

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 6 July 2021

Present: Bob Spencer (Chairman)

Attendance

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

Also in attendance: Mark Sutton and Victoria Wilson

Apologies: Mike Wilcox

PART ONE

15. Declarations of Interest

Vice-Chairman Gill Burnett declared an interest in minute number 19 with regard to her daughter, who is an Early Years Co-ordinator at a Children's Centre.

16. Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June 2021

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

17. Domestic Abuse

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested an update on Domestic Abuse services across Staffordshire, focusing on the impact of the pandemic. Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire Commissioners Office (SCO) jointly commissioned Domestic Abuse (DA) services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, with the SCO acting as lead commissioner. Services included the provision for victims, perpetrators, children and young people. The service contract for victims services had been awarded to Victim Support, with services for perpetrators awarded to the Reducing Reoffending Partnership. Both these services were provided under the brand name of New Era.

Members heard that the overall annual contract value for the Victims and Perpetrator provision was £2,157,000 with the County Council annual contribution being £670,490. This equated to a contribution of 31% of the value of the contract annually, with SCO contributing £1,015,483 (47%) and Stoke City Council contributed £544,997 (22%). The Tri-Partite Agreement for both Victim and Perpetrator services commenced in October

2018 and contained an option to extend the contract for each service for a period of two years from 30th September 2020 until 30th September 2023. The decision to action this extension had been mutually agreed by all parties and the extension was now in place. The Committee felt Staffordshire were getting good value for money from their contribution.

Since the contract began there had been 14,160 referrals/enquiries for support to the victim service across Staffordshire and Stoke, of which 62.9% (8,907) were from Staffordshire residents and Members heard details of the latest quarterly performance report (Q4 20/21). A breakdown of referrals by district for each service was also shared and Members queried why some districts had seen a more noticeable rise in referral numbers. Referrals were monitored on a quarterly basis with fluctuations in each district being fairly common. It was anticipated that districts with higher referral numbers in the last quarter were examples of this normal fluctuation, although this would be monitored.

Members had wanted to satisfy themselves that there were appropriate links between services provided for children and young people who are at risk of child exploitation and services which support victims of domestic abuse to ensure that information wasn't missed that may lead to individuals not receiving appropriate services. The Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Panels enabled information to be shared between services and partner agencies, enabling a joined-up approach to service delivery. New Era attended these Panels. Members heard that the Police also attended MACE Panels, with information governance arrangements in place to allow information to be shared amongst all MACE partners, enabling appropriate actions and support to be put in place.

Members had also queried the rationale behind the disparity in the number of referrals into Staffordshire's commissioned DA services and referrals to the Police. Staffordshire had seen a 30% increase in referrals for their DA services but the Police had not seen a corresponding rise. Analysis was underway to identify the reasons for this and detail of this would be shared with the Committee in due course.

The Committee had requested detail of the impact of the C19 pandemic on DA and heard that this had been seen on both those affected by DA and those delivering services nationally, regionally and locally. During the first lockdown, New Era had seen an immediate drop in the number of referrals to services and low figures were recorded for the end of March and April 2020. Referral rates started to pick up again in May and reached the level of the previous year (i.e. 2019) by the end of May/early June. After the first lockdown was lifted, numbers of referrals increased by approximately 5% on those recorded at the same point the previous year. Following the return to school in September 2020, demand for services increased further. Initially the increase was not unusual, as referrals tend to increase at the start of school terms. However, the number of referrals has continued to increase and had now reached volumes around 30% greater than the same period last year.

The Committee shared concerns that, given the considerable increase in demand, the impact of the restrictions on service delivery and the impact of Covid-19 on staff, there were now waiting lists for both victims and perpetrator services. However, they heard that the triage process in place allocated individuals to workers based upon a robust assessment of risk, meaning that waiting was kept to a minimum for those who were assessed as higher risk.

The victim service reported an increase in the number and complexity of incoming calls to the helpline resulting in increased duration of calls and increased time spent by the Initial Response Officers on triage and outgoing contact. Due to the national restrictions, routine face-to-face service delivery largely ceased. The Perpetrator Service stopped delivering groupwork sessions (which was the usual method of delivery for the programme) and instead delivered their programmes on a 1:1 basis. This had a significant impact on the number of individuals they were able to support at one time and in turn had increased waiting times.

Members asked for details of waiting times for perpetrator services. This information was not available at the meeting but would be shared with Members afterwards.

The Committee queried the lower Staffordshire take up of the Perpetrator programme, particularly in comparison to the higher number seen in Stoke-on-Trent. There was further work needed to increase referral numbers, partly through cultural change, understanding the importance of addressing perpetrator behaviours to support long-term change, and partly an awareness raising of the service. It was also necessary to acknowledge that involvement in this service was voluntary and to take part in the service there was a need for perpetrators to be motivated to change their behaviours.

DA support services had significantly adapted their service delivery to ensure continuity of service and Members gave credit to staff for their flexibility and dedication throughout this extremely challenging period. Services retained their 'front door' to victims and their families and the perpetrator programme had been adapted appropriately. For both victim and perpetrator services, availability of support and services had been maintained throughout the pandemic, largely via remote working arrangements and online delivery, but with some face-to-face support where appropriate and safe to do so. They also received details of the new Adult Specialist Worker provision which provided dedicated support to the whole family unit, focusing on helping and supporting parents and their children at the earliest opportunity. This new way of working had been piloted in Cannock and consideration was now being given to how it would be developed throughout the County. Members queried the funding for this and were informed this formed part of the investment in the Children's Transformation programme.

The Committee heard that the Domestic Abuse Act had now passed both Houses of Parliament and was signed into law on 29 April 2021. There were a number of provisions within the Act, including the creation of a statutory definition of domestic abuse with a recognition that abuse can be emotional, controlling or coercive and economic abuse, as well as physical violence; establishing the role of the Office of Domestic Abuse Commissioner; creating a statutory presumption that victims of domestic abuse are eligible for special measures in courts; prohibiting perpetrators of domestic abuse from cross-examining their victims in person in courts; and extending the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse among other provisions.

Members wished to reassure themselves that DA services could be accessed by those who may have No Recourse to Public Funds. Officers will consult the DA Act and will forward information to Members after the meeting.

One of the key implications of the Act for Local Authorities was the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Duty. The Duty placed a legislative requirement on upper tier local authorities to ensure the provision of support for domestic abuse victims and their families within safe accommodation. This Duty covered a range of types of safe accommodation (including refuge accommodation, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation, sanctuary schemes, move-on accommodation and other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation). Members heard that Staffordshire had been allocated £1.5 million from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) towards this duty and work was underway, under the auspices of the Domestic Abuse Commissioning & Development Board, to ensure that Staffordshire was able to meet their requirements. On questioning whether the £1.5 million was a one off payment Members were informed that this figure had been allocated to support the new safe accommodation duty. It is anticipated that we will receive funding in future years, but the amount of this funding will be outlined in the Government's Autumn Spending Review.

Members noted that repeat offenders or victims weren't mentioned within the report. Evidence suggested that targeting services on the small number of repeat offenders and victims would have a significant impact. An analysis of repeat offenders was currently being undertaken by Staffordshire Police, lead by Chief Superintendent Mattinson. The findings from this work would be reflected in action plans for future service provision.

RESOLVED : That:

- a) the developments in delivery of both perpetrator and victims services be supported;
- b) the range of changes to service provision as mitigation for the difficulties created by the Pandemic be welcomed and staff be congratulated on their flexible approach to overcome these issues;
- c) results of the analysis into the rationale behind the disparity in the number of referrals into Staffordshire's commissioned DA services and referrals to the Police be shared with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- d) learning from the analysis of data regarding repeat victims and offenders currently being undertaken by Staffordshire Police be shared with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- e) details of waiting times for perpetrator services be shared with the Committee; and
- f) details of whether the Domestic Abuse Act addresses the needs of those with No Recourse to Public Funds be forwarded to the Committee after the meeting.

18. Together4Children Regional Permanency Partnership Update Briefing

Members had previously requested detail of progress made with the regional Together4Children Permanency Partnership which, since going live on 28 September 2020, had been delivering the regional adoption service for Staffordshire County Council, Shropshire Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. Partnership development activity had started in 2018 in response to the Government's 'Regionalising Adoption' agenda and brought together 4 Partner Council's to plan the delivery of adoption services regionally.

Through the development phase a vision had been created that went beyond the delivery of Adoption Services and focused on a broader range of activities to ensure that children entering care achieved permanency, working together to improve outcomes for those children who entered care and were not able to return to their birth parents. The Vision was to ensure that children achieved emotional, physical, and legal permanence; growing up in loving homes with adults who provided them with a strong sense of security, continuity, commitment, and identity. The Partnership aimed to:

- a) make best use of collective resources to recruit, assess and support prospective adopters across the region;
- b) improve the quality and speed of matching for children through better planning and by having a wider choice of adopters;
- c) provide high quality support to children and their families delivered through a combination of direct provision and effective partnerships;
- d) provide all children and their families with the right support at the right time through a consistent permanency support offer across the region.

The Committee heard about the delays resulting from the Pandemic and the work developed resulting from that. Whilst it was still early days for Together4Children there were already positive achievements in the effectiveness of encouraging enquiries from potential adopter families and in the number of successful adoptions.

One of the main aims for the new agency was to enable adoptive children to stay within their region of birth where possible. This enabled lifelong support to be offered to children and their adoptive families, through to support for adopted adults who may wish to explore their birth identity.

Members were aware that some children were more difficult to find adoptive families for, with the current most challenging groups to place being boys over 5 years and children in sibling groups.

The Committee were pleased to note that Together4Children was to be one of only two regional adoption agencies to be part of Adoption UK's innovative 'TESSA' support program for adoptive families. This was a pilot program, currently funded through the Big Lottery Community Fund, which aimed to create the conditions for healthy development and family wellbeing in adoptive families at risk of the effects of early childhood trauma. Since TESSA went live in October 2020 40 families across the Together4Children region had received this support.

The Committee were also informed that in addition to the delivery of Regional Adoption Services, other areas of regional practice were being developed, supporting children who came into care to achieve stability and permanence within foster or kinship care families. Together4Children were to be the first ever Local Authority Partnership to receive funding for, and jointly launch, the 'Mockingbird Family Fostering Model' by working together across the four fostering services. The launch of this first regional Mockingbird 'constellation' (a group of foster carers supported by an experience 'hub' carer) was in June/July 2021.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) developments with the regional Together4Children Permanency Partnership and the achievements since its launch be welcomed; and

- b) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be kept informed of developments with this initiative and the two pilot projects.

19. Developing Family Hubs in Staffordshire

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People shared details of the emerging development of the Family Hubs. This was part of the manifesto pledge to champion Family Hubs across England, bringing together a whole family approach enabling families access to early advice, information and support at a local level.

The Committee considered details of the emerging vision for the development of Family Hubs in Staffordshire, demonstrating how ambitions for Family Hubs would contribute to the delivery of the Families Strategic Partnership Children, Young People and Families Strategy, the Early Help Strategy and the development of the Place Based Approach for Children and Families. Members received details of the emerging thinking regarding the development of the Family Hub Model. They were reminded that evidence showed a child's experiences from conception to five played a critical role in their development. Measurable gaps in outcomes between disadvantaged and vulnerable children and their peers could emerge early before children were two years of age with these being difficult and costly to close. In particular, evidence showed that a child's home environment, and parent-child relationships, were central to early development and there was a strong financial case for providing Early Help at this age to prevent later more costly support.

Family Hubs were designed to overcome difficulties some families may face in understanding how to access support, improving the coordination of national and local services and their delivery to vulnerable and disadvantaged families with children aged from conception to nineteen. Members heard that whilst the pandemic provided a challenging backdrop, it had sharpened awareness of the risk faced by some disadvantaged and vulnerable families of being left behind and had encouraged local agencies to explore greater integration and enhanced partnership working.

Staffordshire has a well-developed existing network of Children's Centres which currently focused provision on the Early Years. This network of Children's Centres (operated through the Early Years Coordination Service) sought to deliver a seamless integrated service within communities in relation to the Early Years. The delivery of Staffordshire's Children's Centres was underpinned by the Children Centre Statutory Guidance. This statutory guidance stated that Local Authorities were required to consult with families if they planned to make changes to the delivery of the Children's Centre Services. With this in mind the Committee's support was sought to engage in a period of consultation with families to develop the Children's Centres into Family Hubs with a broader age remit and offer of holistic placed based support working with partners.

Members heard that the aim was to develop a Staffordshire Family Hub model which:

- a) brought together a range of provision into a coherent, connected and accessible offer to families around a local place, supporting them to achieve and maintain positive outcomes and seek to prevent needs from escalating;
- b) placed a focus on early help and prevention with the communities of Staffordshire;

- c) took a whole-family approach and was available to families with children aged 0-19 (and up to 25 for those with SEND), providing services for the all, the some and the few;
- d) had physical presence within a community as well as an online offer and maximised the use of existing resources within a locality, as part of our Place Based Approach; and
- e) adopted a Restorative Practice Model, which seeks to build and maintain healthy relationships and a sense of community.

Developing the Family Hub Model would build upon the Early Help Systems Guide, developed by the MHCLG' which outlined their vision for the early help landscape. This had evidenced several factors which contributed towards delivering improved outcomes and preventing problems from worsening. Over the Summer 2021, the intention was to work together with stakeholders to further develop the approach to Family Hubs to reflect the Staffordshire local context and the needs of Staffordshire's children, young people and families which would inform a report to Cabinet in September 2021.

Members noted that access to the Family Hub would not be dependent upon a formal assessment. However, formal assessments would be undertaken where appropriate in relation to the level of need.

The Committee were informed that as a key component of Staffordshire's early help offer, Family Support was commissioned on a countywide basis, but with a locality footprint. In line with the Place Based Page Approach, commissioners worked with the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to develop the community and voluntary sector market in localities. This resulted in local community organisations being commissioned to deliver whole-family tier 2 support, which joined up services around the family to tackle root causes. The commissioned Family Support services made a significant contribution to achieving targets set by the MHCLG in relation to the Building Resilient Families and Communities (BRFC) programme.

Members were pleased to note that demand was monitored, and service delivery performance managed, by SCC. Monitoring indicated that there continued to be a need for this service provision across the county. Current investment into the Family Support Service contract was circa £2 million per annum. This included SCC investment of £700,000 and external funding from the BRFC budget. The intention was to invest BRFC money for 21/22, subject to an MHCLG decision regarding the continuation of this funding beyond March 2022.

Whilst it was anticipated that Children's Centres would form the foundation of the emerging Family Hub Model, the staffing model currently in place would need to be further developed to support the evolving role of the Family Hub. The management of Children's Centres was currently facilitated through a commissioned Early Years Coordination Service working together with the Internal Children and Families Business Support Service with contractual arrangements due to come to an end in March 2022. Prior to April 2022, it is proposed to work together with key stakeholders to undertake a review of the Early Years Coordination Service and the Internal Children and Families Business Support Service (in connection to Children's Centres) to develop a model which ensured the continued delivery of the Children's Centre Core Offer, whilst

developing an integrated infrastructure for the emerging Family Hub. Members received details of the phased approach to Family Hub development.

Members noted Children's Centres had been closed during the Pandemic and queried how services had been delivered and when the Centres would be reopened. Whilst the physical buildings had been closed the services had continued in a variety of ways, including a full on-line service provision. Government guidance would direct when the Children's Centres buildings re-opened. Some concerns were shared for those families unable to access on-line support and the importance of face to face support was emphasised. The Committee was pleased to note that face to face contact had been ongoing through a range of settings, including schools, parks, family gardens, to ensure support continued. Some families indicated they preferred on-line support, feeling less judged and more able to be open using on-line support.

Concerns were raised over a potential overreliance on voluntary sector for service delivery as well as the previous reductions in youth service, children centre and health visitor services when the evidence used for the concept of Family Hubs was the importance of early support. The right balance of service provision between in-house and the voluntary sector services was always considered. Many local volunteers working within Children Centres had previously received services themselves and wanted to add invaluable support from their own life experience at a local level. The Council was not unique in having to consider how to deliver services differently to accommodate financial pressures. Service delivery had changed and new and innovative ways to support Staffordshire residents had been developed.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the emerging national context and local strategic vision for the development of Family Hubs across Staffordshire as well as the future commissioning intentions in relation to Family Hubs, specifically in respect of Family Support Services and the Early Years Coordination Service (Children's Centres) be supported;
- b) the proposed incremental development of Family Hubs across Staffordshire through the development of an integrated model of working be noted and further development of Family Hubs be considered by the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee within twelve months following public consultation.

20. Work Programme

The Committee noted that items from their 17 June planning meeting had been included on their work programme. There were several cross-cutting items proposed and consideration would be given to how these progressed, looking at whether joint work between Committees would be beneficial. In particular the item proposed on sexual harassment in schools had also been included on the work programmes for both Prosperous and Health, with a spot light piece of work proposed, to include one member from each Committee, who would then report back to their respective overview and scrutiny committees.

Further discussions were taking place to manage agenda planning, allocating proposed items throughout the calendared meetings. Discussions were also ongoing between the Chairmen of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel and this Committee to prevent duplication with this Committee's role as the Crime and Disorder Panel and the work of the Panel.

RESOLVED: That the update work programme be agreed.

Chairman