



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 15th December 2022

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

22nd September 2022 at 4.30pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)
Councillors Abel, Boyd, Brasted, Goodwin, Hasthorpe (substitute for Croft),
Hudson, Patrick and Westcott.

Officers in attendance:

- Sally Jack (Assistant Director – Education and Inclusion)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets)
- Vicki Lawson (Deputy Director of Children Services)
- Karen Linton (Strategic Lead – Skills and Employability)
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy Section 151 Officer)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Jo Robinson (Assistant Director Policy, Strategy & Resources)
- Jenni Steel (Head of Pupil Support)
- Michelle Thompson (Assistant Director – Families, Mental Health and Disabilities)

Others in attendance:

- Councillor Cracknell (Portfolio Holder for Children and Education)

SPCLL.15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Croft for this meeting.

SPCLL.16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest a personal interest.

SPCLL.17 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting on 21st July 2022 be agreed as an accurate record and the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board for the meeting on 25th July 2022 be noted.

SPCLL.18 QUESTION TIME

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

SPCLL.19 FORWARD PLAN

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

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

SPCLL.20 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.9, Mrs O'Brien explained that the out of area figures were currently being worked on and the data was to be circulated once the briefing note was available. For SPCLL.12 Ms Thompson stated that officers were currently awaiting the outcome of the start for life submission, following which a joint workshop would be convened to consider how the findings of the CYP JSNA can shape and inform the direction of Early Help and Prevention and the Start for Life Programme.

RESOLVED –

1. That SPCLL.6 be noted as being complete and be removed from the tracking report.
2. That the tracking report be noted.

SPCLL.21 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 22/23 – QUARTER 1

The panel considered a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets providing key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance for the first quarter of the 2022/23 financial year.

One Panel Member asked about the forecast overspend of £7million within Children Services. He asked whether Officers had a conclusion as to why the service has had such an horrendous overspend. Mr

Lonsdale confirmed that there was a continued demand above estimates that had been built in as part of the planning process. There had been additional resources directed to Children Services as part of budget setting process, but there was still a heavy reliance on agency staffing. They were currently trying to mitigate these issues by the ongoing improvement process. The Elected Member asked the Portfolio Holder whether she thought the budget envelop needed to be bigger. Councillor Cracknell didn't think there was an easy answer to that. She stated that there were several strands of activity that were looking at ways to be more prudent. The recruitment of permanent staff instead of agency workers would help mitigate some of these finance issues as well as looking at placements and the needs of children under the authority's care. Particularly by maximising needs in house instead of out. She stated that it was more at looking how to recognise true costs of services and how we can manage the service better. The Elected Member stated that nothing they were hearing was new or ambitious, but something needed to be done as the overspend kept re-occurring. The Elected Members concern was that unless they received financial help from the government council finances were not sustainable. Mr Lonsdale added that mitigating actions had been outlined in the report and they would continue to work with the service to ensure they get as close to a balanced budget as possible.

One Panel Member asked about local taxation. They explained that Council Tax was down as more families and houses were struggling to pay their Council Tax which could potentially put more financial burdens on the Council. They wondered whether this had been considered. Mr Lonsdale confirmed that it was something they considered as part of the budget setting process. After covid they lowered the anticipated collection rate so this was something they would look at again.

One Member asked about placements and the cost of the ones going out of area. They wondered whether there was a dedicated project team who would lead on potential savings. Ms Lawson stated that there was a team that were looking at a best value service which would still provide us with the best possible outcomes. Senior partners were also looking at every single young person to see whether they were of high cost or whether there was an opportunity to make potential savings. She confirmed that it would be a multi-agency team who would assist at looking at individual children and placements.

RESOLVED – That that Financial Monitoring Report Quarter 1 be noted.

SPCLL.22 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER 1

The panel considered a report from the Leader of the Council providing oversight of performance against the council plan for the first quarter of the 2022/23 financial year.

One Member asked what improvements the service was to make to improve future audits. Ms Lawson explained that the general recognition of the process for audits was now more consistent. They had changed their audit tools on how audits were being graded. She stated that they were now in line with Ofsted gradings. There had been a slight decrease in cases that had been audited as inadequate and recently a small number of good and one outstanding, They now had a good baseline to start building on and a general consensus that May 2022 was the date to count as a consistent baseline

One Member mentioned the vision of Children Services written in the report. He wondered how close Officers felt we were to achieving that ambition. Ms Lawson confirmed that they would do the strategic needs assessment to measure needed to influence the vision

Ms Jack confirmed that the overall purpose of the performance plan was to show a range of activities via the green, amber and red status table. The different colours graded the overall status that the service was at to getting to that ambition/vision. An elected Member stated that a lot of the progress updates was more around initiatives and didn't give a flavour of where we were at. The panel showed concerns that the public had no reassurance on the progress of this service area. Ms Lawson stated that they do have a progress document to analyse whether they were achieving what they wanted to achieve. Members appreciated that there was a document Officers used, but they wondered what the point of the document they had received was if they couldn't identify whether the service was making improvements against the Council Plan.

Mr Jones stated that this was the first time the performance plan had been circulated to scrutiny. This feedback would provide officers with the opportunity to look at rewording the narrative and show what we were set to achieve. Ms Robinson stated that she would take on board the panels comments and work with the service to produce a report that would be more beneficial.

RESOLVED – That the Council plan performance report Quarter 1, be noted.

SPCLL.23 CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The panel received a report from the Portfolio for Children and Education providing an overview of the activity and analysis of complaints and compliments for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

One member raised the complaints around the quality of service they were given. They wondered what actions were taken to address concerns. Ms Lawson stated that a lot of the service issues were predicated on changes of staff and the fact that families had to repeat

their stories over and over. She added that hopefully this would soon be alleviated by the continuous improvement plan. Members wondered whether Officers could see it improving. They did but pointed out that it would happen over time as other improvements needed to be improved first.

One Councillor thought it was good to see the number of complaints received had come down from 2019. They wondered that when someone goes through a stage 1 complaint and doesn't request to go to stage 2, how confident were officers that those who stopped at stage 1 felt that their issues had been answered or did Officers think they couldn't be bothered to take it to stage 2. Ms Lawson explained that responses were signed off at a senior level to make sure responses were satisfactory. The response clearly sets out that if the complainant was dissatisfied with the response, they could forward this on to stage 2.

Members wondered whether they get many complaints from the child or young person. Ms Lawson confirmed that it tends to be more from the carer or parent, but young people were encouraged to make complaints if they wished to. They had an advocacy service in place to allow children and young people to make a complaint if they wished to do so.

RESOLVED – That the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report be noted.

SPCLL.24 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The panel received a report from the Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion monitoring the progress on Elective Home Education (EHE).

Members noticed how numbers of children and young people being electively home educated had dramatically increased. They asked for reassurance on any concerns officers may have that EHE was being seen as an easy alternative for children who were struggling in mainstream education. Ms Steel stated that they worked closely with families and schools to ascertain why they were opting to home educate. Department for Education (DfE) have released a clear explanation as to why individuals have opted for EHE, which was mainly because of anxiety. Particularly, post pandemic and students were struggling to re-engage. They continuously remind families of the enormity of the task they were undertaking, especially around exams and the materials they would need.

One Member wondered whether officers promoted EHE. Ms Steel confirmed that they don't actively promote it but do actively give out the information families need. The DfE guidance remained neutral, so officers ensure that everyone was informed correctly and not misguided in any way.

A panel Member wondered how the authority monitored the education children were receiving. They tend to work on developing relationships via a range of drop ins and making sure they know the service was there if they needed help. Members wondered how many were not engaging. Ms Steel confirmed that it was only a handful, but it became very difficult post covid. She confirmed that they tried every way to make contact.

Members wondered whether officers received feedback from the children in EHE. Ms Steel confirmed that they did, as they try to ascertain whether it was the young person's choice. One Member asked if a child had any concerns was there somewhere confidential, they could go. Ms Steel stated that there were several services that they can access themselves as well as others through them.

RESOLVED – That the Elective Home Education update be noted.

SPCLL.25 SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS

The panel considered a report from the Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion monitoring the progress of Schools Exclusions.

One Councillor wondered whether there was still a truancy service in place and whether the police and academies were working with each other on this. Ms Steel confirmed that there was no truancy service, but they worked closely with community partners and get information from social care colleagues. They also had a positive relationship with Humberside Police.

Members were concerned that numbers in secondary education had gone up. Ms Steel explained that they worked with headteachers to try and reduce exclusion, as the guidance showed that there was an explicit range of early intervention to implement first and a significant amount of governance now got involved. She explained that governance would look in detail at the characteristics of the child. Ms Steel stated that there was a recent change in the exclusion guidance which had changed the process and created an additional working party to look at the mechanism.

RESOLVED – That the update on School Exclusions be noted.

SPCLL.26 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (MULTIPLY)

The panel considered a report from the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Economy, Net Zero, Skills and Housing seeking approval to submit an Investment Plan for the UK Share Prosperity Funding allocation.

Members wondered what stage we were at with this. Ms Linton stated that an investment plan had now been submitted and DfE had

confirmed approval, in which the authority had received full allocation of the funding. She explained that they had been out to market and got four providers who would be delivering the provision for us.

One Member asked whether we would be getting value for money. They wondered whether panel members could have a look at the Investment Plan. Members also wondered whether a progress report could come back to panel to see where we were with it. Ms Linton confirmed that it would be beneficial for Members to receive an update after the end of April. She also confirmed that if they were not meeting their targets, they would increase their providers.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the Multiply Investment Fund report be noted.
- 2) That the Multiply Investment Plan be shared with the Members of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel.
- 3) That a progress report on ‘Multiply’ be added to the Children and Lifelong Scrutiny Panels work programme for 2023/24.

SPCLL.27 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

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

SPCLL.28 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.29 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded for the following business on the grounds that its discussion was likely to disclose exempt information within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

SPCLL.30 CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The panel considered a report from the Deputy Director of Children’s Services providing the panel with an update on the Ofsted Monitoring Visit for Children’s Services.

Members had concerns over what progress had been made following the Ofsted Inspection in 2021. Members believed that it would be beneficial to the scrutiny panel if they were to receive more information on how Children Services were progressing with the improvement plan.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the Children Social Care Improvement plan update be noted.
- 2) That the Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets, in consultation with the Director of Children Services look at the possibility of quantitative evidence, as to the progress around improvement, be fed from the Improvement Board to the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel.

SPCLL.30 REVIEW OF 16 PLUS EDUCATION TRANSPORT POLICY

The panel considered a report from the Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion to consider alternative way of delivering the service provision.

Members asked Officers questions on the different options available on the provision of post 16 SEND children's transport.

Councillor Brasted moved for the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel to recommended to Cabinet that as part of the post 16 SEND transport review, they look at taking a full cost recovery approach. Councillor Abel seconded this.

Some panel members were concerned that they had not received enough data to make a proposal of that magnitude, they also had concerns over whether that proposal would put children in danger of further safeguarding issues. Following the discussion on the original proposal, Councillors Brasted and Abel withdrew their proposal.

Councillor Silvester then proposed that the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel recommended to Cabinet that as part of the post 16 SEND transport review, that where applicable, a full cost recovery approach be looked at, based on an individual assessment being done where necessary. Councillor Hasthorpe seconded this.

After a vote, the proposal was carried.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET - That as part of the post 16 SEND transport review, that where applicable, a full cost recovery approach be looked at, based on an individual assessment being done where necessary.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.15 p.m.



CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

24th October 2022 at 3.30pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)
Councillor Hudson, McLean, K Swinburn and Wheatley

Officers in attendance:

- Rob Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Janice Spencer (Director for Children's Services)
- Kierrah Bott (Interim Team Manager – Safeguarding and Early Help)
- Pippa Curtin (Voice and Influencer Practitioner)
- Alasdair Kennedy (Interim Head of Service)
- Michelle McMahon (Deputy Head of the Virtual School)
- Tracy Morris (Interim Assistant Director)
- Helen Sargeant (New Futures Team Manager)
- Glynis Tinsley (Fostering and Out of Hours Manager)
- Rob Walsh (Chief Executive)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Cracknell – Portfolio Holder for Children and Education

CPB.9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brasted.

CPB.10 ACTION TRACKING

The board received a report that updated them on the action tracking for the Corporate Parenting Board in North East Lincolnshire.

In terms of recruitment and retention, the Chair confirmed that he had requested a joint workshop with the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel and it was anticipated that this would be held in early December 2022.

RESOLVED – That the tracking report be noted.

CPB.11 CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

The board received an update on the proposed Corporate Parenting Board Self-Assessment.

Ms Morris reported that the Local Government Association was providing support to the Corporate Parenting Board to enhance its work. The self assessment would inform some diagnostic work on the support needed. Corporate Parenting Board members would be invited to a specific session towards the end of November to go through the self assessment.

The Board were keen to establish who else would be involved in completing the self assessment. It was noted that there would be engagement with senior officers of the Council at Assistant Director level. It was further suggested that all Members be approached for their input given their corporate parenting role.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

CPB.12 FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

The board received the Fostering Service Annual Report for 2021/22.

Ms Tinsley introduced the report and provided an overview of the key issues.

The Board enquired how it was intended to reduce the number of independent fostering agency placements and what the timescale for this would be.

Ms Tinsley acknowledged the need for smarter ways of working with regard to where children were located and what their needs were so that they could be matched more effectively. Timescales were difficult to assess at this stage but the intention was to work closer with residential care. Ms Spencer added that it was vital to have a co-ordinated approach to identify needs and it was important to have strategies in place ahead of the next monitoring visit. She noted the national shortage of placements and the need to grow our own foster carers.

In response to a query from the Chair about whether this was achievable, Ms Spencer acknowledged the challenges but commented that consistency and quality of care was important and her role was to make sure that the right decisions were being made for children.

The intention to have the liquid logic electronic recording system in place by March 2023 was noted but there was an enquiry as to whether this needed to be in place sooner.

Ms Tinsley noted that a project plan was in place but welcomed any opportunity for this to be in place sooner as it would be of great assistance.

RESOLVED – That the Fostering Service Annual Report be noted.

CPB.13 CHILDREN'S HOMES – OVERVIEW OF RECENT OFSTED REPORTS AND PLANS FOR CHILDREN'S HOMES

The board received a report providing an overview of recent Ofsted inspections of North East Lincolnshire's Children's Homes and setting out future plans.

Mr Kennedy introduced the report and provided an overview of the current position with each of the residential homes.

The Chair asked about the timescale for all homes to be brought to a good standard.

Mr Kennedy felt that it would be about one year. The homes were all in a good physical shape but further work was required around quality, leadership, training and the relationship with Ofsted. He noted that there were positives.

The Board enquired about staff retention.

Mr Kennedy responded that there wasn't an issue with retention but the concern was more around recruitment and getting the right people through assessment. Regular conversations were taking place with potential new recruits to make sure that they remained interested.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CPB.14 CARE LEAVERS WEEK

The board received an update on events and activities taking place during this week's Care Experience Week and heard stories touching on the experiences of care leavers (attached as an appendix to these minutes). A recent care leaver, now attending an apprenticeship at the council, attended the meeting to talk about her experiences.

The board also received an update on the work of the Children in Care Council. A corporate parenting activity was due to be undertaken on 20th December and all Elected Members would be invited to attend.

It was suggested that a communication be issued to all Members, on behalf of the Board, to promote the activities being undertaken during the Care Experience Week.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.
2. That a communication be issued to all Members, on behalf of the Board, to promote the activities being undertaken during the Care Experience Week

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 4.53 p.m.