

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 17 June 2021

Present: Bob Spencer (Chairman)

Attendance

Gill Burnett (Overview))	(Vice-Chairman	Gillian Pardesi Kath Perry, MBE
Janet Eagland		Jill Waring
Richard Ford (Scrutiny))	(Vice-Chairman	Mike Wilcox
Jason Jones		
Peter Kruskonjic		

Also in attendance: Jonathan Price and Mark Sutton

Apologies: Julia Jessel

PART ONE

10. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

11. Minutes of the Safe & Strong Communities Select Committee held on 22 April 2021

That the meeting of the Safe & Strong Communities Select Committee held on 22 April 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

12. Introduction to the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee heard from Ruth Martin, Adult Safeguarding Team Manager, considering the role and responsibilities the Council had relating to adult safeguarding. Section 42 of the Care Act placed a responsibility on the Council around safeguarding adults, with a duty to care and support adults needs and to make enquires where concerns may exist around abuse and/or neglect, and to address these. The Act placed adult safeguarding on the same legal footing as children's safeguarding. Whilst there would always be some adults who came under both adult safeguarding and social care they were different services, with adult social care under Section 75, managed by the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT), dealing with the more day to day adult social care services.

Members received details of the Adults Safeguarding Teams and the delivery of services. Adult safeguarding included work with anyone over 18 with care and support needs including learning and/or physical needs, poor mental health, and those vulnerable due to drug and alcohol misuse. Members noted that there was no eligibility

criteria in respect of adult safeguarding, but rather accessed those adults who had care and support needs which prevented them protecting themselves from harm. This need had risen in Staffordshire over the last year, from 1000 per month last year to 1700 per month this year. There was a need to consider how this growth in referrals would be managed and a Transformation Project was currently underway to consider any changes that could improve service delivery and manage increased demand.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were pleased to note that adults safeguarding was well supported by partner agencies and colleagues. They noted the Adults Safeguarding Board Annual Report gave an overview of adult safeguarding across Staffordshire, with this report included annually on the work programme for scrutiny.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Helen Riley, Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities. Statistics were shared highlighting that most Staffordshire children and young people had good lives. Children's Services provided for those children and families who needed some support and ranged from earliest help low level support to statutory service provision. Members noted that Staffordshire Children's Services had been the first to be rated "Good" by Ofsted in the West Midlands, and they were still a "Good" rated Authority.

Members received details of the range of services provided, including:

- 24/7 365 days a year emergency out of hours service
- First Response/front door entry to services. This was the first thing that any Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services would look at and was crucial to effective service provision
- Early Help local services based on prevention and early intervention. Most Authorities no longer had in-house early help offers and Staffordshire was very fortunate to have kept their in-house offer
- Children in Need statutory social worker lead assessment and intervention for families with more complex needs
- Child protection statutory social worker lead intervention where a child has suffered, or is at risk of suffering significant harm
- Children in care which is a double district based statutory support for those children where care by the LA is necessary. The number of children currently in Care in Staffordshire was 1220 at 31 May 2021.
- Children with a Disability, a double district based statutory assessment and support for children with a significant disability.

Previous scrutiny committees have received regular reports detailing the work undertaken to combat Children Sexual Exploitation (CSE). This work had evolved to include a broader look at Contextual Safeguarding, addressing harm that was outside the home including county lines, gangs as well as CSE. This new method had changed the approach to social work, addressing the different threats to children's safeguarding that now existed.

The importance of the Corporate Parent role was stressed, and Members heard that services for children in care included: adoption; fostering; respite and kinship care; the virtual school and Corporate Parenting. Members heard that in some instances it was difficult to find foster placements, often for teenage young people with more complex needs. These children may therefore be placed in residential care. Staffordshire was

looking to develop its own in-house residential care that would enable Staffordshire children to remain in Staffordshire and allow the LA to have more control over the placements. The first new home was opening in Stafford and would accommodate 3 to 4 young people. There was some discussion around the placement of homes and Members heard how important it was to enable children to reside in their county and be given the opportunity to live in a safe, nice environment, helping them to understand the value and responsibilities this gave.

Preventative Services worked in a range of ways to help support and prevent the breakdown of families and to keep children in their home where it was safe to do so. Preventative services included:

- Intensive Prevention Services
- Family Group Conferencing, with most Authorities identifying this as one of the most significant services in helping children remain successfully in the home
- Intensive Prevention Support Service (Drug and Alcohol)
- Breathing Space, an intervention to disrupt the cycle for some vulnerable young women who had multiple pregnancies where the child was taken into care
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), with a number of children ending up in Staffordshire as a result of M6 ease of access. Staffordshire also agreed to support other LAs such as Kent who received a large proportion of UASC. There were currently approximately 40 UASC in Staffordshire, but up to 100 had previously been accommodated. There were also some real success stories with these children, with excellent school results and achievements, university entrants and making a positive contribution to society.
- Care Leavers, with support and ongoing communication being offered past 18 years in finding accommodation, work, budgeting and gaining independence
- Children with disabilities

Details were shared of commissioning within Families and Communities for Children's Services, such as: Healthy Child programme; reducing infant mortality; emotional and physical wellbeing; domestic abuse; early help and building resilient families; children with disabilities; children's centres and family hubs and the vulnerable person resettlement scheme.

Members received details of the District Footprint and how services will work across districts from 1 October 2021.

Community Safety was an area within the remit of this O&S Committee and Members received details of the Safer Communities Team and their close working with the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, District and Borough Community Safety Partnerships, Police, Probation, Health and other community safety partners. Governance was ongoing in relation to future community safety structures. Members also received details of the Community Safety Agreement and the identified partnership priorities, which included domestic abuse, modern slavery, public place violence, contextual safeguarding, anti-social behaviour, fraud and community cohesion.

Regulatory services included the work of Trading Standards, which included the enforcement of 260+ pieces of legislation. Regulatory services also included safety of sports grounds and the Coroners Service in South Staffordshire.

A number of standing items were also highlighted that were considered annually on the work programme, including Safeguarding Children's Board and complaints and representation annual reports.

The retention of social workers remained an issue and Members queried the success of a previous memorandum of understanding that had attempted to remove poaching staff between LAs. Sadly, this had not achieved its aim. Social worker vacancy rates in Staffordshire were currently at 8%, which was higher than their average 7%. However, when considered against some other authorities Staffordshire remained well placed, with the example given of other West Midlands LAs with significantly higher vacancy rates.

The destructive nature of low level neglect was highlighted. Long term low-level neglect had been instrumental in a tragic local incident in 2019. There was a need to understand better the impact of such long-term low level neglect and how to address these issues, considering how to work differently alongside the family to make improvements.

The MacAlister independent report published today on Children's Services highlighting the importance of the restorative practice model. Staffordshire had introduced a restorative practice model 18 months ago. This model looked at "working with" rather "doing to" children and families and avoided over assessment. This approach required excellent risk management skills and appropriate supervision.

Members queried how to evaluate performance success within children's services and heard that in the long term this would be evidenced by fewer children coming into care and more able to stay at home safely.

A significant issue for Shire Counties was ensuring consistency across service provision. The geographical spread of services presented real challenges for senior officers and their staff.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reiterated the importance of the corporate parenting role all Members had. He reminded them that they had been invited to take part in Level 1 Safeguarding training and urged them to sign up to this training. He then shared the following areas for possible future scrutiny as follows:

- Low level neglect
- Prevention and early intervention
- SEND review – responding to the review and moving forward
- Early years – particularly under 4s children's centres/family hubs
- MacAlister Report – case for change
- Governance Model – how work better together – try and develop more effective model of governance

The Chairman reminded Members that they are the designated crime and disorder panel.

RESOLVED – The detail shared by the Cabinet Member and Officers be used to prompt work programme planning.

13. Outcome Focused 1-1 Support, and Home Care and Community Support (including Domiciliary Care) for Staffordshire Children with Disabilities

Staffordshire County Council has a legal duty to ensure Children's Community Support (including Domiciliary Care) provision was in place to support children and young people with a range of disabilities who had been assessed by a suitably qualified Social Worker as being eligible for a personal care service within the family home and local community. A further legal obligation for the Council was to offer a range of commissioned community short break opportunities, ranging from community-based breaks of a few hours, to overnight short breaks for Children with Disabilities under the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children regulations 2011. Staffordshire had developed its "Aiming High for Children with Disabilities" programme to support these duties. The programme augmented the in-house and commissioned Overnight Short Breaks Unit, and the support of Short Breaks Foster Carers in providing the range of short breaks for children to give parents and carers a meaningful break from their caring responsibilities. The Council also commissioned a range of providers from across Staffordshire to deliver Children's Community Support and Short Breaks on their behalf, currently commissioned and contracted as two separate support programmes.

Members considered the proposal to bring together arrangements for both these services (short break and community support) under one commission. This suggestion had been made following an in-depth options appraisal, concluding that one commissioned service would provide more flexible, responsive support that drew on children and families' existing strengths, focusing on development, independence, preparedness for adulthood and was cost effective.

Cabinet were due to make a decision on this proposal at their meeting of 21 July.

Members raised concerns around ensuring enough provision and heard that considerable work had been undertaken to increase the marketplace, including working with adult colleagues to maximise the range of care for children and young people. This was of particular interest when considering most service users would transition from children's to adults' services, therefore allowing continuity. Work to continue to grow the market will be ongoing and could include providing training to help support opening up this market. The Place Based approach also encouraged providers from the voluntary sector so every effort would be taken to engage local providers, although Members sought assurances that the voluntary sector was there to add value, not replace statutory service provision. Members also discussed how to ensure service users were receiving fulfilling care and were informed that the quality of provision was monitored and that the CQC inspected homes providing this service. If Members had any specific concerns or examples of care concerns they could raise this with officers directly.

Members also shared concerns around recruitment, particularly where wages were often poor which devalued such an important service. Option 2 proposed the development of more in-house provision and it was felt this would give opportunities for better involvement and ease of awareness of the service provided. This would also avoid any tendency to cherry pick the more financially lucrative work. The Cabinet Member agreed that the profile of social care needed to be raised and the vital importance of the work understood better. He also felt it was important to have an open mind when considering service delivery to ensure best outcomes.

Some concern was expressed around the different skill sets needed to provide for children as opposed to adults and whether seeking to recruit adult providers for the children's service would work well. There was a need to ensure training provided for any skill set gaps. Members also reiterated that whilst the voluntary sector provided excellent services, they were services that should complement those provided by Children's Services, not replace them.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the commissioning of the previously separate arrangements for Children With Disabilities' Community Support and Aiming High 1-1 Intensive support and short breaks be brought together into one contracting arrangement be supported;
- b) the open tender approach and implementation of a Dynamic Purchasing System detailed in the costed Options Appraisal to secure the required provision at optimal Value for Money commencing from April 2022 be supported;
- c) the regular breaks clauses in the proposed contracts (2+1+1 years) which allowed time to develop joint approaches to the commissioning and procurement of this provision with Adult Social Care colleagues and other Authorities including with the West Midlands Authorities to attempt to overcome the current challenges for providers with respect to service volumes be noted;
- d) proposals to use the first two years of the contract to further investigate the merits and risks associated with In-house delivery of this support, and the efficacy of this model within the proposed new Children's System be supported, particularly as the Option Appraisal demonstrated a number of potential strengths to this approach; and
- e) that a future report be brought to the O&S Committee outlining developments with this proposal and its successes/challenges.

14. Work Programme Planning

Members considered the work programme planning report that set out the remit of this committee, methods of scrutiny, standard annual items and areas outstanding from the previous committee. They noted that this was a dynamic and flexible document that would change to accommodate key and emerging priorities and that it would be included on each Scrutiny meeting agenda.

On considering this report and the detail shared with them this morning from Officers and the Cabinet Member, the following areas were raised for possible future scrutiny:

- safeguarding adolescents, particularly a cause for concern over the past year when young people have had time on their hands resulting in disruptive and anti-social behaviour, including these difficulties being more complex in some parts of the County with cross boarder issues.
- Community safety – considering the outcome of the inquest into the Fishmonger Hall incident and the findings that there had been inadequate management of Usman Khan, a resident of Stafford. Looking at what learning had been taken from this incident and giving Members an opportunity to seek the Commissioners reassurance that safeguards were in place to prevent any such further incidents
- young and first time parents of pre-school children and early help in supporting parental skills and development

- young carers and how well they are supported
- sexual harassment, abuse and/or assault in schools and how this is recognised and addressed
- the number of those investigated for child sexual abuse that were ultimately found guilty over the past 5 years and whether these investigations were reasonable and proportionate
- Adults Safeguarding Transformation Project
- Further detail on developments with the outcome focussed 1-1 support, home care & community support (including domiciliary care) for Staffordshire children with disabilities, evidencing how the proposed joining of services progresses and its success and/or challenges and whether those providers that transitioned from adults to children's provision have done so successfully, with any skills gaps addressed.
- low level neglect and the devastating impact of long-term low-level neglect. The current changes to ways of working to address this following the tragedy in 2019, what challenges remain.
- Prevention and early intervention
- SEND review – responding to the review and moving forward
- Early years – particularly under 4s children's centre/family hubs
- MacAlister Report – case for change
- Governance Model – how to work better together, trying to develop a more effective model of governance

Members also noted the following standing items for inclusion:

- Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report
- 2 reports – adults & children's complaints & representations
- Regular updates on CSE

The Chairman asked Members to give further consideration to the information received today and forward any further possible work programme items to either himself or the Scrutiny & Support Officer. All items raised would then be considered for inclusion through discussions between the Officer, Chairman and Vice-Chairmen, with thought being given to timing and the range of possible methods for scrutiny, with a draft work programme brought to the July meeting for members consideration.

RESOLVED – That the items suggested for possible inclusion on the work programme be agreed, with a draft programme being brought for Members approval to their July meeting based on these suggestion.

Chairman