



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 24th July 2025.

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

6th March 2025 at 4.30pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)

Councillors Boyd, Clough, Crofts (substitute for K. Swinburn), Downes, Goodwin, Lindley and Patrick

Co-opted Member: Carole Harrison (Trade Union representative)

Officers in attendance:

- Liz Brummer (Strategic Lead – Finance)
- Paul Cowling (Service Director - Children's Regulated Services)
- Wendy Jackson (Head of Attainment and Progress)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Eve Richardson Smith (Legal Services Service Manager, Consultancy)
- Jennifer Steel (Service Director – Education, Inclusion and Integration)
- Charlene Sykes (Service Director – Safeguarding and Early Help)
- Rebecca Taylor (Head of SEND and Inclusion)

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

SPCLL.73 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received for this meeting from Councillors Cairns, K. Swinburn and Wheatley.

SPCLL.74 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPCLL.75 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 16th January 2025 and the special meeting on 5th February 2025 be agreed as a correct record.

SPCLL.76 QUESTION TIME

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

SPCLL.77 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.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

SPCLL.78 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.

Mrs O'Brien identified that for the action on SPCLL.72 the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education had decided to go ahead with the letter to Secretary of State regarding elective home education and this was currently being processed. The panel also agreed that items SPCLL.65 and SPCLL. 66 could be removed from the tracking report as both had been completed.

RESOLVED – That items SPCLL.65 and SPCLL.66 be removed from the tracking report and progress with the other item be noted.

SPCLL.79 FINANCE AND COUNCIL PLAN MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 3

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets presenting the Finance and Council Plan Performance Report for quarter three of 2024/25.

Members asked for some clarification on the following areas:

- Children in Care levels impacting the budget
- School Exclusions
- Foster Campaign
- Children in Care's health plans.

One Member asked if there was an aspirational number to try and control the number of transports services they were providing. Officers stated

that they worked closely with finance, but the needs of the young people took precedence.

Another Member questioned Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) review dates, they wondered whether the service was keeping up with them and whether figures had been obtained of how many had EHCP but weren't receiving the provisions needed. Ms Taylor confirmed that they had figures but had to put those who need significant care first. She added that it was a national challenge in the shortage of being able to provide provisions where EHCP had identified the additional need for alternative provisions.

RESOLVED – That the Finance and Council Plan Performance Report for quarter three of 2024/25 be noted.

SPCLL.80 MAINTAINED NURSERIES AND DAYCARE PROVISIONS

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

The panel noted that the update was positive, they wondered whether it was likely that the figures would change. Ms Steel felt that they would not.

RESOLVED – That the maintained Nurseries and Daycare Provision update be noted.

SPCLL.81 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

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

The panel showed some concerns around staff moral and asked how the restructure was doing. Mr Cowling confirmed that the restructure was still ongoing, and regular meetings took place to make sure staff moral was good, but he acknowledged that staff were keen to see what the future would be like and admitted that the next stages would be unsettled.

Some Members asked for further clarification on managing populations and demand as well as how the local government reorganisation may affect Children Services. Mr Cowling gave some background to managing population and demand and indicated that it was too early to say what the service may look like once local governance reorganisation had taken place.

RESOLVED – That the Children Services improvement journey report be noted.

SPCLL.82 ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

The panel considered a report from the Service Director for Education, Inclusion and Integration on Alternative Provision.

One Member shared concerns around Alternative Provision not being aligned with the regular school day and the quality of education children in Alternative Provision were receiving. They questioned how much control they had over the service that was being provided. Ms Taylor explained that they were currently collating a number of insights of this service from providers and families to facilitate an action plan going forward to improve the service.

The panel didn't think that we had the partnership quite right and requested that the action plan come back to scrutiny before it was implemented.

RESOLVED –

1. That Alternative Provision be added to the work programme for the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel for 2025/26.
2. That the Alternative Provision report be noted.

SPCLL.83 EDUCATION OUTCOMES 2023-24

The panel received a report from the Service Director for Education, Inclusion and Integration on Education Outcomes for 2023-24.

One Member stated how some of the figures provided were not where they wanted them. They wondered whether this was due to Academies not driving them forward. Ms Jackson clarified that most issues were developing from early years, a lot of children who come in at reception level were not ready. She added that in these cases families were heavily supported and there was a huge network of support going through early years because that was where a child's journey started.

Other Members asked for Officers opinion on teens losing interest and whether the softening of Ofsted's criteria would help with the value of attainment recorded. Officers shared their opinion but added that there would now be a separate judgement for outcome, which would have an overall positive result.

RESOLVED – That the report on Education Outcomes for 2023-24 be noted.

SPCLL.84 CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW 2024/25 AND WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer which reflected on the 2024/25 municipal year and the work undertaken by the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel. The panel also considered suggestions to be included in the 2025/26 work programme.

The panel requested the following to be added to the work programme for 2025/26:

- SEND Provision update
- School Exclusions
- Deep Dive into Finances
- Workforce – Children Services
- Skills Strategy
- Joint Working around Youth Justice.

RESOLVED – That the report and members' comments be noted.

SPCLL.85 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

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

SPCLL.86 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.87 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.88 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 and to consider the risk register in correspondence to the Improvement Journey. No such matters were raised.

RESOLVED – That the matters of concern be noted.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 5.40 p.m.