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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 18th December 2017

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

Apologies: Councillor Paul Kane
Councillor Robert Light
Dale O'Neill (Co-Optee)

Co-optees Fatima Khan-Shah

Observers: Sheila Lock, Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board Chair

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Paul Kane, Cllr Robert Light and Dale O'Neill.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting on Monday 6 November 2017 were approved as a correct record.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that all items would be considered in public.

5 Visit to Drop in Centre - Old Registry Office

The members of the committee visited the drop in centre at the Old Registrars building.

RESOLVED – The visit was undertaken.

6 Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board

The members of the Panel were provided with a presentation from Sheila Lock, Chair of the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board (KSCB). Following a question from the Panel around her background and experience in children's services, Ms Lock informed the Panel that she had begun her working life as a social worker and had worked her way up through the system to have become a director in children services in five different local authorities, with the last three authorities being on improvement journeys. Ms Lock explained that she had been a chief executive of a local authority and so understood the corporate world. She informed the Panel that

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she held the safeguarding chairs role in two other authorities in London. Ms Lock told the Panel that she felt passionately that she could assist Kirklees in getting things right throughout the improvement work.

Ms Lock explained that the role of the KSCB was as an independent body to hold partners to account. Ms Lock explained that the annual report was somewhat difficult to write as she was not in post during the time the report referred to. Ms Lock explained that she had joined the board during a time of great change, especially given the recent changes to the Care Act.

Ms Lock explained that it was no surprise that the outcome of the Ofsted inspection resulted in KSCB receiving 'Requires Improvement', as there was insufficient evidence around the board's independent role and the holding of partners to account. It was evident that the board was not as robust as it should have been.

Ms Lock informed the Panel that there had been a significant increase in demand with a 39% increase in access at the 'front door'. Some progress had been made but the ability to evidence that was not as strong as it might be. One of the most important roles currently was to ensure that Early Help was effective to ensure that children don't enter the safeguarding system.

MS Lock advised the Panel that there needed to be a whole system approach around:-

- Keeping children safe
- Making sure children had access to services
- Effective partnership

The Panel asked whether there was disconnect between new operational issues and the fact that situations were expected to be monitored by schools. Ms Lock explained that schools had a unique role within the community and were often trusted by families. However, she informed the Panel that often head teachers were holding on to situations without knowing the support that could be drawn upon. Ms Lock told the Panel that there was a good strategy in place, but as yet the early support in the hubs was not as successful as it should be. Following two recent engagement events with head teachers, all felt confident that the new strategy would enable schools to feel more supported.

Panel members asked how support would be given to the schools that were not part of the hubs, and it had been reported that schools often feel pressurised to close files. Ms Lock explained that there would be a period where the system was unclear however a lot of the difficulties would be resolved once the front door policy, which was recently changed, became embedded. The new front door policy ensured that schools had access to a social worker who they could speak to over the phone. This was much more preferable than e-mail, given head teachers could articulate their concerns more effectively by dialogue with social workers.

The Panel were pleased to see more effective challenge, but asked how more challenge could be undertaken. Ms Lock informed the Panel that it would take a

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while to practice effective challenge however KSCB could now demonstrate evidence of challenge.

The Panel heard evidence from Ms Lock around missing children. Out of 310 missing episodes 230 of them were down to 16 children going missing repeatedly. Ms Lock explained that housing children who were in care was a national challenge. Kirklees had a number of private homes with beds available for children in care, and often other authorities would purchase beds from these Kirklees homes. When a child is placed in the Kirklees area, the authority placing the child must inform Kirklees about them, but the placing authority retains responsibility for the child.

The Panel asked Ms Lock what the biggest challenge was for the board and children's services. Ms Lock explained that following the Ofsted inspection, there were initially feelings of shock, denial and confusion with an emphasis on blame. A lot of time had been spent on looking back rather than looking forward. However, Ms Lock reported that there was good adjustment, particularly in relation to the front door policy with staff embracing the new strategies. A more open culture was developing within children's services.

The Panel commented that 39% of referrals were repeat referrals, and questioned Ms Lock on what actions would be taken to address this. Ms Lock explained that Professor David Thorpe was working with Kirklees by completing a front door analysis and the key factors which resulted in the repeat referrals. There needed to be an understanding of why cases re-presented, sometimes this was due to the right services not being put in place. Professor Thorpe would be reporting back every couple of months to see if there appeared to be a delivery system change.

The Panel asked how KSCB could ensure that the voices of young people were heard and that they were engaged. Ms Lock explained that this was critical as young people often reported being consulted but that ultimately nothing ever happened. A group had now been set up to engage young people and would report back to the board in January. Ms Lock was hopeful that the report would identify a positive improvement.

The Panel noted that there was a budget overspend during the last year and asked what the current position was. Ms Lock informed the Panel that the budget would balance this year, and explained that the overspend last year was due to maternity leave and other staffing issues.

The Ofsted review found that KSCB was not as effective as it could have been and the Panel explored the reason for this with Ms Lock. The Panel heard that there wasn't enough challenge and that the board's report was just telling a story, rather than evidencing challenge. Ms Lock explained that the board had been restructured, with a lot of the sub-groups stripped out to make a simpler structure. There was a business group of key partners to inject some pace and implement change. Ms Lock reported that this had seen a dramatic improvement, and the KSCB had been commended at a recent meeting of the Improvement Board. Although there was still work to do, the board was working much better, and Ms Lock encouraged members of the Panel to attend one of the board meetings.

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RESOLVED –

- (1) That Sheila Lock, Chair of the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board be thanked for attending.
- (2) That the information relating to the KSCB be noted.
- (3) That members of the Panel visit a KSCB board meeting.
- (4) That Sheila Lock be invited to return, so the scrutiny panel can be assured that the Board continues to be effective and accountable.

7 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme

The members of the panel considered the work programme for the Children's Scrutiny panel.

RESOLVED – That the updated work programme be noted.

8 Future Meeting

RESOLVED –

- (1) To note that the next meeting of the Committee will be on Monday 29th January 2018 at 10:00am in the Council Chamber, Huddersfield Town Hall.
- (2) That the next meeting focus on School Transport, Ofsted and Partnership updates and Q2 performance information.