

Contact Officer: Leigh Webb

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 1 October 2020

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

Co-optees Dale O'Neill

In attendance Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources,
Improvement and Partnerships)
Julie Bragg, Head of Corporate Parenting
Elaine McShane, Service Director - Family Support and
Child Protection
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning & Early
Support
Michelle Wheatcroft, Head of Service - Early Support

Observers:

Apologies: Linda Summers

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Linda Summers. The Chair welcomed Councillor Yusra Hussain to her first Panel meeting and placed on record thanks to Cllr Aafaq Butt for his valuable contributions to the Panel.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on the 1 October 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.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No questions were received from the public.

7 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Update

The Panel received a report providing an update about the work undertaken in preparation for re-opening schools for the Autumn term, and the planning undertaken with school colleagues to enable a positive and safe return to education for children, young people and their families. It was reported that dialogue with schools about autumn term opening has taken place during the summer holiday period and builds upon the work of the Education and Learning Partnership Board, and the working groups established in May 2020 that ran weekly to the end of the school term.

During the Summer holidays, the Council has continued to meet as part of its Business Continuity planning to prepare for the return of schools, keeping in focus the Department for Education guidance as and when this has been updated. In addition, three focussed workshops have been run with council wide representation to consider the support schools, as well as families and children may need, with a further workshop planned to pick up any emerging issues as term gets underway.

It was reported that, in advance of term starting week commencing 7th September, schools were contacted by the Learning Service/HR Partners to check that plans were in place for a return for pupils, to offer support and to understand if there were any barriers to reopening. Further contact was made during the first week of term and there was a high level of confidence that all schools were fully open for pupils by Monday 14th September (allowing for a range of usual transitioning arrangements that take place at the beginning of an academic year, including INSET days).

The weekly engagement with a representative group of Headteachers and Multi Academy Trust CEOs resumed prior to the beginning of term and feedback was largely positive about readiness for re-opening and the opportunity to welcome children back.

The report concluded that the reopening of all schools across Kirklees has been hugely positive for thousands of children and families, and overall attendance levels so far have been good. However, given the scale of the pandemic, many schools across the country will need to close 'bubbles' or ask certain people to self-isolate at some stage, which is already happening, including in Kirklees. The Council will continue to work in partnership with our schools as the academic year progresses.

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

- In response to a question concerning measures to ensure isolated children are not disadvantaged Jo-Anne Sanders referred to Government funding available to schools to support pupils and acknowledge that no one size fits all model is appropriate. Schools are looking at working in partnership to share good practice and resources to deliver effective remote and blended learning programmes. A focus on how pupils are monitored is also key to the success of the delivery of remote learning.

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- With regard to the issue of catch up funding, discussions have been undertaken with schools to support pupil led interventions. It was reported that the National Tutoring Programme has been rolled out with the Education Endowment Foundation.
- With regard to the numbers of young people currently at home/ self isolating, it was reported that this equated to 1.5% of the total school cohort as at the end of w/c 23 September.
- In response to the issue of parental anxiety, it was acknowledged that there had been excellent communications from schools and Kirklees Council.
- With regard to digital inclusion, Members raised the issue of access to IT, particularly in socially and economically deprived areas. Jo-Anne Sanders provided an update in respect of the roll out of devices and wireless routers which had been initially targeted at vulnerable pupils. It was reported that a Strategic Group was in place and was working with schools and education settings to address this issue of digital inclusion and access, including looking at the associated financial considerations.
- In response to a question concerning the welfare of school staff, Jo-Anne Sanders referred to the employee healthcare offer in place and the ongoing work with Trade Unions to support staff at this difficult time.
- The Chair requested an update in respect of support provided to Colleges and University in Kirklees

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted and acknowledged the good work undertaken, in partnership with schools, to re-open safely.
2. That an update on the partnership work with Colleges and the University, to support pupils and assist business continuity, be submitted to a future Panel meeting.
3. That the Panel keep a watching brief on the longer term effect of Covid on educational outcomes including levels of family income and digital inclusion opportunities.

8 Number and Age of Children in Care

The Panel received a report providing an update relating to the number and profile of children in our care, including information related to the number placed outside of the District. The report also set out comparative data with statistical neighbours

The number of children in care currently stands at 689, which equates to a rate per 10,000 population aged 0-17 of 68.8. This compares to a statistical neighbour average of 91.6 and a national average of 65.0 based on recently published data for March 2019. With regard to breakdown by age and gender of the children in care it was reported that the largest age group for boys is 10 - 15 years with 153 children and the largest age group for girls is 10 - 15 years with 127 children.

It was reported that the number of looked after children placed outside Kirklees District and 20 plus miles from their home address was 81 on 31 August 2020. This follows a continuum of decline from 127 in 2017. The majority of our children and young people placed out of area are placed in foster care, the remainder are placed in children's homes, semi-independent homes, a small number in youth custody or other specialist settings.

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During discussion of this item, the Panel highlighted the issue of how to reduce the number of children placed outside Kirklees. Julie Bragg referred to local campaigns for Foster Carers and reported that more local provision had been provided as a result of the use of emergency placements. An update in respect of sufficiency for looked after children was provided.

RESOLVED-The Panel noted the report and requested that a refreshed sufficiency assessment for looked after children be submitted to a future Panel meeting.

9 **EARLY YEARS AND BEYOND**

The Panel received a report setting out an update on the Early Years and Beyond Summit and the resulting next steps. The Summit was held on 29th January 2020 and had around 100 attendees including internal and external stakeholders. The aim of the event was to engage with partners to contribute to shaping the vision and development of a 0-19 (25) integrated Early Support Offer for children and families of Kirklees.

There were a number of speakers throughout the event which included a keynote presentation from Professor Brid Featherstone (Huddersfield University) titled 'How we can work together to ensure Early Support Services are invested in and valued by Families in Kirklees'. Presentations were also heard from Andy Petrie, Local Services to you, about joining local community work to wider systems and Allison Simpson from BBEST Community Hub presented their School Readiness Project.

A draft vision for a hub to hub model was appended to the report.

It was reported that Kirklees commissioned a review of the Early Support Services in 2019. This review was undertaken by a company, Peopletoo, who have extensive experience in supporting transformation projects in children's services. The recommendations from the Peopletoo work, that were outlined in the report to Scrutiny in November 2019 have been actioned, these included the development of an Early Support Task and Finish Group chaired by the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Partnership (KSCP) which is still meeting and is supporting the developments of the service. It also included a recommendation to increase management capacity within the Early Support Service, three Service Managers were recruited into the service, which are a lead for Youth, Family Support and the Children Centre/Community Hub Offer and were all in post by 23rd March 2020. Early Support service are also in the process of recruiting and Outcomes, Data and Performance Manager to complete the management team supporting the Head of Service.

The report highlighted that the added capacity into the service has enabled the Early Support Service to develop with some pace including the proposal for an Integrated 0-19 (25) Early Support Offer, which we are proposing will be called Family Hubs.

During discussion of this item, Panel Members recognised the importance of early intervention and supported the model.

The Chair, Councillor Marchington, highlighted the importance of tracking the effectiveness of early interventions to prevent children becoming looked after and

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improve educational outcomes. An update was provided in respect of a number of specific interventions and the opportunities for increased partnership work through the hub model.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

10 Work Programme for 2020/21 municipal year

The Panel considered the progress on the work programme during the 2020/21 municipal year and considered issues for inclusion.

RESOLVED –

1. That the progress on the 2019/20 work programme for the Children's Scrutiny Panel be noted.
2. That the recommendations from the Elective Home Education Group would be monitored by this Panel