

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 28th April 2025

Present: Councillor Itrat Ali (Chair)
Councillor Jane Rylah
Councillor Hannah McKerchar
Councillor Tanisha Bramwell

In attendance: Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director - Learning and Early Support
Martin Wilby, Head of Education Places and Access
Stewart Horn, Head of Children's Integrated Commissioning
Joel Hanna, Head of Service for Corporate Parenting
Councillor Viv Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Apologies: Councillor Ashleigh Robinson
Councillor Richard Smith

1 Membership of the Panel

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Richard Smith and Councillor Ashleigh Robinson.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

7 Special Schools – update on the rebuild of Joseph Norton Academy and Woodley School and College

The Panel considered a report providing an update on the rebuild of two Special Schools, Joseph Norton Academy and Woodley School and College, presented by Stewart Horn, Head of Children's Integrated Commissioning and Martin Wilby, Head of Education Places and Access.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 28 April 2025

Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning and Early Support, provided an introduction and advised the Panel that Kirklees was making a huge investment as part of its sufficiency duty, to enable the ambition of placing Kirklees young people close to where they live. It had been recognised that there was a growing need for places for children with complex autism, and for children with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and additional places would be provided as part of the rebuilds.

Stewart Horn highlighted the following key points regarding the rebuild of Joseph Norton Academy:

- Joseph Norton Academy was facing growing demand for places for children with SEMH needs. The Academy was currently based in Scissett and had 63 places, however there was a need for more places and for a higher-quality learning environment.
- The new building had been designed to incorporate the views of staff, and the children currently at the school had also been consulted using the Our Voice Team.
- The new school would be built on the site of the former Deighton Centre.
- The pre-contract phase involved checking the design against value for money for Kirklees and finalising the design, costings and timelines.
- Groundworks were due to start on site in early June 2025.
- Links between the school and the Deighton and Ashbrow communities were being developed.
- The number of pupils at the school was increasing by utilising other sites, so that pupil numbers could gradually grow before the new building was completed.
- Other ongoing activities included the purchasing of furniture and IT for the school, and transition arrangements.

Martin Wilby highlighted the following key points regarding the rebuild of Woodley School and College:

- Staff and pupils had been involved with the design of the new build to ensure it met the children's needs.
- The future Woodley site presented more complexity due to the existing buildings.
- In July 2024 a report had been presented to Cabinet with a list of key elements that would need to be addressed in order to start the build process and some of these had been addressed and others were underway.
- Telecoms masts on the building had now been removed after legal challenges had been overcome.
- The private pre-school site had moved to alternative and improved facilities at Almondbury Library.
- The Private Public Partnership arrangement that the building was under was due to be exited within the near future.
- Procurement had taken place to recruit a demolition contractor and activity should start on site over the coming weeks.
- A temporary site in Crosland Moor was being used as a satellite site for the school, with 25 pupils gaining a positive experience there prior to the new site opening.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 28 April 2025

In response to a question from the Panel about when the schools would reach capacity, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that Woodley School and College was almost at the capacity of the new build with the combined number of pupils at the satellite site and the current site. For Joseph Norton, because the school was doubling in size, careful planning was being put into place for transition to a larger school population and premises. The Panel was informed that Joseph Norton was also expanding its age range and would admit girls. Each child being admitted to the new school would be looked at individually to promote a smooth transition.

The Panel asked when Joseph Norton would be completed and were advised that it was hoped to be completed in a year, however many factors could affect the timescales. Woodley School and College's rebuild would take longer due to the necessity for demolition on the site.

In response to a question regarding the engagement with parents, staff and children, the Panel were informed that a dedicated team had run play sessions and more formal facilitated feedback to gather the children's voice. This had included videos, drawings and comments, resulting in elements being included in the design such as gardens outside classrooms and a farm provision at Joseph Norton, and a Forest School provision and outside playground including slides, swings and trampolines at Woodley. Proposed designs had been taken back to the schools to ensure the designs reflected the feedback given and reactions from the children had been positive. The Panel was informed that some parents would find the move from Scissett to Deighton more difficult than others, but the location had been chosen as central within Kirklees to facilitate easier transport for the majority of pupils. Parents had raised questions over the length of time the project was taking, but the service was committed to getting the builds of the best quality and value, which took time.

The Panel asked what would happen if circumstances changed with the external partners involved and were advised by Jo-Anne Sanders that the Council had engaged the services of technical experts to put in challenge and support and provide an appropriate level of check and balance. Other partners would be contractually bound, and it was felt that the projects undertaken had been future-proofed.

The Panel raised the issue of recent successful engagement by the Joseph Norton Academy with the community, and were assured that the school wanted to become part of the Deighton community and would take steps to do so.

The Panel asked for detail of the consultation process and were advised by Jo-Anne Sanders and Martin Wilby that there was a genuine commitment to ongoing engagement with all parties, and that results of the consultation undertaken by Woodley School and College and Joseph Norton Academy as part of their "significant change" process had been published. The Panel were assured that residents, parents, pupils, staff and relevant ward councillors had all been engaged with at the time when sites for both builds were chosen. Further detail on the consultation on Woodley School and College could be found in the Cabinet report for the meeting on 12th March 2024. ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Cabinet, 12/03/2024 13:30](#)

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the officers be thanked for their contributions and the report be noted.
- 2) That a visit by the Panel be undertaken to the two new schools when the rebuilds were complete.

8 Decline of the cohort of children in primary schools in Kirklees

The Panel considered a report on the decline of the cohort of children in primary schools in Kirklees, which was presented by Martin Wilby, Head of Education Places and Access.

Martin Wilby gave an overview of the report and highlighted the following key points:

- The number of children in the cohort entering Reception had been in decline since a peak in 2015/16, and the cohort across Kirklees had reduced by over 1,000 since then.
- A large proportion of school funding was determined by the number of children on roll, and the decline in numbers was having an impact on the budgets of some schools.
- Over the last five years opportunities for reducing places had been considered, to enable schools to have a more efficient financial model.
- The mechanism for this had been a reduction in Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN).
- Progress had been made, with a reduction of 7.7% Reception places, over 400 places less than 5 years ago. At the same time, the cohort reduced by 8.2%.
- In some geographical areas progress had been limited, and there were a larger number of surplus places available, with two named areas having a 26% surplus.
- A healthy surplus would be 5-10%, so 26% was being highlighted as a concern.

Martin Wilby informed the Panel of the background to School Planning Areas and explained that there were 23 Primary Planning Areas in Kirklees which were geographical areas signed off by the Department for Education. All schools in the planning area were looked at when planning school places. Pupil cohorts fluctuated year on year within a single schools' locality, so having a larger number of schools within a local area made planning more effective. More information could be found in the school place planning document which provided the evidence base for this report [School Place Planning 2024-2027](#).

The Panel was informed that there were no plans for school closures, but this was the ultimate destination for schools if they could not remain sustainable. There was a heightened risk of school closures in cases where high surplus places could not be resolved.

In response to a question from the Panel, Martin Wilby advised that the majority of engagement to date had been with school leaders, and where this had not resulted in progress being made, he recommended that the next steps would be to present the facts and information to both school leaders and governors, and to discuss potential opportunities in partnership with them. The Panel noted that Kirklees was not the admission authority in some schools as they had their own admission

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 28 April 2025

arrangements and made their own decisions. Martin Wilby advised the Panel that by bringing the report to Children's Scrutiny, awareness of the facts on this issue would be raised and suggestions from the Panel were welcomed.

The Panel suggested that where schools were run by Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) the governors of the MATs were often spread across a large geographical area, however there were often individual school subcommittees/governors whose members held local knowledge and could be valuable contacts for such future discussions. Martin Wilby thanked the Panel for the suggestion.

In response to a question about the Published Admission Number (PAN) the Panel were informed that the National Admissions Code underpinned the national system for admissions, with the decision on a school's PAN made by the admission authority. Martin Wilby advised the Panel that for community and voluntary controlled schools the Council was the admission authority, although schools were engaged with prior to any proposed changes to PAN. Academies, voluntary aided schools and Trusts were their own admission authorities and complied with the same admissions code. The Published Admission Number (PAN) determined the number of pupils admitted at a usual point of entry, for example into Reception for Primary Schools. The most financially efficient PAN would be 30 or multiples of 30.

Jo-Anne Sanders, Head of Learning and Early Support, advised the Panel that:

- Some smaller schools worked creatively to differentiate the curriculum with PANs that differed from the usual model of 30 per year group.
- Schools needed to be financially sustainable to enable them to provide a high quality of education.
- The birth rate was falling nationally, while a bulge of pupils were passing through the secondary system.
- Engagement was taking place with secondary schools; there were opportunities to use surplus space for Additional Resourced Provisions, or satellites for special schools.
- The service was exploring how the school estate could be used to the greatest effect and seeking creative solutions to the issue of surplus places.

The Panel asked for reassurance that the Council had planned for any further significant drops in birth rate. Jo-Anne Sanders informed the Panel that the Council met its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places by using detailed information on birth rates from the NHS, tracking patterns of pupil movement and taking into account factors that impacted on demand such as house building, to ensure the right number of places were available. Schools had the opportunity to join together by federating, and to look at different ways to be as effective and efficient as possible; all avenues would be explored with stakeholders before closures would be considered.

In answer to a question about potential timescales where schools may change their PAN significantly, Martin Wilby advised the Panel that the significant change procedure outlined in the admission code would be followed, which specified a window between October and January for consultation to take place for planned changes for the September the following year, effectively giving an 18-24 month lead time before changes would take effect.

Children's Scrutiny Panel - 28 April 2025

In answer to a question from the Panel about the opportunities around Alternative Resource Provisions (ARPs) and satellite provision for specialist schools, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that Stuart Horn was leading on the publication of a document around specialist places, and that cluster working would provide additional insight into demand for places. Jo-Anne Sanders suggested that this document could be brought to a future scrutiny meeting. The Panel were informed that further ARPS needed to be established, closer to where children lived to improve opportunities for relationships to be built and to reduce travel time for children. Jo-Anne Sanders advised that discussions were underway with some schools regarding new ARPs which provided the opportunity for more inclusive practice and that schools were invited to come forward to discuss possibilities. Kirklees schools had developed good examples of best practice, and the DfE were working with the service while developing their policy on ARPs.

The Panel asked a question about decision making on school closures. Martin Wilby informed the Panel that where schools were under council control, the council made the decision, and it would follow the significant change procedure outlined previously. A non-statutory consultation was always carried out by Kirklees where a controversial change was proposed, followed by statutory consultation as outlined in the Admissions Code. Academies would follow a similar process, also following the Admissions Code, and the decision would ultimately be made by the regional director at the DfE.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the officers be thanked for their contributions.
- 2) That the suggestions made by the Panel be taken into account by officers in taking this work forward.

9 Pre-decision scrutiny - Cabinet decisions on the horizon

No items of pre-decision scrutiny on Cabinet decisions were discussed.

10 Feedback from Panel Members on issues considered by Kirklees Parenting Board

The Panel noted that there had been no meetings of the Kirklees Parenting Board since the last meeting of the Panel in March 2025.

11 Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2024/25

The Panel noted the end of the Work Programme for 2024/25 and that the scrutiny visits scheduled during May, June and July 2025 would lead into the Work Programme for the next municipal year 2025/26. The Panel noted that the Children's Scrutiny Panel workshop to plan the 2025/26 Work Programme was scheduled to take place on the 13th June 2025.

RESOLVED:

That the progress on the Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2024/25 be noted.