

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 15th September 2021

- Present: Councillor Andrew Marchington (Chair)
Councillor Elizabeth Reynolds
Councillor Joshua Sheard
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor Jackie Ramsay
- Co-optees Dale O'Neill
Linda Summers
- 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
Charlotte Jackson, Head of Service, Family Support and Child Protection
Ophelia Rix, Head of Service (Children in Care, Children looked after and Care Leavers)
Sara Miles, Head of Service, Resources, Improvement & Partnership
- Observers: Cllr Viv Kendrick
Cllr Carol Pattison
Cllr Elizabeth Smaje
- Apologies: Councillor Paul White
Toni Bromley (Co-Optee)

- 1 Membership of the Committee**
Apologies for absence were received from Toni Bromley and Councillor Paul White.
- 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**
The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on the 28th July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.
- 3 Interests**
No Interests were declared.

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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 **Feedback from Panel Members on issues from Corporate Parenting Board**

The Panel acknowledged that some members of the Children's Scrutiny Panel were either members of the Corporate Parenting Board or attended the meeting as an observer. The Panel considered potential duplication of work between the Corporate Parenting Board and Children's Scrutiny panel.

The Chair of the Panel, Councillor Marchington, confirmed that questions would be asked by Children's Scrutiny Panel Members at the Corporate Parenting Board meetings regarding areas of scrutiny focus, for example Performance data and any key issues would be fed back to the Children's Panel.

The Panel was informed that at the last Corporate Parenting Board concerns had been raised regarding recruitment and retention of carers and officers reported that this was a key area of focus for the Board.

Tom Brailsford, Service Director for Resources, Improvement and Partnerships advised that there was a comprehensive action plan which looked at national best practice and research on the recruitment and retention of carers. The action plan looked at how foster carers were marketed and how they targeted groups of people that would like to foster. Tom Brailsford further advised that the Action Plan also looked at how Fostering Advisers engaged with foster carers as part of the initial conversation after an expression of interest had been submitted and ensured that it turned into an enquiry in a timely manner. The Panel was informed that Fostering Advisers undertook to work closely with the Kirklees Fostering Network.

In response to a question around understanding and being able to supply retention and wrap around care, Tom Brailsford advised that there was a variety of support and offers around retention of Foster Carers and one example was remuneration and benefits. Tom advised that foster carers had access to Employee Healthcare, training, support from other Foster Carers and supervision from social workers.

The Chair of the Panel, Councillor Marchington, advised the Panel that Corporate Parenting Board looked at performance management data and scrutinised the data received. The Panel was informed that a variety of different questions were asked from Partners and Members of the Board and it was noted that Children's Scrutiny would also feed in their questions to the Board.

In response to a question regarding how difficult it was to get young people who abused substances and who were unwilling to admit it and come forward to receive the right support, Tom Brailsford advised that there was a very well established substance misuse service which ensured that young people received the right

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service which met their needs. Elaine McShane, Service Director for Family Support and Child Protection advised that it was a challenge for young people as the first step of accessing support was admitting they had a problem. The Panel was informed that there were practices in different services that helped work with young people to build trust in relationships and to help facilitate the disclosure by the young person.

Panel members who were also members of the Corporate Parenting Board advised that the main focus of the Board was to be a corporate parent to young people who were not in a family environment and were looked after by Kirklees. The Board wanted to achieve the experience of a family for looked after children through Kirklees and took the opinion that if something was not good enough for their own children then it was not good enough for looked after children in Kirklees.

RESOLVED-

1. That the feedback from Panel members and officers be noted.
2. That updates on key areas of focus for scrutiny are provided to the Children's Scrutiny Panel after each Corporate Parenting Board by relevant members of the Panel.

8 Update of Peer Review (Health Check) - Duty and Advice

The Panel considered a report relating to the Front Door Health Check that took place in May 2021 presented by Charlotte Jackson, Head of Service for Family Support and Child Protection.

Charlotte Jackson highlighted that the Front Door Health Check was a recognised contribution to the improvement through conversations, direct observations, dip sampling cases, auditing and reviewing of performance data, the self-assessment in relation to:

- Effectiveness of Thresholds; Consent; Step Up/ Step Down
- Effectiveness of decision making and management oversight
- The quality of assessments (screening)
- Strength of partnership contribution
- Effectiveness of Quality Assurance (through audit analysis)

Charlotte Jackson further explained that over two days the team of five reviewers had met with leaders, practitioners and partners. This was supplemented with an audit of approximately 40 cases. The Panel was informed that the review identified areas of strength and areas for consideration.

The Panel was informed that the key areas of strength were:

- Clear evidence of a strong and effective front door,
- Practitioners were motivated and confident,
- There was strong political support,
- The teams were well resourced, with good morale and the staff felt supported and valued,
- There was good management oversight and challenge on cases.

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Charlotte Jackson advised that the key areas of improvement identified were:

- To ensure consent was always sought before checks were undertaken and that professionals understood consent fully,
- Check whether feedback to the referrer was consistently applied,
- Consider how daily performance management was proactive in timeliness for contacts to ensure proactive oversight of contacts to prevent delay,
- To ensure that fathers were consistently included in the screening stage of contacts.

The Panel was advised that overall, a strong Front Door where good outcomes for families, by the right service was recognised.

In response to a question regarding consent not being obtained previously, Charlotte Jackson advised that consent was really understood in partners and practitioners, whereas in the past that had not been the case. Charlotte further explained that in the past Practitioners could dispense with consent, this meant there could be significant risks identified to not undertake checks which could be detrimental to a child. Parents were asked to consent to basic statutory information checks for example: school, health visitor, GP, which enabled the practitioner to decide what needed to happen next.

In response to a question regarding how the review measured to what the reviewers saw in the Service's own self-assessment and how accurate the self-assessment had previously been, Charlotte Jackson advised that feedback received from the reviewers was that it was evident that the Children's Service clearly knew itself well. The Panel was informed that the two days started with a comprehensive presentation from Charlotte Jackson and Elaine McShane and the reviewers had fed back that the information provided was an honest self-assessment.

In response to a question around consent for young people under 16, Charlotte Jackson advised that the Service always tried to work with parents and young people to gain consent. Charlotte advised that there were occasions where practitioners would speak directly to young people, for example a 16-year-old who had come through Front Door and was having difficulties, was homeless and no longer lived with parents.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report on the Front Door Review be noted and the panel thanked Charlotte Jackson and Elaine McShane for their contributions.

9 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2021-22

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

Cllr Marchington advised that following the September informal meeting, visits would be arranged to take place throughout the municipal year. A pro-forma had been created and agreed by the Panel to help them with their questions and areas of focus at the visits.

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The Panel noted that a visit to the Youth Engagement Service had previously taken place and arrangements were being made for the Panel to re-visit.

The Panel asked when the Learning Strategy would return to Panel, Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning and Early Support, advised that they had been co-producing a district learning strategy. The plan was to be shared wider across the partnership, firstly to be considered by Cabinet in October and then looking at implementation planning and that views and engagement with the Children's Scrutiny early in 2022 would be welcomed. The Panel agreed to receive a copy of the report on the 'Kirklees Future Commission Learning Strategy' being considered by Cabinet on the 5th October 2021.

The Panel was informed by the Cabinet Member for Children's that there was a Local Government Association (LGA) training/conference on 4th October 2021 on contextual safeguarding, making safeguarding of children everyone's business. The Panel agreed to receive the details of the conference and noted that it was free of charge to those who wanted to attend.

RESOLVED –

1. That the arrangements for the visits by the Panel be noted and thanks were given to officers for arranging the visits.
2. That the Cabinet report for Learning Strategy be circulated to the Panel when available.
3. That the details regarding the conference on Contextual Safeguarding be circulated to Panel Members.