

**Minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee Meeting held on
28 May 2019**

Present: John Francis (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech
Jason Jones
Paul Snape

Bob Spencer (Vice-Chairman)
Carolyn Trowbridge
Conor Wileman

Also in attendance: Mark Sutton

Apologies: Ron Clarke and Trevor Johnson

PART ONE

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

2. Membership Changes

Following changes to membership made at the Annual Council meeting on 23 May, the Chairman welcomed Ron Clarke, Bob Spencer (Vice-Chairman) and Carolyn Trowbridge to the Select Committee.

3. Minutes of the Safe & Strong Communities Select Committee meeting held on 4 March 2019

RESOLVED- That the minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee held on 4 March 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

4. Children and Young People who go Missing from Home and Care in Staffordshire

In 2017 Catch 22 were commissioned to deliver Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The integrated commissioning arrangements were led by Stoke-on-Trent, with funding from Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Stoke-on-Trent Public Health, Stoke-on-Trent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC).

Catch 22 conducted all independent return interviews for missing and absent children and young people aged up to 18 years residing in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, including those placed by other Local Authorities (LAs). Members received details of the interview process and use of information gathered. A performance and quality assurance framework was in place, with monthly and annual reporting to ensure

appropriate intervention meetings were undertaken based on vulnerability and to build intelligence and insight to enable appropriate safeguarding initiatives were in place.

The Select Committee received an analysis of service performance over six months. Catch 22 had completed between 70-80% of missing person interviews in comparison to a national average of 38%. The Team had a good record of building rapport and relationships with those at risk of episodes to help reduce risk. Use of a co-designed interview form created a consistent approach to return interviews. There were strong links between the CSE and Missing Co-ordinator, Catch 22 and Children's Services in sharing information. The Annual Contract Report was due to be produced in June 2019 and would reflect demand and performance during 2018/19.

Members received details of developments in place in response to the Ofsted Focused Inspection on the LAs services for the protection of vulnerable adolescents. They also received details of priorities for the next 12 months.

The Select Committee were aware that Stoke-on-Trent's Children's Services had been judged as inadequate by Ofsted and queried whether this would have an impact on the joint Catch 22 commissioning. Whilst Catch 22 had been commissioned to undertake visits for all missing episodes across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, the details of that work were fed back to the host authority. Therefore Staffordshire would receive details of the interviews undertaken with their children and young people and would take appropriate action, and Stoke would do the same for their children and young people. Members were informed that Stoke on Trent City Council were developing an improvement plan and had a new Director and Assistant Director for Children's Services. The DfE appointed Commissioner would need to be satisfied that their improvement plan was good enough to make the necessary improvements, with Children's Services being outsourced if this was not the case.

The Catch 22 contract ran until 2020, at which time all partners would need to consider if they wished to continue commissioning this service. Both Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent had received some criticism around the overall management of missing children in that, whilst the information gathered through interviews was used to inform work on an individual basis, it had not routinely been used for collective analysis. Work was now underway to include a more strategic response from the collating intelligence and collective learning, and this had helped inform a first draft of the Child Exploitation Strategy, with the final Strategy being expected by September.

Member's queried the information sharing between the Police and Children's Services. Catch 22 reported details of information gathered through the interview process to both partner organisations. Unfortunately, as the IT systems for the differing organisations were not compatible, details had to be put into the differing systems manually.

Members heard that roughly 1 third of all children and young people missing episodes were those going missing from their own homes, 1 third were from the care system and 1 third were those placed in Staffordshire by another local authority. The amount and type of information Catch 22 would receive from the Police when a referral was made normally reflected which third the child was from, with more detail normally being available pre-interview for those children and young people that Staffordshire had placed in their Care System. Difficulties remained around interviewing individuals placed

outside their county, with some authorities not having reciprocal interview arrangements. The responsibility for any missing episode interview remained with the LA who placed the child rather than with the LA where the child was currently resident.

The Select Committee was aware that Ofsted had recognised the work of Staffordshire's Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Panels as good but had felt they needed to have broader consideration of exploitation than just CSE. To ameliorate for this a pilot had been developed in Burton for a Panel with a broader more contextualised approach to safeguarding.

Members received details of how the work of Catch 22 was quality assured. They raised some concerns at the Ofsted comment that there was a lack of tenacity when undertaking some missing interviews. Whilst there were always opportunities to improve Members were informed that Catch 22 had evidenced tenacity and had, in fact, delivered well beyond their contract which stipulated two interview attempts should be made. A Multi-agency Board oversaw this work, with a lot of pro-active preventative work undertaken. Members wished to see first hand the work that Catch 22 undertook and the internal audit systems they employed.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the work of the County Council and key partners in respect of children and young people who go missing from home or care be received: and
- b) the Select Committee has the opportunity to consider first hand the work of Catch 22 and their internal audit systems.

5. Children and Families Improvement Plan

The Select Committee received details of the Improvement Plan post the outcome of Ofsted's focused visit on 26-27 June 2018 and the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services on 4-8 February 2019, which rated services as "good".

The June Focused Visit had evaluated the LAs arrangements for the protection on vulnerable adolescents. Inspectors found that Staffordshire had clear strategic plans in place to strengthen their approach and praised the work taking place in Staffordshire, including that of partner agencies. They also identified the following areas for improvement:

- a) Changes to the auditing process to include greater focus on the quality of practice taking place;
- b) High workloads in specific parts of the service impacting on case planning for children and young people;
- c) Plans for children and young people not being outcome focused and SMART enough linked to timescales;
- d) Management oversight and supervision to progress plans for all children and young people.

An improvement plan to address the areas highlighted was implemented in August 2018, focusing on; recruitment and retention; quality of practice; management oversight; and caseload.

At the February 2019 Ofsted inspection, where services were rated as good, Ofsted also noted that leaders and managers had made impressive progress since the focussed visit in 2018. They also found:

- a) The impact of leaders on social work practice within children and families was good;
- b) The experience and progress of children who need help and protection required improvement;
- c) The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers was good; and
- d) Overall effectiveness was good.

The areas highlighted for improvement had been built into the improvement plan. This plan was regularly reviewed by both the Children's Social Care Management Team and the Children's Improvement Board.

Members received a link to the Improvement Plan and copies of the Ofsted Inspection and Focused Visit report/letter.

Members noted comments around the management of Electively Home Educated (EHE) children. This Select Committee had undertaken two separate pieces of work around EHE and remained concerned around the growth in numbers and the lack of resource to deal with this growth effectively. They were also aware the Edward Timpson review on exclusions, which highlighted concerns around EHE.

Members were pleased that Ofsted had rated Staffordshire Children's Services as "good" and that a proactive approach was evidenced in the improvement plan to work towards becoming outstanding.

The Select Committee noted concerns around caseloads and asked whether the caseload number for social workers was appropriate. Appropriate casework levels were dependent on the type of work undertaken. For example, those working within safeguarding should have no more than 25 cases at any one time, with those working with looked after children having case loads no higher than 20. Other areas of Children's Services may have higher caseloads, with the number being dependent on the complexity of cases. Recruitment and retention of experienced social workers, particularly within safeguarding, remained difficult. A recruitment drive had been undertaken and agency social workers were used to help ensure appropriate case load levels where necessary.

Difficulty with the Court systems was discussed. Members heard that more court time had been given to address the backlog, however the issue now was around the reluctance to remove children from their home. Increasingly where an Interim Care Order was made the child remained at home as the Court didn't want to pre-judge the outcome of proceedings by removing the child into the care system. However, this put the LA in a difficult position in that they had joint parental responsibility for the child but little opportunity to influence the child's safeguarding and care throughout this period. Court proceedings could take up to 26 weeks and, even where a care order is awarded, the Court often judged that the child should remain at home as, in their view, the LA had managed the care of the child successfully for 26 weeks without the child being removed into the care system. Frank conversations had taken place explaining the

difficulties with this, however currently the only recourse for the LA was to appeal the decision, which was a costly and lengthy process.

Members queried whether it was difficult for children in the looked after care system to be returned home. Until recently the rise in the number of children in the looked after system was not so much resulting from a rise in the number of children coming into care but in the lack of children leaving. Each child in care had an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who reviewed their care plan, contact, return home etc. and it was acknowledged that at times young people could perhaps be returned home a little sooner than was currently the case. In particular 16 and 17 year olds who would leave the care system at 18 anyway and often returned home at that time.

Members noted that all social workers had laptops to work from but that the IT system used was complex which sometimes resulted in difficulty in finding specific information. Work was underway to simplify some of the “bolt-on” additions that had been developed over time.

RESOLVED – That the progress of the Children and Families Improvement Plan be welcomed.

6. Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) were being reviewed following the Wood Review, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent LSCB statutory partners were:

- ACC Jennifer Sims, Staffordshire Police;
- Heather Johnstone, Executive Director of Nursing and Quality, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent CCGs;
- Mark Barratt, Director of Children and Family Services, Stoke-on-Trent City Council; and
- Helen Riley, Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities, Staffordshire County Council.

The new Board started from 1 April 2019. The Board will meet monthly during the initial implementation period and quarterly thereafter. Chairing the Board would change, with Heather Johnson in the Chair initially. The role of the Chairman would be different from the role of the previous Board, in that they chaired the individual meetings rather than being responsible for the whole work of the Board.

The Board would be supported by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership and would interface with other key partnership boards in respect of safeguarding. The Select Committee received details of the new structure, key functions and activities.

There had been suggestions that schools should be included as the fourth statutory partner. Work was currently underway to find the most appropriate mechanism for schools to feed into the Board.

The new arrangements were expected to be reviewed in December 2019.

RESOLVED – That the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board new arrangements be noted.

7. Work Programme Planning

The Select Committee received details of their closing work programme for 2018/19 and draft new work programme for 2019/2020. They considered details of outstanding items from their previous work programme, considering if these should be carried forward to the new municipal year.

Members noted the proposal to refer items to alternative Select Committees where appropriate.

RESOLVED - That:

- a) the following referrals be made:
 - Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee - Stresses within Mental Health Services
 - Cabinet (following the APMG in 2018/19) – Children’s Mental Health
 - Health Staffordshire Select Committee – Care Packages and Communication
- b) children not in full time education be considered by this committee when looking at the safeguarding implications of the education policy report being produced by Clive Cartman Frost;
- c) the proposed working group on transition and preparation for adulthood be postponed in light of the recent work undertaken by the TSU; and,
- d) the following additional items be included:
 - the perceived rise in drug use by children in residential care;
 - the new Child Exploitation Strategy;
 - considering the work and internal audit of Catch 22; and
 - progress of the Children’s Services Improvement Plan.

Chairman