



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

## **CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**31st July 2025 at 4.30pm**

### **Present:**

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)

Councillors Boyd, Clough, Crofts (substitute for Cairns), Farren, Lindley, Patrick, K. Swinburn and Wheatley

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

### **Officers in attendance:**

- Liz Brummer (Strategic Lead – Finance)
- Queenie Carrie (Deputy Service Director – Regulated Services)
- Ann Marie Matson (Director of Children Services)
- Bev O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Julie Poole (Head of Service, Practice, Performance, Quality and Assurance)
- Eve Richardson-Smith (Legal Services Service Manager (Consultancy) & Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Charlene Sykes (Service Director – Safeguarding and Early Help)
- Rebecca Taylor (Head of SEND and Inclusion)

### **Others in attendance:**

- Councillor Cracknell (Portfolio Hold for Children and Education)

No members of the press and one member of the public were in attendance.

## **SPCLL.1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN**

It was noted that at the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on 22nd May 2025, Councillor Silvester had been appointed the Chair and Councillor Lindley the Deputy Chair of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel for the ensuing Municipal Year.

## **SPCLL.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cairns and Downes for this meeting.

## **SPCLL.3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

## **SPCLL.4 MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025 be agreed as a correct record.

## **SPCLL.5 QUESTION TIME**

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

## **SPCLL.6 FORWARD PLAN**

The panel received the current forward plan with a view to identifying any items for examination by this panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure.

Mrs O'Brien noted the Youth Justice Plan that was due to be considered by Cabinet on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025. She explained that a joint meeting with the Communities Scrutiny Panel had been arranged before this date to consider this report.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

## **SPCLL.7 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.

Ms O'Brien noted the action for SPCLL.72 and explained the response received from the Secretary of State. Panel Members were happy to discuss the impact of the response when they received an update on Elective Home Education later in the municipal year.

RESOLVED - That the tracking report be noted.

## **SPCLL.8 COUNCIL PLAN YEAR END PERFORMANCE AND PROVISIONAL FINANCIAL OUTTURN REVIEW 2024-2025**

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets providing key information and analysis of the

Council Plan year end performance and provisional financial outturn review 2024/25.

One Member asked about the Elective Home Education figures tripling since 2021. They wondered whether this was something they should be concerned about. Ms Matson stated that it probably was something they should be concerned about, but it was an ongoing issue up and down the country. She added that they were having extensive discussions on this and were looking at a standalone strategy to address across the place.

Another panel member asked about permanent exclusions. They wondered what actions Officers were taking to tackle these issues and they wanted validation that the exclusions were all for valid reasons. Ms Matson stated that their priority was to focus on school attendance. She noted that attendance was going up and was now above England's average. She added that their school network was now aligned, but there was still a lot of work to do.

The Chair stated that at the end of last year the focus was on school transport. He was worried that the costs were still escalating. Ms Matson stated that this was an ongoing piece of work.

One Member explained that at a recent Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel they were discussing the NHS 10-year plan and thought it would be useful to have a joint panel meeting to discuss how this may impact Children's Health Services.

An Elected Member asked about Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans and whether officers were expecting figures to come down. Ms Taylor explained that it was a complex system, but assured Members that they were getting better at identifying needs and accessing children and young people earlier. She stated that numbers would go up but suggested that the level of complexity had shifted and they were now seeing complex children who definitely needed an EHC plan in place.

A panel member asked about the significant overspend. Ms Matson stated that it was better if it was looked at as a whole. It had come down in the millions over the last 12 months, due to the strategic work, children's homes and the fostering campaign. High costs were linked to agency workers and children in our care provision and education transport. She stated that it was hard to predict whether numbers would come down as some children's outcomes were longer term and it all needed to be thought through and taken into account. Ms Matson added that the workforce was in a place where it needed to be and benchmarking was doing well.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **SPCLL.9 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY**

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

One Member asked for clarification on sector led improvement partner arrangements, plethora of external scrutiny and for Officers to expand further on opportunities to drive forward further change. Officers present were able to answer those queries.

Another member asked about strengthening Family Hubs. They wondered what extra was being done. Ms Matson explained that they were rebuilding the Family Hub offer. Particularly, part of National reforms, which worked to build the agenda further. They were working with service users to see how they could strengthen the service as they needed to know what more they had to do. They had made major progress, but continued to look for ways to improve. The Panel welcomed an invite to visit the Family Hubs.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Children's Services Improvement Journey update be noted.
2. That the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel be invited to visit the Family Hubs.

## **SPCLL.10 CHILDREN'S HOMES UPDATE**

The panel considered a report from the Director of Children's Services on the provision of children's homes in North East Lincolnshire and an update on the creation of more provision within the borough.

One Member asked about the recruitment programme and how it was going. Ms Carrie explained that they had recruited nine childcare officers but there was still a need to use agency workers. She stated that they were gradually recruiting care officers to work in our homes.

Ms Harrison asked whether they were maintaining ratio of full time staff to agency workers. Ms Carrie assured Ms Harrison that they were. Ms Matson stated that Regulation 44 visits were undertaken by a highly skilled, newly appointed person, who directly reported to her, which were also sent to Ofsted on monthly basis.

One Member asked about the one home waiting on an annual Ofsted inspection. Ms Carrie confirmed that they were still waiting for them to come. The member asked a supplementary question and wondered whether the new homes were for children and young people out of area. Ms Carrie confirmed that they were firstly for children in the borough, but it would be about matching the needs of the child.

One Member asked how Officers know that the Homes were providing a caring, loving and nurturing environment. Ms Carrie explained that they visit regularly and talk to the young people on how they felt. They regularly observed the relationships they had with the carers around them.

RESOLVED – That the Children's Homes update be noted.

## **SPCLL.11 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES PROVISION**

The panel considered a report from the Service Director for Education, Inclusion and Integration on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Provision.

One Member asked about the overspend in the capital programme. Ms Brummer explained that this was due to academic timing with the financial year. She stated that this was more about timing not non delivery. The scheme slipped into the new year but Members were assured that the scheme would continue to be delivered.

Another Member asked about the number of spaces when the provisions were fully open. There were currently 66 places taken, but a possible 140 available. Would these places be left for our children or our neighbours. Ms Matson explained that there was a level of need coming through for children in North East Lincolnshire. The Elected Member wondered when these provisions would be full to capacity. Ms Taylor confirmed that it would probably be up to 2-3 years. The 66 places were in relation to specialist provision. They phased children into these services over a period of 1-2 academic years.

The Chair asked about the free school that was being built on the East Marsh. He wondered if we knew timescales for it to be completed. Ms Taylor explained that this was being done by the Department for Education and activities were out of the authority's hands. She assured Members they were having regular updates with them on design and feasibility. Activity was still happening on site, and she added how a feasibility study had highlighted a new programme to be drawn up. It was too early to be definitive about timescales for completion.

RESOLVED – That the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Provision update be noted.

## **SPCLL.12 CHILDREN'S SERVICES WORKFORCE UPDATE**

The panel considered a report from the Director of Children Services on the newly developed Children Services Workforce.

One Member mentioned the concerns Officers had with staff retention. They wondered whether things had been better. Ms Matson was incredibly proud of the workforce strategy coming into fruition. The retention for

social workers was now three times better. They were recruiting better and retaining. Ms Matson explained that people were now choosing to come work with children in this borough and were choosing to stay. They were almost fully staffed with permanent social workers and the Employee Voice Survey had given them a wealth of feedback from the workforce on how positive it now felt to work in Children Services.

One panel member asked about Leadership Team positions. They asked for clarity on what was still vacant.

Another Member asked about the 33 social workers that were recruited from South Africa. Ms Matson stated that the majority were still here, but a small number had moved on.

The panel wondered how long they were measuring retention for. Ms Matson admitted that it was something they were continuing to work on as their workforce strategy was becoming a daily obsession. Retention was measured over a yearly period formally, but this was something that they consistency looking at on a day to day basis. A panel member asked what the caseloads were like for each social worker. Ms Sykes confirmed that there were approximately 23 cases per social worker. The panel member wondered if Officers would like number to come down. Ms Matson said that they would, but the main thing was that they had stopped changing social workers about and they were now able to do meaningful intervention.

RESOLVED – That the Children Services workforce update be noted.

## **SPCLL.13 CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel approved the work programme for 2025-26 for the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel.

Ms Poole explained that the work programme has been created around thematic meetings to help widen the scope and focus on meaningful scrutiny. She did, however, add that the outcome of the recent Ofsted report would be available for the next meeting and in agreement with the Chair, they thought it would be beneficial if the next panel meeting was dedicated to it to allow a detailed discussion.

The panel requested the following additional items:

- Children's Compliments and Complaints
- Exam results
- Children's Health Services (joint workshop with Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel)

RESOLVED – That the work programme of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel for 2025/26 be approved, subject to the addition of the items listed above.

#### **SPCLL.14 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

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

#### **SPCLL.15 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.16 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.17 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.

Ms Matson gave the panel an overview of the recent Ofsted inspection. The Panel asked Officers to pass on their thanks to colleagues for all the work they had done. They stated that they could see a significant change, looking at it from an external perspective.

RESOLVED – That the discussion be noted

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 5.50 p.m.