



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 16th March 2023.

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

17th November 2022 at 4.30pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)

Councillors Abel, Boyd, Brasted, Hudson, Patrick, Westcott and Wheatley
(substitute for Goodwin).

Co-opted Member: Reverend Ian Robinson

Officers in attendance:

- Janice Spencer (Director of Children's Services)
- Sally Jack (Assistant Director – Education and Inclusion)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law and Governance)
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy Section 151 Officer)
- Michelle Thompson (Assistant Director – Families, Mental Health and Disabilities)
- Paul Caswell (Head of Young and Safe and Statutory Youth Justice Services)
- Drew Hughes (Head of Transformation, Policy, Strategy and Resources)
- Gemma Dabb (Commissioning Manager Families Mental Health and Disabilities)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)
- Joanne Paterson (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Others in attendance:

- Councillor Cracknell (Portfolio Holder for Children and Education)
- Councillor Stan Shreeve (Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care)

One Member of the press was in attendance.

SPCLL.31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Croft, Goodwin and McLean.

SPCLL.32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPCLL.33 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting on 22nd September 2022 be agreed as an accurate record and the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board for the meeting on 24th October 2022 be noted.

SPCLL.34 QUESTION TIME

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

SPCLL.35 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.36 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 (children's out of area figures), Ms Jack advised that data had been prepared which was currently being validated, it was hoped this could be circulated to the panel next week. For SPCLL.12 (joint workshop to look at the whole family approach to the early help and prevention agenda), Ms Jack confirmed that the workshop would be organised with members following the preparation meeting referred to in the report.

Councillor Wheatley enquired whether substitutes would be invited to attend this workshop. The Chair confirmed that they would.

In response to a member query, Mr Windley assured the panel that the joint workshop around retention and recruitment was included on the Corporate Parenting Board tracking report and was therefore being dealt with.

RESOLVED – That the tracking report be noted.

SPCLL.37 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 22/23 – QUARTER 2

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 second quarter of the 2022/23 financial year. This report was referred to scrutiny by Cabinet at its meeting on 16th November 2022.

Reference was made to pressures on energy costs and associated financial assumptions, a member asked whether the Council had fixed rates on its energy bills. Mr Lonsdale confirmed that the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) period meant the Council was tied into a rate until 2024 and this would mitigate against the short-term impact over the next 12 months. However, after this time the Council would look to go out to procurement.

Concerns were raised around the £4m budget pressure by 2024/25 due to the rise in interest rates. Comments were also made around the autumn statement announcement and whether there were any implications for the Council. Mr Lonsdale explained that in terms of interest rates, the Council was looking to re-profile the Capital Programme to mitigate against interest rates and this would impact on all parts of the Council. Regarding the autumn statement, given its very recent announcement, officers were still working through the implications for the medium term financial plan. Mr Lonsdale advised that members would be fully briefed as part of the informal budget process.

Further reference was made to the upcoming Local Government Financial Settlement. Mr Lonsdale advised that the report before members outlined the current position, which was unsustainable, and a whole range of actions were being undertaken to manage demand issues such as the level of agency staffing.

The Chair was concerned that the Council had only just come out of Quarter 2 and already had a major overspend. Given that the budget was only set around six months ago the Council would have been aware of the position within Children's Services after its Ofsted inspection. Mr Lonsdale explained that the budget was formally set in February 2022 at full Council and the assumptions made then regarding the budget for this financial year were on an assumed level of demand, the anticipated level of demand was not where the Council anticipated it would be. Mr Lonsdale explained that children in care numbers at this time had stabilised over the past few weeks. Mr Lonsdale highlighted that there had been a significant investment made into the service as part of the budget setting process.

Members questioned the accuracy of the financial assumptions within the report and how realistic they were. Mr Lonsdale advised that the Council had not moved in the direction it anticipated at the time the budget was set. Ms Spencer suspected that there had been some over

optimism and the constant churn of staff did not allow children to receive the necessary support needed at the time, combined with the fact that children were being kept in care longer than needed. It was apparent that these factors had not yet materialised in the budget setting process, and it was hoped the Council was now in a different place to where it was 12 months ago.

Members asked if the overspend would impact on other services within the Council. Mr Lonsdale advised that Officers relied on drawing down into reserves and contingencies to reach a balanced budget position. Mr Lonsdale reiterated that this was exactly why the current position within children's services was unsustainable, and the Council needed to try to reduce the number of children looked after within the system and the heavy reliance on agency staffing.

A Member sought assurance around the Council's Financial Plan and risks of the issuing of a Section 114 Notice in the future. Mr Lonsdale advised that finance officers need to work through the budget framework and policy statement and look at how the Council could allocate resources across a range of services, this would then feed into the formal budget setting process that would be presented to Council in February 2023. It was noted that the Council was already in the process of budget setting and assurance would need to be sought around more accurate financial assumptions in future budget setting processes, particularly given the Council's current financial position.

Mr Jones highlighted that the report on this evening's agenda related specifically to the Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Report. Mr Jones assured the Panel that all members would be fully engaged on next year's budget proposals through the budget scrutiny process.

RESOLVED – That the Financial Monitoring Report Quarter 2 be noted.

SPCLL.38 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER 2

The panel considered a report from the Leader of the Council providing oversight of performance against the Council Plan for the second quarter of the 2022/23 financial year. This report was referred to scrutiny by Cabinet at its meeting on 16th November 2022.

A Member made reference to the average caseload for qualified social workers this being 25 as at September 2022 and wished to confirm if this was still the position. Mrs Spencer confirmed that this had now reduced to 21 cases.

RESOLVED – That the Council Plan Performance Report Quarter 2, be noted.

SPCLL.39 CHILDRENS SERVICES IMPROVEMENT

The panel received a report from the Director of Children's Services providing the panel with an update on the Ofsted Improvement Plan for Children's Services.

Reference was made to the percentage of children reporting that they met with their social worker regularly and queried what was classified as 'regular'. Mrs Spencer advised that statutory guidelines defined the minimum contact with social workers required, however, she noted this was dependent upon where children were located on their pathways and also in the Children's Social Care (CSC) system. Mrs Spencer further reported that the pandemic had impacted this authority more than others due to the number of long-distance agency workers who were not always as accessible, which as a result had impacted on families.

Reference was made to 98% of children that reported they felt happy where they lived, a member asked what the demographics were for those children and was concerned this was not a true reflection of where the Council was. Mrs Spencer clarified these figures for the Panel. Furthermore, Mrs Spencer explained that children were not all placed where they needed to be, and therefore this had led to children reporting they were unhappy where they lived.

Members asked whether anything could be done better to encourage more productive feedback from children through the surveys. Mrs Spencer considered that surveys should be age related and asked meaningful questions to help the Council do things better and differently. A Member considered it was a positive step that this Panel now had some metrics and data that could be examined. Mrs Spencer stated that a number of these metrics had to be reported to the Department for Education (DFE) as they formed part of what the Council had to measure nationally.

The Chairman suggested that Mrs Spencer work with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services around specific areas for potential workshops. Members fully supported the suggestion for these workshops and noted that this was around the one-year mark since the 'inadequate' Ofsted Inspection and therefore this was a good time to reflect on issues. The panel welcomed the provision of metrics at this meeting, which was considered as a step in the right direction in allowing the panel to receive assurances around the required improvement.

Reference was made to the agency workforce issues and work underway to streamline the workflow. A Member asked what the timescales were for this, and what outcomes Officers were looking to achieve. Mrs Spencer advised that there was an Assessment and Intervention Service for those children on child protection, it was hoped that there could be more consistency within the agency

workforce in future. In terms of streamlining, there would be some merging of teams and a new Supervision Group.

Mrs Spencer emphasised this was about having the right support at the right time for the right children, and the Council needed to avoid issues escalating to a point where children were in crisis and came into care by default. Mrs Spencer was committed to reviewing all children in care of the Local Authority to determine which children could now safely return home. In terms of timescales, Mrs Spencer confirmed that this work had already commenced with the first cohort of children in registered provision, these being under 16-year-olds living in accommodation regulated by Ofsted. The second cohort would include those in kinship care, those living with their parents but subject to a care order and kinship foster carers who had special guardianship. Mrs Spencer reiterated that there were certain cohorts that needed to be prioritised in order to demonstrate that improvements were being made.

Members queried whether the courts had placed children in the care of the Local Authority wrongly. Mrs Spencer advised that the court would only make a decision on threshold, and the court's jurisdiction was around whether the threshold was met. A member commented that the Council would not have put children in care unnecessarily. Mrs Spencer reiterated that this was due to the churn in the system and managing and understanding the risks to make safe decisions. Mrs Spencer considered there were more children the Council could support in their individual homes.

Mrs Spencer made reference to the original Ofsted report and understood it needed to be approached with some optimism, however it was important that Officers responded to it by having honest conversations with staff to look to resolve issues.

In concluding, Mrs Spencer acknowledged that there would be some difficult conversations to be had with staff, however on this occasion the Council must approach it differently in terms of the systems and processes in place and ensuring colleagues were clear about expectations, as ultimately children were not receiving the service they deserved.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.40 CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH FOLLOWING COVID

The panel received a report from the Assistant Director Families, Mental Health and Disabilities on how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected children's mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Members asked how Officers felt the Council were progressing with children's mental health since coming out of the pandemic. Ms Dabb reported that there had been good progress on the workstream as

detailed within her report, which had shown there was lots of things the Council needed to do in terms of challenges ahead but the Council were not alone with this.

Ms. Dabb highlighted wider difficulties with staffing in terms of appointing practitioners. However, there were also lots of opportunities with the upcoming transfer of CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) to a new provider, it was hoped this would allow the Council to fill gaps around recruitment. In terms of relationships with schools, Ms. Dabb advised that additional resources had been secured across schools within the borough to obtain early support and the relationship with the schools was very positive.

A Member highlighted the importance of digital inclusion for more vulnerable families and reminded Members that scrutiny had received a presentation on the Council's vision around this. Ms. Dabb explained the impact of schools closing during the pandemic, which had shown an increase in children not returning to education, however the covid recovery funds were now being utilised to support young people to return to education. In terms of digital inclusion, although the Council offered digital means of contact, some young people were requiring face to face support. It was noted that there would be a wider digital review across the Council's Integrated Care System (ICS).

A Member wished to understand how the Council differentiated between whether a mental health condition was Covid related or an ongoing condition. Ms. Dabb explained that the Council were still trying to understand both what had been a direct and indirect consequence of Covid.

A Member commented on the adolescent lifestyle survey 2019-21 which had shown that children's negative wellbeing had increased by 4% and asked whether the Council had considered the previous three years. It was confirmed that there had been an increase of 2% and 4% respectively over a three-year period.

A Member referred to the ICS for Mental Health and Wellbeing commencing in April next year, and whether this would be led by the Local Authority or Navigo and what involvement the Council would have with this. Ms. Dabb confirmed that as the contract moves over on 1st April next year, in terms of the Council's involvement it would need to ensure the transformation still took place in terms of the parts that were not working and look at achievements made and the longer-term vision.

The Chairman reminded Members that as part of the Tracking Report a joint workshop with Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny was in hand to look at the whole family approach to early help and prevention.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.41 NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICES - HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION (HMIP) INSPECTION

The panel considered a report from the Head of Young and Safe and Statutory Youth Justice Services providing the panel with oversight of the outcome of the HMIP inspection report

Members wished to note the positive outcome of the Youth Justice HMIP inspection and expressed thanks to all Officers involved which had been a joint team effort across the partnership. Members asked when the Council expected to see these changes take place. Mr Caswell confirmed that all recommendations at the Youth Partnership Board meetings had been actioned and were being progressed.

Mr Caswell stated that a child-first centred approach contributed to the low number of children in custody. One of the areas for improvement highlighted was quality of the resettlement policy and provision. Mr Caswell confirmed that Officers had now drawn up a new policy on this. In terms of training within the team, Mr Caswell confirmed that training had now been delivered to a number of colleagues across the partnership.

A member wished to clarify the process for referrals through neighbourhood policing teams in terms of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). Mr Caswell confirmed that the report detailed referrals relating to crime and this did not include ASB. Mr Caswell assured the panel that the Council had an ASB Officer and ASB Panel to oversee this. In response to further queries, Mr Caswell stated that this was about ensuring the right service was working with the right child. Mr Caswell further explained that all crimes came through a filter system into the Youth Offending Service (YOS) also, the youth justice service model was being looked at as a whole.

RESOLVED – That the panel receive a briefing paper to monitor progress in a years' time.

SPCLL.42 CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL – WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The Panel considered a report from the Assistant Chief Executive (Statutory Scrutiny Officer) providing panel members with the opportunity to reflect on the progress of the panel's work programme at the half year stage and provide a formal opportunity for the panel to update its work programme.

Mr Windley reminded Members that one of the recommendations that had arose from the scrutiny review earlier this year was to have six-monthly reviews of the scrutiny panel's work programmes. It was

envisaged that this would be done via an informal workshop and he reiterated that this option was available to members.

Members were referred to the panel's work programme and it was noted that the next two scheduled meetings were quite heavy in terms of agenda items. Mr Windley suggested officers review the work programme informally with the Chair and Deputy Chair, to consider those items where the information could be provided to the panel separately via a briefing note or whether it needed to be brought back formally to the panel.

A Member suggested that recent data around GCSE results be added to the work programme for consideration at the next meeting of this panel.

One member suggested the CAMHS contract be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the Panel's Work Programme be reviewed with the Chair and Deputy Chair and any proposed changes reported back to this panel informally via email.
- 2) That recent GCSE data be added to the work programme for consideration at the next meeting of this panel.
- 3) That the CAMHS Contract be added to this panel's work programme.

SPCLL.43 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

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

SPCLL.44 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 Chairman declared the meeting closed at 5.52 p.m.