

Contact Officer: Yolande Myers

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 6th November 2017

Present: Councillor Cahal Burke (Chair)
Councillor Donna Bellamy
Councillor Fazila Loonat
Councillor Amanda Pinnock

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

Co-optees Dale O'Neill

Observers: Councillor Masood Ahmed, Cabinet Member - Children
Maggie Featherstone, Portfolio Manager - Attendance &
Pupil Support Service
Sue Grigg, Directorate Performance Lead -Children's
Services & Public Health
Saleem Tariq, Service Director - Children and Families
Diane Yates, Senior APSO/ SF Consultant

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting on Monday 9th October were approved as a correct record.

2 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Fatima Khan-Shah, Cllr Paul Kane and Cllr Robert Light.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that item 5 – Corporate Performance Information (2017/18) be considered at an informal meeting of the Panel.

5 Corporate Performance Information (2017/18)

The Panel heard representation relating to the Corporate Performance Information from Saleem Tariq, Service Director, Children and families.

RESOLVED –

That the information be considered at an informal meeting of the Panel.

6 Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board

The Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board annual report was circulated to members prior to the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED –

That the information relating to the work of the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board be considered at the meeting on 18th December 2017.

7 Elective Home Education

Cllr Ahmed explained that the purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the legislation in relation to Elective Home Education (EHE). The term Elective Home Education was the term used by the Department of Education to describe parents' decisions to provide education for their children at home instead of sending them to school.

The number of electively home educated children and young people are increasing in Kirklees and the report outlined that this was in line with neighbouring Local Authorities and national trends. The report explained that the number of EHE children had increased in Kirklees from 171 in 2012/12 to 263 in 2016/17, reducing to 243 due to support being provided that enabled 20 children to return to school.

Following questions from the Panel, Ms Yates confirmed that although the Local Authority kept a note of how many children had been referred following being taken off a school's register, the Local Authority do not know how many children there were who have never started school.

Ms Yates explained to the Panel that when a family was referred, they were offered a visit where a dialogue was entered into to find out the reasons why the family had made the choice to electively home educate. She informed the Panel that there were many reasons why families chose to home educate, and it was often down to there not being a place at the parent's chosen school. Ms Featherstone also advised the Panel that parents were informed at that initial visit that they must take over financial responsibility for educating their children, including the purchase of books and all other materials needed. The Local Authority did not fund electively home educated children to sit their GCSE's and parents are advised about this on the visit.

The Panel asked how the quality of education was monitored and how the Local Authority could establish if children were receiving a suitable education. Ms Featherstone explained that the Local Authority had no statutory duties in relation to the monitoring of the quality of home education on a routine basis. However, under Section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996 stated:-

"if it appears to a local education authority that a child of compulsory school age in their area is not receiving suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, they shall serve a notice in writing on the parent requiring him to satisfy them within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education."

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Ms Featherstone explained to the Panel that this was, in practice, difficult to evidence. Whilst some parents were content to meet and discuss their child's education, parents had no duty to respond to such enquiries. The Panel questioned how many parents engaged with the informal elective home educated groups that were in the area. Ms Yates explained that the Local Authority did not have that information.

Ms Featherstone answered the Panel's questions about the reasons why parents chose to home educate their children, in that the team had only just begun to look at the reasons why elective home education had been chosen. However, she explained that this was difficult to assess as parents were under no obligation to tell the Local Authority the reasons why they had chosen that route. Ms Featherstone explained that most parents chose to engage with her team, however if the team did have a concern about the child, then they could follow safeguarding procedures. A family refusing a visit in itself did not fall into a safeguarding concern.

Ms Featherstone explained that legislation was there to support Local Authorities if it did appear that the child was not receiving suitable education, by means of a School Attendance Order. Ms Featherstone informed the Panel that historically Kirklees had not made use of these orders, but the team had recently visited Leeds City Council to see how they carried out the obtaining of these orders. She explained that in the first instance there needed to be a clear policy in place which included what support was available to families.

The Panel asked how many venues were available for electively home educated children to sit their GCSE exams. Ms Yates explained that they had recently become aware that Shelley College would provide facilities for external candidates, but there was a cost attached to this, which the family themselves had to bear the cost of. Ms Yates didn't have the costs of sitting the exams, as she explained that the fees varied between exam type, the examining board and the administration fee charged by Shelley College.

Ms Featherstone informed the Panel that there was a dedicated service for careers advice for electively home educated children.

The Members and Chair of the Panel expressed concerns about some of the aspects of elective home education, and the Panel felt minded to create an ad-hoc panel to look at this issue in more depth.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the information relating to Elective Home Education be noted.
- 2) That the Panel commence an in-depth consideration of Elective Home Education by means of an ad-hoc Panel, subject to the approval of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

8

Work Programme

The Panel considered the work programme for the Children's Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED –

That the updated work programme be noted.

9 Future Meeting

RESOLVED –

- 1) To note that the next meeting of the Committee will be on Monday 18th December 2017 at 10:00am. The meeting will commence with a tour of the Drop in Centre, The Old Registry Office, High Street, Huddersfield. The meeting will continue in Council Chamber, Huddersfield Town Hall where the meeting will be webcast.

- 2) That the next meeting focus on the work of the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board, and Home to School Transport.