

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Friday 17th October 2025

Present: Councillor Itrat Ali (Chair)
Councillor Hannah McKerchar
Councillor Richard Smith

In attendance: Councillor Viv Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Councillor Jane Rylah, Cabinet Member for Education
Tom Brailsford, Executive Director for Children and Families
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning and Early Support
Stewart Horn, Head of Children's Commissioning for West Yorkshire ICB and Kirklees Council
Dawn Pitt, Parent and Carer Network Kirklees
Johanna Hull, Parent and Carer Network Kirklees
Robert Fordyce, Children's Principal Social Worker (on behalf of Vicky Metheringham)
Adrian Wisniewski, Transformation Programme Manager
Ian Bennett, Director of Quality and Nursing for the NHS in Kirklees and Calderdale
Jayne Whitton, Principal Educational Psychologist
Vicky Dutchburn, West Yorkshire ICB

Apologies: Councillor Tanisha Bramwell

22 Membership of the Panel

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Tanisha Bramwell.

23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8th and 29th August 2025 be approved as a correct record.

24 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

25 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

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26 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

27 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

28 The outcome of the Kirklees Local Area Partnership Inspection of SEND and Alternative Provision undertaken in June 2025 by Ofsted and CQC and the post inspection Action Plan

The Panel considered a report and presentation on the outcome of the Kirklees Local Area Partnership Inspection of SEND and Alternative Provision undertaken in June 2025 by Ofsted and CQC, and the post inspection Action Plan, which was presented by Ian Bennett, ICB Kirklees Place Director of Nursing and Quality.

The Panel noted that the strength of the inspection was in the partnership arrangements and relationships that were in place between health partners, local authority partners, education partners, and most importantly the voice of children and young people.

Ian Bennett gave context to the report and highlighted the following key points:

- All local area partnerships were eligible for inspections by Ofsted and CQC, which looked specifically at services provided for children and young people with special educational needs and those with disabilities (SEND) and at alternative provision.
- The Kirklees local area partnership was inspected between the 16th and the 20th of June 2025, and the report was published in August.
- The previous inspection in 2022 had identified two areas for improvement and significant improvement that had been made in those two areas.
- The outcome of the report was that the local area partnership arrangements led to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children, young people and those with special educational needs and disabilities and that the partnership needed to work more jointly to make improvements.
- Ofsted and CQC had asked the local area partnership to update and publish its strategic plan.
- The Panel were asked to note the recommendations set out within the report and consider the detail of what would be done to address them, as set out in The Big Plan Part 3.

Tom Brailsford, Executive Director for Children and Families, informed the Panel that inspectors:

- Recognised that leaders were ambitious for children and young people with SEND.
- Noted that the partnership worked well together, including with the Parent and Carer Forum, Parents of Children with Additional Needs (PCAN).
- Understood that the partnership was aware of areas of strength and areas that needed to improve further.
- Saw passion and dedication within Kirklees, that people worked together to make a difference for and with children and young people and their families.

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- Were very positive about many things including the Big Plan and cluster working.
- Observed that children were at the heart of what was being done and were the centre of decision making - children and young people's voices were listened to and helped shape local developments that affected them.

Tom Brailsford advised the Panel that the inspection highlighted four areas of improvement:

- Preparing for Adulthood (PfA)
- Waiting times for some Health services (therapeutic services, Mental Health Services and access to wheelchair services)
- Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)
- Communication

The Panel was informed that these areas for improvement would be addressed in SEND: The Big Plan 3, a document that could be read on its own as a response to the inspection, and which complemented part 1 (the 5-year strategy) and part 2 (which outlined action in 2025). The Big Plan 3 had been worked on by partners and created using responses from children, young people, parents and carers. Tom Brailsford explained that there was also a detailed action plan in the very late stages of being finalised that underpinned this plan, which was being co-produced across the partnership.

Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director, Learning and Early Support, presented the Panel with information on actions that would be taken to address improvements in Preparation for Adulthood (PfA):

Each area for improvement was planned on a quarterly basis. In the Autumn term the PfA work stream would be reviewed, publicly available information and guidance updated, and annual reviews looked at with a focus on transitions.

During the Winter and Spring a peer review with the Regional Sector-Led Improvement Team would generate recommendations and feedback to impact the PfA Action Plan. Existing Post-16 options included opportunities for volunteering, work placements and the SEND employment forum and work had already started with Post-16 providers and employers on improving the available pathways. In Spring there would be a focus on any gaps in terms of educational opportunities, to ensure greater opportunities for young people to move forward with their learning.

Partnership working with health services, therapies, social work and education would assist in making the transition to adulthood as smooth as possible.

Stewart Horn, Head of Children's Integrated Commissioning, advised the Panel on the plan for Waiting Times for health services for children. The Panel were informed that this area of improvement had been expected and was a common area for improvement for local authorities nationally. It was important to recognise limitations and avoid overpromising, given the resources available. Stewart Horn advised on actions on Waiting Times:

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- A wheelchair service improvement plan was already underway and additional funding had been identified and provided by the ICB.
- Over winter, funding and contractual arrangements would be examined. There was work ongoing across West Yorkshire, with regional partners, around maximising and improving access to neurodevelopmental assessment.
- Work with health provider partners would take place to ensure that the data they provided was more accurate, timely, easy to understand, and available to those who needed it.
- In Spring, CAMH services and speech and language would be prioritised for improvement. The improvement programme would be developed from a child and family perspective.
- There were a range of early intervention and support services that could reduce the need for the clinical services, which also needed to be focused on, to ensure that the clinical services were used to maximum efficiency.
- Parents had asked for access to clear and easy to understand information about their position in the queue, and the waiting time until their assessment or service. Information would also be provided about what they could do to help themselves whilst they are waiting.
- In Summer 2026, intensive work with children and families around their mental health would commence, outcome measures for CAMHS would be reviewed and work on the wheelchair service improvements would continue.
- In Autumn 2026 work so far would be reviewed to find out what the impact had been. New ways of implementing therapy services would be developed (speech and language, physiotherapy and occupational therapy) to use expert staff in the best way.

Jo-Anne Sanders presented on improvements planned in relation to Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), which was a key focus for the Service and had previously been discussed at Scrutiny. The Panel noted that actions for EHCPs included:

- Timeliness had improved for initial EHCPs and this needed to be matched by progress with annual reviews.
- Currently Kirklees oversaw almost 5,000 EHCPs. In Autumn 2025 annual reviews were being prioritised for children and young people who were about to change phases, to ensure transitions were right for each individual.
- Investment had been made into a new information and case file management system. Reports were being developed so that, as with initial EHCPs, the annual review process could also be tracked to assist with prioritisation and timeliness.
- Schools were being consulted about their experience of the annual review process, at cluster meetings, SENCO networks, Headteacher forums and early years family hubs.
- To improve the quality of plans, the Envision 360 platform would be used to review each section ensure it reflected children's needs and partner's advice.
- Workforce development in response to baseline surveying would focus on shared understanding and good practice.
- The EHCP team would work with families to update plans.
- A further detailed plan should be in place by Winter 2026.

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Jo-Anne Sanders advised that there was a need to be realistic, that the annual reviews would not all be completed at the same time, and communication with families needed to be clear. The new case file management system featured tools which were being developed to help the service work well with partners, as well as with children and families. The Panel was informed that by Spring 2026 it was planned that the children and family portal would become live, enabling EHCPs to be viewed along with annual review documentation. It was hoped that this would positively impact co-production of plans, improve communication and enable amendments and comments to be added to plans.

The Panel were informed that practice standards across the partnership on EHCP reviews would be reviewed and learning from auditing would be fed back during practice progress events. The partnership would then seek feedback on the experience of young people and families to see if improvements had been made, and the parent carer forum would give feedback to inform the next stage.

Tom Brailsford presented the plan for improving communication, and highlighted the following key points:

- Investment had been made in expert communication help to develop a strong communications plan across partnerships as well as for parents.
- Families and partners would be updated about events and progress against the plan on the local offer.
- ISOS Partnership's "What Works in SEND" workshop would be delivered on good practice from other local authorities.
- A Youth Forum would be established.
- Consistency of communication would be enhanced with the new portal.
- In Winter a local offer live event would take place for people to share information, join workshops and meet other families.
- Develop training about "A day in the life of a carer" with PCAN for senior and all other teams, to understand how to communicate better and lessen the impact of stress on families.
- In Summer 2026 the Families Together gateway and local offer would be reviewed to see if one gateway could provide information, videos and self-help.
- Activity with partners, including the DfE and NHS England, would be reviewed. Tom Brailsford updated the Panel on next steps for governance, including reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Board, Cabinet and Children's Scrutiny. Senior Officers had met with NHS England and the DfE who had been positive about the Team's response post inspection and the Big Plan 3. They had felt it was a strong outcome and could see strength in the partnership. Big Plan 3 would be published imminently, and a more detailed action plan would be brought back to Scrutiny.

In response to questions, the Panel was informed that:

- Each LA had a DfE advisor and an NHS England advisor who worked across the country and shared their experience, to support and challenge. The DfE advisor for Kirklees had worked closely with the authority to help improve 20 week compliance on EHCPs, and on pre and post inspection work. Where excellent practice existed, the advisors spread awareness of this locally and

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nationally. For example, DfE policy writers would soon be producing guidance using its experiences with Kirklees's Additionally Resourced Provision arm of the Sufficiency Strategy. The results of DfE visits would be communicated via the local offer to update on progress. The role of the DfE advisor would also be to assist with reforms brought about by the forthcoming white paper.

- In response to a question on whether the dashboard for partners would integrate with the portal being set up for parents of children with SEND, Stewart Horn responded that while integration was always the aim, this was dependant on whether the systems worked well together. The aim of the partnership dashboard was to home in on the key metrics that measured progress and identify the issues that were most important to families. Each service area could have one or two important areas to track, and the dashboard would bring those together into one place to provide a single set of agreed data that would be used to monitor progress against national trajectories. The dashboard data would be meaningful for all partners and the professionals working together and could be simplified for parents and carers so they could also monitor progress. The aim was to be transparent and share data from the dashboard so that families can see their own waiting times as well as local and national data.
- Responding to a question regarding how a range of children's perspectives would be gathered, the Panel was informed that the finer detail was yet to be put in place but the approach would be to understand a range of views from different young people.
- Vicky Metherringham, Service Director, Child Protection and Family Support, advised in response to a question about the wheelchair service contract, that in addition to allocating short-term non-recurrent funding, there was the opportunity to do some progressive work through the planning round to make in-year contract variations, as well as looking at procurement of the next contract.
- In response to the Panel's question on how annual reviews were prioritised, and whether individual cases where parents felt plans needed reviewing urgently could be fast-tracked, the Panel was informed that there was the opportunity for parents to be able to call an early annual review, which was something the service was trying their best to accommodate, particularly where a substantial review had not taken place for two years. A detailed plan would be forthcoming, but assurance was given by Jo-Anne Sanders that a detailed plan was coming and that there was the ability to call for an early review.
- The Panel was informed, in response to a question regarding the satisfaction survey in Summer 2026, and the baseline used for this, that after each EHCP was issued, there was the opportunity for feedback. Feedback was also taken when the quality assurance framework was developed, which had also provided some survey outcomes. It was also possible that the results of the summer survey would provide a baseline with which to compare future data.
- In response to a question regarding the Youth Forum and how young people would be invited and engaged with, the Panel were advised that there was an established group of children and young people who the service had been working with but that the aim was to widen this out, using the "Our Voice" young people's involvement team and also involving the Youth Council.

RESOLVED –

That the Panel noted the recommendations set out within the report and that officers be thanked for their contributions.

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

Robert Fordyce, Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Practice Development gave an update on performance data in response to questions from the Panel:

- Recorded completion rates of under-5 developmental checks appeared lower, but this was likely due to data entry gaps. Locala figures showed 97% of Children Looked After had assessments in Quarter 2 (Aug–Sep 2025). A joint health data group had been established to confirm what had accounted for this gap.
- Lower numbers of dental assessments were linked to carers not being asked regularly about checks and data not being logged. Heads of service would oversee improvements, ensuring carers are prompted in meetings and that completed checks were consistently recorded.
- Adoption figures had declined, reflecting national patterns, while special guardianship placements had increased. The New Beginnings model, which engaged families pre-birth, had led to more children remaining with their families. Where adoption was needed, carers were identified in partnership with One Adoption West Yorkshire.
- Demand for exploitation assessments had risen in August, not tied to a specific incident but linked to revised definitions and training. Numbers fluctuated but often rose after practice reviews. Weekly monitoring ensured overdue cases were addressed, and the exploitation screening panel provided oversight and a level of assurance.

Jo-Anne Sanders presented highlights on August data:

- The cumulative figure for initial EHCPs being undertaken within 20 weeks was 54.4%, compared to the national average last year of 45.9%.
- In June and July there were a significantly higher number of requests for EHCPs than in the previous quarter (125 in June, 137 in July). In answer to a question, the Panel were advised that this increase may have an impact on timeliness in the next quarter.
- Analysis was being done on where the request to assessments was coming from. There was a national trend in requests from parents and carers and this was also the case in Kirklees.
- A robust data dashboard for EHCPs was in place which would provide more detail around progress on annual reviews.
- Some health information was provided to partners on a quarterly basis as the process was manual, and it was in the plan to improve this.

RESOLVED –

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

30 Pre-decision scrutiny - Cabinet decisions on the horizon

Councillor Rylah, Cabinet Member for Education, updated the Panel on Cabinet priorities for education which were:

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- Securing sufficient learning places, with priority for SEND pupils, Joseph Norton Academy and Woodley School and College.
- Increasing opportunities for young people Post-16.
- Embedding cluster working within the schools to provide greater support for children with SEND.
- Improving the quality and timeliness of EHCP annual reviews.
- Preparing for the White Paper on SEND reform, which would be published this winter.

RESOLVED –

That the Panel noted the update on Cabinet priorities.

31 Feedback from Panel Members on issues considered by Kirklees Parenting Board

Councillor Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, updated the Panel on the recent Kirklees Parenting Board Meeting, held on 16th September 2025, which looked at the Fostering Strategy.

The Care Experienced representatives had raised the lack of reciprocal arrangements. Where care leavers lived outside Kirklees they could not necessarily take advantage of provision offered within Kirklees. Cllr Kendrick and Tom Brailsford had undertaken to take this forward.

The next meeting would be a takeover meeting by young people, with a later start time to enable more young people, who attended college, school or work in the daytime, to be participants.

RESOLVED –

That Tom Brailsford and Councillor Kendrick explore opportunities for reciprocal arrangements for care leavers with other local authorities as part of the work of the Kirklees Parenting Board.

32 Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2025/26

The Panel discussed the delay in the government's White Paper on SEN Reform and acknowledged that the paper may not be published in time for a report to be brought to the next meeting in December as planned. The Chair agreed that the timescale on this would be flexible, and Officers undertook to bring a response to the paper at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the progress on the Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2025-26 be noted.
- (2) That the report in response to the White Paper on SEND Reform would be considered by the Panel once it had been published.