

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Friday 19th July 2019

Present: Councillor Andrew Marchington (Chair)
Councillor Paul Davies
Councillor Amanda Pinnock
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor Paul White

Co-optees Toni Bromley
Dale O'Neill
Linda Summers

In attendance: Steve Comb
Elaine McShane
Jo-Anne Sanders
Harkireet Sohel

Observers: Councillor Viv Kendrick

1 Membership of the Committee

No apologies for absence were received.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on the 1st April 2019 be agreed.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

5 Public Question Time

No questions from the public were received.

6 Number of Children in Care

The Panel considered the latest data showing the number of children in care presented by Steve Comb, Head of Corporate Parenting (Sufficiency).

Steve Comb highlighted the following key facts:-

- there had been a reduction in the number of children living outside the District from May to June 2019;

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- in the last 2 years, Kirklees had also seen a reduction in the number of children living more than 20 miles outside the District;
- some placements outside the District came to a natural end, either due to the fact the young person had left care due to their age or because it was not appropriate to bring them back to Kirklees due to their personal circumstances;
- sometimes children did not want to return to Kirklees as they had settled in another local authority area.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the position in terms of foster carers and recruitment, Steve Comb advised that progress was starting to be made in this area in Kirklees. Steve Comb advised the Panel that 75% of children in care in Kirklees were in foster care, which was a higher proportion than the Council's statistical neighbours and national average.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding semi-independent homes, Steve Comb advised that this was for children aged between 17 and 18 and was designed to help the young person to learn to live independently. The Panel was informed that the semi-independent homes were monitored by Kirklees rather than Ofsted and Kirklees would manage the contractual arrangements and service provision from those providers.

Elaine McShane advised the Panel that no young people were placed outside of the district without her agreement, which the Panel agreed was reassuring.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding whether special guardians were reducing the number of foster carers, Steve Comb advised the Panel that as a Local Authority if a connected person or mainstream foster carer had a conversation to say a child did not need to be looked after, they could at that point discuss the option of special guardianship. Steve Comb explained that Kirklees did provide financial assistance for special guardians in Kirklees and that there were currently about 300 children in special guardianship arrangements.

In response to a query from the Panel regarding the figures for gender breakdown, Steve Comb agreed to check the accuracy of the figures and report back to the next meeting of the Panel.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding care and support arrangements for children in youth custody, Steve Comb advised that children in custody were treated as a looked after child and would get support and be monitored by the Youth Offending Team (YOT). The Panel was advised that some young people received significant sentences and the YOT Team would keep in constant contact and be involved with that young person whilst they were in custody.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding educational outcomes for looked after children, Jo-Anne Sanders advised the Panel that the Virtual School Head Teacher reported on this matter to the Corporate Parenting Board and that they also considered an Annual report from the Head Teacher. The Panel agreed to consider educational outcomes for looked after children as part of the work programme for 2019/20.

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RESOLVED -

- (1) The Panel noted the report on the Number of Children in Care showing the latest data and thanked Steve Comb and Elaine McShane for their contributions.
- (2) That the figures for data for children looked after age and gender breakdown be checked for accuracy and an update be provided at the next meeting of the Panel.
- (3) That the Panel consider educational outcomes and stability for looked after children as part of the work programme for 2019/20.

7 **The Educational Landscape in Kirklees**

The Panel considered a report providing an overview of the educational landscape in summer 2019 with a focus on attendance, exclusion and an update on the Kirklees Learning Strategy presented by Harkireet Sohel, Head of Service (Outcomes for Children).

Harkireet Sohel highlighted the following key facts:-

- the 2018/19 outcomes report had highlighted that whilst there were strengths in areas such as Key Stage 4 attainment, Key Stage 1 writing and an improving picture in phonics, reading and writing, Kirklees lagged behind the national averages in too many indicators;
- the Kirklees Education and Learning Partnership Board had been instrumental in shaping the development of the strategy;
- 6 out of 8 attainment figures, Kirklees ranked in the bottom quartile (D) with rankings at 120 on average out of 152;
- a closer analysis of the recent Ofsted reports had highlighted the inconsistent performance of school leaders and governors. Harkireet Sohel advised the Panel that recruitment and retention within schools was an issue and formed part of the Strategy which would address what strong leadership would look like;
- since 2013/14 the number of exclusions nationally had been on the rise and an analysis of the situation in Kirklees would be shared with the Panel in the future.

Harkireet Sohel advised that Secondary Head Teachers had come together and formed a view that exclusions were too high and working groups had been set up to look at the current system and practice. The Panel was informed that Head Teacher sub groups would complete the working group task to refine the process for exclusions, establish best practice and suggest an agreed definition of 'persistent disruptive behaviour' for the next Head Teacher's Forum in September 2019. The Panel agreed to consider a future report on the findings of this work.

Harkireet Sohel advised the Panel that the Council was looking at alternative provision and how effective it was, why it was needed and if it was meeting the

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needs of children in Kirklees. The Board noted that Kirklees used 4 main providers who engaged with the school system in supporting complex students.

Harkireet Sohel advised the Panel that the Learning Service were looking at schools whose students were performing well in mathematics and would be sharing good practice.

The Panel expressed concerns regarding exclusions for disadvantaged learners and that all children had different needs and accepted that some learners needed more support, however, felt that a line had to be drawn with regard to the level of disruption and impact caused by some pupils to other learners in the classrooms. The Panel wanted to understand what the current practice was within Kirklees and the mechanisms for dealing with exclusions and how better outcomes could be achieved. The Panel agreed to consider a future report which analysed data on attendance and exclusions to assure the Panel that progress on reducing exclusions was significant and best practice was being shared.

Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning and Early Support, advised the Panel that a new Ofsted Inspection Framework would be coming into place in September 2019 and would include a different approach around governance and leadership. The Panel acknowledged that once embedded, it would be useful to know how the new Ofsted Framework for Education was working for schools and learners in Kirklees.

RESOLVED -

- (1) The Panel noted the report on the educational landscape in Kirklees and thanked Harkireet Sohel and Jo-Anne Sanders for their contributions.
- (2) That Officers plan visits to settings and meetings with senior leaders within schools, so that the work around reducing exclusions is communicated clearly.
- (3) That the Panel consider a future report which analyses data on attendance and exclusions to assure the Panel that progress on reducing exclusions was robust.

8 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and agenda plan for 2019/20

The Panel considered the work programme and agenda plan for the 2019/20 and will consider issues for inclusion.

The Panel noted that the Ad-Hoc Panel on Elective Home Education would meet shortly to finalise its findings and bring a final report back to the Panel.

The Panel agreed to visit schools and talk to children and staff about the Learning Support Strategy and hear their feedback and perspective.

The Panel noted that there had been an increased level of referrals of primary aged children to the mental health services. The Lead Member, Councillor Marchington, agreed to keep a watching brief on the CAMHS Transformation Plan.

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The Panel agreed to a programme of visits by the Panel and that the Panel's work programme be updated accordingly.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the 2019/20 Agenda Plan for the Children's Scrutiny Panel be noted and updated as agreed.
- (2) That the Governance Officer be authorised to liaise with officers on agreed actions.