

Minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee Meeting held on 7 November 2019

Present: John Francis (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech
Ron Clarke
Paul Snape

Bob Spencer (Vice-Chairman)
Mike Worthington

Also in attendance: Julia Jessel, Jonathan Price and Mark Sutton

Apologies: Trevor Johnson and Victoria Wilson

PART ONE

19. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

20. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 October 2019

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee meeting held on 1 October 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

21. Children and Families System Transformation Part 2

[Members of the SEND Working Group invited to attend for this item]

The Select Committee considered the draft Cabinet paper on the Children and Families System Transformation Part 2, noting progress made. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reminded members that developments with the System Transformation had previously been considered by the Select Committee.

Members received a presentation outlining the whole system model for change and progress to date, highlighting outcomes, which included:

- effectively managing the removal of the £2.4m Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding plus delivering an additional circa £750k as part of the Transformation process;
- achieved £4.2m Earned Autonomy funding;
- 18% reduction in Local Support Team (LST) caseloads over the past 12 months;
- 17% reduction in the total number of social care cases open in the last 12 months;
- piloted district Locality Hubs in the Moorlands and South Staffordshire; and,
- worked with partners to develop a graduated response to need.

Additional pressures had included an increase in the number of looked after children and subsequent pressures on care and court planning, and the Virtual School.

The Select Committee received details of: the underpinning values to the Transformation; the Staffordshire Model; investment in elements of the model; and, stabilizing actions required to address the looked after children number increase. Members also received details of the Business Case for £8.1m investment from 2019/2020 to 2025/26 with a predicted cashable return on investment of £17.072m by 2025/26 and a non-cashable saving of £15.611m from growth avoidance. Members heard that with the current Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) commitment delivered, the underlying overspend on looked after children mitigated, and the predicted return on investment, the impact on the overall MTFS by 2025/26 would be an improved position of £3.453m, with a projected break even date of April 2023.

Members also received details of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) changes as part of the whole system approach. Stabilisation activity had been introduced to mitigate the funding shortfall for SEND. Future delivery provision would be part of the District Model and would inform the SEND strategy, with funding for children with SEND being via the high needs block. Key elements of the SEND Transformation included: SEND locality hubs; inclusive mainstream education settings for children with moderate learning difficulties; broadening the remit of Special Schools to support mainstream settings; and, the Special Schools Strategy. It was important to look at the individual child's needs rather than a "label" to ensure appropriate support. More focused SEND partnership working was in place, which included representation from parents and carers. There was also a change to the way in which need was responded to, which aimed to provide a timely, appropriate and graduated response.

Members noted that the Out of County Placements (OCP) for children with specific SEND were independent non state funded special schools.

Members agreed that to "do nothing" was not an option and that the proposals were welcomed. However, there was concern that the success of much of this work was dependent on partnership working and the need to ensure each partner was fully engaged. The SEND Locality Hubs were welcomed but Members highlighted the necessity for all areas to be working well with this model. Concern was also expressed around possible difficulties in persuading some partners to engage fully with this process, with academies suggested as one potential area of difficulty as the Authority could not require them to attend. The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that buy-in from all schools to the SEND Hubs had been very good to date and a lot of place-based work was already successfully taking place.

One of the significant findings in the SEND Ofsted report had been around co-production, and ensuring a relationship developed that allowed relevant partners to contribute to the development of SEND was essential. A governance model had been produced which also took account of how work would be allocated and completed at a district level. The initial hub development had been successful and the expectation was that these would be developed within all of the eight district and boroughs by September 2020. Over half Staffordshire schools were now academies, however all schools were aware of their accountability and statutory responsibilities and the Local Authority

worked with academies and academy trusts to ensure that they were part of these developments and saw the value in this partnership working. All schools within South Staffordshire and around the North Staffordshire hub had been fully engaged, with the hub process working well.

In the first phase of the Place Based Approach (PBA) in 2015/16 successful pilot projects had been undertaken in Tamworth and Newcastle. This learning had been successfully rolled out across the County, with some areas having been easier than others. Partnership working had seen district and boroughs, the Police and the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) coming together in the eight localities to identify areas of work that would effect positive change in their area. Robust governance was in place around all this work. The earned autonomy status from the Building Resilient Families and Communities programme (BRFC) had meant that money could be allocated against initiatives agreed by the local partnerships. Monthly performance meetings were held to scrutinise performance against priorities to ensure the investment was working, with good outcomes already evidenced, such as a 7% reduction in anti-social behaviour in Tamworth and a reduction in permanent school exclusions in two other districts.

The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that a robust plan was in place to ensure effective roll out of hubs, with a risk register developed to enable mitigation of identified risks. A governance structure had been developed to manage the process and to ensure that the plan met key milestones. Members requested a copy of the plan to help in their future scrutiny of progress made.

Whilst supporting the proposed new approach the Select Committee were aware that it would require significant changes to culture and practice and asked whether this was an indication that the current system was wrong. The Cabinet Member informed them that over a period of time everything developed and there was a need to change systems and ways of working to ensure best outcomes, such as through the development of restorative practice and whole family working.

On considering the significant cultural changes required for this new approach, Members highlighted the difficulties in ensuring all staff were motivated and supported the changes and were assured that work had been, and continued to be undertaken to support this change.

Members noted that the Ofsted inspection of children's social services had been positive and asked whether the significant changes proposed in the Transformation System would result in losing some of this good practice. The Cabinet Member informed them that regular meetings were held with representatives from Ofsted, outside of the formal inspection processes. Ofsted had indicated they were happy with the proposed changes and direction of travel, which had taken into account the work of a number of local authorities who had been judged as "outstanding".

It was also noted that statutory interventions were seen as a last resort, with children only coming into the care system if they were at risk of serious harm. The new system was designed to work with the whole family, with this intensive family support enabling more children to stay in their family setting and fewer being brought into the care system.

The Select Committee noted that North Yorkshire was referred to as an outstanding authority from which learning had informed the development of Staffordshire's Transformation proposals. They were informed that during the development of the Transformation programme evidence of ways of working had been gathered from many areas, including authorities judged as outstanding, including Essex, Leeds, East Sussex and North Yorkshire. A number of authorities had received innovation funding, with most of these authorities using this funding for family group conference work, which was one of the areas Staffordshire was now putting in place to support the intensive family support and reduce the number of looked after children. It had been felt that transforming the model as a whole would result in better and more joined up ways of working, rather than developing individual parts of the service in isolation, particularly as each part impacted on the other. Learning from other local authorities which had informed decisions for Staffordshire proposals had included both the areas that worked and those areas that in hindsight suggested a different approach.

Members sought reassurance that the decision making process using the one front door approach had the right intelligence base to enable appropriate decisions to be taken. They also referred to information they had recently received in respect of Catch 22 and Domestic Abuse (DA), highlighting the vital importance of effective information sharing to enable informed and accurate decision making. Information was gathered through the Early Help systems. The Cabinet Member offered to forward details of how the new IT system would work after the meeting to highlight the breadth of information shared between partners to enable the most effective decision making for service users.

Members noted the rise in unaccompanied asylum seekers and the work undertaken by the Virtual Schools to support them.

Whilst the Select Committee were pleased to note the extra staff resource the Transformation Programme allowed, they had concerns over difficulties in recruitment of appropriately trained staff. The biggest section of recruitment was around family support workers, which was also the easiest area to recruit to. Qualified social workers and educational psychologists were difficult to recruit, and this was a national problem. Wider recruitment tools were being used as well as work to enable Staffordshire to grow and train their own staff resource.

Members felt this proposed approach was very aspirational and had some concerns that the Transformation and its subsequent savings were based on a number of assumptions. Whilst understanding the reasons behind this the Select Committee felt it imperative to ensure milestones were met and progress effective. To help support this process they proposed creating a working group to meet monthly, or as appropriate, to scrutinise the progress made.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the progress made to date on the Children and Families System Transformation Part 2, the system aspiration and investment be noted;
- b) further detail on how the new IT system enables effective information sharing be forwarded to Members;

- c) a copy of plan for developing the roll out of hubs, giving key milestones, be forwarded to the Select Committee to enable them to monitor and scrutinise progress made;
- d) a Select Committee working group be established to monitor progress made on a monthly (or as appropriate) basis with the following membership:
 - Bob Spencer
 - Ann Beech
 - Ron Clarke
 - Mike Worthington
 - Paul Snape

22. Regional Permanency Arrangement Development (Phase One)

The Permanency Partnership between Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council fulfilled the statutory requirements of the Education and Adoption Act 2016 and delivered the vision set out by the Government in “Regionalising Adoption” (DfE 2015). In April 2017 these four local authorities established the North Midlands Regional Adoption and Permanency Partnership. The Partnership aimed to improve outcomes for children who entered care and required permanent care away from their families of origin. This included children who were adopted from care, children living with special guardians and kinship carers, and those who required long-term foster care.

This Partnership was the only regional arrangement to have secured Department for Education (DfE) transformation grant funding to develop services for this broad “permanence” agenda.

The Select Committee noted that a phased transformation programme had been developed to align partner local authority functions and practice. The arrangements would operate a hub and spoke model, enabling local authorities to benefit from the delivery of some core services whilst maintaining individual independence. Staff would continue to be employed and based in their current local authority, with opportunities for secondment explored for specific regional roles and functions within the Partnership.

A central Regional Permanency Hub would co-ordinate and deliver core functions across the partnership’s footprint. Locality Permanency Hubs would operate within individual local authorities and would form part of the wider Children and Families System. A Service Management Board was in place to be accountable for the regional arrangements.

Members understood that the Partnership gave benefits in marketing and economies of scale as well as better use of digitalisation and technologies. It helped to pool expertise and enabled better engagement with stakeholders.

Members noted work was well on track to meet the “go live” date of April 2020.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the statutory requirement to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by 1 April 2020 be acknowledged;

- b) the progress to date in the formation of the RAA between Staffordshire County Council, Stone-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council be welcomed; and,
- c) the Partnership's ambition to go beyond adoption and develop a regional model of wider permanence be supported; and
- d) a report detailing progress to date be brought to the Select Committee in six months time.

23. Building Resilient Families and Communities Programme (BRFC)

The Building Resilient Families and Communities (BRFC) programme was Staffordshire's response to the Government Troubled Families Initiative, developed to improve multi-agency responses to the needs of families who had multiple needs that resulted in a high cost to the public purse. After evidencing positive performance in delivering the programme Staffordshire were one of 14 local authorities that successfully achieved "Earned Autonomy" status in April 2018. This moved funding from a Payment by Results model to up-front funding with the aim of supporting accelerated service transformation for Early Help. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government had confirmed that funding would be available up until 2020-2021.

The Select Committee considered progress made to date in delivering the BRFC programme and the outlined vision for ongoing delivery into 2020-2021. They noted the number of families attached to the BRFC programme had steadily risen, exceeding the original target of 4,680 families, and was now working with a total of 6,049 families encompassing 23,667 people. Work with 2,796 families had successfully closed, which gave a conversion rate of 60%. A challenging target of 80% conversion rate had been set for March 2020.

The number of families who received subsequent interventions from children's social care was 2.5% of the families who had achieved successful outcomes as at January 2019. Whilst there would always be a small percentage of families that remained challenging, BRFC worked to build resilience and an understanding of how to manage when difficulties re-emerged.

Locality work was supported through district governance arrangements, enabling local ownership and leadership. Each district had developed their own Family Improvement Board which worked to bring together partners from public, private, voluntary and community sectors and families themselves to deliver improved outcomes for children and their families.

Members requested details of the quarterly progress on the earned autonomy district investment plans. They felt the evidence given was very encouraging. Members also noted that as BRFC was part of the wider outcomes for Children and Family Services in future this work would be considered by the Select Committee as part of the wider Transformation programme.

The Select Committee was informed that this would be the last meeting before Barbara Hine, BRFC Co-ordinator, retired. On behalf of the Select Committee the Chairman thanked Barbara for all she has contributed and in particular her expertise, commitment and advice to the Select Committee.

RESOLVED - That;

- a) the progress with the BRFC be noted;
- b) quarterly progress on the earned autonomy district investment plans be forwarded to Select Committee Members;
- c) future scrutiny of BRFC will be part of the wider Transformation programme.

24. Work Programme

The Scrutiny and Support Manager outlined the following proposed additions to the Work Programme:

- an update on taxi licensing following the Regional Licencing Groups scrutiny of Wolverhampton's approach to taxi licensing;
- a progress report on the Regional Permanency Arrangements in six months time; and,
- that future scrutiny of BRFC will be as part of scrutinising the Children's Transformation.

RESOLVED – That the proposed amendments to the work programme be agreed.

Chairman