



CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

2nd March 2026 at 4.30pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)
Councillors Augusta (substitute for Wheatley) Cairns, Downes, Farren, Lindley, Patrick and K. Swinburn.

Co-opted Members: Canon Ian Robinson (Church of England)

Officers in attendance:

- Liz Brummer (Strategic Lead – Finance)
- Paul Cowling (Service Director – Regulated Services)
- Helen Davis (Children’s Strategic Lead)
- Harriet Malkin (Deputy Service Director – Safeguarding and Disability)
- Bev O’Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Julie Poole (Assistant Director – Children’s Assurance, Partnership and Evaluation)
- Eve Richardson-Smith (Head of Law and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Jennifer Steel (Service Director – Education, Inclusion and Integration)
- Charlene Sykes (Service Director – Help, Protection Care, Care Leavers and Youth Justice)
- Joseph White (Deputy Service Director – Inclusion)

Others in attendance:

- Councillor Cracknell (Portfolio Holder for Children and Education)

SPCLL.64 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Boyd, Clough and Wheatley for this meeting.

SPCLL.65 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPCLL.66 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 12th January and 15th January 2026, be approved as a correct record.

SPCLL.67 QUESTION TIME

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

SPCLL.68 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.69 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.

The panel were content that all actions had taken place and agreed for them to be removed from the tracking report.

RESOLVED – That items SPCLL.72, SPCLL.43, SPCLL.49, SPCLL.55 and SPCLL.58 be removed from the tracking report.

SPCLL.70 2025/26 Q3 COUNCIL PLAN RESOURCES AND FINANCE PERFORMANCE

The panel considered a report from the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Economy, Regeneration, Devolution and Skills that provided information and analysis of the Council's financial performance during the third quarter of 2025-26.

RESOLVED – That the 2025/26 quarter 3 Council Plan Resources and Finance Performance report be noted.

SPCLL.71 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, ATTAINMENT & EXCLUSIONS

The panel considered a report from the Director of Children Services on school attendance, attainment and exclusions.

Members asked for reassurance that enough was being done to try and improve attendance issues. One Elected Member wondered whether issues for permanent exclusion needed to be looked at a bit more, particularly young people going on to alternative provisions. Mr White explained that permanently excluded children had to be placed into education by the sixth day after exclusion. Support was provided for the child and the authority had to make sure their education journey carried on. Members wondered whether we had enough resources for children to offer them the correct support. Mr White explained that a transformation project was underway as outcomes on this had historically not been the best. Members felt that it would be good to look at this deeper as part of an Alternative Provision update at a future meeting.

Members had some concerns over the numbers for attendance at certain schools and whether this related to exclusions. If this was in relation to Covid, they wondered whether Officers had an idea of why this had such an impact. Ms Steel explained that the new Ofsted testing criteria highlighted issues like this. They would then get notified if there was an issue and Officers would want to focus efforts to make sure children and young people remained in mainstream school. She noted that it was a national issue.

RESOLVED – That the school attendance, attainment and exclusions report be noted.

SPCLL.72 FAMILY HUBS

The panel received a report from the Director of Children Services on the latest position in relation to the family hubs across North East Lincolnshire.

Members asked what the future held for family hubs. They wondered what the vision was. Ms Sykes explained that they would be in line with the national social care reforms. The hubs had a community feel for families and will this would continue to be developed.

The Panel wondered if Officers had used our statistical neighbours service to see how they were doing in comparison. Ms Sykes confirmed that they had, making comparisons both nationally and with statistical neighbours.

One Member noted that some years previously, the Council had taken the opportunity to close five family hubs, they wondered if there was any reassurance that the areas hadn't lost the service or been adversely affected. Ms Malkin explained that they offered an outreach service were a team go out to families unable to attend the hubs. There was also a mobile youth club to offer services in communities. They also monitored other services being offered in the community to make sure services were not duplicating themselves. The Member thought it would be useful to get visitors of the hub to provide their postcode when accessing the service

so it could give them an idea of what areas were visiting the hubs. This would then identify any localities that weren't receiving this service.

One panel member asked if there had been any benefits to having public events and whether there were any measurable outcomes for having them. Ms Sykes stated that the public events had been extremely well attended, and there being less referrals into Front Door showed that it was working. Mr Cowling added that measurable outcomes were being regularly updated to provide meaningful data. The social care reforms would also enable the development of further measurable outcomes. The Member stated that having something like that would help to secure the future of the family hubs and provide a real focus on what had been achieved.

One Member asked about expanding the age ranges from 5years to 10years. Ms Malkin confirmed that they were looking at outreach offers. This would be focused on as part of social care reforms. She added that they were working on several different ideas to make sure the correct approach was taken.

Another Member asked if Officers were able to signpost or identify need from other agencies that were working within the hubs. Ms Sykes confirmed that they could as it was an integrated offer.

Members asked that Officers engage with Ward Members for each setting, to give Members the chance to get involved and promote the service more.

RESOLVED – That the Family Hubs report be noted.

SPCLL.73 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The panel considered a report from the Service Director for Education, Inclusion & Integration that provided a summary statement of children that are electively home educated (EHE) in North East Lincolnshire.

Members had concerns with the rapid increase in individuals electively home educating. They wondered what had happened. Mr White explained that numbers of children educated at home increased as an academic year progressed, then decreased once per year as Year 11 children progressed into post-16. Mr White explained that there had been a year-on-year decrease in numbers of children EHE in North East Lincolnshire.

The Chair wondered whether Officers delve into why they may have chosen to be electively home educated. Mr White explained that it was not mandatory for families to tell them why they had chosen to go EHE, but they did work closely with schools to get a better insight into why. Officers also spoke to families to try and ascertain what the reason was for doing so.

The panel wondered what multi-agency support the child still got if they were no longer in a mainstream setting. Mr White confirmed that all the same support would continue.

One Member noted that it had been published that home educated children tended to have poor mental and physical health, which was seen as a ticking time bomb for adult services. They wondered if they had got the message right for supporting children that were EHE. Ms Steel explained that it was difficult to stop them going EHE as it was the parents' choice, but she explained that this was why they were keen to have the EHE Strategy in place, so all officers working with these children knew what was best to do. It would also help external agencies understanding and any expectations of them.

One Councillor wanted reassurance in place to ensure this was the best thing for the child. Officers confirmed that checks were made once they had been notified of a child going EHE and support was implemented quickly. Ms Steel added that if the education the child was receiving was not going in the way it should be, then they would intervene. Mr Cowling added that the council did not advocate for or promote EHE, and its general position was a preference for children and young people to remain in mainstream schooling.

The panel were worried about EHE children withdrawing from academia post 16. They wondered whether the Council was intervening early enough to stop this or at least provide them with options for their future, so they knew what they needed to achieve whilst still at school age. Mr White explained that officers from Young People's Support Services worked proactively with EHE children throughout Year 11 to support with careers, aspirations and applications to Further Education.

RESOLVED – That the Elective Home Education update be noted.

SPCLL.74 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE REFORMS

The panel considered a report from the Director of Children Services on the National Children's Social Care Reforms.

One Member wondered whether Officers thought Children's Social Care Reforms would make Children Services better. Ms Davis believed it would, particularly by helping identify problems earlier. Wrapping care and support around families would have a lasting impact. Mr Cowling added that a lot of work was going on in the background and this piece of work was moving fast. Members would soon see changes in how agencies were working with families. Ms Poole included that they were learning from others who had taken a similar approach. She explained that no area was the same, but it was about seeing what worked best for these individuals.

The Chair commented on how this may have a significant impact on the number of children in care. Ms Davis explained that it would impact

everything. It would help them learn and change as they moved on. It would also mean a shift in how support was delivered to families.

One Councillor asked how this would affect finances. Ms Davis explained that this was something they'd consider as the scheme developed. Some savings would be immediate, and some would be over a period of time.

RESOLVED – That the Children's Social Care Reforms report be noted.

SPCLL.75 CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW 2025/26 AND WORK PROGRAMME 2026/27

The panel received a briefing note from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer which reflected on the 2025/26 municipal year, and the work undertaken by the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel. The panel also considered, within its terms of reference, suggestions to be included in the 2026/27 work programme.

The panel requested the following to be added to the work programme for 2026/27:

- Alternative Provision
- Children Services Social Reforms progress.
- Monitoring the process and recommissioning of school transport.
- Kinship Carer Programme
- Children's Homes – expected role of a Councillor.

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

SPCLL.76 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

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

SPCLL.77 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.78 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.79 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 5.42 p.m.