



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

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

**9th September 2021 at 4.30 p.m.**

### **Present:**

Councillor Freeston (in the Chair)

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

### **Officers in attendance:**

- Joanne Hewson (Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for People, Health and Care)
- Sally Jack (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets)
- Michelle Thompson (Assistant Director Families, Mental Health and Disabilities Team)
- Paul Ellis (Head of Information Governance and Complaints (Data Protection Officer))
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy S151 Officer)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- James Purdie (Children's Commissioner)

### **Others in attendance:**

- Councillor Lindley (Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Skills)

## **SPCLL.13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillor Cairns, Councillor K. Swinburn, Councillor Woodward and Maddy Wilson (Non-Voting Youth Voice Representative).

## **SPCLL.14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

## **SPCLL.15 MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

## **SPCLL.16 QUESTION TIME**

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

## **SPCLL.17 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.18 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.

Mrs O'Brien asked members if they were happy for completed actions to be removed off the tracking report. Members were all in agreement.

Ms Thompson took the panel through the progress on the autism spectrum conditions diagnosis pathway working group recommendations. She stated that a more detailed update would be received at the November meeting of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED – That SPCLL.48, SPCLL.38, SPCLL. 61 and SPCLL.8 be removed from the tracking report and all other actions be noted.

## **SPCLL.19 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2021/22 - QUARTER 1**

The panel considered a report from the Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources which provided key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance for the first quarter of the 2021/22 financial year.

The Chair mentioned how it can be hard to understand the figures included in this report when they don't have easy access to previous years' figures. He wondered whether it could be possible for this to be added to the report in the future. Mr Lonsdale stated that they did have a range of benchmarking data that looked at our position compared to similar demographical areas, which did tend to be included in these types of reports.

One member stated that the £8 million overspend was a significant amount and they found it very concerning that the majority of this came from Children's Services. They recognised that the local authority was getting money from several grants and was concerned that the authority was becoming dependent on COVID funding. They wondered how the local authority would manage if COVID funding were to come to an end. Mr Lonsdale explained that the council's spends would become more apparent at the end of October, but he stated that we were not the only local authority seeing an increase in demand, specifically in Children Services. Mr Lonsdale explained that financial planning was currently being undertaken, particularly for best and worst case scenarios for funding. One member asked for reassurance about the earmarked reserve balance and wondered whether there were any solutions beyond the central government grants. Mr Lonsdale explained that the Section 151 officer had to sign off the budget every year. This authority was very much in line with comparative groups. Several authorities across England were seeing a level of earmarked reserves tracking downwards. Going forward, sustainability would feature in the budget setting process and any decision taken around a specific service would have to be considered in line with the total budget and funding available.

Another member wondered whether there was a breakdown on where the money was going to make the authority go over budget. Mr Lonsdale stated that this report provided highlights and details of key areas of financial challenge. One member thought it would be interesting to look at the impact of the extra money put into Children's Services.

RESOLVED –

1. That the panel receive a briefing note on the services that had received extra resources and the impact of this on the service.
2. That the report be noted.

## **SPCLL.20 METHODOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERSPEND**

The panel received a briefing note on the methodology of how the overspend for Children's Services had been calculated and comparing figures of assessment and safeguarding over the last three years.

The Chair noted that there was still a reliance on agency staff. He wondered whether any thought had been given to teaming up with local colleges to offer scholarships and funding to help improve this situation. Ms Hewson explained that they had considered this idea and they had recently launched the social worker academy. It encouraged existing staff to build up on their existing skills. She explained that they didn't tend to struggle to recruit newly qualified social workers, but finding experienced social workers was a challenge, which seemed to be the same for other local authorities. The Chair wondered why agencies were

able to get qualified social workers on board and the local authority couldn't. Ms Hewson explained that agencies were able to offer a higher rate of pay than the authority and it was a constant battle, especially in areas of high demand. Agencies were also able to cap the number of caseloads social workers could receive, whereas as a local authority they were unable to do so.

Another member was also worried about the dependency on agency staff within Children Services. They wondered how successful the Council had been in retaining staff. Ms Hewson explained that when they had looked at figures previously, the authority had a high percentage of staff that had worked for the authority for over 4 years. Normally, if individuals were to move on, they would tend to do this within the first year of employment. One panel member believed it would be useful to look at how successful we were at retaining staff.

Councillor Lindley stated that the use of agency staff had been an ongoing issue for many years, which was particularly compounded when the authority received an improvement notice for Children's Services.

One member wondered whether they could have a breakdown of agency staff for all areas of Children's Services with comparisons to current permanent staffing levels.

The Chair believed it would be beneficial if a working group was created to go through the council's agency employment in more detail. This was agreed by the panel.

There was a query about the Safeguarding and Early Help outturn figures and how they had been impacted by COVID. They wondered whether the figures were an overall trend now or whether it was from the impact of COVID. Ms Hewson explained that there had been an increase in children coming into care, however, fewer cases were now being presented in court. One councillor had concerns that part of the overspend was put down to not being able to receive money through penalties from children and young people not attending school. Ms Jack explained that during the pandemic it wasn't something the local authority was able to do. However, guidance had now changed and there was now a push for people to attend school and the appropriate guidance would now be implemented. Mr Lonsdale added that the demand each year has increased, but the demand would now be picked up within the system and this would be included within future financial planning.

RESOLVED –

1. That the briefing note be noted.
2. That the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel establish a working group to look in more detail at the Council's agency employment within Children's Services.

## **SPCLL.21 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Skills providing an overview of the activity and analysis of complaints and compliments for the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.

One member asked for reassurance that the individuals that had put in a complaint were fully satisfied with the outcome. Mr Ellis stated that if the complaint did not escalate to stage 2, after the response has been received, it was a good indication that they were satisfied with the outcome. He added that the complaint response also provided full rights to the individual to appeal. The panel stated that it was good to see that the local authority had received less complaints than last year.

Councillor Lindley added that lessons had been learnt when a complaint had been received and it had been used to improve our service delivery.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **SPCLL.22 SEND INSPECTION WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION – PROGRESS UPDATE**

The panel received a briefing note on the progress of the SEND written statement for action.

RESOLVED – That the briefing note be noted.

## **SPCLL.23 NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE'S OFFER TO CARE LEAVERS WHO ATTEND UNIVERSITY**

The panel received a briefing note to review the current offer to North East Lincolnshire's care leavers who attend university.

The Chair asked whether the receipt of £35 per week was statutory for children in care. Mr Purdie stated that it was not. One member asked why it was only for care leavers and not for all children going on to further education. The Chair thought it was unfair that young people who were in further education didn't receive the same support. One panel member disagreed and stated that having support like this in place encouraged children in care to go to further education. Another member added that children who were not in care had the ability to get extra loans and grants if they were from disadvantaged backgrounds. Mr Jones added that when the local authority were given a care order for a young person, the local authority were also obliged to ensure they meet their parental responsibilities and this extra support, he believed this was part of that.

Councillor Lindley added that young people experience trauma going into care and leave them with no emotional capacity to learn. As corporate

parents they had an obligation to encourage young people to go on to further education and he felt this incentive did that. He believed investment was key.

The Chair proposed to recommend to Cabinet that the £35 care leavers receive a week be removed. No panel member seconded the motion, therefore the motion fell.

It was then proposed, and seconded, that the panel recommend to Cabinet whether the £35 a week figure was adequate enough. Members of the panel voted on the proposal, with three for and five against. Therefore, the proposal fell.

RESOLVED – That the briefing note be noted.

## **SPCLL.24 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

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

## **SPCLL.25 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.

## **SPCLL.26 URGENT BUSINESS – 16-21 SUPPORT ACCOMMODATION**

With the permission of the Chair, the panel considered a report on 16-21 Supported Accommodation.

This item was considered urgent due to the need to have pre decision consultation with scrutiny as Cabinet were due to take a decision on this matter at its meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

Mr Purdie introduced the item and explained that they were hoping to undertake work to improve a range of accommodation for children leaving care and for homeless young people.

The panel believed that it was a great idea and were happy with the proposals being put forward. However, they expected to receive the recommendations before giving Cabinet their support.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations for this Cabinet report be received at a future panel meeting for further scrutiny consultation.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 6.28 p.m.