

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

## **KIRKLEES COUNCIL**

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

**Friday 6th February 2026**

Present: Councillor Itrat Ali (Chair)  
Councillor Aafaq Butt  
Councillor Tanisha Bramwell  
Councillor Hannah McKerchar  
Councillor Richard Smith

In attendance: Councillor Viv Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children's Services  
Councillor Jane Rylah, Cabinet Member for Education  
Tom Brailsford, Executive Director - Children and Families  
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director – Learning and Inclusion  
Robert Fordyce, Head of Service – Quality Assurance and Practice Development (on behalf of Vicky Metherringham, Service Director – Family Help, Safeguarding and Permanence)  
Emma Brayford, Head of Educational Outcomes  
Mark Janes, Chair of SACRE  
Jake Womack, SACRE  
Emma Salter, SACRE – Professional Advisor

- 46 Membership of the Panel**  
No apologies were received.
- 47 Declaration of Interests**  
Cllr Hannah McKerchar declared an other interest in the agenda item relating to the Kirklees Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report 2024-25 (Minute No. 52 refers) as Vice-Chair of SACRE.
- 48 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**  
**RESOLVED –**  
That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2025 be approved as a correct record.
- 49 Admission of the Public**  
All agenda items were considered in public session.
- 50 Deputations/Petitions**  
No deputations or petitions were received.

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### 51 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

### 52 Kirklees Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report 2024 -2025

The Panel considered the 2024/25 Annual Report from the Kirklees Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). Emma Brayford, Head of Educational Outcomes, introduced the report and advised the Panel that the Local Authority were compliant in meeting the statutory responsibilities with regard to SACRE, and were advised by Pennine Learning who worked alongside the service and SACRE. These responsibilities were:

- To monitor Religious Education (RE) provision across the local authority and produce the annual report which is shared with the Department for Education (DfE) and the National Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education.
- To monitor and support collective worship across the local authority.
- To ensure that where there have been family concerns, complaints, or requests to be removed from collective worship that they have had the opportunity to raise those with the advisory council.
- To produce an agreed syllabus for RE for community schools; this was the first year of that syllabus being in operation.
- To provide schools with high quality training and networking opportunities.

Mark Janes, Chair of SACRE, informed the Panel that SACRE met four times each year, and that its membership included Councillors, members of religious and other communities, teachers and representatives from the Church of England. The partnership with Kirklees was essential and Kirklees funded the work of SACRE. Strong relationships with officers and the partnership with Pennine Learning enabled SACRE to help teachers deliver the RE syllabus, called Believing and Belonging, so that children and their education remained at the heart of SACRE's activities.

Jake Womack, RE Advisor at Pennine Learning, thanked Kirklees for the funding that enabled the work of SACRE to provide high quality religious education training and support for the benefit of students and teachers. RE provided the opportunity for teaching critical thinking and remained an important subject. The Panel were advised that:

- The locally agreed syllabus that began in 2024 continued to be well embedded, with half of Kirklees schools using the planning and many used the associated resources.
- Interfaith events had taken place and were planned for this year, with over 2,000 pupils taking part, interacting with the faith and belief panel.
- Secondary and Primary networks had been opened up to teachers free of charge, and networks were being run with up to 40 primary school teachers, with Secondary networks representing about 20% of the schools in Kirklees.
- A SACRE award had been set up as an alternative to the costly RE Quality Mark bronze standard, which demonstrated where schools were meeting the standards required to deliver quality religious education. Advisors visited

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schools as part of this process, to evaluate learning through a learning walk, work scrutiny and a student panel.

- Work was ongoing with the school welcome project. SACRE held a directory of faith and belief groups that schools could connect with, to invite speakers in and to organise visits to places of worship. This enriched students' education by providing religious literacy and cultural understanding, which was at the core of the syllabus. Ultimately SACRE aimed to help young people to find their place in a multifaith, diverse, multicultural society and to navigate its complexities.

Emma Salter, RE Advisor at Pennine Learning, advised the Panel that SACRE connected with and engaged in sustained relationships with community groups that were aligned with SACRE's values and objectives. The Communities Team attended the SACRE meeting in September and Kirklees North and South Interfaith groups attended regularly. Teachers were invited to attend the December SACRE meeting and feedback data was being gathered from teachers across Kirklees. At the network meeting questionnaire feedback was gained from Secondary teachers and this work would continue at the March Primary network.

Emma Salter informed the Panel that in November the DfE issued its report outcome on the curriculum and assessment review, which indicated that RE may become a national curriculum subject, rather than a statutory subject, and in response to that, a task and finish group was underway. By the end of March 2026, programs of study would be presented to government for further discussion to assess whether that RE should be part of the national curriculum. This would be the biggest legislative change on RE since 1988.

SACRE offered an open invitation to Councillors to join the Advisory Council, and any interested Councillors could contact Mark Janes, Emma Salter or Jake Womack to find out what would be involved.

In answer to questions, the Panel were advised that:

- Feedback from young people about their RE learning was positive, and they valued the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions. Feedback had been collected through the RE award and the interfaith events and would continue to be a priority in the coming year.
- A series of videos featuring a number of local faith leaders talking about their faith was available on [Pennine Learning YouTube](#).
- The high quality RE curriculum was suitable for all demographics as it focused on the skill set needed to navigate our diverse world, including understanding, compassion and relationships. Where schools had issues they wanted to address in their local community, specific advice could be provided through working with the RE advisors to implement strategies to navigate those issues.
- Parents were able to bring concerns about RE directly to SACRE, and it was part of SACRE's statutory duty to address parental concerns, however, no complaints had been received in the last year.
- Parental feedback was considered by individual schools as part of curriculum development by teachers.

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- SACRE were working closely with the Communities Team which strengthened the voice of families and the wider community in curriculum and training design moving forward.
- SACRE had produced a guide on faith sensitivities to help teachers work with parents, called "Sharing the Journey", which was available on the Pennine Learning website.

### **RESOLVED –**

The Panel noted the report and thanked Officers and the representatives of SACRE for their contributions.

**53**

### **'The Big Plan' - Preparation for Adulthood (PFA)**

The Panel considered a report on 'The Big Plan' – Preparation for Adulthood (PFA) presented by Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director for Learning and Early Support. The report outlined what Preparation for Adulthood was, as set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (2015) and provided an overview of the work that the Local Area Partnership was undertaking to improve, as part of the SEND transformation. The Panel was asked to note the progress made so far and the planned next steps.

Jo-Anne Sanders presented the highlights of the report which included:

- Preparation for Adulthood (PFA) meant being healthy, having care needs met, educational opportunities, entering the world of work or volunteering, being part of society, and enjoying leisure and social activities.
- As a partnership there were statutory responsibilities to remove barriers to achieving this preparation.
- High quality resources for parents, carers and young people were available online to provide an understanding of PFA.
- Transition from childhood to adulthood involved different health and social care services, and possible changes in educational or work setting.
- The Local Government Agency had provided advice to help prioritise, and develop services, support and sufficiency for young people.
- Suggestions from parents and the Parent Carer Forum had included additional learning opportunities for young people, help with their housing needs and information on their rights regarding finances and benefits.
- A 'Preparing for the Future' event had been held with council services and partners, and output from the event had fed into the refreshed PFA workstream under the SEND Transformation Plan.
- Feedback from young people had informed the plan, specifically with regard to providing for those young people who had been in receipt of some SEND support but had not received an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- The Inspecting Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS) inspection in June 2025 acknowledged the good practice in PFA, including Project Search's supported internships and Real Employment's help in finding the right jobs for young people.
- ILACS identified PFA as an area for further improvement.

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- 'Big Plan 3' incorporated focused activity around PfA over the next 12 months, including a board refresh and the convening of a working group involving partners including parents.
- Positive feedback was given by the Peer Review regarding self-evaluation, culture, the new governance, the Local Offer Live, examples of co-production, personalised transition support, job coaching and the enthusiastic participation of all those involved in providing PfA services.
- Areas for action included establishing and publishing a clear pathway, from Year 9, putting in place collaborative transition teams (transition huddles). Gap analysis and a commissioning review was recommended, and it was suggested that good practice be built upon with supported internships.
- The review team had also learned from Kirklees and asked for the PfA Board's terms of reference.
- More support from the RISE partnership would be available in March, with co-production workshops, training for social workers, and the gathering of young people's voice.

In answer to questions, the Panel were informed that:

- Calderdale and Kirklees Careers monitored data on young people which enabled detailed analysis to be undertaken. It was a statutory duty to collect and monitor this information. Regular updates allowed detailed planning, and informed bespoke work with young people who were not in education, employment or training.
- Successful PfA would mean that young people were physically and mentally healthy, able to pursue their dreams, understand their rights, build toward independence and have access to a personalised pathway to education, training and employment.
- Qualitative measures could be recorded on EHCPs for some aspects, such as independent travel and work experience.
- There would be a focus on transition from childhood to adulthood, involving teams that straddled adults and children's services.
- The Director of Adults and Children's Services communicated regularly about the projected number of young people who may require support as adults so that sufficiency was prepared for the future according to need.

### **RESOLVED –**

1. That the report be noted and Jo-Anne Sanders be thanked for her contributions.
2. That the final report on Preparation for Adulthood would be shared with the Panel.

**54 Multi-agency developments around the Children's Social Care Reforms**  
The Panel considered a report on Multi-agency developments around the Children's Social Care Reforms, presented by Robert Fordyce, Head of Service and Practice Development.

Robert Fordyce highlighted the following:

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- The Department for Education had asked children's social care departments to get engaged in one of the biggest reforms of children's social care in a generation.
- The government's aim was for every child to be given the best chances in life, by focusing on earlier intervention in children's lives, and preventing children getting to the stage where they could no longer live with their families.
- The three main areas for change were: family help, support to children on child protection plans, and involving families more effectively through family group decision-making meetings.
- The ultimate aim was for children and families to be supported to stay together and get the help they need.
- The Children's Well-being and Schools Bill required families to be offered a family-led decision-making meeting before care proceedings were issued.
- Assessment templates were being changed to one assessment and one plan for children, to ensure that families did not have to complete complicated reassessments on new forms when their level of service provision changed.
- Pathfinder local authorities had been trying out these changes and Kirklees had been linked in with them to learn what had worked well and what challenges they had faced.
- Oversight of progression of the reforms was being provided by the safeguarding partnership executive group which fed into the chair's delivery group, and a Family First Partnership program board that had been set up.
- A working group had been set up to ensure that the renewed one assessment plan was easily understood by families, using clear language.
- Quarterly updates were being sent to the DfE on progress made and a quarterly newsletter was being sent to partners.
- Engagement events had been held with staff, and the Our Voice Team had been working with high school children.
- Challenges included:
  - There would be changes to some job titles and job roles. In other authorities this had led to staff leaving, so to avoid disruption, Kirklees needed to ensure that valued and experienced staff remained in post.
  - Effective working with Multi-agency teams.
  - Meaningful and effective engagement with children and families, building on what was already known.
  - Once reforms had been implemented, reviews would need to take place to make sure they were working.
  - Ensuring partners had a shared approach to risk management and a shared understanding of effective intervention.
- Reforms should be implemented by April 2027, with a plan completed by the end of the financial year, although the Children's Well-being and Schools Bill was going through parliament more slowly than had been expected.
- Next steps included talking to HR partners and the unions to ensure that staff were well briefed on any changes, and engaging with staff and partners to ensure that the reforms were right for children and families in Kirklees, and would make a positive difference.
- The reforms would be used as an opportunity to make changes to the things that could be improved, while building on current strengths.

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In answer to questions, the Panel were advised that:

- Partners in education, health and police had safeguarding as part of a wide variety of other responsibilities, but Kirklees was fortunate to have wide representation on its subgroups and buy-in at senior leadership level.
- Tom Brailsford and his peers in health and police attended all the engagement events and were well aware of the changes.
- The subgroups had the right level of expertise to help guide the reforms.
- Police and health colleagues had met counterparts in the pilot areas to find out how well the reforms worked from a police/health perspective.
- Barriers to communication included the difficulty of schools and the authority having different systems to record safeguarding concerns. Education representation was needed in those teams who could navigate both systems.
- Where a child had a social worker, and a designated safeguarding lead in education had concerns but could not immediately speak to the social worker because they were unavailable, improvements could be made so that those urgent conversations could take place more effectively.
- Libraries and other council spaces were being considered as spaces alternative to schools where family group decision-making meetings could take place.
- The local population needs assessment would build up a big picture on a ward by ward level to get the right services and support in the right places, using data that agencies already had.

### **RESOLVED –**

That the report be noted and Robert Fordyce be thanked for his contributions.

**55**

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

Robert Fordyce gave an update on performance data to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025:

- Children's Social Care Assessments – The percentage of assessments completed within 45 days was improving, but needed to increase by a further 6% to be in line with statistical neighbours. Service managers were writing weekly performance reports which kept a clear focus on the overall performance of teams. Where teams were performing less well, support had been put in place, and social workers were being offered protected time to record their assessments on liquid logic.
- Children's Social Care Caseloads - Vacancies in some social work teams had impacted the caseloads of social workers in the Assessment and Intervention Service. This was being addressed through a variety of pathways into social work, including apprentices, frontline students, the step-up programme, and hosting university students on placement. Over the next 24 months there were a number of students due to qualify, with the first social work apprentices qualifying in July 2026.
- Section 47 Assessments - A section 47 assessment was completed when a multi-agency strategy meeting had taken place to discuss concerns that a child may have suffered significant harm. In December it was noted that more than 50% had an outcome of "other" which covered a range of different options eg: a child may already be on a child protection plan or may be a

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looked after child but there was enough risk for a strategy meeting to take place. These were monitored to ensure that children were put through that process only when necessary.

- Core Groups – Timeliness and rate of core groups changed according to the month; staffing levels, school holidays and other staff taking leave over Christmas could impact figures. The aim was to ensure that education representatives attended core groups where appropriate. Timely recording should improve these figures as social workers used their protected time.

Jo-Anne Sanders gave an update on December's EHCP performance data and highlighted the following key points:

- The number of EHCPs held was over 400 more than the same period in 2024.
- 38 plans were issued in December, with only 5.3% issued within the statutory compliance time frame. This was partly due to a spike in requests for assessment in June and July which had impacted the EHCP team and those who provided statutory advice.
- Cumulatively across the 12 months of 2025, there had been 50.8% compliance (issued within the 20 weeks) which was more than double the previous year's performance.
- The new IT case file management system provided data to pinpoint where the challenges were.
- Pressure on the educational psychology team due to maternity leaves and retirement had been identified. The existing team had been bolstered with locums to ensure compliance increased.
- It was important to balance compliance with quality to ensure that the plans were of good quality when they were issued.
- Less than five plans in December had been complex cases whereby families were waiting more than 52 weeks.
- A very small number had been waiting 30 weeks.
- The vast majority of EHCPs were issued between 20 and 30 weeks, and most of those were issued in week 21 and 22.
- Low percentages of compliance could continue into January and February but the partnership were working together to improve timeliness.
- A new head of service had been recruited and was working on communication with families on waiting times, which had been identified as an important issue.

In answer to questions from the Panel it was advised that:

- Caseload numbers for social workers was monitored, and although the number (18.6 in December 2025) was useful for benchmarking, it was the complexity of the cases that had more of an impact on social worker's workload. To address this, nuanced conversations took place weekly between social workers and team managers to identify any flash points and address these. Allocation of cases was being reviewed so that the most experienced workers were working on the more complex cases.

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- Re-referrals at 20.1% was due to a variety of reasons, one of which was that when families were working under a child in need plan, this was voluntary, and there were occasions when families chose to stop the involvement. When a further incident arose, and another referral was made, this then impacted on re-referral figures.

### **RESOLVED –**

That the verbal reports be noted and officers thanked for their contributions.

### **56 Pre-decision scrutiny - Cabinet decisions on the horizon**

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

### **57 Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2025/26**

Visits were being organised for February 2026, dates and times were in the process of being arranged and the Panel would be updated on these.

### **RESOLVED –**

That the Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2025/26 be noted.