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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 23rd September 2019

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

Co-optees Dale O'Neill
Linda Summers

In attendance: Mandy Cameron
Steve Comb
Sheila Lock
Jo-Anne Sanders
Ronnie Hartley

Observers: Councillor Viv Kendrick

Apologies: Toni Bromley (Co-Optee)
Elaine McShane

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Elaine McShane and Toni Bromley (Co-optee).

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Subject to the following amendment that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 August 2019 be approved.

Apologies for absence were received from Linda Summers Co-optee.

3 Interests

Councillor Paul White declared an interest in item 6 (SENDACT Action Plan – Progress Report) on the grounds that his wife was chair of a multi academy trust that included Castle Hill Academy.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were taken in public session.

5 Number of Children in Care

The panel welcomed Steve Comb Head of Corporate Parenting to the meeting.

In response to a panel question regarding the trend for the numbers of children in care Mr Comb informed the panel that there were 635 children in care in August

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2019 which was similar to last year and that the current 12 month average per 10,000 population showed that Kirklees remained below its statistical neighbours.

In response to a panel question on how Kirklees compared to its statistical neighbours for children and young people placed more than 20 miles outside the district Mr Comb stated that Kirklees was slightly better.

Mr Comb explained that out of area placements was an issue that the council was continually looking at and explained the process that the service followed when considering the options to bring a young person back into the district.

Cllr Marchington outlined the work that was done by the Corporate Parenting Board in scrutinising children in care and stated that there had been a significant improvement in the scrutiny of this area.

RESOLVED - That the report outlining the number and age of children in care be received and noted.

6 **SENDACT Action Plan - Progress Report**

The panel welcomed Mandy Cameron, Head of Service Education Safeguarding and Inclusion to the meeting.

Ms Cameron informed the panel of the background to the progress report which was an update on the recommendations from a piece of focused work that scrutiny had previously undertaken on children with special educational needs.

Ms Cameron stated that the service was making good progress in the areas outlined in the recommendations and explained that the council had made an investment to increase the size of the team to better meet the increased demand and that the timescales for statutory assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) had significantly improved.

Ms Cameron informed the panel of the monitoring board that looked at the work of the team and would provide help and support in order to maintain the momentum in progress that was being made.

Ms Cameron informed the panel of the work that had been done in establishing an advocate agency for parents and providing the package of support that parents required.

A question and answer session followed that covered a number of issues that included:

- The importance of the work that was being done to support parents and carers through the EHCP process.
- The complexity of understanding the criteria for getting an EHCP.
- An explanation on the process for supporting parents through the EHCP process and the focus on getting a common understanding of the criteria in schools across the district.
- An overview of the EHCP leaflet that had been co-produced with parents.

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- A question on the lack of information on the timescales set against the actions detailed in the action plan.
- The wider piece of work that was taking place on school transport.
- The council's focus on looking at a more holistic solution to home to school transport to provide a suitable package of support to young people and their families.
- A question on progress of the recruitment exercise to increase capacity in the SENDACT team.
- Details of the recruitment process and quality of applicants.
- The work that was taking place in looking at the use of interpreters.
- The need to ensure that the work that was being undertaken in the action plan had clear timelines attached to each action.
- Clarification that many of the actions had remained on the action plan because they had moved into a different phase of work.
- Confirmation that the next update report would include much clearer detail on the timescales.
- A discussion on how the panel could visit parents and front line staff in order to get assurance that the required improvements outlined in the action plan were happening.
- Details of the parent monitoring group.
- An overview of what the service had learned from the scrutiny review.
- The importance of providing support post 16 and during the transition from school to the work place.
- A concern over the length of the 20 week timescale for a statutory assessment for an ECHP.
- An explanation of the process that was followed during the 20 week ECHP assessment period.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the panel would wish to see greater clarification in the timescales outlined in the SENDACT action plan.
- (2) That the panel would wish to see that the voice of young people is captured and reflected in the work of SENDACT.

7 Kirklees Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

The panel welcomed Sheila Lock, Independent Chair Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board to the meeting.

Ms Lock outlined her role to chair the multi-agency arrangements in Kirklees which was aimed at safeguarding and protecting children.

Ms Lock explained that it took a whole system to keep children safe and outlined the critical role of partners and other agencies such as the police and health in supporting an effective system in discharging those safeguarding responsibilities.

Ms Lock outlined the work that had been undertaken in getting the basics right in partnership working and explained the development of the partnership arrangement following guidance from government.

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Ms Lock explained the process that had been followed in establishing the new Partnership arrangements that included the local authority, the police and health through the clinical commissioning groups.

Ms Lock stated that Kirklees had submitted its revised arrangements to government in May 2019 and the new arrangements were currently being implemented.

Ms Lock informed the panel that the outcome of the new arrangements was a slimmed down executive function which meant that decisions could now be discharged with pace.

Ms Lock explained that arrangements in Kirklees had retained its large partnership to ensure that there was continued engagement with local communities and organisations and charities that worked with young people.

Ms Lock informed the panel that the Board had strengthened its sight with the front line and outlined a practical example of how this was being done through discussions with multi agency practitioners.

Ms Lock stated that the Board had also strengthened its approach to learning lessons which now included a focus on things that had gone very well.

A question and answer session followed that covered a number of issues that included:

- Consideration of how scrutiny could assess the effectiveness of the Board's work.
- The importance of transparency and promoting a culture where people could speak freely.
- An overview of the process that was in place for escalation and whistleblowing.
- An outline of the government's guidance that covered the changes to safeguarding arrangements.
- The challenges of effective engagement and communication with the different communities across the district.
- An overview of who the safeguarding board was accountable to and how its performance was reviewed.
- The role of scrutiny in reviewing the effectiveness of the board.
- The process for reviewing a serious incident.
- A question on the impact of GDPR on information sharing.
- The requirement to share all information in the event of a suspected safeguarding risk.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the panel acknowledge the need to continue to focus and promote openness and transparency in safeguarding matters and will investigate the effectiveness of this approach.

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- (2) That the panel will consider further its role in supporting and challenging the work of safeguarding partnerships in helping to reduce the risks to young people.

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

Ms Sanders Service Director-Learning and Early Support presented an update on Almondbury School.

Ms Sanders outlined the work that the council was doing with the four local schools in the area and explained that the council was planning to create the right opportunities for transition for young people currently receiving secondary education at Almondbury.

Ms Sanders informed the panel of the importance of the council working alongside government agencies and explained the council had to work within the guidelines of the admissions code.

Ms Sanders stated that the council had made applications to the agencies requesting a variation to the admission arrangements as they wished for every child in the Almondbury school catchment area to have priority to attend another local school.

Ms Sanders stated that as soon as the outcome of the decision was known the council would communicate it clearly with parents.

Ms Sanders outlined the approach that the council was taking to communicating with parents and would be writing directly to the families whose children were affected by the changes.

Ms Sanders outlined details of a planned open evening which would enable families to have one to one conversations to help them make informed decisions.

Ms Sanders informed the panel of plans to engage with a small group of families and local ward councillors.

In response to a panel question Ms Sanders explained that the schools adjudicator was obliged to make a decision on the request for a variation of admission arrangements before October 31st 2019.

A question and answer session followed and covered a number of points that included:

- The importance of the council engaging with as wide a group of parents as possible to ensure that the views of as many families as possible were heard.
- A question on how well the proposed variation to admission arrangements had been communicated.
- Clarification that the details of the proposed variation had been included in the consultation information and the guide to admission arrangements.

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Cllr Marchington provided an update on the panel's work programme that included an update on the work that was being undertaken by the Ad Hoc scrutiny panel on elective home education.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the verbal update on Almondbury Community School be noted.
- (2) That progress of the work programme and agenda plan for 2019/20 be noted.