



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 14th March 2024.

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

25th January 2024 at 4.30pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)
Councillors Beasant, Boyd, Brasted, Croft, Downes, Goodwin, Patrick and Westcott.

Co-opted Member: Reverend Ian Robinson (Church of England) and Carole Harrison (Trade Union)

Officers in attendance:

- Samantha Colley (Deputy Service Director Integrated Front Door and Children's Services)
- Paul Cowling (Service Director Children's Regulated Services)
- Lauren King (Integrated Care Board Commissioning Lead – Families, Mental Health and Disabilities)
- Ann-Marie Matson (Director of Children Services)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Jenni Steel (Head of Pupil Support)
- Charlene Sykes (Service Director Safeguarding Children, Youth Justice and Family Help)
- Rebecca Taylor (Head of SEND and Inclusion)
- Michelle Thompson (Integrated Care Board Assistant Director – Families, Mental Health and Disabilities)
- Tracey Urquhart (Consultant Clinical Psychologist/Clinical Lead)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)

Others in attendance:

- Councillor Cracknell (Portfolio Holder for Children and Education)

One member of the public was in attendance.

SPCLL.54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Astbury 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 held on 16th November 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

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 the panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure. Mrs O'Brien mentioned the Special Educational Needs Disability and Alternative Provision Strategy (SENDAP) Strategy, SENDAP Sufficiency Strategy and SENDAP Joint Commissioning Strategy were on the Forward Plan to be received by Cabinet in March 2024. She confirmed that conversations had already been had to make sure they came to scrutiny beforehand.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

SPCLL.59 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel considered a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer tracking the recommendations of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel. Members were content with the update they received as part of this report.

RESOLVED – That SPCLL.4 be removed from the tracking report and all remaining items be noted.

SPCLL.60 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

The panel considered a report from the Director of Children's Services providing the panel with an update on the performance and implementation of the transformation programme that would deliver the Improvement Plan.

One Member asked when we may notice a reduction in finances. Ms Matson explained that they were currently looking at recruitment to make sure we had robust employment. The sufficiency strategy's local offer needed to enable children to be looked after in this community, but an increase on control of financial spend needed to be implemented. She added that it would take a number of years to show that the authority's finances were incrementally coming down. This was linked to the number of children that were currently in high cost provisions out of the area.

Another Member asked if we still had too many boards and, if so, whether we were starting to reduce them. Ms Matson explained that they were currently doing a piece of work to look at the service's current governance structure and part of it was to look at the board element. She stated that there were a number of statutory boards that the authority needed to maintain, but it was also to look at groups attached to these boards to see whether they were the right meetings happening with the right people. She added that it was about maximising the workforce capacity and making sure the right conversations were being had.

One Councillor showed concerns over the local offer for care leavers and how a job advert was withdrawn for a care leaver officer. They wondered whether care leavers were receiving the right support. Ms Matson confirmed that there has been an internal advert and that the care leaver offer would be reviewed. She stated that their priority was to support care leavers and ensure a robust offer was in place.

One Elected Member asked if modular housing was still going ahead. Ms Matson stated that this was part of the sufficiency strategy work. They were looking how they could best work with housing providers. Mr Cowling explained that they were looking at the authorities' whole offer to care leavers, including a range of accommodations. He stated that they were making sure that they remained as part of the community.

Reverend Robinson asked how long they support individuals after they had left care. Mr Cowling confirmed that it was for as long as they needed it, but generally, support was provided until 21 years old, and is also offered to 25.

One Councillor wondered whether Officers were aware of the number of children who were currently in alternative provision or home educated and were not receiving a good provision. Ms Steel reassured Members that a significant amount of work was currently happening. School leaders, the police and health professionals all identify hot spots across the town where individuals not in provision hang out. Ms Steel confirmed that there was a qualified teacher whose sole role was to go in and ascertain the quality of support these children were getting.

Another councillor commented on how they historically had been told about staff attainment and the cost and lack of quality the services had. They wondered what could be done differently. Ms Matson explained that

they had looked at what was happening in the Yorkshire and Humberside region around retention of staff. She added that a whole piece of work, in terms of social workers, was being implemented. There had already been a refresh of salary to ensure we were competitive, in terms of increasing the salary and increasing what was expected within the role. They had also launched a progression criterion to help applicants see how their professional development could be progressed. This could help create ambitious social workers who potentially could be managers of the future. They currently had received success with refreshing recruitment campaigns and recently employed three full time permanent social workers. They were now looking at a package with Hull University to enable a scheme which encouraged individuals to want to work in North East Lincolnshire. Ms Matson added that when these new employees do arrive, they want to make sure the high-quality offer was followed through, particularly through service management. She stated that there was still lots to do but work had started and would be reviewed. The hope was to grow our own which would in turn invest in local residents.

An Elected Member asked how we advertised our Fostering Service. Ms Matson explained that this would be part of the Sufficiency Strategy and were looking at a delivery and recruitment plan to get the right message out there. They needed to focus on how they re-branded and re-focused to make fostering look more attractive. Mr Cowling added that work had already started on this, and they had started to look at a lot of different ways to do this. The Elected Member wondered if Officers could state the timescales of an assessment being completed. Ms Matson stated that it would take time as part of a formal process for example, to undertake initial checks and complete a full holistic assessment. The immediate need was to get the fostering campaign out there. The Chair added that the Fostering Workshop Members had requested would give the panel a better opportunity to look at this in more detail. One Member said they were looking forward to the different ways they would take forward advertising. They wondered how Officers would work with individual households to break the myth of who can and can't be a foster carer and those who were dealing with difficult situations. Ms Matson stated that there would be a support package around fostering, which was critical to have as they would only be able to retain carers if the package of support was right around them.

One Panel Member mentioned the difficulties they had with attendance at schools, particularly ones that were regularly not attending. They wondered how the local authority was working to support schools and how closely they worked with secondary schools. Ms Steel confirmed that there were always regular meetings happening to discuss these types of matters. Officers attend every school and look at registers. There was a tremendous amount of work that went into this, and it was on the forefront of all schools' agendas. It affects the school, so they were very proactive in wanting to do something about it.

One Member wondered whether we receive any feedback on why foster carers were leaving. Ms Matson confirmed that morale was mixed. Some

felt that they were well supported. They now had the opportunity to strengthen that for other carers, but that had to be in partnership with the service. They were competing with high cost fostering agencies and the local authority needed to look at how we position ourselves within the local marketplace.

Members were worried that schools would push for non-attendees to go for home schooling. Officers work hard to help parents who elect for their children to be home educated to understand what this would entail. It may be that there was work that needed to be done to enable that child to go back into mainstream education. Ms Steel stated that at the earliest opportunity Officers would always try to talk to parents to understand why they were making such a choice. She reassured Members that parents get advised right from the start.

RESOLVED – That the Children Services Improvement Journey report be noted.

SPCLL.61 THE INTEGRATED FRONT DOOR IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

The panel considered a report from the Director of Children's Services on the Integrated Front Door improvement journey, and the changes made since the last report.

One Member asked how much more effective this service had been, particularly the quality service users have been receiving. Ms Sykes explained that it had been positive. Children were receiving the right help at the earliest stage after receiving a referral.

A Member asked if we now got a wider range of referrals. Ms Sykes confirmed that the police were currently the dominant referrer, but reassured Members that referrals they were now receiving were right and the quality was better.

Reverend Robinson stated that he valued the opportunity to visit this service. It gave him confidence in what they were doing. The Commissioner mentioned the Officers moral and when he was there, he could tell there was a very positive atmosphere. The level of motivation and passion was great now there was a stable and permanent workforce.

One Councillor found the visit interesting. They wondered how far away this service was from being rated by Ofsted as good/outstanding. Ms Sykes explained that Ofsted didn't focus on one area, but it was certainly making some progress in the context of there still needing further improvement. Ms Matson added that they had now ensured that the senior leadership workforce that was now in place were permanent and had the skills and experience the service needed. They moved at pace for the restructure to be implemented to make sure they had the right management structure in place so that the children received the quality of support the children needed.

RESOLVED – That the Integrated Front Door Improvement Journey report be noted.

SPCLL.62 APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION WRAPAROUND CHILDCARE PROGRAMME FUNDING

The panel received a report from the Director of Children's Services on the government's new National Wraparound Childcare (WAC) Programme.

One Councillor asked about the demand for a wraparound provision. They wondered how we knew what the need was. Training sessions had been offered to all schools so they understood their duties in relation to WAC, and then determine what the need would be and the implications for their setting.

RESOLVED – That the approval and acceptance of the Department for Education wraparound childcare programme funding report be noted.

SPCLL.63 SPECIALIST EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES - PROGRESS OF AWARDED SPECIALIST FREE SCHOOL

The panel received a report from the Director of Children's Services to update the panel on the awarded specialist free school.

One Member commented on how it was necessary to bring children back to their local area. They wondered whether the specialist school would be sufficient enough to bring back all children back to the area or would there always be a need for children to go out of area. Ms Matson explained that there would always be potential for a small number of children whose needs were so complex that would need to be met outside the local authority. The Members asked if it would be less than 10. Ms Matson stated that it was too hard to put a number to it.

The Chair asked if the timeline for completion was still on track. Ms Taylor confirmed that they were still on track to meet Department for Education (DfE) timescales. The application for the trust to sponsor the new school had been submitted. She confirmed that it would all be under contract management by the local authority.

One Member asked if there had been any interest from trusts. Ms Taylor stated that two trusts had been interested but there was a national DfE process to decide on who would be awarded it.

One Member asked if the new school would take children from out of area. Ms Taylor confirmed that it predominantly would be for our local children, but she explained that the odd student living on the border may need a place.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update on the Specialist Education Needs Disability (SEND) specialist free school be noted.
2. That the progress of the SEND specialist free school be placed on the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panels work programme for 6 months' time.

SPCLL.64 NEURODEVELOPMENT SERVICE

The panel received a report from the Assistant Director, Families, Mental Health and Disabilities on children and young people's autism assessments.

One Member asked whether it would be more effective now that it was handed over to Navigo. Ms King explained that the report showed the impact it has already had on timescales. They now were able to see children in a more efficient way. They could now decide the day they were assessed and decipher what support it may be that they needed.

The Chair stated that it was good to hear that the support they needed would be decided on quickly, but he wondered how quickly that support would be put in place. Ms Urquhart stated that it depended on the level of support they needed. They now had a local team and they hoped they could use the support within their team. They were now in a different position to what they were historically. There had been lots of development in education, so the offer of support was much wider and there was now a significant opportunity to widen the scope. They were now looking at the waiting list initiative to working collaboratively with other organisations to help work together better.

RESOLVED – That the Neurodevelopment Service report be noted.

SPCLL.65 MAINTAINED NURSERIES AND DAYCARE PROVISION

The panel received an update from the Director of Children's Services on the maintained Nurseries and Daycare Provision.

Members wondered whether the three nurseries were getting a fair deal. Ms Matson confirmed that the local authority was significantly involved and confirmed that the support had never stopped.

One Member stated that it was obvious that officers were satisfied with the support they were giving, but this Member wondered how satisfied the nursery staff were with the support. Unfortunately, Officers were unable to answer that on the provision's behalf, but Ms Matson reassured Members they were working very closely with the three nurseries.

One Member asked about the internal investigation and whether the scrutiny panel would get the opportunity to see the investigations findings. Members were reminded that the review was commissioned by the Chief Executive. Ms O'Brien confirmed that she would ask the Monitoring Officer to confirm the progress of the report.

One Member asked whether final business plans would be asked for in Spring 2024. Councillor Cracknell explained that the report that was due to come to Cabinet in the Spring was part of the ongoing process. They were planning to continue work with the settings and jointly assess each situation.

RESOLVED – That the maintained nurseries and daycare facilities update be noted.

SPCLL.66 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holder for Children and Lifelong Learning at this meeting.

SPCLL.67 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.68 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That the public and press be excluded for the following item on the grounds that discussion of the following business was likely to disclose confidential information within paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 172 (as amended).

SPCLL.69 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT

The panel were provided with an opportunity to discuss any confidential matters of concern with the Director of Children's Services. No such matters were raised.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 5.39 p.m.