

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 14th January 2019

Present: Councillor Cahal Burke (Chair)
Councillor Donna Bellamy
Councillor Lisa Holmes
Councillor Sheikh Ullah

Co-optees Dale O'Neill

In attendance: Elaine McShane, Service Director, Family Support and Child Protection
Steve Comb, Head of Corporate Parenting
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director, Learning & Early Support
Tom Brailsford, Head of Joint Commissioning – Children
Mandy Cameron, Head of Service (Education Safeguarding and Inclusion)
Harkireet Sohel, Head of Service (Outcomes for Children)

Apologies: Councillor Darren O'Donovan

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr O'Donovan.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Panel meeting held on 9th November 2018 were presented and approved as a correct record.

The Panel thanked Yolande Myers for all her help and hard work in supporting the Panel and welcomed Helen Kilroy, Governance Officer, to the meeting.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

The meeting was held in public session.

5 Introduction to Director for Children's Services

This item was deferred.

6 Ofsted Letter to Director for Children's Services

The Panel considered the Ofsted letter sent to the Director for Children's Services following the monitoring visit on the 4th and 5th December 2018 presented by Elaine McShane (Service Director for Family Support and Child Protection).

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The Panel was informed that Ofsted had advised that there had been significant improvements made within the Children's Services since the last monitoring visit in November 2017. Elaine McShane advised the Panel that the Inspectors did not have time to see all the Social Workers who wanted to meet with them but that the Inspector had viewed this as a very positive step forward.

Elaine McShane highlighted the following key points:-

- 97.6% of cases which required social worker intervention were dealt with in 1 day;
- Increasingly, and in the majority of cases seen, thresholds were being appropriately applied for children in need of a social work response;
- The quality of child protection plans had improved since the last visit in July 2018;
- The recently established risk and vulnerabilities teams were offering effective return home interviews when children went missing;
- Inspectors found mostly effective management decision-making at every level and good independent reviewing officer oversight at the midway review of the child protection plan;
- Audits remained focused on compliance issues and were not sufficiently focused on children's experiences;
- A new recording system, Liquid Logic, had been introduced which was an identified area for improvement at the inspection in 2016 and data migration to the new system had resulted in a temporary backlog of records waiting to be put on the system;
- The workforce was now increasingly stable and there had been a considerable improvement in the recruitment of permanent staff at all levels;
- Senior Managers were using data effectively to inform their improvement journey;
- The report to the Improvement Board detailed the current performance but also gave a continuous update on the areas that needed to be improved.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to staff and how they felt about the progress and improvements, Elaine McShane advised the Panel that the Inspector had met with Team Managers at the front door and asked to spend time with them. Elaine McShane further explained that Social Workers were much more confident and Senior Managers were monitoring the consistency of practice and ensuring all information was recorded.

Elaine McShane advised the Panel that the Transformation Teams had set out all areas that needed to be considered in preparation for the full inspection to take place sometime in 2019 and an action plan was in place.

Elaine McShane informed the Panel that as a Service Director she undertook to look regularly into children's cases to check practices.

The Panel noted that one of the issues highlighted by the Inspector was that staff morale had significantly improved and agreed this was very positive.

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In response to a question from the Panel relating to the number of agency staff currently being employed, Elaine McShane advised that there were currently 12 agency staff across the whole of the Children's Service including the Intervention Team which was a significant reduction on previous figures. The Panel was informed that some of the current agency staff would be converting to permanently employed staff in the near future, that 3 qualified Social Workers had recently been recruited and recruitment would soon be underway to appoint some newly qualified Social Workers.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to employing agency staff, Elaine McShane advised that the next stage would be to look at decision making around when to employ agency staff. The Panel was informed that the average caseload for a Social Worker was 15.9 and that caseloads were reducing. The Panel noted that agency staff were used to plug gaps in resources and to keep consistency with families. The Panel noted that the caseload was previously between 20-30 cases per Social Worker, and agreed that it was encouraging to learn that the caseloads had reduced.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to the evaluation of the quality of practice when undertaking audits, Elaine McShane advised that better practice had now been established for auditing cases.

The Panel was informed that audits were now undertaken by Team Managers as part of their everyday practice and that Team Managers were now getting a real insight into and understanding of each case.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to the sickness level and number of hours of agency staff, Elaine McShane responded to advise that agency staff would work 37 hours per week which was the same as Social Workers employed by Kirklees. Elaine McShane advised that discussions were ongoing in relation to the number of hours worked by Social Workers and that staff were now working to protocol which meant that if they worked over a certain number of hours there was a plan in place for that employee to gain those hours back. The Panel was advised that the data for sickness absence of staff was not available at this time, but that sickness had reduced and retention of staff was more stable. Elaine McShane explained that the Service was trying to create an environment where Social Workers wanted to remain with Kirklees and progress in their roles, which would ultimately mean that Kirklees would retain good qualified staff.

The Panel agreed to consider sickness absence data for agency staff working within the Children's Service at a future meeting – date to be determined.

In response to a question from the Panel in relation to what the main problems would be moving forward, Elaine McShane responded to advise that the service had a self-assessment and action plan in place following the last 3 monitoring visits which was in preparation for the full Ofsted inspection and included an outline of the areas where the Service needed to improve.

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The Panel agreed it was good to see the achievements and improvements to the Children's Service gathering pace and noted the significant progress that had been made to protect the most vulnerable people in our society. The Panel thanked officers for their hard work and commitment.

Elaine McShane advised the Panel that the Service did not underestimate the amount of work that still had to take place to achieve an outstanding status from Ofsted, but that good foundations were now in place to work towards this.

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the letter from Ofsted sent to the Director for Children's Services following the monitoring visit on the 4th and 5th December 2018 and thanked Elaine McShane for the update.
2. The Panel noted that there was still further work and improvements to be made within the Children's Service but welcomed the progress made so far and thanked officers for their hard work and commitment.
3. The Panel agreed to consider sickness absence data for agency staff working within the Children's Service at a future meeting – date to be determined.

7 Children in Care - statistical information

The Panel considered a report presented by Steve Comb, Head of Corporate Parenting, relating to the number and profile of children in care, including information relating to those children placed outside of the District.

Steve Comb highlighted the following key points:-

- The current number of looked after children (LAC) equated to a rate per 10,000 population aged 0-17 of 63.6 which compared to a statistical neighbour average of 84.9 and a national average of 62 based on published data for March 2017;
- There were 637 children in care as at November 2018 and around 630 by the end of December;
- In 2017 the number of children in care was over 700 and a lot of work had been undertaken by staff in early help;
- Weekly legal gateway meetings were held, attended by Senior Managers to look at whether children should be in care and Social Workers now saw this as a supportive measure;
- Cases of children who are at the cusp of being in care were looked at in terms of what was happening within their families, what support could be given and who was in the extended family;
- There was a continuing decline in children placed outside of the Kirklees District and the service was working hard with partners to try and bring those children who were living outside the boundary back into the District;
- Actively recruiting for more local foster carers and engaging with existing foster carers.

Steve Comb advised the Panel that it was a major decision to put a child into care and mechanisms which had been put into place to support Social Workers and families had been well received.

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In response to a question from the Panel relating to unaccompanied asylum seekers, Steve Comb explained that there were regular 'keeping in touch' meetings with colleagues and partners who worked with asylum seekers, including the Home Office regarding allocation and education. The Panel was informed that age assessments had to take place with young people who presented in the District and they would become one of the Council's children in care.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to the reasons why children were placed outside of Kirklees, Steve Comb responded to advise that every effort would be made to care for these children locally, however, if children were placed out of the area for some time it was not just a case of bringing the child back to Kirklees. The Board noted that a decision would need to be made on the child's circumstances as to whether it was the best decision to bring them back to Kirklees.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to what was being done locally to create more placements, Steve Comb responded to advise that prior to December 2017 the Service was attempting to recruit an extra 25 foster carers, but that it usually took 6 months to progress applications. The Panel was informed that the Service were reviewing the process for recruitment of foster carers and there was now a Service Manager for Fostering in post who was responsible for the recruitment of foster carers.

Steve Comb advised the Panel that work was ongoing within Kirklees to recruit more foster carers including promotional events, including events held to celebrate the good work of foster carers, eg long service awards.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to children subject to care orders pre-birth, Steve Comb responded to advise that a pre-birth assessment would be undertaken if necessary and a decision would be taken on whether to remove the child at birth depending on the level of risk. The Board was advised, however, that the Service would explore extended family if the child could not remain with the mum or the route of permanence and adoption. Steve Comb further explained that removing children from their families permanently was a huge decision to make.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to the Council's statistical neighbours, Steve Comb responded to advise that the Department of Education (DoE) had defined the statistical neighbours which were a group of Local Authorities deemed to be similar to Kirklees. The Board agreed to receive information giving details of the Council's statistical neighbours and that this information and comparable data be included in future reports.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to what support was given to extended family members who become carers of children, Steve Comb advised that there was a large group of connected family foster carers. The Board was informed that some extended family members could become special guardians and would then receive financial help and a support package would be put into place.

The Panel agreed to learn more about all elements of foster caring and agreed to visit the Fostering Team in the near future – date to be determined.

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RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the report on numbers of children in care and current foster placements and thanked Steve Comb for his contributions.
2. The Panel agreed that details of statistical neighbours and comparable data should be included in future reports to the Panel.
3. The Panel agreed to visit the Fostering Team in Kirklees – date to be arranged.

8

CAMHS Transformation Plan

The Panel considered the CAMHS Local Transformation Plan which included an update on Autism assessments and the current position in Kirklees.

Tom Brailsford advised the Board that there had been a national inquiry held into the children's and adolescents mental health services and the findings had been quite damning in terms of the funding and multi commissioning arrangements and the lack of parity that the local provision had with adults.

Tom Brailsford advised the Panel that the waiting time for autism assessments was currently down to 11 months locally which even though it was a significant improvement on previous waiting times, was still a considerable amount of time for children and families to wait for an assessment. The Panel was informed that the CCGs had allocated an additional £100,000 of funding towards the waiting times which will bring the waiting list down further to around 6 months. The Panel commended the work put into reducing the waiting times for assessment but agreed that 11 months was still too long for a young person to wait. The Board was informed that the waiting time in Kirklees for autism assessments was the lowest in the region. Tom Brailsford advised that the ambition for 2019 was to bring the waiting time for assessments down to 6 months but the NICE Guidance was that the waiting time for autism should be 3 months but there was no other local authority meeting that standard.

The Board was informed that a neuro development pathway which combines autism and ADHD so that parents and SENCO could self-refer a child.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to the aim to reduce waiting time for assessments down to 6 months and whether this was as a result of additional funding, Tom Brailsford responded to advise that funding received from the NHS was going to continue beyond 2020 and that the new referral pathway would also help to reduce waiting times. The Board was informed that there was a real discrepancy nationally regarding funding.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to how Kirklees compared to other waiting lists, Tom Brailsford responded to advise that the waiting lists for other Local Authorities were as follows:-

- Wakefield – 30 months
- Calderdale – 5 years (but his figure could not be confirmed)
- Sheffield – 12 months
- Leeds – between 18 months and 2 years

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The Board agreed that the CAMHS Local Transformation Plan was a complex and detailed document and agreed to receive a summarised version of the Plan when it was available.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to what support was in place for families whilst they waited for an assessment, Tom Brailsford responded to advise that families should be able to receive support and access services whilst they waited for assessments and work was ongoing with PECAN to ensure that the message was clearly received by parents as to what support could be given to families.

The Board discussed how children and families in Kirklees could access the mental health services and what forms of communication were available. Tom Brailsford advised that Kirklees was working with Leeds to look at MindMate which was an online support and advice service for young people. The Board noted that Kirklees was behind some other Local Authorities in terms of its digital offer to families.

The Board agreed to consider further information in relation to what was available digitally when making a request for an assessment and what support and help was available for families whilst waiting for an assessment.

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the report on CAMHS Local Transformation Plan and Autism and thanked Tom Brailsford for his contributions.
2. The Panel agreed to receive a summarised version of the CAMHS Local Transformation Plan when it was available.
3. The Panel agreed to consider a future report outlining what was available digitally when making a request for an assessment and also what support and help was available for families whilst waiting for an assessment.

9 Elective Home Education - Ad Hoc Panel Update

The Panel considered an update on the work being done by the ad-hoc scrutiny panel in relation to Elective Home Education (EHE), and to outline the work still to be completed. The Panel welcomed Mandy Cameron, Head of Service (Education Safeguarding and Inclusion) to the meeting.

Mandy Cameron advised the Panel that the work of the Ad-hoc Scrutiny Panel on Elective Home Education had been very helpful and that she was waiting for the outcome of the Department of Education Consultation on EHE. The Panel noted that parents often believed that EHE was the best way to educate their child. The Panel was informed that officers from the Learning Service went to visit the family to work with them and the school to try and return the child to school. The Board noted that there had been 70 new referrals for EHE since September 2018.

The Board agreed that the work of the EHE Ad-hoc Panel should continue as soon as possible, but noted that a Governance Officer would be allocated to support this work as soon as possible.

The Panel agreed the next steps for the Ad-hoc Panel on EHE as outlined in 5.1 of the report.

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RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the progress update on the work of the Ad-hoc Panel on Elective Home Education and agreed the next steps as outlined in 5.1 of the report.

10 Date of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates of the meetings of the Children's Scrutiny Panel for the remainder of the 2018/19 municipal year.

RESOLVED –

1. The Panel noted the dates of the meetings of the Children's Scrutiny Panel for the remainder of the 2018/19 municipal year.
2. The Panel agreed to rearrange the February Panel meeting to take place on Monday 25th February 2019 at 10am.

11 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2018/19

The Board considered the current work programme and agenda plan for the 2018/19 municipal year.

RESOLVED –

1. That the 2018/19 Agenda Plan for the Children's Scrutiny Panel be noted.
2. That the Governance Officer be authorised to liaise with officers on agreed actions.
3. The Panel noted that CSE Briefings for elected members had been scheduled to take place on the 28th January at 10 am and 26th February at 5.30 pm