

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 1st December 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, EHE Lead
Tom Brailsford, Service Director, Improvements & Partnerships

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 20th October 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 EHE - progress update on Recommendations of Ad Hoc Panel Action Plan

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The Panel considered a progress update on the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel's Action Plan Recommendations for Elective Home Education presented by Diane Yates, Acting Portfolio Manager (Education Safeguarding Service, Learning and Early Support). Following findings from the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel review in March 2020, the Children's Scrutiny Panel had made several recommendations including the need for a new Kirklees EHE Policy as below:-

1. A new Kirklees Policy on EHE be produced, in consultation with home educators, at the earliest possible opportunity - The Panel was informed that the new EHE policy had been approved by Cabinet on 5th October and had now been adopted.
2. Consider the implementation of a dedicated EHE Team, including a qualified teacher, with dedicated budget provision sufficient to implement the policy effectively and consistently - The Panel was informed that an EHE Team was a long-term plan as part of the overall Service Plan, in the interim there was a dedicated EHE Team which helped build positive relationships with carers/parents. Diane Yates explained that a qualified teacher had been considered and it was felt that there were few occasions when a qualified teacher was required, this could be managed on an Ad hoc basis by tapping into resources as and when required.
3. Provide a dedicated telephone number and email address – the Panel was informed that a dedicated email address was now in place which had been beneficial in streamlining communication and improving accessibility to the EHE Team. An automated telephone system was currently being explored which would enable the caller to link directly to the EHE Team.
4. Implement a new form for schools to complete when taking a child off roll, for submission to the EHE Team within a short timescale – Diane Yates advised the Panel that new ways of working had been introduced, this included telephone contact directly with schools upon receipt of all new EHE notifications, which helped identify families who required additional support and enabled the team to provide advice and support to schools on the correct procedures they were required to follow.
5. Update and improve the relevant section of the Council's website – the Panel was informed that work on the website was taking place and would cover all the Panel's recommendations. The website was due to go live by the end of 2021.
6. That the possibility for the provision of at least one centre where home educated students could sit exams be explored, preferably one for North Kirklees and one for South Kirklees – the Panel was informed that two independent provisions were now offering exam facilities to private candidates in North Kirklees, one specifically for female students and were continuing to explore other options in South Kirklees.
7. That the options for alternative provisions particularly in respect of the Key Stage 4 cohort be investigated – Diane Yates explained that the team had

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worked in partnership with Kirklees College to look at early access to college opportunities and a pilot started in September 2021 for a small number of children who were home educated to access 14-16 provision in South Kirklees. The plan was to evaluate the pilot at the end of the academic year and be able to offer a programme to more children who were home educated in North and South Kirklees.

The panel received data which showed EHE figures for the last 5 years. It was noted that there was a steady increase year on year with the increase in 2021 due mainly to Covid19. In November 2021 there were 489 children Elective Home Educating which was 0.7% of the school population within Kirklees.

In response to a question around reasons why families chose to electively home educate, Diane Yates advised that it was mainly due to lifestyle choices, for example where a child suffered with anxiety, electively home educating reduced anxieties as a result of not attending school as it was felt that it was in the child's best interest not to be in a school environment.

The Panel asked about National and Local conversations on children's Mental Health, and if views from parents could be fed into school and mental health system to mitigate Mental Health within the school provision and if there were any forums where information could be fed into. Tom Brailsford, Service Director, Resources, Improvements and Partnership advised that there was a forum to feed back to schools where the EHE Team could link in with.

RESOLVED:

- That the Panel noted the update on EHE and thanked Diane Yates and the team for the good work on the improvements that had been made and for the update provided to the Panel.
- That Children's Mental Health in schools be picked up within the work programme for 2021/22.

8 Outcome of Ofsted inspection of Children's Services

The Panel received an update on the letter received for the focused visit to Kirklees Children's Services from Elaine McShane, Service Director for Family Support and Child Protection.

The Panel noted that the letter summarised the findings of the visit to Kirklees Children's Services on 6th and 7th October 2021. Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for the experiences of children in care, in particular the quality of matching, placement and decision-making for children in care. They also looked at the quality of management oversight and whether performance management information and quality assurance activities provided managers with an accurate view of social work practice to help senior leaders improve outcomes for children. The visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority Children's Services framework.

Elaine McShane advised that one weeks' notice was provided to prepare for the inspection. The inspectors spoke with practitioners on the ground and two young people were identified to provide information regarding their experiences.

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The headline findings were that continuously ambitious and effective senior leaders had created a culture where strong social work practice improved outcomes for children in care who were in need of permanence. Skilled and committed social workers provided sensitive, child-centred practice to children and their carers. Elaine McShane further explained that despite the challenges of the pandemic, a wide range of effective services had been developed to support children and their carers, with many children benefitting from improved placement stability and live in timely, well-matched permanent placements. Staff had reported that professional development was strongly encouraged and supported, however, supervision did not take place frequently enough for some social workers with their direct line managers.

The Panel was informed that there was one area of improvement which was around the quality and frequency of social work supervision, including management oversight of children's progress and experiences.

Elaine McShane advised that social workers were resilient, persistent and took into account the children's culture and community. Advanced practitioners were very supportive, however, some team managers didn't always show their workings out and weren't always consistent. A session with team managers was to take place on supervision and recording the decision making on the child's record.

RESOLVED:-

- That the Panel noted the letter regarding the focused visit and thanked the team for the good work on the improvements that had been made and Elaine McShane for the update.

9 Feedback from Panel Members on issues considered by Corporate Parenting Board

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 a robust discussion took place around data received and showed that numbers of looked after children had reduced, questions were asked as to why that was happening and feedback was provided on differences with Kirklees and other areas. Ongoing work around ethnicity and how other local authorities were looking at Special Guardianship Orders was being undertaken.

The Panel received feedback on the Annual Fostering Report, work had taken place to ensure there were sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people in Kirklees. Interviews had taken place for foster carers who chose to not continue with further foster placements. The fostering network played an important role within the interviews.

The Panel received feedback from the Virtual School, the Virtual School was made up of a Head Teacher, Teachers and a Virtual School Governing Body. It was noted that the Virtual School Governing Body was seeking foster carers or young people who had recently left foster care to join the governing body.

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The Panel received feedback on the Youth Justice Service which highlighted that looked after children within the youth justice system were treated the same as any other looked after child. Work had been carried out around CAMHS to try and improve waiting list times.

The Panel was informed that there was now a care leaver on the Corporate Parenting Board who was able to provide feedback on direct experiences.

RESOLVED:

- That the feedback from Members of the Panel who had attended the Corporate Parenting Board be noted.

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

The Panel received an update on the face-to-face visits which were to take place with various teams in Children's Services. Visits had been arranged with Batley and Dewsbury Front Line Social Work Teams. A visit to the Youth Justice Service took place on the 18th November 2021, a discussion took place regarding HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection, which recognised the interaction within the team and young people within the Youth Justice Offending Team and the restorative practice which took place with the offender and victim.

A discussion took place around Child Sexual Exploitation and names of offenders that had been released. A concern was raised by the Panel around the impact on the wider family. The Panel agreed that a detailed discussion would take place at a future meeting along with a discussion around the practices as the team were moving into a contextual safeguarding process.

The Panel agreed that a progress update on the Learning Strategy be added to the Educational Outcomes scheduled for March meeting in 2022.

RESOLVED:

- That the work programme and Agenda Plan for the 2020/21 municipal year be noted and updated.
- That information of the offenders of Child Sexual Exploitation be scheduled as an item for consideration at a future meeting.
- That a progress update be added to the Educational Outcomes item at the March 22 meeting.