



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021

## **CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 at 4.30 p.m.**

### **Present:**

Councillor Freeston (in the Chair)

Councillors Abel, Brasted (substitute for Astbury), Goodwin, Harness (substitute for Cairns), Patrick, Robinson, Rudd, K. Swinburn and Woodward.

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

### **Officers in attendance:**

- Lisa Arthey (Director of Children's Services)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets)
- Dave Kirven (Strategic Lead Accountancy)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

### **SPCLL.1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN**

It was noted that at the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2021, Councillor Freeston had been appointed the Chair and Councillor Woodward the Deputy Chair of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel for the ensuing Municipal Year.

### **SPCLL.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Astbury, Councillor Cairns and Greg Marsden (Church of England representative) for this meeting.

### **SPCLL.3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **SPCLL.4 MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021 be agreed as an accurate record and the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2021 be noted.

#### **SPCLL.5 QUESTION TIME**

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

#### **SPCLL.6 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.

Mrs O'Brien informed the panel that other than the Compliments and Complaints annual report, that was scheduled to be received at the next meeting of this panel, the only other report relevant to this panel was the dynamic purchasing systems for apprenticeships. Ms Arthey confirmed that this would be incorporated into the education focused panel meeting scheduled for November 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

#### **SPCLL.7 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.

A panel member showed concerns over receiving an update on the Autism Pathway. Ms Arthey stated that there was currently a pathway in place, but an update on the new pathway had been included in the work programme and this would come before the panel in the upcoming year.

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

#### **SPCLL.8 2020/21 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT**

The panel considered a report from the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets. Mr Kirven provided key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance against its Finance and Commissioning Plan at the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

A panel member noticed the costs of COVID and that reserves were getting low. They wondered whether the council would be able to meet their financial responsibilities. Mr Kirven stated that the council's financial

strategy was in place for this municipal year, therefore finances would be sustainable. Another panel member noted the £11.8million overspend in Children's Services and that £7.5million was attributed to COVID costs and loss of income. He wondered whether a future report could come back to the panel detailing the methodology of how this was calculated.

The same member showed concerns over the overspend on social workers and wondered whether it was due to workers' caseloads being so big. Ms Arthey confirmed that caseloads had dropped significantly. Members' made comments on the overspend coming from using agency workers. They wondered whether the Council was struggling to get the right skill set and it was obvious there was a need to improve staff retention. Ms Arthey explained that they were currently working hard to keep permanent staff within the service.

Members asked why there was such a large variance from last year when it came to assessment and safeguarding. Mr Kirven explained that it included such things like the re-placement of Looked After Children (LAC), fostering placements into out of area homes and social work agency costs. Members wondered whether they could receive a report comparing the figures for the last three years so that they could assess whether there was a need for them to be alarmed.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a reports on the methodology around the calculation of children services overspend and comparing figures for assessment and safeguarding over the last three years, be submitted to a future meeting of this panel.

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## **SPCLL.9 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT UPDATE**

The panel received a presentation on the improvement plan for children's social care.

Panel members had been informed by vulnerable families that they felt like they were out of the loop with our services and had not been contacted recently. Ms Arthey explained that they worked closely with a link officer, via education colleagues, and during the pandemic they made phone calls to everyone deemed vulnerable. She explained that this also included children who had not turned up to school during the pandemic. Colleagues confirmed that if they had not been able to make contact, they had visited the family and carried out several follow up visits. One Member explained that this was not the experience one family had explained to her, however, when relayed to officers it seemed to have been ignored. Ms Arthey explained that for officers to make contact they needed further details such as contact information.

A panel member wondered whether family experiences had been reviewed during the inspection. Particularly, whether any evidence had been created to show that the local authority was improving. Ms Arthey confirmed that Ofsted and the Department of Education had spoken to staff, children and families about their own particular experiences. They had a participation strategy in place, where they had invested in staff to use specific skills and tools to be able to talk to young people and families. An advert was currently being advertised for a Children and Parent Coordinator who would engage and support families directly.

The panel had noticed that there had been a vast improvement, but there was still some way to go.

Miss Wilson wondered whether the young people had been part of the discussions for the improvements. Ms Arthey confirmed that regular meetings had taken place with children in care, via the Youth Action Group. All young people over 12 were now invited to chair their own children in need/child protection meeting so that they can manage their own care. One Member queried whether we had any significant issues with asylum seekers. Ms Arthey explained that they currently had a rota system with the European transfer scheme. It was a regional rota, which implemented a fair distribution to each local council.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **SPCLL.10 CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL – WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22**

The panel considered a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Assistant Chief Executive) outlining the forward work programme of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel.

Members asked that figures around agency social workers, their caseloads and implementing staff retention be included within the work programmes.

RESOLVED – That the Children and Lifelong Learning work programme 2021/22 be approved, subject to the inclusion of the additional request as set out above.

## **SPCLL.11 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holder at this meeting.

## **SPCLL.12 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 5.37 p.m.