

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 25th February 2019

Present: Councillor Cahal Burke (Chair)
Councillor Donna Bellamy
Councillor Lisa Holmes
Councillor Darren O'Donovan
Councillor Sheikh Ullah

Co-optees Dale O'Neill

In attendance: Mel Meggs
Jo-Anne Sanders
Elaine McShane
Harkireet Sohel
Emma Brayford
Janet Tolley
Martin Green
Michelle Wheatcroft
Mandy Cameron
Steve Comb
Tracy Bodle

Observers: Cllr J Stewart-Turner, Cllr M Ahmed

1 Membership of the Committee

No apologies for absence were received.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 14th January 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

5 Introduction to Mel Meggs, Director of Children's Services

Members of the Panel welcomed Mel Meggs, the new Director for Children's Services.

Mel Meggs advised the Panel that she had started at Kirklees Council in December 2018 and had worked within Children Services in a number of local authorities for a total of 34 years. Mel Meggs acknowledged the significant progress made by

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Children's Services on their improvement journey, but advised that the Service needed to continue on its path of improvement.

Mel Meggs advised the Panel that her key areas of focus as Director of Children's Services were as follows:-

- Continuation of improvements and progress on improvement journey;
- Work needed with schools around achieving the very best learning outcomes for children and young people in Kirklees;
- Take the early help offer forward and the vision for young people;
- Support the next stage for the SEND transformation which would provide the right support at the right time.

RESOLVED - The Panel welcomed Mel Meggs, new Director for Children's Services, to the meeting and thanked her for the update and introduction.

6 Number of Children in care

The Panel considered the latest data showing the number of children in care presented by Steve Comb, Head of Corporate Parenting.

The Panel welcomed the information within the report on statistical neighbours, which had previously been requested by the Panel.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding what work was taking place to support children in care living outside of the District, Steve Comb explained that there were a number of ongoing work streams, such as External Placement Panel and Quality and Permanence Panels. The Panel was advised that there was a review system in place to look at cases where a child had been in a placement for some time. Steve Comb further explained that if a placement was not going well outside of the district, all efforts would be taken to try and place the child closer to home. The Board was informed that in December 2018, two children had been placed outside the district for safeguarding reasons.

Steve Comb advised the Panel that Kirklees was looking to build its local capacity in terms of fostering resources locally, but was also reviewing whether the child had to stay in care for the whole of their childhood or whether the service could begin to help to rebuild connections for the child with their families.

The Panel requested that they be kept up to date with future plans around the number of children placed in care outside of the district.

RESOLVED -

- 1) The Panel noted the report on numbers of children in care and thanked Steve Comb for his contributions.
- 2) The Board agreed to be kept up to date on the future plans around the number of children placed in care out of the district.

7 Virtual School

The Panel considered a report providing an update on the role of the Virtual School in Kirklees, its statutory responsibilities and some case study examples presented by Janet Tolley, Virtual School Head Teacher (Children and Young People in Care).

Janet Tolley highlighted the following key facts regarding the Virtual School:

- The virtual school was currently working with 535 youngsters aged between 3 and 18 years old and the team worked with the school and carers to improve education, attainment and attendance for children in care;
- Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and processes were in place to focus on individual young people and how to enhance their educational attainment;
- A new part of the Virtual School Head Teacher's role was to provide advice and guidance relating to previously looked after children regarding issues such as choice of school, access to services or if the child had been excluded;
- The Virtual Team worked similar to a school and received data on attainment and attendance each term for all the children they were working with;
- There were currently 15 staff in total in the Virtual School, including a Data Analyst and IT support and that the cohort of children and young people could vary, for example in primary there could be between 60 to 70 young people and in secondary schools the cohort tended to be smaller and the cases usually required more intensive support from year 9 through to age 18.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding whether there were adequate resources within the Virtual School Team to support all the youngsters with special needs within Kirklees, Janet Tolley explained that the National Association of Head Teachers were currently undertaking a survey of Virtual School teams to see what ratio of support staff there was against the ratio of number of children in care. Janet Tolley further explained that her team were not able to attend every PEP meeting with the social workers and schools as there was not the capacity, but that the team did undertake to carry out pre-PEP preparation to try and ascertain what questions might be asked at the meeting and if the support currently in place for the child was having an impact.

In response to a question from the Panel asking if Kirklees was able to make a genuine difference to children in care with special needs, given the cohort numbers and the demand on resources within the team, Janet Tolley advised that the case studies attached to the report demonstrated that a difference could be made by the Team's ability to work across services and enable the youngster to get onto the right trajectory. The Panel was informed that it was difficult in terms of data to be able to demonstrate what a difference had been made to a child due to any trauma and life experiences that had taken place pre-care. The Panel was informed that consideration should be given to how well the youngster was engaging and settling into their school.

In response to a question from the Panel asking if all schools were using the funding allocated to them each year, how it was allocated, and what would the funding be used for, Janet Tolley advised that the pupil premium plus funding requests would go to the Virtual School Head Teacher for approval and when the Team felt that

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targets were not being set they would contact the school and work with them to ensure that the right support was put in place for the child. The Panel was informed that it was the role of the Virtual School Head Teacher to challenge how Pupil Premium funding was being spent for previously looked after children. Janet Tolley further explained that the most popular requests from schools were that the funding be used for one to one tuition within schools or Kip McGrath (specialised tutoring) for example, but the school and the social worker would identify exactly what support the youngster needed.

In response to a question from the Panel asking if parents were involved in any of the SEND processes, Janet Tolley responded to advise that it would depend on the individual case and the Team would be led by the Social Worker.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding whether the pupil premium was being utilised in the best way within schools, Janet Tolley advised that the Team would not be informed of this but that in terms of pupil premium plus, the schools were using the funding effectively for children in care that schools were usually positive about how funding was allocated and the support that was provided by the Virtual School.

The Panel agreed that the information contained within the report had raised their awareness of the Virtual School and recognised the positive and continuous improvements being made to achieve better educational outcomes for children in care.

RESOLVED -

- 1) The Panel noted the report on the role of the Virtual School in Kirklees, its statutory responsibilities and case studies and thanked Janet Tolley for her contributions.
- 2) The Panel agreed that the information contained within the report had raised the Panel's awareness of the Virtual School and recognised the positive and continuous improvements being made to achieve better educational outcomes for looked after children.

8 Kirklees Annual Educational Standards and Quality Report 2017/18

The Panel considered a report to the Kirklees Annual Educational Standards and Quality Report for 2017/18 – key stage educational achievement outcomes for Kirklees schools academic year presented by Harkireet Sohel (Head of Service for Outcomes for Children) and Emma Brayford, Kirklees Learning Partner (Data and Assessment).

Harkireet Sohel and Emma Brayford highlighted a number of key facts, as follows:

- New curriculum for learning came into force for first teaching in September 2014 for year 1 to year 9; the first assessment took place in the summer of 2016 for the new curriculum in KS1 (age 7) and year KS2 (age 11);
- New grading system for KS4 (GCSE's) assessments had been changed to the new grade 1 to 9;

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- In 2014 match funding ceased to be offered to the Local Authority and since 2015 Early Years had been below national levels; the match funding had provided resources and expert training to early years practitioners and this had contributed to a drop in standard for Early Years teachers;
- In 12 of the 17 curriculum areas, children in early years were achieving at least a grade 2;
- Teachers were working hard to look at the gaps for learning in KS1 and aligning them with early years, particularly for communication and phonics;
- Kirklees was currently 2% behind the national average for phonics, which meant that some children could not access the full curriculum as they were struggling with their reading; the Learning Service and Schools were working together to focus on reading and had put additional funding into this area;
- KS4 mathematics was above national average for Kirklees, but the Council had higher aspirations for children to be able to achieve grade 5 or above;
- KS4 figures have been above national average since 2012, but there were huge differences between boys and girls in that there was nearly half a grade difference, girls were achieving better grades than boys in 8 of the subject areas;
- Mathematics, phonics and reading was a key area of focus for KS1 and KS2 and faster progress was needed for those with special needs and disadvantaged children; Leadership and management both within Kirklees and Schools was critical in making this a sustainable and effective piece of work;
- Kirklees needed to reduce the rates of exclusions and look at how the process within schools could be strengthened to achieve this.

The Board requested a future report outlining progress and aspirations for reducing the number of exclusions within schools.

In response to a question from the Panel asking how the involvement of parents in their child's education could be increased, Harkireet Sohel advised that engagement with parents was part of the national standards for leadership and whilst some schools were doing this successfully, the good practice needed to be shared with other schools. Mel Meggs advised the Panel that the Learning Strategy would focus on engaging with parents in the education of their children and the Learning Service recognised that parents could be the biggest influence on their children's learning.

In response to a question from the Panel asking for more information regarding the match funding that was withdrawn in 2014, Emma Brayford advised that when phonics was first introduced in 2012 the DFE offered match funding to Local Authorities to fund training and resources to support the implementation of the phonics. The Panel was informed that match funding ceased after approximately 24 months and was never intended as long term funding, but had still had an impact on schools. Emma Brayford advised that Kirklees was still providing phonics training to schools, but that the funding was not available to support some of the schools in Kirklees.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding how many hours of learning were lost through exclusions and children being put into isolation, Harkireet Sohel explained that whilst recognising that exclusions in Kirklees was high, it was

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important that the Learning Service looked to other Local Authorities to learn from what they were doing to reduce the number of exclusions and think more creatively about how this could be managed in a more effective way.

The Board agreed to consider a future report giving a progress update on the educational challenges ahead, attendance and exclusions.

RESOLVED –

- 1) The Panel noted the report on the Kirklees Annual Educational Standards and Quality report for 2017/18 and thanked Harkireet Sohel and Emma Brayford for their contributions.
- 2) The Panel agreed to consider a future report giving a progress update on the educational challenges ahead, attendance and exclusions – date to be determined.

9 Kirklees Community Hubs

The Panel considered a report on the development of Kirklees Community Hubs and the accountability arrangements established for activity taking place within the hubs and across Council and partner agencies presented by Martin Green (Head of Localities Officer for Children and Families) and Michelle Wheatcroft (Head of Service for Early Support).

Martin Green advised the Panel that schools and partners were looking to engage with communities outside of the school gates to improve outcomes for children and highlighted the following key facts:

- There were currently 17 community hubs across the Kirklees District which defined the Council's partnership with schools at primary and early years;
- Not all schools were active within the community hubs and there were varying degrees of engagement by schools;
- The Kirklees Healthy child Programme was specified and commissioned with Hub Leaders and was delivered through Hub infrastructure;
- A team of consultants drawn from the Council's Early Support Service had been appointed and aligned to each Community Hub.

Michelle Wheatcroft informed the Panel that the Early Support and Partnership had been launched at the end of January and had been well attended. New and revised services had been launched including the Multi-Systemic Therapy, Family Group Conferencing, Family Mental Health Service, Family Support Service and Parenting and Group work.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding data that showed the Learning Support Strategy was being effective, Michelle Wheatcroft advised that it was early days and that the Learning Service were looking at data sets and that this information would be brought to a future meeting of the Panel for consideration.

The Panel advised that engagement with elected members by some of the Community Hubs had not always been satisfactory or effective and Councillors had

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on occasion not been invited to events and meetings. Martin Green agreed that he was aware that there had been occasions when Councillors had been discouraged to be involved in Community Hubs work and that this was not acceptable. Martin Green further explained that going forward Community Hubs would be clearly briefed on the essential engagement with Councillors. The Panel was informed that some community hubs were more developed than others and that work over the next 12 months would achieve more of a shared understanding. The Panel agreed that regular engagement with Ward Councillors should be undertaken by Community Hubs in the future.

RESOLVED –

- 1) The Panel noted the report on Kirklees Community Hubs and thanked Michelle Wheatcroft and Martin Green for their contributions.
- 2) The Panel agreed to consider a future report showing data which demonstrated that the Early Support Strategy was being affective – date to be determined.
- 3) The Panel requested that regular engagement with Ward Councillors be undertaken within the Kirklees Community Hubs and that they be invited to events and meetings as appropriate within their ward areas.

- 10 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and agenda plan for 2019/19**
Members of the Panel considered the 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.

- 11 Future Meeting Dates**
The Panel noted the dates of the meetings of the Children's Scrutiny Panel for the remainder of the 2018/19 municipal year.