

Contact Officer: Helen Kilroy

## KIRKLEES COUNCIL

### CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

**Friday 8th November 2019**

Present: Councillor Andrew Marchington (Chair)  
Councillor Paul Davies  
Councillor Amanda Pinnock  
Councillor Richard Smith  
Councillor Paul White

Co-optees Toni Bromley  
Dale O'Neill

In attendance: Tom Brailsford  
Jo-Anne Sanders  
Steve Comb

Observers: Councillor Viv Kendrick  
Councillor Alison Munro

Apologies: Linda Summers (Co-Optee)  
Elaine McShane

**1 Membership of the Committee**

Apologies for absence were received from Linda Summers (Co-optee) and Elaine McShane.

**2 Interests**

No interests were declared.

**3 Admission of the Public**

All items were considered in public session.

**4 Deputations/Petitions**

**5 Number and Age of Children in Care**

The Panel considered a report giving an update on the number and age of children in care presented by Steve Comb, Head of Corporate Parenting (Sufficiency).

Steve Comb highlighted the following key points:-

- The number of looked after children in Kirklees was significantly lower than statistical neighbours;

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- There had been a further decline in September of the numbers of children living more than 20 miles outside the District;
- Information on Semi Independent Accommodation for young people aged 16 plus had been included in the report at the request of the Panel.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding young people from Kirklees living in semi-independent accommodation outside of the District and whether they returned to Kirklees, Steve Comb advised that some would return to Kirklees, or might have family living in the area and others could have previously lived in that locality in foster placements. Steve Comb further explained that these young people would have reviews and allocated Social Workers, the Leaving Care Team would also be involved and Kirklees would still act as the Corporate Parenting for those placed outside of Kirklees.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the stability of the numbers of children less than 2 year old who were taken into care, Steve Comb advised that some placements were temporary whilst an assessment was undertaken, some returned to their family where it was safe to do so or to extended family members, alternatively plans could be put in place for adoption depending on the circumstances. Steve Comb further explained that there was a slight increase in the numbers over a recent 3 month period and that the figures would be monitored to ensure this was not a long-term trend.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the recent increase in numbers of looked after children and whether there were any trends, Steve Comb advised that there had been an increase in recent months but that over the last few weeks the figure had remained at 640. The Panel was informed that some analysis was being undertaken to look at the specific circumstances of the children, but that children would always be taken into care if that was necessary to keep them safe.

### **RESOLVED -**

- (1) The Panel noted the report on Number and Age of Children in Care and thanked Steve Comb for his contributions.
- (2) That officers continue to monitor the stability of the data for looked after children less than 2 years old.

## **6 Update on repeat referrals and second time on Care Protection plan**

The Panel considered a report giving an update on repeat referrals and second time on Care Protection Plan presented by Steve Comb, Head of Corporate Parenting (Sufficiency) and Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources Improvements and Partnerships).

Steve Comb advised that this report was in response to a request by the Panel at the October 2019 meeting when concerns were raised in relation to the number of repeat referrals. The Panel was informed that there had been 28.6% referrals in August 2019 which had decreased to 24.2% in September 2019. Steve Comb further explained that analysis was being undertaken to review the referrals as part of quality assurance. The Panel was informed that the early help offer was being officers were strengthening and embedding the early help offer to support families.

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Steve Comb advised the Panel that Professor David Thorpe would be undertaking a piece of work in November to assess how the front door had developed and was performing, including responses to child protection enquiries and referrals.

In response to a question by the Panel regarding what initiatives were in place to support the underlying issues of repeat referrals, for example, domestic violence, Steve Comb advised that this was being addressed by the Improvement Board and was a key focus for the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Board partnership who were working across the District to enhance services, for example, working with the police to create positive outcomes for those experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the origin of referrals relating to domestic violence, Steve Comb advised that academy research was being commissioned and further background regarding data could be brought to a future Panel meeting.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the number of children in care in Kirklees and referrals compared to Kirklees' statistical neighbours, Steve Comb advised that if assessments were completed and children needed to come into care then that would happen. Steve Comb further explained that the comparative data within the report dated back to 2018 and that there had been rises in a number of areas across the country in terms of challenges for children in care.

The Panel agreed to consider further how domestic violence and abuse was affecting children and young people in Kirklees and what support and services were available.

Tom Brailsford advised the Panel that Domestic Abuse Strategies were being produced that crossed over between children and adults and that these could be shared with the Panel. Tom Brailsford further explained that the regional comparative data for re-referrals was currently static and a month by month account on how this data had changed nationally and regionally was not currently available. The Panel was informed that the work being undertaken by Dr Thorpe would look at the whole risk agenda.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding what relationship and links Kirklees had with third sector organisations to which young people could be introduced, Tom Brailsford advised that a detached youth programme had been put in place in the summer which had been very successful. The Panel was informed that Kirklees had also commissioned the Youth Alliance to do some work on healthy holidays which was about engaging with young people during the holiday period and putting on activities whilst also making sure that children and young people had the right amount of nutrition and food. The Panel noted that a report on the Healthy Holiday's Scheme would be considered by Cabinet in December 2019.

The Panel considered a report giving an overview of repeat Child Protection Plans (CPP) where a child or young person previously subject to a CPP was made subject to a second plan within two years of the previous plan ending presented by Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources Improvements and Partnerships).

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Tom Brailsford advised that 70 children in Kirklees had been made subject to a repeat CPP within 2 years of their previous CPP ending, but that a number of these ended after a relatively short period of time. The Panel was advised that neglect was the overriding initial risk of harm category for children being on a repeat CPP.

The Panel was advised that when comparing re-registrations for Child Protection Plans for children who have previously been subjected to a previous plan during their life time, the number of repeat CPP's in Kirklees had historically been below our statistical neighbours and the national figure. Tom Brailsford advised that the figures for Kirklees over the past 6 months had been increasingly in line with these comparators.

Tom Brailsford advised the Panel that through quality assurance activity, Children's Social Care and the Child Protection Review Unit would continue to monitor the professional response for children and families subject to CPPs. The Panel was informed that the Children's Services Quality Assurance Framework was currently under review and when complete would be shared with the Children's Scrutiny Panel for further discussion. Tom Brailsford further explained that CPPs would be monitored including the reasons for them being on a CPP.

In response to a question from the Panel in relation to the ending of a CPP and the intervention long term, Tom Brailsford advised that the Quality Assurance work being undertaken would help to identify the success of the intervention and why a CPP came to an end and then examine why a CPP started again within a 12 month period.

The Panel agreed to consider a future report outlining what support was put into place for children and young people once their Child Protection Plan had ended.

### **RESOLVED –**

- (1) The Panel noted the report on repeat referrals and second time on Care Protection Plan and thanked Steve Comb and Tom Brailsford for their contributions.
- (2) That the Panel consider a future report giving more detail on child referrals of domestic violence/abuse, including what impact this was having on young people and information on the origins of the referrals.
- (3) That the Panel consider a report outlining the results of the research undertaken by Professor Thorpe assessing how the front door has developed and is performing including responses to child protection enquiries and referrals.
- (4) That the Panel consider a future update outlining what support is put into place for children and young people once their Child Protection Plan finishes.

### **7 Early Support Partnership**

The Panel considered a report giving an update on the Early Support Partnership presented by Michelle Wheatcroft, Head of Service (Early Support) and Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director (Learning and Early Support).

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Michelle Wheatcroft highlighted the key areas from the report, as follows:-

- The Early Support Service was established in April 2018;
- Family Support were currently supporting 670 children (as at 16.10.19) as early support status which did not include cases supported that were open to social care;
- The area with the highest number of referrals to Early Support was Dewsbury and Mirfield at 108 (average of 18 per month) followed by Spen and Cleckheaton second highest with 111 (average 11 per month);
- The service received an average of 90 referrals per month with highest number received from schools closely followed by Children's Social Care;
- The Parenting Team had started some improvements to the parenting offer and were allocating members of the team to each community hub area to build relationships with schools and other professionals;
- The Parenting Team would be exploring the running of sessions during each school holiday to bring families together in the learning environment and would capture impact on the children of parents attending the programmes;
- Family Group Conferences had been introduced and were voluntary decision making meetings to help families find their own solutions to problems;
- All therapists in Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) were above target for adherence to the MST model, as reported by all parents;
- The MST Service would expand to develop 2 additional teams, one to focus on young people at the risk of exploitation and one to develop services for children with a plan to return home from the looked after services;
- Kirklees MST made a successful bid to the national Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) which meant more investment would be made in protecting children who were at risk;
- The Mental Health in Families Team (MHF) coordinated appropriate early support for parents who had mental health difficulties and shared information relevant to the welfare of their children;
- There were now 17 Community Hubs across Kirklees with a defined partnership of schools bringing together Early Years, Primary and Secondary partnerships;
- A Youth Summit was held in May 2019 with 150 attendees, the Children's Commissioner for England and the West Yorkshire Police Crime Commissioner attended as key note speakers;
- A detached Youth Offer had been implemented over the summer holidays and would continue to the end of the year; a permanent Youth offer had been developed and integrated into the Early Support Service.

In response to a question regarding what problems were being addressed by the introduction of the Early Support Service, Michelle Wheatcroft advised that data reporting and analysis was being worked up and this would be shared with the Panel in the future for consideration.

The Panel agreed to consider a report at a future meeting explaining how the intervention work being carried out could have an impact in reducing the risks of tensions within families and how this might impact in terms of repeat referrals, children coming into care and child protection plans.

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In response to a question from the Panel relating to how the impact for better outcomes could be measured to reduce the number of children going into care and whether schools were aware and helping, Michelle Wheatcroft advised that schools were on board with the Early Support offer and that the link to schools was through the community hubs. Jo-Anne Sanders advised the Panel that there was a huge commitment from schools to contribute towards keeping children safe.

In response to a question regarding the Youth Offer and Children's Centres and what was available, Michelle Wheatcroft advised that the detached Youth Offer would be in place until the end of 2019. The Panel was advised that funding was committed until the end of December and that a Programme Board was considering 5 work streams for the Youth Offer and that there was a commitment from the Local Authority to provide funding. Michelle Wheatcroft further explained that with regard to the Children's Centre Offer a session with partners (health and voluntary sector) would be held towards the end of January to produce this. The Panel was informed that a link would be made to what was already available in the Community Hubs and need within communities would be mapped out.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the reasons for the unsuccessful Family Group Conferences (FGC), Michelle Wheatcroft advised that sometimes families did not engage or the FGC did not take place, but agreed to provide further information on this for the Panel.

### **RESOLVED –**

- (1) The Panel noted the report on the Early Support Partnership and thanked Michelle Wheatcroft and Jo-Anne Sanders for their contributions.
- (2) That the Panel consider data and analysis on the key areas of the Early Support approach when it was available.
- (3) That the Panel consider information at a future meeting regarding how the intervention work being carried out could have an impact in reducing the risks of tensions within families and how this might impact in terms of repeat referrals, children coming into care and child protection plans.
- (4) That the Panel consider information giving further detail on the outcomes of all referrals to Family Group Conferencing or the reasons why these may not have been successful.

## **8 Almondbury Community School Update**

The Panel considered a verbal update on Almondbury Community School and the transitional arrangements for school places from September 2020 presented by Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director (Learning and Early Support).

Jo-Anne Sanders highlighted the following key areas:-

- A letter was recently sent to all affected families in year groups 7-10 and the current year 11 families to provide clarity;
- Kirklees had worked with the local school partnership to ensure good transitions for those pupils affected by the proposals and gave parents the opportunity to express a school preference;
- An event was held on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at Almondbury Community School and representatives from King James, Netherhall and Newsome High Schools attended so that they could explain their curriculum offer and other school

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arrangements about their Schools; representatives from the Council's own Admissions Team were also on hand to give advice, for example siblings in school;

- Parents were asked to return their preference forms by the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and officers were working closely with all affected families to ensure all the forms were returned, on receipt of this information detailed planning could begin around transition.

The Chair of the Panel, Councillor Andrew Marchington, advised that he had attended the Parents Evening at Almondbury Community School on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019 and that a lot of concerns raised by parents had been addressed. Cllr Marchington had found it useful to talk to parents and teachers at the event. The Panel agreed that it would be useful for them to be invited to other future events arranged for the families affected by the proposals at Almondbury Community School.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding families whose children might have to take more than 2 bus rides to their preferred school, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that as Kirklees had asked parents to express a preference for schools which were within a reasonable distance, this would hopefully solve a lot of issues and allay anxieties for families. Jo-Anne Sanders further explained that it was not sustainable for the Council to provide a school bus service, but that officers would work with families to endeavour to resolve any concerns. The Panel was informed that in some cases there might be an opportunity to apply the home to school transport policy.

In response to a concern raised by the Panel relating to parents whose first choice of school might not be in their catchment area or within a reasonable distance, Jo-Anne Sanders advised that parents had not been told they had to send their children to certain schools, but had been given the opportunity to make a preference for a school within a reasonable distance.

### **RESOLVED –**

- (1) The Panel noted the progress report on Almondbury Community School and thanked Jo-Anne Sanders for her contributions.
- (2) The Panel agreed to continue to attend future meetings with parents regarding the transition arrangements for children from Almondbury Community School for the school year 2020/21.
- (3) That the Panel consider future updates on the transition arrangements for children from Almondbury Community School for the school year 2020/21 – date to be confirmed.

## **9 Children's Scrutiny Panel Work Programme and agenda plan for 2019/20**

The Panel considered the work programme and agenda plan for 2019/20 and considered issues for inclusion.

The Panel agreed that as part of their scrutiny role they would look at how affective partnerships were working for services and support available for children and young people. Councillor Marchington advised that the Panel had been invited to attend a

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Multi-Agency Meeting in Children's Services and a visit to Locala's Single Point of Access at Northorpe Hall.

### **RESOLVED -**

- (1) That the 2019/20 Agenda Plan and Work Programme for the Children's Scrutiny Panel be noted and updated as agreed.
- (2) That the Governance Officer be authorised to liaise with officers on agreed actions.