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## **KIRKLEES COUNCIL**

### **CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Wednesday 9th August 2017**

Present: Councillor Cahal Burke (Chair)  
Councillor Donna Bellamy  
Councillor Fazila Fadia  
Councillor Paul Kane  
Councillor Amanda Pinnock

Apologies: Councillor Robert Light  
Fatima Khan-Shah (Co-Optee)

Observers: Councillor Masood Ahmed, Cabinet Member - Children  
Penny Bunker, Governance and Democratic Engagement  
Manager  
Yolande Myers, Governance and Democratic  
Engagement Officer  
Steve Walker, Strategic Director - Children and Families  
Dale O'Neill – Scrutiny Co-optee

#### **1 Membership of the Committee**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Robert Light and Fatima Khan-Shah (Co-optee).

#### **2 Interests**

No interests were declared.

#### **3 Admission of the Public**

Agreed that all items be considered in the public session.

#### **4 Leadership arrangements and priorities for Children's Services in 2017/18**

Steve Walker, Strategic Director for Children and Families confirmed to the Panel that he had been appointed to provide support to Kirklees Council from Leeds City Council. He informed the Panel that Saleem Tariq had also been appointed as Service Director, and that Elaine McShane had been seconded full time to Kirklees Council.

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Mr Walker explained that Leeds City Council had been on a similar improvement journey, working with Eleanor Brazil and he could bring the lessons learned at on that journey and could provide consistency and stability to Kirklees Council. Although the formal declaration from the Secretary of State had not been made about the partnership, both Leeds City Council and Kirklees Council agreed that there should be no delay in beginning to work together on the improvement journey.

The Panel was advised that as the Strategic Director of Children's Services, Mr Walker would be a presence within Kirklees and would be accountable to them for performance. There would be a clear governance structure and the improvement programme would develop over time with a good social work model of practice, with cases allocated and children being seen. This model and clear agreement would be brought to the Panel for consideration once it had been established.

Eleanor Brazil, Independent Improvement Partner, advised the Panel that the formal approach between Kirklees Council and Leeds City Council would be published in the second week of September and would outline the new direction being taken. Ms Brazil gave credit to Leeds City Council for accepting the strategic partnership. The Panel was informed that there would be funding available from the Department of Education to support the improvement journey; however Ms Brazil could not confirm how much funding would be provided and what the money could be used for.

Ms Brazil explained that although the Trust model was effective in authorities such as Doncaster and Slough, there was a huge cost financially and in time and resources to put the new organisation in place. However, the alternative approach of collaboration with another authority was one that would be monitored by the Department of Education to assess its effectiveness, with the focus being to get on with the improvement journey. Ms Brazil informed the Board that there was no direction to go into partnership with Leeds City Council, but both authorities did this on a voluntary basis, and she confirmed that the other party to the partnership would be the Department of Education due to the funding that would be available. A draft of the partnership arrangement would be available by the end of September, but this would just be the parameters but would likely include the timeline, governance arrangements and details of the funding being provided.

The Panel asked Ms Brazil if she felt improvements had been made since her first visit in December 2016. Ms Brazil confirmed that the service had struggled, particularly with the senior leadership team, which had seen a number of changes. The Panel were informed that the quick fixes that had been put in place by the service, were not the best approach that could have been taken, and that staff felt the service had become chaotic. These quick fixes should not happen again, and Ms Brazil felt that the service, at best, had stood still. The service was no longer chaotic, but she had not seen the improvement that she would have wanted to see at this stage. The Panel were advised there had been very little performance data, although that had now improved and the focus would be on improving the areas that the service should have been doing better in.

The Panel was informed that the Improvement Plan was being reviewed and there would be some changes made to it. Of particular note would be the re-thinking of the Model of Practice, improving social work recordings and ensuring that case files were kept up to date. The Panel was advised that the Leader of the Council,

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Leading Members and the Chief Executive had seen Ms Brazil's most recent report which contained timescales for the improving service. The Improvement Plan would contain milestones and would be updated quickly with progress made. However, Ms Brazil advised the Panel that the improvement journey would take between 18 months and 2 years to complete, but that improvement should be seen along the way. The plan would also look at how the difficulties within the service came about to ensure that this did not happen again.

Following questions from the Panel regarding the leadership in Children's Services Mr Walker informed the Panel that all Heads of Service posts were filled, although two of them were on an interim basis. Those posts would be recruited to on a permanent basis in September and would provide a Head of Service to work with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Duty and Advice, with the other post working with Assessment and Care Management. Training programmes were being rolled out with some of those for the Leadership Management Team, who were a fairly new team.

The Panel asked about the use of agency staff within Children's Services and Mr Walker confirmed that there was significant use of agency staff, costing around £5m per year. The level of agency staff was currently between 20% & 25% and although the reliance on agency staff needed to be reduced, this would take time to resolve due to a number of issues. Given the difficulties within Children's Services, staff sometimes felt unsupported, with no clear vision as to how the service would improve, and this often meant that they left to work for other authorities. There was also difficulty in recruiting new staff to a struggling service, and it was shown that this was not an issue of resources, given the additional £13m that the service had been given last year, but was around giving support to social workers to enable them to work effectively. Mr Walker advised the Panel that staff should be reminded that although agency staff did appear to be paid a higher amount they did not receive sick pay, holiday pay or pension contributions.

### **RESOLVED –**

- 1) That the current leadership arrangements in Children's Services be noted.
- 2) That the priority areas of focus for the Leadership Team and Management Team be noted and considered as part of planning the work programme.

## **5 Ofsted - Update on monitoring visit**

The Panel considered the outcome of the most recent Ofsted monitoring visit, and noted that it was disappointing but not unexpected and was a realistic assessment of the service. Ms Brazil advised that the issue was with the pace of improvement, which needed to be improved significantly. The Panel asked Ms Brazil what had hindered the progress, and she confirmed that a significant factor was the leadership and the lack of an effective social work model. The Panel was informed that there needed to be a clear way in which social workers and partners intervened to work with families as the current way of working resulted in too much delay. There had not been enough knowledge about good social work planning and the system to support social workers was lacking.

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The Panel heard that a previous recommendation from Ofsted had been a replacement of the case management system, but this was often used as an excuse for poor social work recordings. These excuses had been accepted previously, but this was no longer the case. It was acknowledged that the case management system did need replacing, however it was a useable system and managers should have been encouraging social workers to use it.

Mr Walker informed the Panel that although it was disappointing, Ofsted had identified progress made within the service. He explained that the IT system was to be replaced and was one of the reasons why progress had been limited however, it was important to involve staff in the how the new system would be set up, and it had therefore been delayed for this process to take place. The service would then go back to fundamentals and ensure that there was a training programme rolled out to staff on the use of the IT system.

The Panel asked whether the difficulties encountered within Children's Services were a 'managed decline', given the limited improvement that Ofsted had seen, and asked when the decline had begun, given the previous Ofsted reports. Ms Brazil explained to the Panel that from the original report being provided, there were differences in the number of children where the degree of risk was not being addressed. She informed the Panel that this was not the case now, and that was important given the safeguarding of children being the first priority. Children were now safer than they were last year and there were social workers doing some excellent work.

The Panel noted that the demands on Social Care were increasing both for the service and for partner agencies. Expectations in terms of Child Sexual Exploitations (CSE) were higher than they were previously, and Ofsted inspections themselves were more rigorous now than they used to be. The Panel was informed that the journey of a child from start to end and the experiences they encountered on the journey was considered when Ofsted inspected. There were higher standards set between the last inspection in 2011 to the recent one in 2016, and Kirklees didn't keep up with the pace of change. Changes implemented in other local authority areas didn't happen in Kirklees and the use of independent assessments of the service were not utilised. Peer review could be undertaken by other authorities, the Local Government Association or by Commissioners, but had not taken place and it was felt that scrutiny was not as robust as it could have been. The Panel noted that the focus of scrutiny in previous years had been officer led, and that had often resulted in scrutiny being steered in the wrong direction.

Mr Walker explained that Kirklees suffered from lack of succession planning and lessons could be learned from Leeds Council who now had a clear plan on the future direction of social care. Performance management information would have focused minds on strategies needed to deal with increased demand. Mr Walker informed the Panel that the Performance information as a data set should be brought to the Children's Scrutiny Panel.

Panel members noted that information given to the Children's Services Ad-hoc Scrutiny Panel was of some concern to them, particularly the Risk Sensible model of Social Work. Mr Walker explained that there had been a lack of understanding

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around this complex model and a lack of evidence as to why this model was chosen. He informed the Panel that there was a strong evidence base for the Restorative Practice Social Work model and was a model that staff could relate to. The Panel were told that 3 or 4 other Local Authority areas had implemented this model and had subsequently received a good Ofsted rating.

Ms Brazil informed the Panel that the Risk Sensible model was used in Blackpool and Lancashire but it wasn't a straightforward model and only 20% of staff in Kirklees had been trained in that model. She explained however, that the Restorative Practice Model used in Leeds had been evaluation by the DfE and this report would be useful for Panel members to see.

Panel members raised concerns about morale amongst social workers, particularly in relation to the changes of staff and the upcoming IT system. The Panel also asked how the service was ensuring children were kept safe during the restructure. Mr Walker explained that the service had taken a step back to consider what was important to people working in their jobs, and to understand that it wasn't necessarily about being paid more money. He informed the Panel that in Leeds, they had begun to understand that staff wanted a clear career path, to be trained and supported well and to have a manageable caseload. Mentoring posts had been created with advanced practitioners supporting and mentoring newly qualified social workers. Mr Walker explained that this had reduced the turnover of staff in Leeds with an increase being seen in staff having more than 2 years post qualifying experience. This had gone from around 52% in 2013 to 80% in 2015. Mr Walker explained that in 2 years' time, the use of agency staff should be less 10% and with effective monitoring it would tell in advance if this target was unlikely to be met.

Mr Walker informed the board that in ensuring children were kept safe; the Service was working on the 5 core principles of social work which was 1) allocation, 2) seeing the child/children), 3) assessment, 2) planning and 5) reviewing. This would ensure that fewer things were likely to go wrong and ensure that children were kept safe.

The Panel noted that the next monitoring visit was due late October beginning of November, and Ms Brazil hoped that there would be a positive, although not significant change in children being better served in Kirklees. There were currently around 2,000 children allocated a social worker, and Ofsted would only look at a tiny number of these. However, they would want to see better use of the case recording system, more supervision and better decision making. Ms Brazil noted that staff were reporting confidence in the new leadership direction.

Cllr Masood Ahmed informed the Panel that the service was on a journey and it would take time to improve to an acceptable level. Recent changes had seen social workers moving to Civic Centre 1, and he was confident that this would improve staff morale and would ensure that the senior leadership team and Members would see staff there on a regular basis.

Mr Walker recommended that the reports and minutes from the Improvement Board be brought to the Children's Scrutiny Panel so that it could support the work of the Improvement Board.

**RESOLVED –**

- 1) That the OFSTED monitoring visit outcomes be noted, including the limited progress made.
- 2) That the issues raised by the report, including recruitment and retention be picked up as part of work programming.

**6 Draft work programme for the Panel**

The Panel considered the draft work programme for the Children's Scrutiny Panel and had a discussion about ensuring that Scrutiny were not duplicating work being carried out elsewhere.

**RESOLVED –**

- 1) That the work programme be drafted as agreed at the meeting, with particular focus on;
  - The improvement journey – quarterly
  - Corporate Parenting – including fostering and adoption
  - Elective Home Education
  - Special Needs Education
- 2) That update briefing notes be provided where in depth work is not required.

**7 Schedule of Meetings 2017/18**

**RESOLVED –**

- 1) That the next meeting of the Panel be held on a Monday at 11am. This arrangement to be reviewed as required.
- 2) That the next meeting focus on Corporate Parenting.