

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

## KIRKLEES COUNCIL

### CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

**Thursday 25th February 2021**

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

Co-optees Toni Bromley  
Dale O'Neill

In attendance: Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director, Learning and Early Support  
Tom Brailsford, Service Director, Resources, Improvement and Partnerships  
Elaine McShane, Service Director, Family Support and Child Protection  
Michelle Wheatcroft, Head of Service Early Support  
CarolAnn Smith, Project Officer, Children's Services  
Julie Bragg, Head of Corporate Parenting

Observers: Cllr Viv Kendrick

Apologies: Linda Summers (Co-Optee)

- 1 Membership of the Committee**  
Apologies for absence were received from Linda Summers.
- 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**  
The minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021 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 petitions or deputations were received.
- 6 Public Question Time**  
No questions were received from the public.

**7 Number and age of children in care**

The Panel considered 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 and was presented by Julie Bragg, Head of Corporate Parenting.

Julie Bragg highlighted the following key issues:-

- The number of children in care over the last 12 months had maintained at 688 (which excluded any looked after children receiving only Section 20 short term breaks) alongside the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children;
- The largest age group for boys in care was 10-15 years with 150 children and the largest age group for girls was 10-15 years with 131 children;
- Ethnicity changes – there had been a relatively small change in the percentage split over the last 12 months.
- More than 72% of children in care were white and the next largest group was dual heritage;
- There were 76 children placed more than 20 miles outside Kirklees – there had been a decline in the number placed outside Kirklees since 2017; officers look to carers first and foremost and also try and maintain the young person's educational provision due to the support the child would get from stability and consistency and that all these issues were seriously considered before placements were approved;
- Seen a further reduction in the number of children in children's homes outside the district;
- Kirklees provided 18 placements to young adults over 16 who lived in supported accommodation; 11 young adults were placed outside of the Local Authority.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the policy of contact time between infants who had been taken into care and parents, Julie Bragg responded to advise that there were different plans in place depending on the needs and requirements for individual cases; general contact was supervised visits for 1.5 – 2hrs per day, 5 days per week. Julie Bragg further explained that once the adoption process was in place the contact between parents and infants would be reduced.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the number of children taken into care in Kirklees compared with statistical neighbours, Julie Bragg advised that a lot of different factors could have an impact on the numbers and confirmed that close scrutiny was undertaken in Kirklees of children taken into care via the Legal Gateway Panel, which was chaired by a Head of Service. The Panel was informed that parents could work with the Local Authority to make a claim for children to stay in their care and parents also had access to legal advice. Julie Bragg advised that she could confidently say that children coming into care in Kirklees was for the right reasons. Tom Brailsford advised that with regard to child protection planning, the Council was quality assuring the processes to ensure that children taken into care were regularly assessed. The Panel agreed

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to consider further information to a future meeting on the reason why Kirklees figures on the number of children in care was different to statistical neighbours.

### **RESOLVED –**

1. That the Panel noted the report on Number of Children in Care and thanked Julie Bragg for her contributions.
2. That the Panel consider future information explaining the reasons for differences in numbers of children in care for Kirklees compared to statistical neighbours.

## **8 Update on Engagement of Family Hubs**

The Panel considered a verbal report on the Early Help offer for children Young People and Families presented by Michelle Wheatcroft , Head of Service Early Support and CarolAnn Smith, Project officer, Children's Services. The Panel noted that a Cabinet report approved on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020 on Proposal for the early help offer for children, young people and families had been circulated with the agenda as background information.

Michelle Wheatcroft & CarolAnn Smith highlighted the following key issues:-

- Engagement with stakeholders had taken place for a period of 8 weeks from 4<sup>th</sup> January to the 26<sup>th</sup> February which included a generic online survey, online meetings with key partners, online public sessions, sessions with Councillors, engagement with schools and parents/carers and leaflets set to food and baby banks;
- 158 online surveys had been completed;
- 31 sessions had taken place with key partners, staff teams, third sector organisations, volunteers and foster carers had taken place;
- 250 stakeholders had engaged through online meetings;
- Online sessions had taken place with young people with an adapted survey; 72 young people completed the survey;
- 18 sessions had been held with Councillors from all 23 wards;
- The team attended Town/Parish council meetings;
- Emails were sent to all 4 MP's;
- 8 online public sessions had taken place;
- Information had been shared and promoted through social media channels;
- Leaflets were printed and shared with all main Kirklees food banks and Rainbow baby bank.

A number of comments were made by members of the Panel, as follows:-

- How families in need would be identified and how support would be provided;
- Concerns were raised regarding the distance to the hubs for some families.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the definition of the word 'hub' and asking if it could be renamed, Michelle Wheatcroft advised that this could be considered and that officers were open to suggestions from the Panel.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding early intervention and how families could be contacted as early as possible, Michelle Wheatcroft responded to advise that officers were working with colleagues in the voluntary sector organisations and health colleagues to raise awareness of the services and what

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was on offer to families. The Panel was informed that there was dedicated Children's Centres in place to provide the services and support to families. Michelle Wheatcroft further explained that conversations were ongoing in respect of how to start those early conversations and break down barriers.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding what was on offer for children at the Children's centres, Michelle Wheatcroft responded to advise that the centres would also be used as an admin area and other integrated services would be using the centres, such as adult learning. The Panel was advised that the Centres were not just about children but were about the whole family and that there would be services for children of all ages up to the age of 25.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding families travelling long distances to some of the Centres, Michelle Wheatcroft advised that this issue had already been raised at some of the engagement sessions and that locations for the Centres would be properly considered once all the feedback had been received from the engagement. The Panel was informed that local Councillors would be consulted as part of the engagement and that families would not be expected to travel long distances and that services needed to be accessible by all.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding prevention work with children around mental health and trauma and how this would be addressed by the family hubs, Michelle Wheatcroft advised that this was not specific in the plan and that she would take this back for further discussion.

The Panel were informed that the branding and naming of the family engagement hubs would be a key part of the work going forward.

In response to a question from the Panel asking that when the family engagement hubs were up and running could information be provided for families on how and when they could access all the services on offer, Carol-Ann Smith advised that this work would be undertaken and examples could be given of how the services could relate to families. The Panel was informed that the voice of the child would be taken into account and officers agreed to report back to the panel further on how this would be addressed.

### **RESOLVED –**

1. That the Panel noted the verbal update on the Engagement of Family Hubs and thanked Michelle Wheatcroft and CarolAnn Smith.
2. The panel requested an update at a future meeting which would include details of the services that could be offered to a family of 4 where there were 2 workers and 2 children.
3. That the issue of prevention work around mental health and trauma experienced by children be built into the overall early help offer.
4. That information be provided for families on how and when they could access all the services on offer and that examples be given of how the services would relate to families.
5. The Panel agreed to receive a future update on how the voice of the child would be taken into account in the work of the engagement of family hubs.

**9 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2020/21**

The Panel considered the Working Programme and Agenda Plan for the 2020/21 municipal year.

Cllr Marchington advised that a report on Educational Outcomes was scheduled for consideration at the Panel in April 2021.

The Panel considered items for consideration during the 2021/22 municipal year, as follows:-

- Educational outcomes – the Panel agreed to monitor the progress of how children in year 11 this year would be assessed or examined and how grades would be decided;
- Multi Systemic Therapies – the Panel agreed to consider a report on how many families had received treatment and how successful and cost effective it had been;
- Liquid Logic (tableau) – the Panel agreed to consider an update on how live information could be accessed on a daily basis and how this was being managed within the Children's Service;
- Visits - The Panel agreed to undertake some visits to internal and external teams and partners, including attending and observing meetings already scheduled;
- Voice of the child – the panel agreed to revisit this on an annual basis;
- SEND – the Panel agreed to consider a future report on how the recommendations of the report had been implemented including a progress update, and seek feedback from parents who had been consulted as part of the Adhoc Panel;
- Social Workers – the Panel agreed to visit Social Workers and their teams to undertake a temperature check of how they were getting on and seek feedback on whether they felt there was a professional pathway for them within the Council.

**RESOLVED –**

1. That the Work Programme and Agenda Plan for the 2020/21 municipal year be noted.
2. That the items for consideration during the 2021/22 municipal year be added to a draft work programme for consideration by the Panel at the Informal Meeting in June 2021.