engage first hand with those who provided services to children and young people.

Tom Brailsford advised that officers agreed that the Work Programme covered the key priorities for the Service and welcomed the contributions and input from the Scrutiny Panel in these important areas of work, which included scrutiny later in the year on the DfE White Paper proposals for SEND Reforms and the focus on care leavers.

### **RESOLVED -**

1. That the progress on the Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2025-26 and agreed schedule of visits be noted.
2. That Panel Members provide feedback and comments on the areas of focus included within the Work Programme for 2025-26.