

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 20th October 2021

Present: Councillor Andrew Marchington (Chair)
Councillor Elizabeth Reynolds
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor Paul White
Councillor Jackie Ramsay

Co-optees Toni Bromley
Dale O'Neill
Linda Summers

In attendance: Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director, Learning and Early Support
Elaine McShane, Service Director, Family Support and Child Protection
Diane Yates, Elective Home Education Lead

Observers: Cllr Viv Kendrick
Cllr Carol Pattison

Apologies: Councillor Joshua Sheard

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Joshua Sheard.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on the 15th September 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 **New Elective Home Education Policy**

The Panel considered a Cabinet report proposing the adoption of a New Elective Home Education Policy presented by Diane Yates, Acting Portfolio Manager (Education Safeguarding Service, Learning and Early Support). Following findings from the Ad Hoc Scrutiny review in March 2020, the Children's Scrutiny Panel had made several recommendations including the need for a new Kirklees Elective Home Education Policy, rather than a refresh of the existing policy.

Diane Yates, Elective Home Education Lead, highlighted that the new policy was approved by Cabinet on 5th October 2021 which included the recommendations from the Ad Hoc Scrutiny review and was compatible with April 2019, Department for Education, Elective Home Education guidance for Local Authorities. In addition to the new policy an 'Informed for Parents' guide and 'Flexi-Schooling' guidance had been produced.

In response to a question from the Panel on the percentage of children who chose to be electively home educated, how many were using the flexi-school option and if there was a difference in percentage that had special educational needs and disabilities, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that analysis data had not been provided and would like to be given the opportunity to provide the analysis at a future meeting.

In response to a question regarding mental health and assessment of education Diane Yates responded to advise that all children were treated individually with their needs taken into consideration. Diane Yates explained that there were some children that had been taken out of school due to Mental Health and for some children it had reduced anxiety. There were families where their children had suffered with mental health difficulties and whilst being at home their anxieties had reduced, they would like to consider returning to education in the future.

In response to a question regarding availability of Exam Centres, Diane Yates responded to advise that it was difficult for parents to access a local provision to sit exams. There was a variety of considerations to be looked at around accessibility and different exam boards for different schools. The Panel was informed that Kirklees Council were in negotiations with a Kirklees provider and anticipated an offer being in place by the end of the year.

In response to a question regarding parent's legal responsibilities and how the Authority ensured that parental responsibilities were being met, Diane Yates responded to advise that the Local Authority's legal duties were to act as if it appeared an elective home provision was not suitable and the Local Authority had a duty to maintain contact with families, which was minimally once a year.

Resolved:

- That the Panel noted the report on Elective Home Education and thanked Diane Yates for her contributions.
- That an update on the Elective Home Education Policy and analysis on percentages of families who had chosen to Elective Home Educate be brought back to the Panel in December 2021.

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

The Panel received an update from the last Corporate Parenting Board from members of the Panel who had attended the last meeting. It was noted that compared with statistical neighbours, Kirklees had significantly fewer looked after children. Work had taken place around what Kirklees had done differently and it had been highlighted that Special Guardianship Orders were being utilised and worked effectively. Feedback was also provided on fostering and adoption around recruitment and retention of foster carers. Kirklees has good foster care placements locally for children's stability.

The Panel received an update on face-to-face visits that had taken place at the Valleys Social Work Cluster, Front Door team in Civic Centre 3 and the virtual Front Door weekly referral meeting. The Panel received good examples of partnership working, voice of the child, data collection, good practice and professional development. Further Scrutiny visits had been arranged for November 2021, December 2021 and January 2022 and the work programme had been updated with the details.

A number of Panel Members attended the Front Door Weekly Referral meeting on the 11th October 2021 and gave feedback. It was noted that the Panel saw some good examples of partnership working, where representatives from the Police, Education and Health along with children's services teams worked together to review cases by dip sampling. The Panel were informed that there had been good examples of referrals received from Schools, GP's, ambulance service and NSPCC which showed a wide range of organisations were engaging with the Front Door service. Data analysis was provided which looked at weekly data and showed how that compared week on week to the previous week along with deep dives into individual cases whilst at the same time, capturing the voice of the child.

The Panel received an update on the information session for Kirklees Families Together Programme. Invites had been sent to all Kirklees Councillors and also the co-optees of the Children's Scrutiny Panel for the events which took place in October and November 2021. The sessions had discussed the structuring of the programme and establishing partnership boards. There were 4 geographical areas, each to have their own families together Area Partnership Board. The Panel agreed to add Kirklees Families Together Programme to the work programme to look at how the Boards were established and how effectively they were working.

RESOLVED:-

- That the work programme and Agenda Plan for the 2020/21 municipal year be noted and updated.
- That the Panel add Kirklees Families Together Programme to their work programme for 2021/22 and look at how the Area Partnership Boards in the 4 geographical areas were established and how effectively they were working.