



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 16th December 2021

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

4th November 2021 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:

Councillor Freeston (in the Chair)

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

Officers in attendance:

- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets)
- Michelle Thompson (Assistant Director Families, Mental Health and Disabilities Team)
- Yvonne Shearwood (Assistant Director – Safeguarding and Early Help)
- Lauren King (Senior Commissioning Manager – Families, Mental Health and Disabilities Team)
- Karen Linton (Strategic Lead – Skills and Employability)
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy Section 151 Officer)
- Keith Nicholson (Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Jennifer Steel (Head of Pupil Support - Wellbeing and Safety)

Others in attendance:

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

SPCLL.27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Goodwin and Councillor Woodward for this meeting.

SPCLL.28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPCLL.29 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting on 9th September 2021 be agreed as an accurate record, subject to the addition of Councillor Astbury to the list of attendees for the meeting.

SPCLL.30 QUESTION TIME

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

SPCLL.31 AUTISM SPECTRUM CONDITIONS DIAGNOSIS PATHWAY

The panel received a briefing note that provided an overview of our current programme in response to the work undertaken by a previous scrutiny working group which reviewed the local Autism Spectrum Conditions Diagnosis Pathway.

A panel member thought it was interesting to hear the new plans and how Officers signpost. However, they did wonder what response had been received from parents on the new system going forward. Ms King reassured the panel that parents had been involved in several workshops to help with the development of the pathway. Ms Thompson added that as part of the workshops all parents had been able to provide their views as they went through each new aspect of the pathway. The panel member added that they were on the working group where parents shared a range of issues regarding the communications with the system, they asked for reassurance that Officers were satisfied that parents were now happy with the new pathway. Ms King stated that they had tried to rectify all issues parents had initially put forward and they now received less complaints. The access pathway website was now more straight forward, and support services were now detailed on the referral form.

Another member explained how he was new to the panel and asked for clarification on what was wrong with the previous pathway and what challenges they had before. They also wondered how they had been dealt with. Ms King explained that they had now launched the pathway with additional business support and a designated pathway coordinator. They started with improving their communication with parents and making sure the correct professionals were attending panel meetings to make sure the right multi agency recommendations were being given. Members wondered whether the issues had arisen last time because pace was slow and the proper professionals were not involved. Ms Thompson stated that it was due to the lack of up-front coordination. Additional investment had now been made to make sure they had a multi-disciplinary assessment process and additional coordination where someone was always there to answer any queries. One Member asked about the mechanisms for engaging with parents. They added how no metrics had been given to them to show improvement. Ms King stated

that they had been working with ten families from the start of the journey through the pathway. They were not yet at the end of their journey, so results were not available but any issues that had arisen during their journey had been learnt from.

One member asked whether officers were content with where we were now with the pathway. Ms King stated that they were now two sessions away from a completed clinical pathway. They were due to meet with all professionals involved mid-November to go through how they felt the process had gone.

Another panel member wondered whether parents and children have been part of putting the new pathway together. Ms King reiterated how they had been tracking ten families and had been given evaluation forms to fill in throughout the process. They had been part of the outcomes approach and had proposed some questions to be part of the new referrals model. There were also ten schools involved as part of the pilot scheme and other schools had received all the information they need through different portals, i.e. a SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) newsletter.

RESOLVED - That the update be noted.

SPCLL.32 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.33 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.

One Member raised issues over the 16-21 supported accommodation tracking subject. They stated that when this item was presented at the last meeting, they were informed how there was a need for 16-21 support accommodation and how a third-party agency had come forward, but then since then a significant u-turn had taken place and panel members were informed that it was now okay for internal resources to be used. Ms Shearwood appreciated where Members were coming from. She explained that after a sufficiency analysis they concluded that there was no need to go to external providers.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.

2. That the completed actions SPCLL.49, SPCLL.20 and the recommendations for the Autism Spectrum Conditions Diagnosis Pathway working group be removed from the tracking report.

SPCLL.34 COUNCIL PLAN

The panel received the Council Plan, as referred by Cabinet on 8th September 2021, seeking engagement and feedback prior to Full Council adoption.

A panel member thought that the report consisted of a very broad outline for Children's Services. Ms Shearwood explained how the plan was there to give members information on what was new to Children's Services and its ambitions. It had been generalised with what Children's Services was expected to do. She added that the strategy would be implemented shortly. Members welcome early intervention but stated how it was not new. They added that they would welcome metrics on what the council wanted to achieve.

Members wondered whether specific work had been done with the community to develop specific strategies included within the report, particularly in terms of housing. Ms Shearwood stated that they were working with a number of partners and health colleagues to look at how we can improve our services. Members stated that if residents were asked to engage it would help develop a pride to the environment. Ms Shearwood stated that they had engaged in a community-based work programme working alongside the community safety partnership scheme using a partnership approach. Members were concerned that nothing was moving forward. They asked what partners had been approached. Ms Shearwood stated that they had been working with youth offending, community outreach workers, early help workers and through statutory intervention via social workers. One Member recommended officers to work with East Marsh United who were based on the East Marsh, they added how they would be able to provide all the information they needed about that neighbourhood.

RESOLVED – That the briefing note and draft council plan be noted.

SPCLL.35 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2021/22 - QUARTER 2

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

A panel member commented that the £4.3 million overspend was a big concern. While it was not unknown to dip into contingency funds, this was not a good resolution for the long haul. They asked how confident officers were that a balanced position would be achieved at the end of the financial year. Mr Lonsdale stated that there were discretionary spending controls in place to reduce any shortfall. They would look at non recurrent

measures to balance the budget. The next financial year was currently going through the process where a range of options would be put forward. He added that if they were unable to balance the budget, they would look at other mechanisms.

A member wondered whether the council would be expecting the same level of revenue support grants compared to previous years. They asked for reassurance that slippage would not impact on bringing revenue locally in the future. Mr Lonsdale stated that they had always given a clear message in terms of the council's direction of travel. They were always keeping a keen eye on the delivery of the capital programme.

One Member wondered whether officers were stating that the money the council had received to cover issues around COVID wasn't enough. Mr Lonsdale stated that in terms of the current financial year, there had been several specific challenges. Specifically, around the level of demand in social care and recruitment issues. Issues like this were leading to the shortfall. The significant funds received in terms of COVID were used last year in the first year of the pandemic, but there had been longer term impacts due to COVID across a range of services.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.36 VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHER ANNUAL REPORT 2021

The panel received the Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2021.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.37 NEETS UPDATE

The panel received a presentation updating the panel on young people who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

One member asked about the percentage of not knowns decreasing. They wondered whether Ms Linton could tell them a bit more about the category as it was concerning to see that they had young people that they did not have data on. Ms Linton explained that it was a snapshot in time and that tracking continued to establish the current situation, adding that it was not that we did not know about them, it was more around whether they had moved house and not told us the new address. Work was undertaken with other agencies to establish a current address so it was not that they were not known forever, but just for that moment in time.

One Member stated how encouraging it was that local employers take people on that were struggling. It was not easy to get a job and, with there being a lot of demand for jobs, rejections can impact on people's wellbeing, especially if someone comes from a difficult background. Ms Linton stated that traineeships offer a young person the opportunity to build their employability skills whilst undertaking work experience with a local employer. She explained that some were getting appointed as part

of the kickstart scheme which was aimed at young people between 16 and 24.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.38 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The panel received an update on Elective Home Education.

Councillor Lindley stated that when this last came to panel, members asked him to write to the Secretary of State to ask for the Department of Education guidance to be reviewed. He explained how this was completed but the response was not fantastic. He stated that since there had been a significant rise in elective home education, he wondered whether the panel would like him to write to the local MP who could lobby on their behalf to get the Department for Education guidance reviewed. He was concerned that the guidance was 15 years old, and we were working in a very different way to what we were then.

RESOLVED –

1. That the briefing note be noted.
2. That the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, and Skills write to the local MPs to ask for them to lobby, on the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel's behalf, to review the Department of Education's guidance on elective home education.

SPCLL.39 SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS

The panel received an update on school exclusions.

Members of the panel asked for clarification on what type of behaviour would warrant a permanent exclusion. Ms Steel confirmed that it would be a very high-end incident, i.e. serious assault on staff/peers, use of drugs or a weapon. Ms Steel confirmed that they did work hard with schools to make sure early intervention took place so incidents like this did not happen. One member asked what measures were in place to try and stop permanent exclusions. Ms Steel confirmed that they had a behaviour and attendance collaborative process where they hold a meeting once a week to consider young people who may be at risk of permanent exclusion. This was then reported back to the school to offer further support to that young person.

RESOLVED – That the briefing note be noted.

SPCLL.40 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

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

SPCLL.41 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 6.30 p.m.