

Minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee Meeting held on 1 October 2019

Present: John Francis (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech	Jason Jones
Ron Clarke	Paul Snape
Ann Edgeller	Bob Spencer (Vice-Chairman)
Trevor Johnson	Mike Worthington

Also in attendance: Gill Heath, Mark Sutton and Alan White

Apologies: Conor Wileman

PART ONE

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 July 2019

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

15. Domestic Abuse

At their meeting of 15 January 2018 the Select Committee had received an update on the commissioning of Domestic Abuse (DA) services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. A comprehensive needs assessment had been undertaken as part of the re-commissioning process which informed the development of the first pan-Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Domestic Abuse Strategy. Joint governance arrangements had been established to manage and oversee strategy delivery, with a shared multi-agency action plan having been developed.

Staffordshire County Council (SCC), Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire Commissioners Office (SCO) jointly commissioned DA services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, with the SCO acting as lead commissioner. Commissioned services included provision for victims, perpetrators, children and young people. Members received details of these commissioned services, their annual value and a breakdown of SCC's contributions. Services were commissioned from Victim Support and from the Reducing Reoffending Partnership, with both commissioned services provided under the brand name of "New Era", commencing on 1 October 2018. Members received details of referral numbers as well as age and gender profiles.

The County Council's Insight Team had produced the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and this, together with a range of market engagement events with partners, providers and stakeholders, including national DA charity Safe Lives, supported the development of the Service Specification. Demand for victim services had been significant, with a triage process introduced to target high priority cases. Members were concerned that there remained capacity issues, that the provider currently had a waiting list for services and that the level of demand around children and young people perpetrators had not been anticipated. They were informed that the new arrangements enabled a pan Staffordshire consistent service. The new service offered additionality, supporting victims within the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) to resolve issues identified within the need's assessment, as well as an integrated support service providing a bridge between victim and perpetrator services. The service specification looked at reducing cyclical abuse through early intervention, prevention and targeted services. An increase in DA cases had been expected as individuals became more confident in reporting. Police recorded incidents of domestic abuse appeared to have plateaued, with the new services Potentially being one reason for this, but clearly more work would be needed to understand the reasoning.

Members had concerns that there were no base line figures to assess the impact of the new services. Data from previous services had been difficult to assess and/or use to create a base line. Twelve months on data had been gathered from New Era and would be used to create a baseline going forward.

Members were informed that there was confidence that New Era were the right service providers and that they were working hard to support victims. Cases were often complex and there was a need to ensure cases, and particularly repeat offender cases, were accurately and appropriately recorded. Members heard that feedback from social care professionals indicated the perpetrator programme was accessible and working well, with experienced workers and accredited programmes, receiving much more positive reactions than previous programmes.

The report indicated that further resource might be needed to address the unexpected demand for specialist services for children and young people. Members asked whether this resource was already in place and were informed that an element was, although there may need to be additional resource and Commissioners were discussing financial contributions with all funding partners.

The Select Committee asked for details of programmes delivered by New Era. These would be circulated to Members after the meeting and included support for individual victims, children and their families as well as perpetrator programmes looking at building better relationships and behaviour changes.

Members noted the recording of stalking offences had changed in April 2018, with an alteration to the Home Office Classification Rules meaning that stalking and harassment cases were now recorded separately. Nine out of the ten Policing Teams had seen an increase in stalking over the last twelve months (up to the end of March 2019), with an overall increase of 174% over this period of which 70% had been domestic related.

Concern was expressed over the impact domestic abuse had on children and young people within a family and Members were informed that incidents of DA were prevalent in many families with complex needs. Members were aware that the three most significant reasons for children coming into the care system were parental mental ill health, substance misuse and domestic violence. The Strategic Lead for Specialist Safeguarding advised members that new ways of working had been developed in a pilot project around substance misuse, with an intensive targeted twelve-week programme now delivered to families with children on the edge of care. Evidence showed that this new way of working was successful in supporting the whole family and in achieving real change. This would be rolled out across the County and it was hoped that learning from this new approach would be used to develop a similar whole family restorative approach to tackling domestic abuse.

Members were pleased to note the work with partners to support the referral process, including GPs, schools, hospitals, dental surgeries and hair dressers, targeting professionals that had regular contact with individuals and may be able to recognise concerns for referral. Work had also been undertaken to identify Domestic Abuse Champions within work place settings to provide support. Communication was a concern for Members, specifically whether confidentiality would create problems with information sharing, for example with GPs. Information sharing agreements were in place between key agencies and effective information sharing was a priority. There was confidence that referrals were being received from partner organisation.

Repeat offending remained a concern for Members and specifically they wished to ensure that there was robust offender management. Pilot projects in both Newcastle and Tamworth were highlighted as examples of work to reduce repeat offences. These included locally owned and delivered Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARACs) enabling a timelier response from partners, multi-agency ownership and responsibility increased local engagement and improved action plans. A harm reduction hub in Tamworth dealt with complex cases with an emphasis on reducing repeat referrals. The Select Committee were pleased to note these developments. They asked for clarification as to whether the perpetrator programme was Cafcass (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) approved, this would be clarified after the meeting.

Members noted that the MARAC process was subject to a review, led by the Police, looking at learning from the pilot projects. Discussion took place around the differing risk rating systems of DIAL and DASH and the use of professional judgement alongside the scoring system to evaluate risk. Members acknowledged that the continued development and roll out of a consistent approach to MARAC and police led Harm Reduction Hubs was important and that it would be helpful for a Police Lead to attend the next Scrutiny meeting to update the members on progress in this regard.

Members noted that a performance framework was in place and that the service was rigorously reviewed against this framework at quarterly meetings. Performance outcomes would be shared with the Select Committee at a future meeting.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) details of the New Era programmes be circulated to Select Committee Members;
- b) whether the perpetrator programmes were Cafcass approved be clarified; and,

- c) a six-monthly update on DA be included on the Work Programme. Police Lead on MARAC/Harm Reduction Hubs to update at the next Scrutiny Meeting where domestic abuse was tabled.

16. Customer Feedback and Complaints Report - Children's Social Care

The Select Committee received the Customer Feedback and Complaints Annual Report for Children's Social Care in line with the Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. The report gave details of the number of recorded complaints together with information on the outcome and timescales for each.

In 2018/19 112 complaints had been investigated through the Statutory Complaints Procedure, stages 1,2 and 3 and 121 complaints through the Corporate Complaints Procedure at stages 1 and 2. Members received details of these complaint investigations along with details of the 242 compliments received during the same time period.

Members noted that 61% of completed complaints had responded within the prescribed timescales. Whilst there was an aspiration to meet the timescales 100% of the time this was unrealistic as complaints were often complex and involved arranging meetings with several individuals to collate the necessary information. The timescales were challenging, particularly in respect of competing time demands on those involved in the complaint, however it was hoped that an 80% target could more realistically be achieved.

Most complaints were made up of several elements. Many complaints were around communication, and with individuals struggling to understand the process they were involved in being a significant reason for complaints. Whilst recognising the immense work load of professionals there was also a need to remain aware that individual service users would not have the knowledge, expertise and understanding of the service and therefore often needed a greater degree of explanation.

Corporate complaints had seen an overall decrease at Stage 1, with the completed investigations showing an increase in the number of complaints found to be upheld. However, in the vast majority of cases at Stage 1 an explanation and an apology were the required remedies resulting from the investigation. Members noted that despite a decrease in overall Stage 1 Corporate Complaints the SEND Service reported an increase in complaints of 96% compared to 2017/18. At the same time the Safeguarding/Targeted Service reported a 47% decrease, with Looked After Children/Disability Services reporting a 42% decrease.

Concern was expressed at changes to the County's Call Centre arrangements and how these would impact on complaint referrals. Whilst there was a 20-minute wait for calls to be answered through the call centre the Complaints Services direct telephone number was available on the web site and complaints could also be made electronically.

Members remained concerned at the lack of educational psychologists and the impact this had on the timeliness of Education Health Care Plans. They were aware that there was a national shortage of educational psychologists. Staffordshire were recruiting two more educational psychologists to help ameliorate this issue. The Cabinet Member for

Children and Young People also informed the Select Committee that he had requested a deep dive report into differences in performance around this issue across the County to identify delays and subsequently help address these issues.

Learning from each investigation was used to inform future practise and any recommendations made were implemented in a timely manner. This Annual Report was used by the Strategic Leads to help triangulate learning and support self-assessment and service planning going forward.

RESOLVED – That the Customer Feedback and Complaints Annual Report – Children’s Social Care, be noted and the use of learning from complaints to inform future practise be supported.

17. Customer Feedback and Complaints Report - Adults Social Care

The Council had a duty to publish an annual report on the activity of its statutory complaints and representation service under the NHS and Community Care Act 1990 and the Local Authority Act 1970. Members received the Annual Report for 2018/19, considering the number and nature of complaints received, together with responses provided and their handling by the Council.

176 statutory stage 1 complaints were investigated, along with 27 Local Government and Social care complaints. There had been two statutory independent investigations and 182 complaints handled informally. The main areas for complaint had been: poor communication (43); delays in receiving a service (18); financial contributions (16); standard of service (12); and, financial assessment (8).

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing informed Members that there had been a slight increase in the number of complaints, which was to be expected with the changes made to services. Should a complaint be found to be upheld this was acknowledged and work was undertaken to make amends.

Poor communication and a delay in receiving services were the top two reasons for complaints. Members were aware that services were complex but remained concerned that complaints around communication were the most prevalent reason for dissatisfaction. Work was ongoing with finance colleagues to achieve less silo working to ensure the service user received a more joined up service, with a pilot project currently looking at ways to improve this area.

The Chairman shared details of an incident experienced by a service user of his acquaintance who had experience difficulties with the service and for whom the Chairman had made a complaint. In this instance there had been shortfalls in provision, although the appropriate procedures had been in place. This was a very complex service area with many partner organisations contributing to it. Where shortfalls were found it was right to raise the issues concerned and test these against the procedures in place, using learning from any incident to inform future practise. Examples of where changes had been made were given around delays in assessment resulting in this service being brought in-house to improve timeliness. A current issue was out of county placements and work was underway to establish policies and procedures to enable placements to be kept in County as far as possible.

Difficulties with Care Director were shared. From an audit trial point of view when investigating complaints Members were informed that the system was now much improved.

Members noted that the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) had fully investigated 23 complaints of which 12 complaints had been upheld. Members queried whether there had been an opportunity missed to prevent this escalation to the LGSCO. Individual complainants were entitled to take their complaint to the Ombudsman and in some instances the findings were around differing interpretations of the law/guidance. An Annual Report from the LGSCO would be available shortly and would give a national context to the Staffordshire findings. Members felt this would be useful and requested this to a future Select Committee meeting.

Members were reminded of the unintentional consequences of interpretation of the law that came from the Cheshire East finding over Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLs). It was hoped that new legislation would soon be in place around DoLs, then to be called Liberty Protection Safeguarding.

RESOLVED – That the Annual Report of the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service, Adults Social Services 2018/19 be noted and the learning from complaint findings be used to inform future practise.

18. Work Programme

At their July meeting Members had requested a visit to Catch-22 to understand better the work they are commissioned to do for the Council and progress made. The Vice-Chairman and Members of the Select Committee had met with representatives from Catch 22 on 17 September and the Vice Chairman gave a summary of this meeting. Members had been particularly pleased to note that “hearing the children’s voice” was at the heart of the work undertaken by Catch 22.

Members were informed that the letter requested at their July meeting to the Minister of State for Education raising their continued concerns with EHE had been sent on 29th July, with a response received on 16 August 2019. Details of the response had been shared with Members.

The Scrutiny Officer also informed Members of the following proposed amendments to their work programme:

- Children’s Transformation – Part 2, was due to come to the Select Committee on 7 November. It was proposed to invite all members of the SEND working group to join the meeting for that item;
- an item on the Regional Permanency Partnership be included on the agenda for 7 November meeting; and
- the Adult Safeguarding report be included for the 13 January meeting.

Following this morning’s meeting additional work programme items would be included:

- six monthly update on the work of Catch 22;
- six monthly update on the new DA contract work; and
- contextual safeguarding and the process around MASH referrals.

RESOLVED – That the work programme amendments be accepted.

Chairman