

Contact Officer: Nicola Sylvester

## **KIRKLEES COUNCIL**

### **CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Friday 28th July 2023**

Present: Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)  
Councillor Paul Moore

In attendance: Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning & Early Support  
Vicky Metheringham, Service Director – Child Protection and Family Support  
Anna Gledhill, Head of Children’s Improvement, Partnership & Voice  
Councillor Carole Pattison  
Councillor Viv Kendrick

Apologies: Councillor Elizabeth Reynolds  
Councillor Richard Smith  
Councillor Ammar Anwar  
Oliver Gibson (Co-Optee)

**1 Membership of the Committee**

Apologies were received from Councillor Reynolds, Councillor Smith, Councillor Anwar, and Oliver Gibson (Co-optee).

**2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023 be approved 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 members of the public.

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### 7 Performance Data (Children's Services) - verbal update on highlights

The Panel received a verbal update on the performance data for May 2023, which was provided by the Service Directors in Children's Services.

Vicky Metheringham, Service Director for Child Protection and Family Support explained that:

- There had been an ongoing reduction in the number of contacts through the front door and that re-referral numbers had reduced with an understanding of the reason for re-referrals,
- The timeliness of initial child protection case conferences had risen to the highest it had been throughout the year, resulting in children subject to a repeat child protection plan reducing,
- The number of children going missing had declined with the number of children entering care remaining stable, ensuring that children and young people who did not need to be looked after lived with family members in Special Guardianship Order arrangements,
- Social Workers continued to see children in care frequently, and 98% of their reviews were held on time,
- 98% of care leavers had a pathway plan, with 92% of them being in suitable accommodation,
- Caseloads for workers had increased, there was work in the team taking place to improve the number of assessments that needed to be completed on time,
- The number of children on a Child Protection Plan had risen in Kirklees, this was lower than neighbouring Local Authorities and across England,
- 90% of children who were looked after were seen on time, work was ongoing to ensure that health checks were completed in time, particular dental checks.

Anna Gledhill, Head of Children's Improvement, Partnership and Voice advised that Ofsted judgements for some of the residential children's homes had declined. This had been impacted by sufficiency and a national capacity crisis that developed throughout the pandemic. As a result, identifying and securing safe living environments for children and teenagers had been increasingly challenging. Children's homes had identified that risk management needs for children in the homes had grown significantly, with the issues in the homes being related to demands in staffing skills.

In response to a question regarding recruitment and retention of staff in Children's Services, Vicky Metheringham advised that recruiting and retaining social workers was a national issue. Due to social worker posts being vacant, in March 2023 it was agreed that the service could recruit agency social workers, however, these posts were not successfully filled. Through government reforms there had been a national agreement that the use of agency workers would not be a possibility anymore, and there was a consultation around the parameters of agency workers. Kirklees was clear that they would not breach the memorandum of understanding which was an agreement with Local Authorities and the Yorkshire & Humber region on how much agency workers were paid. Caseloads were higher for some social workers than the service would like them to be. A weekly case load meeting took place with Head of

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Services considering the workload of all teams and the cases allocated to them. Directors and Managers were doing everything they could to ensure that staff felt supported and that their work was recognised.

In response to a question around the contact source information in the data, it was noted that there was a very low number of contacts from the housing department. Housing staff would go into homes on a regular basis where concerns would arise, a question was asked what training those staff had received in relation to safeguarding. Vicky Metheringham advised that the service had a very close relationship with housing colleagues through the front door, and that housing colleagues did understand what their responsibilities were with regards to safeguarding. The Panel was informed that it was an area for the service to look at to assure themselves that safeguarding concerns were recognised and referred into the front door. Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning & Early Support advised that through the children's safeguarding partnerships, safeguarding training was reviewed across all partner agencies, which any colleague across the council would be involved with. Jo-Anne Sanders confirmed that the service would approach the partnership to ensure that there was take up of the training sessions and would bring back data to the Panel on the take up of training from front line housing staff, and systematically, what was done to record concerns around safeguarding.

Jo-Anne Sanders advised that it had come to the end of the academic year and that a report on the educational outcomes would be provided for the panel to consider in the September meeting. Jo-Anne Sanders acknowledged the work of the Virtual School for children that were looked after and explained that the team undertook personal educational planning and had 100% compliance. The team had worked hard with colleagues in children social care, the looked after children's team, to ensure there was robust planning, and looked after children's education was secure. One challenge was suspensions and exclusions across the district within different groups. There was an increase in suspensions which was a key theme in our Kirklees Futures, Our Learning Strategy, and it was agreed with the educational learning partnership board that it would be a key priority from September 2023. It was noted that far too many suspensions took place, particularly in Secondary Schools. The Panel noted that there was good partnership working with schools on how suspensions and exclusions could be reduced.

Jo-Anne Sanders explained that the number of Health and Care Plans were stabilising, although quite high, Kirklees had a higher than national average number of youngsters with special educational needs, which provided an opportunity for youngsters to be supported in the right place to receive their education. The Panel noted that there was a sufficiency challenge with the re-build of two specialist schools, and that there were 5 new additionally resourced provisions opening in September.

During discussion the panel agreed to arrange supported visits to schools to look at a range of practices regarding exclusions and the good work that was being undertaken.

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### RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted and that officers be thanked for their contributions.
- 2) That a report be provided at a future meeting on the sufficiency of Children's residential homes,
- 3) That the panel arrange supported visits to children's residential homes,
- 4) That a report be provided at a future meeting providing data on the take up of training from front line housing staff, and systematically, what was done to record concerns around safeguarding.
- 5) That the panel arrange supported visits to schools to look at a range of practices regarding exclusions.

### 8 Cabinet Priorities for Children's Services

The Panel received an update on the Cabinet priorities for Children's Services from Councillor Viv Kendrick, Portfolio Holder for Children and Councillor Carole Pattison, Portfolio Holder for Learning, Aspiration and Communities.

Councillor Kendrick advised that her cabinet priorities were:

- To achieve a good outcome from the Inspection of Local area Children's Services reflecting improved outcomes for our children, young people and families - In 2016 the inspection received an outcome of inadequate rating, over the years, a number of inspections and reviews had taken place with a range of hard work to improve the quality of service. There was a real desire to do the best for all children with reduced resources and increased demand. A good outcome for the inspection was a goal, but the real desire was to continue improving services to support Kirklees children and families.
- Providing high quality, stable, loving homes for our children and young people locally - A key priority was to do the best for children and young people in Kirklees and to have early help and support for families which enabled them to stay together where possible. There was a shortage of foster carers within Kirklees. Foster carers within the authority were provided with a good offer of support, along with a robust training package. It was noted that Kirklees were unable to compete with what independent fostering agencies paid, and therefore end up with higher charges. The service worked to support children by placing them with other family members where possible, where they could not remain with their birth parents. It was far better for children to remain with family members under a special guardianship order than it was being taken into care.
- Ensuring our children and young people and families with additional needs were supported as early as possible and were provided with a new financial support system to meet their needs in their learning environment – Early help was key in supporting families with children and young people with additional needs, and to continue that support when needed through the child and young person's development. Education in local places was important, two new special schools were being built to replace two within the authority. One was to provide better accommodation and greater capacity for children with autism, and the other was to increase the capacity for young people with social, emotional, and mental health needs. Additional places were being

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added at mainstream schools, supported by special school, so that children could be educated locally. A new financial system was being developed to assist schools in providing the best educational environment for the children.

Councillor Pattison advised that her cabinet priorities were:

- Ensuring the number of school places matched need and that schools were supported to meet changing needs – The demand for school places in some sectors was reducing, in others sectors it was increasing. Changing needs referred to the increasing numbers of children been seen with special educational needs and a need for special education as a result. The biggest priority was finding places for children with special educational needs, both in the long and short term. Schools were facing challenges due to numbers on role falling, especially in primary schools, this was providing problems in terms of accommodation and staff which was costly and causing financial problems. In some secondary schools, there were bulge years going through their schools that required extra provisions and staff on a temporary basis. Adapting to change resulted in financial pressures, but it was a legal responsibility for the Local Authority to find school places for every child.
- Reviewing Our Kirklees Futures, Our Learning Strategy, and its delivery over the next 5 years –Launched in 2001, the vision and obsession of Our Kirklees Futures, Our Learning Strategy had not changed, but the ability to achieve the vision had changed. A review of the learning strategy was required to ensure delivery was on track for 2030. A vision was that by 2030, no child would be excluded from school, and that they would be achieving the best education that was available to them. There was an action plan behind the vision, the national picture was that exclusions had risen, partly to the pandemic and home learning, and partly to the structure in people's lives.
- Working with women and local organisations and understanding their lived experiences to drive culture change and ensure services respond appropriately – one of the key priorities for the Mayor of West Yorkshire was violence against women and girls, which was also a Cabinet priority. It had become apparent that it was not about tackling the violence but was quite often about culture. Kirklees was looking at introducing a pledge with partners across the partnership board to take action regarding the culture within their organisations, ensuring appropriate responses were received.

### **RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the Cabinet priorities be noted, and Members be thanked for their contributions.
- 2) That a report be provided at a future meeting giving an update on Exclusions and Suspensions.

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### 9 **Pre-decision Scrutiny - Cabinet decisions on the horizon**

Councillor Kendrick advised the Panel that Post 16 Home to School Transport for Special Educational Needs young people was an area of focus.

Councillor Pattison explained that an agreed scheme of support had been agreed for Improvement to Schools, which would commence in September 2023, a report would be provided for the Panel to consider in 2024.

Jo-Anne Sanders explained that a report on Youngsters Outcomes, which would include A levels and GCSE's results would be available for the Panel to consider in the September meeting. Jo-Anne Sanders also explained that a report for decision by cabinet regarding the SEND Transformation plan and sufficiency regarding alternative provision would be available for the Panel to consider at a future meeting.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel noted the items for pre-decision scrutiny and thanked the Cabinet Members and officers for their updates and the opportunity to comment on the reports prior to the decisions being taken by Cabinet.

### 10 **Feedback from Panel Members on issues considered by Corporate Parenting Board**

Councillor Cooper advised that no feedback was available from the Corporate Parenting Board held on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023. The next Corporate Parenting Board was scheduled to take place on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and Panel members would feedback to the next Panel meeting on any key areas of focus.

**RESOLVED:** The panel noted that Panel Members would feedback on the key areas of focus from the Corporate Parenting Board meeting due to place on 12<sup>th</sup> September at the next panel meeting.

### 11 **Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2023/24**

The Panel considered the work programme for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Councillor Cooper requested that Post 16 Home to School Transport for special educational needs young people be added to the work programme for 2023/24

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) The Panel noted the Work Programme and agenda plan for 2023/24,
- 2) That Post 16 Home to School transport for Special Educational Needs young people be added to the 2023/24 work programme.