

Minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee Meeting held on 3 September 2018

Present: John Francis (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech
Mike Davies
Syed Hussain
Jason Jones

Paul Snape
Conor Wileman (Vice-Chairman)
Mike Worthington

Also in attendance: Gill Burnett

Apologies: Trevor Johnson and Natasha Pullen

PART ONE

18. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

19. Minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee held on 10 July 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee held on 10 July 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

20. Quarterly Performance Update against Safeguarding Indicators

The Select Committee had requested Key Performance Indicator data on adult safeguarding to help inform areas for future work. The Cabinet Support Member for Adult Safeguarding introduced the report, highlighting the increase of 18% in the number of concerns referred around abuse or neglect and that 45.1% of these converted to a Section 42 enquiry. Whilst Staffordshire had seen a significant increase in referral rates it had seen a decrease in conversion, leading to Staffordshire's conversion rate being more in line with national data.

Members queried why Staffordshire's trend in the number of concerns of abuse or neglect referred was three times that of the national figure, with an increase of 6% nationally and 18% in Staffordshire for 2015/16. In part this was due to differences over the point at which cases were recorded, with Staffordshire recording very early in the process, when a concern may end up being a quality rather than a safeguarding issue. Examples of quality issues could be a late call by carers, or a missed visit, or overcharging by a provider. Issues of quality still needed to be recorded and monitored but needed to be recorded differently.

With regard to the 18% increase in referrals and the 20% in conversions to a Section 42 enquiry, Members asked whether this was due to a cohort of third party organisations making referrals without understanding the thresholds or if Staffordshire's thresholds were too high. An internal audit had taken place this year, and an external audit had been completed in 2016, with both of these finding that Staffordshire was working in line with the Care Act 2014, and therefore working with appropriate thresholds. The manner of recording did, however, vary significantly. Attempts were being made to address this lack of recording consistency, both locally and regionally, including work with the local Safeguarding Board to ensure policies and protocols work well and that consistency of application is improved. The Select Committee requested that they be kept informed of developments in improving consistency of data recording. Members also noted the intention to undertake an audit identifying repeat referrals and the underlying reasons behind these, with a view to developing multi-agency guidance that will set thresholds for appropriate referrals. This audit was expected to start in January 2019 and would be completed by another independent local authority.

Some of the frustrations in using Care Director were discussed. There was an issue around the inability to update a certain screen which meant that in some circumstances cases remained recorded as "open" on Care Director and this then led to an increase in indicator SA6, recording the number of safeguarding referrals and enquiries that remained open after 12 months. Members were also informed of a "bolt on" to the system used for the children's services that was now being requested for adults which should see improvements. Care Director gave access to current and accurate data and Members requested three year comparative data on the safeguarding indicators, which would be circulated after the meeting.

Both children and adult services used Care Director and Members asked whether there was the ability to share information between systems where this was appropriate for the individual. Historically adult social workers had not had access to children's records, however there was a move now to allow the five adult safeguarding officers "read only" access. This would help in identifying the risks to young adults to be identified by the Adult Safeguarding Team.

On querying whether there was enough staff resource Members were informed that the Adult Safeguarding Team had been able to maintain their staff team, however they were under increasing pressure. The Team had one of the lowest sickness rates within the County Council.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the Select Committee receive details of developments in improving consistency of data recording, including the work undertaken both locally and regionally and the results of the audit on the underlying reasons for repeat referrals; and,
- b) three year comparative data on the safeguarding indicators be circulated to Members after the meeting.

21. Customer Feedback and Complaints Service, Adult's Social Services Annual Report 2017/18

The Select Committee considered the Annual Report of the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service, Adults Social Services 2017/18. The report provided information about complaints made during the twelve months between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 under the complaints and representations procedures established under the NHS and Community Care Act 1990 and the Local Authority Act 1970.

From April 2012 Adult Social Care services were transferred to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent NHS Partnership Trust, now known as the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT). From April 2017 the Partnership Trust co-ordinated all statutory complaints relating to adult social care services that they are commissioned to provide. Complaint documentation is shared with the County Council's Complaints Team for reporting purposes and Members received details of these.

In line with the previous year there had been a 28% increase in complaints received by the County Council, due to an increase in complaints regarding financial re-assessments for non-residential care. The number of complaints going to independent investigation had increased by 60%, with two complaints concerning the care provided by a home care agency and three complaints around residential care. The number of complaints investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had risen by 58% from the previous year, with complaints around couple's financial re-assessment for non-residential care.

The main theme for Stage 1 complaints had been changes in domiciliary care contracts. As in previous years, resulting from care charges not being discussed with service users prior to a care package/respite being arranged, 20% of complaints received resulted in charges being waived. 11% of complaints received were in respect of the Brokerage Service.

Members noted that MPFT had chosen to use the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) to handle complaints made to them rather than the statutory complaints process, with PALS handling 138 complaints. Members had some concerns about the decision to use PALS and understood that the Ombudsman had also raised some concerns.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report of the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service, Adults Social Services 2017/18, be received.

22. Customer Feedback and Complaints Service, Children's Social Services Annual Report 2017/18

Members considered the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service Annual Report for Children's Social Services in 2017/18. There were 54 Stage 1 complaints during this period, 5 considered to Stage 2 and 3 considered to Stage 3. Members also received a breakdown of 130 Corporate Complaints considered at Stage 1.

The Complaints Service had excellent relationship with colleagues within Children's Services and valued their co-operation when investigating complaints. Lessons learned from the complaints made helped to inform practice across the Service.

Members asked why complaints would be sent straight to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and were informed that some complainants may feel that making

their complaint to the LGO was the most appropriate. The LGO has started to suggest this is premature and refers complaints back to the local authority.

Members noted that of the 5 Stage 2 Independent Investigation findings 11% of complaints made were partially upheld. In most instances each individual complaint had a number of complaints within it. Within the 5 Stage 2 complaints investigated there were 55 individual complaint elements made. The investigation may feel that some elements of the complaint should be upheld whilst other are not and may therefore return a finding of “partially upheld”.

All learning from complaints was collated, including learning from serious case reviews. This detail was cross referenced to try and identify themes and trends which then informed practice and service improvements.

The Select Committee noted the percentage of complaints that cited “staff conduct” as the reason for the complaint and asked for clarification on this. Most of these complaints were either: where an individual didn’t do what they said they would or when they said they would; or, where the service user hadn’t understood the action to be taken. The Specialist Safeguarding Teams were the teams that picked up all children referrals. They worked in sensitive and complex situations, often delivering information to families that they didn’t want to hear and where circumstances were very difficult. The volume of work continued to increase. Members heard that these teams picked up 850 new pieces of work in a month. The number of complaints in comparison to the volume of work was small. Fortunately a recent agreement had been reached for more investment in children services for 20 additional social workers, which should help with the increasing work loads.

RESOLVED: That the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service Annual Report for Children’s Social Services in 2017/18 be received.

23. Edge of Care Inquiry

The Head of Families First had reported to the Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group in 2016/17 that there was a projected overspend of £3.5m in the Looked After Children budget. A significant number of initiatives had been developed to prevent those on the cusp of care from coming into the care system. At their meeting of 26 September 2017 the Select Committee agreed both the scope, terms of reference and membership of the Inquiry Group to consider this issue.

The Inquiry set out to understand why there had been a rise in the number of children becoming looked after in Staffordshire, the preventative measures in place and whether further initiatives could be developed to prevent children from coming into the care system.

The Chairman of the Inquiry Group, Mr Conor Wileman, presented his report and recommendations. He outlined some of the challenges the Inquiry Group had faced and noted that some of the data identifying the reasons for children becoming looked after had been 2015/16, before the rise in number in 2016/17, making it difficult for the Group to establish the reasons for the rise in numbers. Whilst current data was always

available, this was not validated until the end of each year and therefore there was some anxiety about publishing non validated data.

The Select Committee congratulated the Inquiry Group Members on their report and thanked the officers for their support. They agreed both the report and recommendation for submission to the Cabinet Member for his executive response.

A number of recommendations had also been made to the Corporate Parenting Panel and Members proposed that the Inquiry Group Chairman attend the next meeting of this Panel to present this report.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the report and recommendations be endorsed and submitted to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young people for his executive response; and
- b) The Inquiry Group Chairman attend the Corporate Parenting Panel to present his report.

24. Work Programme

The Select Committee had received two briefing notes, requested at their July meeting, on Post 18 Transition Services and Direct Payments.

Two following items were to be added to the Work Programme:

- Vulnerable Adults Peer Review; and
- Domestic Abuse Contract.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be amended to include the items listed above.

25. Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED - That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below

The Committee then proceeded to consider reports on the following issues:

PART TWO

26. Child Sexual Exploitation - Learning From Reviews

The Committee then proceeded to consider the following report:

Child Sexual Exploitation – Learning from Reviews
(exemption paragraph 7)

Chairman