

Kirklees Council

Scrutiny Lead Member Report

Lead Member: Cllr Andrew Cooper, Children's Scrutiny Panel

Period of Update: From September 2023 – December 2023

Panel Highlights

Bi-monthly Lead member briefings with:

Senior Officers in Children's Services

- Service Director – Learning and Early Support
- Service Director – Resources Improvement and Partnerships
- Service Director – Family Support and Child Protection
- Strategic Director for Children's Services

Cabinet Members

- Children (Statutory responsibility for Children)
- Learning, Aspiration and Communities

Panel Activity and meetings -

- Panel meeting on 22nd September 2023 – Performance Data; update on key issues considered by the Corporate Parenting Board, Informal meeting considered a verbal update on Post 16 Home to School Transport
- Informal Panel meeting on 1st December 2023 – Performance Data; Post 16 Home to School Travel; Quality Assurance
- Visit to the Education and Learning Partnership Board (ELPB) on 27th September 2023
- Visit to Early Years Conference on 12th October 2023

Outcomes:

Performance Data

On the 22nd September 2023, the Panel received verbal updates from Senior Officers in Children's Services on the key performance issues for the service for period ending July 2023. The following key issues were considered by the Panel:-

- a progressive increase in the timeliness of initial child protection case data,
- a reduction in the timeliness of initial health assessments
- an increase in foster care placements for children and young people looked after within family arrangements
- an increase in placements provided by independent foster carers
- a decrease in CAMHS and Neuro Developmental referrals, but an increase in timeliness of both areas
- caseloads, work practice, workloads and wellbeing of Social Workers
- officers felt there were too many section 47 assessments happening unnecessarily and the service were looking at the reasons why
- work was ongoing to look at last year's educational outcomes data which included exclusions and attendance
- the previous academic year had highlighted the highest percentage for absence and illness. The service were working closely with the school system and new

attendance duties for the Council had come into place in September 2023 and once data had been gathered it would be shared with the Panel

- data was available on how children progressed through the school system and officers wanted to look closer at the impact of mobility when children moved from early years settings into mainstream schools and the academy system.

2022-23 Kirklees Annual Education Quality and Standards

At an Informal meeting on the 22nd September 2023, the Panel received an overview of the statutory outcomes achieved by learners in Kirklees during the academic year 2022-2023. The report covered outcomes at the end of the Foundation Stage, Phonics (Year 1), Key Stage 1 (Year 2), Key Stage 2 (Year 6), Key Stage 4 (GCSE) and Key Stage 5. This report was submitted for information. The early Kirklees Annual Educational Quality and Standards Report 2022-23 is presented to establish a shared understanding about the performance of our children and young people in terms of Educational Outcomes across the district, so that the partnership can identify where to prioritise our collective efforts for improvement.

Performance Data

On the 1st December 2023, the Panel received verbal updates from Senior Officers in Children's Services on the key performance issues for the service for period ending September 2023. The following key issues were considered by the Panel:-

- Officers were focusing on school attendance and making improvements but it was acknowledged that some students found it harder than others to attend school and that schools and partners were working with pupils and parents to remove barriers by building trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place
- Attendance did impact on academic outcomes and nationally overall absence rate of pupils not achieving grade 9 to 4 was over twice as high as those achieving grades 9 to 5, 8.8% nationally compared to 3.7% and 90% of young offenders have been persistently absent
- Kirklees have been assigned an Independent Education Advisor from the Department for Education who would spend 5 days with the Learning Service and Schools looking at what could be done to improve attendance and the first visit took place in November where Kirklees data was shared and how the Service was being measured within Kirklees
- Engaging with children and families to instill good habits and routines from the start, working with the Council's youngest children as part of Families Together
- Take up for eligible 2 year olds of free early entitlement within early years settings was 80% as at September 2023, which was really positive and helped the Council to build strong relationships from the early stages which would have a positive impact on children's more formal schooling career
- DfE were releasing fortnightly data showing school type and absence rates across the academic year – national figures showed 4.8% absence rates in state funded primary schools, 3.3% authorised absence, 1.5% unauthorised absence, state funded secondary schools was 3.8% and Kirklees 5.6%
- More stable picture on exclusions and suspensions, but this was being closely monitored and there were concerns for those with Special Needs and an Education Health and Care Plan
- A dialogue had commenced with Secondary and Primary Schools on attendance underpinned by the data, a further session was planned with Secondary Headteachers to share data, intelligence and good practice

- Rate of children in need was lower than statistical neighbours in England and lower than 12 month average so progress was being made
- Assurance was given that Caseloads were being looked at on a weekly basis by Managers and Senior Leaders to make sure the levels for individual social workers was safe and that we were getting the best outcomes for children
- Social Worker caseloads were currently reported at 19.2 which varied depending on the stage of career and factors such as multiple children within families
- Initial Child Protection Conference timeliness was at 91% at end of September and as of last week was at 100% due to a piece of work taking place across the directorates within social work teams and independent reviewing officers
- Number of children on Child Protection Plans had reduced to 495 and the service were capturing children correctly; seen a slight increase in children on plan for a second time but officers were confident that the visits to children were happening as quickly as they needed them
- Children looked after numbers had increased to 622 but had since reduced, this figure was highly variable and fluctuated dramatically depending on factors eg cases closed as reached 18 years old and multiple admissions, but the figure was far lower than our statistical and local neighbours, the service was trying to keep children with close family members and within environments close to home where possible before looking at other provision, eg foster carers, residential facilities
- Increasing residential options and recently re-opened a children's home; in December hoping to open another 4 bedroomed Children's Home which would give the opportunity to place children in homes closer to home rather than placing out of area.

Post 16 Home to School Travel

The Panel received an update on the Consultation process for the Post 16 Home to School Transport at an Informal meeting on the 22nd September 2023.

At an Informal meeting on the 1st December 2023, the Panel considered an update on Post 16 Home to School Travel. The consultation of the draft post 16 Transport statement would run until 31 December 2023. Following the consultation, the responses would be taken into account on the final Statement and a decision will be made by Cabinet in March 2024. The Panel will consider an update on the consultation for the Post 16 Home to School Travel in January 2024 as part of pre-decision scrutiny.

Quality Assurance

The Panel considered a briefing note at an Informal meeting on the 1st December 2023, giving an overview of the main areas of learning and development that had arisen from learning conversations and Practice Learning Days. The Panel agreed to consider a future update report once the process had embedded.

Partnership Visits

Visit to Education and Learning Partnership Board (ELPB) on 27th September 2023

The Chair of the Panel attended the Education Learning and Partnership Board (ELPB) on the 27th September 2023 as part of the Panel's focus on exclusions and

suspensions in Kirklees' schools. The following key areas were considered –

- Exclusions and suspensions including data taken from 2022/23
- Support approach in place, including new DfE guidance published in May 22

Visit to Early Years Conference on 12th October 2023

The Panel attended the Professional Development Conference for early years partners on the 12th October 2023 to see some of the work being undertaken with the wider schools system to secure positive outcomes for Kirklees Children and Young People. Work force development and prioritising the early years were two clear areas showcased at the event.

Looking Ahead

In January 2024, an update on the consultation process for Post 16 Home to School Transport will be considered by the Panel. A Corporate Risk Update will be considered in the Informal meeting of the Panel.

In March 2024, the Panel will consider reports on Educational Attainment Outcomes and Ofsted Inspection outcomes for Children's Residential Homes

General Comments

I continue to be impressed by the detail in the performance data for Childrens Services. On questioning officers, it is clear there is also a clear understanding of the data and that it is used to guide action by management; this bodes well for the forthcoming OFSTED inspection.

The Early Years Conference was a particular highlight for me and I learned a lot about good practice and I saw that staff were obviously enthused by the event.

The number of absences, exclusions and suspensions is an ongoing concern. Though this is a national phenomenon, post pandemic, it is clear that there is an understanding of the issues particular to Kirklees and these are being addressed.

The challenge of addressing the high costs of home to school transport is one that Kirklees is clearly grappling with and is work in progress. The panel will continue to take a strong interest in how the council is addressing this issue.

On a personal note, I have enjoyed beginning to understand the work of Childrens Services and I'm impressed with the professionalism and commitment of officers.