

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 30 November 2021

Present: Bob Spencer (Chairman)

Attendance

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| Janet Eagland | Kath Perry, MBE |
| Richard Ford (Vice-Chairman (Scrutiny)) | Jill Waring |
| Peter Kruskonjic | Mike Wilcox |
| Gillian Pardesi | |

Also in attendance: Sue Barnsley (SSCB Independent Chair) and Mark Sutton

Apologies: Gill Burnett and Jason Jones

PART ONE

31. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

32. Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 September 2021

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 September 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

33. Working Together to Keep Children Safe

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Sue Barnsley, Independent Chair of the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB) outlining background to the Board and the more recent changes.

Members were reminded that the SSCB is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how local organisations will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people living in Staffordshire.

Local Authorities, the Chief Constable and Clinical Commissioning Groups were the three safeguarding partners with equal responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent had ended their joint safeguarding board arrangements from January 2021. Members received details of these new arrangements as well

as details of the Board's: vision, principles and priorities; membership; representation; and duties.

Members queried the rationale for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent separating from their joint arrangements, sharing concerns that a compelling argument had been made for combining the Boards. There had been strong arguments for bringing the two Boards together, with these arguments supported by partners for a County wide approach. The joint board had been an early implementer under the Wood Review. However, shortly after the joint arrangements had been established the city of Stoke-on-Trent underwent a Children's Services OFSTED inspection and were graded as "inadequate". Naturally the majority of the focus for the joint Board was centred on Stoke-on-Trent's arrangements. Stoke on Trent City Council felt that whilst they had supported the original arguments, given their inspection outcome, there was a need for them to establish their own board to allow them to focus solely on Stoke. The two newly separated Boards work closely together and have shared priorities and good connectivity. The Independent Chair reassured members that the SSCB arrangements worked well.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

34. Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) Annual Report 2020/21

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report 2020/21. The Report had a focus on the differences that had been made rather than a description of activities undertaken. This annual report detailed the impact of Covid19 on children and young people in Staffordshire, the consequent changes to services and the challenges this brought. These included:

- a reduced opportunity for face to face meetings and concerns that potentially this would prevent early signs of neglect being identified. However, Early Help referrals overall had increased which may signify that agencies were now more adept at spotting the early signs;
- the emotional impact of partners being unable to attend births and the development of Maternity Voices Partnership champions;
- the loss of face to face education and the resultant impact on wellbeing of children and young people, particularly where on-line learning was not accessible to them;
- face to face training opportunities reduced, however on-line provision had been provided and proved very successful; and
- significant delays in judicial services.

Members heard that at the beginning of the pandemic work was quickly undertaken to identify all vulnerable children and young people. Vulnerable children were entitled to attend school along with key worker children.

Where vulnerable children did not attend school face to face visits were arranged to ensure these children remained safe.

Although Early Help referrals were briefly suspended at the beginning of the pandemic, as this was not a statutory service and staff capacity had been a concern, these were quickly re-instated after a short period.

The social workers in school project, which is part of a national pilot, had proved to be very useful in supporting vulnerable young people to stay in school. This work was also supported by the District Improvement Hubs in avoiding young people being excluded.

The Board would be focusing on two priorities during 2021/22, neglect and exploitation, and Members heard details of the rationale and anticipated work around these priorities.

Part of the work of the SSCB included ensuring learning was identified, improvements embedded at both individual and multi-agency levels, as well as an alertness to emerging risks and understanding systemic issues which policy and practice changes would address. To implement and monitor these a structure of five sub-groups were established on:

- scrutiny and assurance
- child safeguarding practice review
- joint child death overview
- review of restraint
- learning in practice

Members received details of the work of these sub-groups and were pleased to note that they had delegated powers to deliver against their specific responsibilities.

On querying the broader collecting of intelligence around low-level neglect, and particularly for under 1 year olds, Members heard that Staffordshire had made significant investment in this area over the last 4/5 years, particularly in training front line practitioners and awareness raising. Hearing the voice of the under 1s was a challenge, however in this new performance year a thematic review had been commissioned to look at this issue.

Concerns were shared around safeguarding of children who either attended unregistered schools or who were home educated. Staffordshire had invested in staffing of its Elective Home Education (EHE) Service to help support the increasing number of home educated young people. Although the Government had suggested they intended to introduce a statutory register for home educated young people, they had not done so yet.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report be received, and the work undertaken and differences made be welcomed.

35. Joint Overview and Scrutiny Spotlight Review on Sexual Harassment in Schools - Scoping Report

Members received the scoping report for the Health & Care, Prosperous and Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee's joint spotlight review on sexual harassment in schools. The Review was scheduled for 14 January and Mrs Kath Perry MBE would be representing this Committee.

Members were reminded that at the conclusion of this meeting an informal discussion session would be held to consider the questions this Committee wish to be considered as part of the review.

RESOLVED: That the scoping report be noted.

36. Work Programme

The Committee received an update on their work programme and noted that the presentation on the MacAlister Report had been moved back to the February meeting as a result of delays in its final publication.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be agreed.

Chairman