



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 29th July 2021

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

25th March 2021 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:

Councillor Freeston (in the Chair)
Councillors Abel, Bramley, Cairns, Goodwin, Rodwell, Rudd, K. Swinburn,
Wheatley and Woodward.

Co-opted Member – Maddy Wilson (Non-Voting Youth Voice Representative)

Officers in attendance:

- Lisa Arthey (Interim Assistant Director Safeguarding and Early Help)
- Sally Jack (Assistant Director – Education and Inclusion)
- Karen Linton (Strategic Lead - Skills and Employability)
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy Section 151 Officer)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Rebecca Taylor (SEND Strategic Lead)
- Michelle Thompson (Assistant Director Women's and Children's Services – Clinical Commissioning Group)

Also, in attendance:

- Councillor Ian Lindley (Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People)

SPCLL.54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies of absence for this meeting.

SPCLL.55 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting.

SPCLL.56 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting on 28th January 2021 and the special Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel on 16th February 2021 be agreed as an accurate record and that the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board meeting on 18th January 2021 be received for information.

SPCLL.57 QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public for this meeting.

SPCLL.58 FORWARD PLAN

The panel received the Forward Plan and members were asked to identify any items for examination by this panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

SPCLL.59 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer tracking the recommendations of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED – That the tracking of recommendations for the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel be noted.

SPCLL.60 QUARTER 3 FINANCE MONITORING REPORT 2020-21

The panel received a report from the Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources providing key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance at the end of quarter three of the 2020/21 financial year.

Mr Lonsdale highlighted the financial matters that specifically referred to this scrutiny panel. One member enquired about the children services budget envelope where there was a projected overspend which was not all COVID related. They also asked how sustainable this would be long term as they knew funding had been transferred from reserves previously to support the service.

Mr Lonsdale explained that they had acknowledged issues and additional funding had been provided to the service. Significant funds had been invested into children services in 2021/22 and ongoing demands showed that the local authority needed to invest initially to be able to deal with these demands. Reserves were monitored on a regular basis and acknowledgement had been taken. Consequently, a COVID risk reserve was created as part of the budget setting process for 2021/22.

Ms Arthey reassured members with regard to the overspend previously mentioned. She explained that the main area of deficit was due to the cost of placements and the number of Looked After Children (LAC) the local authority currently had. She added that they currently had several recruitment programmes being implemented as their current drive was to have an increase in our foster care population. This was expected to result in lowering the numbers of children and young people in care and ultimately lowering children's services costs.

Members showed concerns around the high cost of placements for children out of the borough. They hoped that the children's needs were being taken into consideration first and the need to lower costs were not overshadowing this. Ms Arthey reassured Members that they had significantly reviewed every one of their LAC in terms of their care package and they had worked with partners, the court, and the children to make sure their needs were being met.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.61 LAPTOP DISTRIBUTION UPDATE

The panel considered an update on the distribution of laptops and associated technology to support young people with remote learning throughout the Covid pandemic.

Members were concerned that disadvantaged children had not received laptops until January 2021. They stated that children and young people had been in lockdown since March 2020 and they were particularly concerned that children from disadvantaged homes had not had access to the technology they needed. Members asked to be reassured that every child and young person who needed a laptop were provided with one. Ms Linton explained that from a school perspective, education link officers had maintained contact with schools and the feedback they had received was positive in terms of the laptop scheme and allocating equipment to vulnerable children and families. Some primary schools had also reported that 100% of their students had been able to access remote learning.

Members queried what the qualifying criteria was for students to be able to receive devices and wondered what would happen once the need for these devices had ended. Ms Linton explained that one indicator was free school meals data and communication was undertaken with schools to make sure appropriate services were being provided. Ms Linton also added that the devices would go back to individual institutions and schools once there was surplus need for them.

Members wondered who made the decision around the ownership of laptops, they also wondered whether there was any data to show how many households had struggled with internet connections. Ms Jack stated that it would be more appropriate if they could take these

questions away for further research but added that any issues were identified very early and education link officers shared these with the local authority.

One member queried whether schools opening times were to be extended to substitute the schooling that children and young people had missed during lockdown. Ms Arthey stated that no national guidance had been received on this yet.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.
2. That the outcome of the questions mentioned above be sent to all panel members via email and that the Department of Education laptop scheme be added to tracking for future updates.

SPCLL.62 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES UPDATE

The panel received an update on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

One Member asked about the assistance parents were receiving around respite breaks. Ms Arthey explained that during the pandemic, respite provision was suspended, but Officers were currently working through the children who were due an overnight respite and were receiving community respite through their direct payments. Members mentioned that they had heard that parents had been directed to attend parenting groups prior to being added to the access pathway. Members wanted clarification on this. Ms Arthey stated that work was underway, and a clear timeframe was in place to bring panel members an update on the pathway, but Ms Thompson explained that they were currently working on a neuro disability model, which consisted of them working with colleagues to articulate what the offer was. Healthwatch were also going to facilitate an independent steering group that would feed into the SEND executive. This would be made up of parents, carers, children, and key professionals who would oversee the development of the new model.

One Member asked what happened to children who had an educational health plan and get to 18 years old and left education. Ms Taylor explained that educational health places were educational driven. As long as young person was in an education setting/provision, the plan would continue. However, if that young person were to not attend an educational provision the plan would cease. Ms Taylor reassured Members that there were other options available if that young person required further assistance within health and social care.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

SPCLL.63 CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL – REVIEW 2020-21 AND WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22.

The panel considered a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Assistant Chief Executive) summarising the panel's 2020/21 work programme and the timetable of activities to undertake this work. The panel also considered any issues it may wish to retain or add to its work programme for 2021/22. The members of the panel requested that the following be added to the work programme:

- Digital Learning
- Respite care
- Educational Attainment including standards of education received and the progress of young people during the pandemic.
- Children's emotional health and wellbeing after COVID.
- Youth Crime Board – To be linked with the Communities Scrutiny Panel update.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the items listed above be added to the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2021/22.

SPCLL.64 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions for the portfolio holder at this meeting.

SPCLL.65 CALLING IN OF DECISIONS

There were no formal requests from members of this panel to call in decisions of recent Cabinet and portfolio holder meetings.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.