

Contact Officer: Leigh Webb

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 2 July 2020

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

Co-optees Toni Bromley
Dale O'Neill
Linda Summers

In attendance Julie Bragg, Service Manager (Children and Families)
Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources,
Improvement and Partnerships)
Elaine McShane, Service Director - Family Support and
Child Protection
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning & Early
Support
Natalie McSheffrey, Head of Education Relationships and
Business
Martin Wilby, Acting Deputy Assistant Director, LA
Statutory Duties Learning and Skills

Observers: Councillors Viv Kendrick and Carole Pattison

Apologies: Councillor Amanda Pinnock

- 1 Membership of the Committee**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Amanda Pinnock.
- 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**
The minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on the 13 March 2020 were agreed as a correct record.
- 3 Interests**
No interests were declared.
- 4 Admission of the Public**
All items were considered in public session, with the exception of Item 12, Improvement Journey Update
- 5 Deputations/Petitions**
No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No questions were received from the public.

7 Impact Of Lockdown And What Has Been Done To Keep Children Safe

The Panel received a Service Update report with regards to the provision of services to vulnerable Children, Young People, their families and their carers During COVID 19. The report also provided a wider overview of the actions and steps taken to ensure that children in Kirklees are safe and contact is maintained during the current emergency.

The report outlined a range of measures that had been undertaken to support the workforce across a range of services including managerial support, check-ins, prioritisation clarity and advice on dealing with Covid-19 presenting clients. Information was also set out in respect of front door access for social care services and the work of the Assessment and Intervention Teams.

With regard to the numbers of looked after children it was reported that at the start of lockdown was 675 there was a slight increase by the end of May 2020 to 677. On the 19th June 2020 the numbers of children in care were 691 this increase is due to two sibling groups.

During discussion of the report the following key areas were highlighted:-

- Risk assessments had taken place at the start of the Covid epidemic and keep in touch co-ordinators were following up contacts with all looked after children and care leavers
- Social Workers have continued to undertake statutory visits to children who are in the care of the Local Authority.
- With regard to residential and foster care it was reported that all settings have been risk assessed, which had resulted in the suspension of respite provision at Orchard View and the Young Persons Activity offer. With regard to capacity alternative temporary settings have had to be registered. Work has been ongoing with KFN to help with the stability of placements with a new payment system being introduced

In response to a question from Councillor Davies concerning respite care, Tom Brailsford explained that the service was managing to provide a flexible service with staff being re-deployed to assist foster carers where appropriate. It was reported that there are concerns about the need for respite for children with additional needs and the use of bubbles was being engaged.

In response to concerns raised by Linda Summers relating to pressures on school staff in respect of looked after children, Elaine McShane and Jo-Anne Sanders highlighted the positive collaborative work between the social care and education sectors.

Councillor Davies enquired as to any concerns regarding decision making for social workers as a result of them not being office based. Elaine McShane explained that more social workers were returning to the office where possible.

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With regard to support around decision making, Elaine explained that social workers were empowered to make decisions, with support available from more experienced staff and Team Managers where appropriate.

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the report on Number and Age of Children in Care and thanked Elaine McShane for her contributions.
2. The Panel thanked social care staff for the dedicated work done during the pandemic.

8 Update on the wider opening of schools and planning for the next academic year

The Panel received a report providing an overview in relation to schools since the outbreak of Covid-19 and explaining the engagement, collaboration and planning in place that has supported a wider opening for children and young people. Alongside this, and where there are specific characteristics in relation to the type of setting, the report set out the work being undertaken for Special Schools, the Early Years and Childcare sector, Post 16 settings and Alternative Provision.

The report included details of the latest government guidance relating to the re-opening of schools. Statistical information in respect of attendance levels was appended to the report.

During discussion of this item, Jo-Anne Sanders highlighted the following engagement and actions that had been put in place as part of the education planning process in Kirklees:

- School Headteachers representing the system from the Education and Learning Partnership Board (Secondary/Special/Primary) - originally daily, now twice a week.
- CEOs of Multi Academy Trusts – weekly
- Civil Servants from the DfE – originally daily, now twice a week.
- Kirklees Learning Partner 1:1 engagement with Headteachers
- Community Planning Hub strategic leads (building on the 17 Kirklees Community Hubs to support locally planned arrangements, plus 1 specific hub for Special Schools given the bespoke nature of their offer and cohort).
- Trade Union liaison via corporate Business Continuity (as well as now a Schools specific weekly meeting led by the Service Director for Learning and Early Support)
- A schools Covid dedicated telephone line and email address to funnel in questions/queries.
- Regular comms/FAQs/Guidance issued to the system via 'Heads Up' our electronic communication system to schools from Learning Services (attendance, admissions etc. as well as all corporate services including Infection Prevention Control, Catering, Cleaning, Risk Assessments, HR, Emergency Planning as well as sign posting to the regularly updated Government Guidance. This has been particularly key in terms of supporting Free School Meals entitlements and challenges with the Government system/the Council's support for children and families over the holiday periods.

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- Liaison and contribution to regional and national strategic groups via the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

Questions and comments were invited from the Panel and the following issues were raised:

- Councillor Smith suggested that a gap analysis be provided to parents to highlight the effect of lost teaching time as a result of the pandemic. Jo-Anne Sanders stressed the importance of getting all children back into schools to enable staff to analyse where children were up to.
- With regard to Catch Up packages, exact details are awaited in relation to how they are to be delivered and the funding packages associated with them. Linda Summers highlighted the fact that currently catch up packages were not available for post 16 education within colleges.
- In response to a question concerning the wider opening of schools and whether the test, track and trace programme was effective and fully operational, it was explained that clear guidance had been provided to schools on how to respond to outbreaks.
- In response to a question from Toni Bromley concerning specific risk assessments for BAME staff and pupils, Jo-Anne Sanders confirmed that risk assessments did cover all BAME staff and undertook to take away the issue of how applied to BAME children going forward.
- With regard to the issue of innovation and the increased use of digital technology, Panel Members recognised the creative opportunities but stressed the need to ensure inclusiveness and recognise the real issues of digital poverty in relation to both hardware and broadband connectivity.

RESOLVED-

The Panel noted the report and the update on the ongoing work to re-open schools within Kirklees.

9. Almondbury Community School update

The Panel considered an update on the implementation of the Council's decision to change the age range of Almondbury Community School (ACS) from the 1st September 2020 presented by Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director (Learning and Early Support) and Martin Wilby, Senior Strategic Manager (Education and Access).

Martin Wilby highlighted the following key points:-

- Strong partnership working has continued with all parties committed to achieving the best outcomes for children affected by the closure
- Despite the challenges faced due to Covid-19 significant progress has continued to be made and planned pupil transitions are still on track for September 2020.
- With regard to Academy conversion, the Trust have been engaging stakeholders about a new identity for the school and as a result have announced their intention to change the name to Hill View Academy.
- Vouchers will be issued to parents of pupils currently at Almondbury Community School to allow them to purchase branded items of uniform required for their new school in September.

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- The staffing review has been completed with no need for any compulsory redundancies.

In response to a question from Cllr Munro concerning vacancies, Martin Wilby confirmed that the staff vacancies were within the primary phase and explained that the HR process did separate primary from secondary. It was reported that the process had been undertaken positively in collaboration with the Trade Unions.

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the update on Almondbury Community School and thanked Jo-Anne Sanders and Martin Wilby for their contributions.
2. The Panel look to monitor the effect of stresses on staff in respect of educational outcomes for children across Kirklees.

10 Work Programme for 2020/21 municipal year

The Panel considered the progress on the work programme during the 2019/20 municipal year and considered issues for inclusion in the Panel's work programme during the 2020/21 municipal year.

RESOLVED –

1. That the progress on the 2019/20 work programme for the Children's Scrutiny Panel be noted.
2. That the items be noted for inclusion in the Panel's work programme during the 2020/21 municipal year
3. Panel Members agreed to forward any further items for inclusion in the 2020/21 work programme to the Governance Officer.
4. That opportunities be explored for virtual visits to observe the good work being undertaken in education and partner organisations

11. Improvement Journey

The Panel received an update in respect of the improvement journey. Through the Improvement Board have continued to work toward having imp notice lifted. Evidence is to be provided to Secretary of State in relation to the 6 tests that had been set.

Further evidence has been provide to Department for Education on the 10 Ofsted recommendations. It was reported that Focus Groups are being set up to examine and monitor the ongoing work

Going forward evidence and learning will be shared to explore the role of scrutiny as a means of offering challenge going forward.

In response to question from Linda Summers concerning the level of confidence if currently assessed, Elaine McShane outlined the continued positive work with partners and recognised that staff had gone above and beyond during the Covid -19 pandemic.

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RESOLVED-

That the Panel notes the progress made to date in respect of the improvement journey

12 Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED – That acting under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as specifically stated in the undermentioned Minute.

13 Improvement Journey

(Exempt information within Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information)(Variation) Order 2006, namely that the report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). The public interest in maintaining the exemption, which would protect the interests of the Council and the company concerned, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information and providing greater openness in the Council's decision making.)

The Panel received a copy of the update report which had been submitted to the June meeting of the Improvement Board

RESOLVED –

That the Improvement Board update report be noted