



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 17th March 2022

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

13th January 2022 at 4.30pm

Present:

Councillor Freeston (in the Chair)

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

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

Officers in attendance:

- Joanne Hewson (Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for People, Health and Care)
- Sally Jack (Assistant Director – Education & Inclusion)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets)
- Michelle Thompson (Assistant Director Families, Mental Health & Disabilities Team)
- Vicki Lawson (Deputy Director of Children Services)
- Emma Overton (Policy and Practice Development Lead)
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy S151 Officer)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Others in attendance:

- Councillor Lindley (Portfolio Holder for Children and Education)
- Councillor Shreeve (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets)

SPCLL.45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robinson and K. Swinburn for this meeting.

SPCLL.46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPCLL.47 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting on 4th November 2021 was agreed as an accurate record and the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board meeting on 15th November was noted.

SPCLL.48 QUESTION TIME

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

SPCLL.49 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.

Ms O'Brien highlighted proposed decisions that were relevant to the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel. She stated that there were two reports that go to Cabinet on an annual basis around school admission arrangements and school term dates. The Panel felt that they were happy for these to go forward without coming to panel beforehand. Another report that Mrs O'Brien mentioned was the School Building capital programme for 2022 to 2025. Ms Jack explained that this report was to capture the growth required to meet the incumbent pupil numbers primarily driven by new build developments within the borough. She added that this report was going to focus on Beacon Academy but was happy to bring a report to the panel focusing on a wider remit of schools within this area. Members welcomed the report.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Forward Plan be noted.
2. That a scrutiny report be brought to a future Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel to show the local School Buildings Capital Programme.

SPCLL.50 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.

At SPCLL.38, the Chair asked if Councillor Lindley would send a reminder to Martin Vickers as he believed it was an important matter that needed to be followed up.

RESOLVED – That SPCLL.19 be removed from the tracking report and the other actions be noted.

SPCLL.51 OFSTED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES – DRAFT ACTION PLAN

The panel received an update on the next steps the Council would be taking following the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services. Ms Hewson explained to the Panel that they had now put together an improvement plan to address areas highlights within the Ofsted Report. She stated that they were due to meet with Ofsted to discuss the plan and receive their comments on whether the plan submitted provided sufficient reassurance that inadequate areas would be covered.

The Chair stated that he got the impression that the inspection report focused a lot on the way a variety of senior managers were working. He wondered what additional training activities were planned for management to gain more understanding and to allow them to be more productive to identify problems so that they can be addressed assertively. Ms Hewson explained that they were now undertaking a programme called 'Signs and Safety' where a wide range of Children's Services staff would go through the training. There would be more performance reports and more information being passed on to senior managers and Elected Members. The audit of the signs and safety model came out as not being effective, they were now working with neighbouring local authorities to see how their audit systems work and how we could relate it to our signs and safety model. They were working to refine the audit model so that they could go into more detail on where case work was inadequate and hoped that it would also allow them to look at the turnover of staff more effectively.

One Member stated that recruitment retention had been an issue for quite some time now. They wondered what the master plan was to finally get over this hurdle. Ms Hewson stated that recruitment won't be an easy fix. Vacancy issues were not just an issue in North East Lincolnshire, it was also happening in other places within the country. They were working towards a more focused recruitment plan which would be more targeted. They would look at what they could do to support staff more, particularly around admin support which could alleviate some of the social workers workloads. Ms Hewson added that they were looking at what they can do so that they don't use more agency staff going forward. They were implementing a social worker academy to enhance longer term social work recruitment. The Elected Member asked whether exit interviews were offered when staff were leaving the authority. Ms Hewson stated that they were offered but the up take on these were not significant.

Another Member stated that it was a very upsetting report from Ofsted. They believed it would leave a stain on the Council forever. The report stated that corporate leaders did not have a sufficient understanding. He wondered who they were referring to as corporate leaders. Ms Hewson stated that no one was specifically named within the report, so she couldn't comment on who they were referring to. However, several Officers were spoken to as part of the inspection, and it was not just managers and Elected Members. One Elected Member wondered whether the Portfolio Holder considered himself to be a corporate leader. Councillor Lindley stated that he did not think he was a corporate leader but could be seen as a leader since he was part of the leadership of this Council. A Member stated that their concern was whether we had the right corporate leaders in place to take this improvement plan forward. Councillor Lindley explained how he had been heavily involved with Children Services as either the scrutiny chair or as a Portfolio Holder for this remit. He assured Members that he was fully committed to being part of Children Services improvement journey.

Another Member of the panel asked whether the Council had received help to get additional funding. Ms Hewson confirmed that the Commissioner had the option to negotiate whether the Council needed additional resources. The Chair asked about the Children Services oversight group. Mr Jones stated that this was a matter for Full Council, but he stated that it was to bring senior officers and elected members together to look at improvements within Children Services. The Chair went on to ask what new governance was going to be put in place and how it would vary from previous governance. Ms Hewson explained that the commissioner was heavily involved with looking at the information that supported Children Services governance. They currently have regular meetings with the Department of Education, but there currently wasn't an Improvement Board. However, she stated that all the mechanisms and plans on what the Council needed to do were there.

One member stated that £9 million was given to Children's Services to help get caseloads down. She wondered whether it was money well spent. Ms Hewson stated that everyone knows that agency workers would cost us a lot of money. She explained that sometimes they had no other option, but to use agency workers. The average caseload was now 23, but she added that in the past it used to be 40 plus per full time worker. Ms Hewson stated that if you looked at it from that point of view, you could say it did work. However, she endorsed that this was not good practice, but in terms of vacant posts and the absence of being able to recruit they needed to put additional workers in. The Elected Member was worried that our home-grown social workers would jump ship and go work for agencies as they request lower caseloads and more money. Ms Hewson stated it can affect the moral of social workers when they get paid more and have a lower caseload. She hoped that giving additional admin support would alleviate some of their workloads.

The Chair stated that scrutiny was the driving force to support Children Services. He asked for reassurance that Officers would be forthcoming with scrutiny so that the panel could have an oversight of everything before it went to Cabinet. Ms Hewson confirmed that as soon as they were in a position to do so they would be able to look at the plan in more detail.

One Member asked what method was used to calculate caseloads. Ms Lawson stated that they use the number of workers in the team divided by how many cases there were. However, she did confirm that it was looked at on a weekly basis. Ms Lawson confirmed that engagement and communication with teams and workers was vital and this would be happening. Cases were weighted by complexity and type to account for the work involved, as different types of cases would require different amounts of time. An average figure wouldn't always take this into consideration. Another Member asked whether there was a number they were trying to reach when it came to caseloads. Ms Lawson stated that nationally there were average numbers, but she believed it was more about making sure the cases were weighted to reflect the different type of activity and time needed. For instance, if a child was in a home out of county and the travel time would need to be taken into account as independent reviewing officers have a clear role to oversee care planning to check through the care being given, she didn't want to give an artificial figure that didn't have this level of complexity taken into account.

A panel member stated that when you live around children suffering it's important that we all work together. She said she was sick of just talking about it, things needed to get done.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

SPCLL.52 MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005

The panel received a briefing note following a recommendation from the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel recommending that the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel be reassured that an implementation plan for the changes to the Mental Capacity Act 2005 was in place within children's services and that they would be ready for implementation. It was noted that the Act's amendments were due for implementation in April 2022, but they have now been delayed.

The Chair asked whether this was referring purely to children in care. Ms Overton confirmed that the Mental Capacity Act, and its pending amendments, apply to any young person of 16 or above who is unable to make their own decisions. Ms Overton gave examples of the kinds of decisions which might be relevant to young people working with children's services.

Members gave Ms Overton respect as they could see that children's services' staff often work with young people with complex needs and

need to apply the Mental Capacity Act in challenging situations. The Chair asked that it came back to Children and Lifelong Learning when the Health and Adult Social Care scrutiny panel receive an update on implementation.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the briefing note be noted.
- 2) That a further briefing paper come to Children and Lifelong Learning Panel when the Health and Adult Social Care scrutiny panel receive an update on the Mental Capacity Act 2005 implementation.

SPCLL.53 FINANCIAL MONITORING – SERVICES THAT HAVE RECEIVED EXTRA RESOURCES

The panel received a briefing note to look in more detail at the services that have received additional resources within 2021-22, Quarter 1.

Members thought the report was very brief. The Chair stated that he will make a note to find out what details panel members wanted further information on.

RESOLVED – That the briefing note be noted.

SPCLL.54 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

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

SPCLL.55 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 5.46 p.m.