

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 21 April 2022

Present: Bob Spencer (Chairman)

Attendance

Gill Burnett (Vice-Chairman (Overview))	Gillian Pardesi
Richard Ford (Vice-Chairman (Scrutiny))	Mike Wilcox
Peter Kruskonjic	

Also in attendance: Mark Sutton

Apologies: Janet Eagland, Kath Perry, MBE and Jill Waring

PART ONE

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 January 2022

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 January 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

3. Young Carers

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested details of the service provision for young carers, and now considered a presentation outlining Staffordshire's provision. A new all age carers strategy had been developed with the five Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) "All Together for Carers (2019-2023)". Engagement activities whilst developing the strategy had shown that pathways and processes for carers were at times unclear, with no single point for initial contact. It had also highlighted that: practice around carers was variable depending on assessment; commissioned services were not widely known or used; carers wanted a break from caring, with a few hours to pursue an interest often being enough; young carers said their highest need was for support to manage their caring role in the home; and, a need to better identify carers to avoid carer crisis.

It was estimated there were approximately 2000 young carers across Staffordshire.

Implementation of the Staffordshire Together for Carers Service was slightly delayed due to the Pandemic, but finally went live in April 2021. It is an all-age carers service with one lead commissioned provider, n-compass, allowing a more straightforward and clearer contractual arrangement. The initial support and assessment had been brought in-house to enable a one-stop-shop for initial contact. The service pathway aimed to provide:

- high quality and easily accessible information, advice and guidance that explained when and how to find support and who was likely to be eligible, including an initial assessment on need and active referral on to preventative support and beyond as necessary;
- an enhanced range of preventative support for carers of all ages in the community to prevent, reduce or delay the need for additional and higher cost support;
- further assessment and support planning where necessary and access to formal support to meet assessed eligible needs on a basis that was transparent and equitable.

Members received details of service pathways and were pleased to note that work was ongoing with schools in helping to identify young carers.

Members considered the eight generic service outcomes and, in particular, the one specific to young carers, "children & young people with caring responsibilities have the support they need to learn, develop, thrive and enjoy positive childhoods". Measures of success in achieving this outcome were highlighted as young carers reporting that they knew who to speak to for support, an increase in the number of Young Carers known to their school or education provider in order that appropriate support could be provided when required, with the aim of improving attendance, improving emotional wellbeing and reducing risk. A further measure of success was that 95% of Young Carers that wanted to, had been offered access to peer support and a break from their caring role.

The Committee considered performance data from the three-quarter reports to date. They were pleased to note that further work would be developed to enable a greater clarity in this reporting, with more depth behind the figures given and some reported figures sub-divided to give a more accurate reflection of the caring activity undertaken.

Members discussed concerns around the amount of caring activity young carers may be undertaking and asked what an acceptable level would be. Clear guidelines were set out for this, and part of the initial triage and assessment process would consider the level of care given and refer to n-compass and/or adult care services for support as appropriate. The triage

service would also take account of the type of care given and the number of hours undertaken.

The Committee raised the issue of respite care to enable young carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities. Whilst n-compass provided short breaks once a year, there wasn't currently a more frequent overnight respite type facility. The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that this was something he would take back, giving consideration to the possibility of more frequent short respite offers.

Members wanted to reassure themselves that in supporting young carers the County Council was not simply enabling them to continue in inappropriate roles. There was a particular concern around the performance measure of the number of young carers who cared for between 11-30 hours per week, feeling a caring role for 30 hours per week could be seen as child exploitation. There was a need to understand the figures better, looking at the individual situations and the type of care given. It was also important to understand whether this was care for individuals with an assessed need or needs that didn't qualify for statutory services. Where an individual met the need for statutory services a referral to adult social care would be made.

Members were informed that work was undertaken to hear the voice of the young carer and that skilled and well-trained officers undertook the initial triage process to help establish the level and types of care given and any impact on the young carers wellbeing. Members asked for the opportunity to meet young carers to reassure themselves first hand of the support and service provided. This may be something The Voice Project could facilitate.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the implementation of the new Together for Carers Service be welcomed;
- b) developments in the type of data recorded to enable a clearer picture of types and hours of caring undertaken to supported; and
- c) an opportunity for the Committee to meet with young carers to hear their experience of the service first hand be explored.

4. Community Support (incl Dom Care) and 1-1 Intensive Support for Children with Disabilities

Developments to home care & community-based support for children & young people with disabilities in Staffordshire had been scrutinised by the Committee in June 2021 prior to a Cabinet decision on the new integrated service. At that meeting the Scrutiny Committee had requested a further report in six months to establish progress made.

Members were reminded of the challenging marketplace issues that had influenced the changes, including staffing shortages across the sector locally as well as nationally, in both adults and children's social care. There had also been limited choice of provision in Staffordshire within the children's framework, with just five providers then available.

Progress since the Cabinet decision in July 2021 was shared with the Committee, including:

- a full open tender for all four service types;
- flexible framework contracts to be in place with 11 providers from 1 April 2022. Utilising this flexible framework procurement approach enabled it to be re-opened at specific intervals to allow providers to be added on a contracted basis as appropriate;
- shortfalls in capacity and choice had been addressed to support children and young people with complex needs and/or who needed urgent care, with at least six contracted providers now covering each double district operational area;
- seven new entrants to the children's market, some of whom currently delivered adult care services to Staffordshire residents and some new entrants from neighbouring authority areas;
- specifications for new services written alongside those for the new Tier 2 Family Support providers, which included new requirements for early help services to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) to prevent, reduce or delay additional need;
- better linking between the Aiming High Short Breaks for Children with SEND programme and the Healthy Activities and Food (HAF) funded activities for families in food poverty, enabling a broader range of accessible support for families caring for a child with SEND.

Market development and commercial work still to be developed included:

- further options for home care, for this reason the framework would be re-opened in October following further engagement activity throughout the summer, which it was hoped would encourage further new entrants;
- 1-1 short breaks support was currently limited to 3-4 providers in some areas. Some providers had indicated that their own capacity to submit multiple tenders had inhibited their involvement in this service tender, however they remained interested in joining the Framework, subject to the usual commercial and procurement processes and SCC due diligence;
- further work to be undertaken with the District Operational Teams to reduce or eliminate emergency care provision being sourced outside of SCC's frameworks, and to manage associated costs;
- to ameliorate the continuing challenges of independent sector providers, plans were being developed to pilot in-house delivery from summer 2022 onwards, focusing on the East Staffs District

initially to test viability, as East Staffs was the area with the most limited provider options currently;

- consideration of the balance between spend on Direct Payments (DP) (which was falling) and agency care (currently rising) and ways to address the number of DP hand backs, reviewing the hourly DP rate.

Members welcomed the progress made. They noted the reduction in use of DP, querying the reasons for this. DP saw the service users have employer responsibilities, which some families had found difficult to navigate. This had accelerated throughout Covid restrictions. There was a need to highlight again the benefits of DP, for example enabling families to have more control of the service provided and ensure consistency of carer. A better DP pay rate was being proposed, in line with the increase recently introduced for adult services, which would enable families to pay at least the National Living Plus 5%. There would be significant cost implications if the movement away from DP to agency care was not addressed.

Members asked what efforts were made to ensure consistency of carers where agency care was used. Whilst consistency of carer was preferable and work continued to encourage this to happen as far as possible, it did not happen in all cases.

Members were pleased to note the excellent work from providers for holiday activities. They also noted there was funding for the activity for three years, ensuring stability for this provision.

RESOLVED: That the Committee were reassured by the progress made, particularly with the increase in provider numbers and in the recognition of potential problems with Direct Payment reductions and the proactive work to address this.

5. Spotlight Review of Sexual Harassment in Education

The Chairman thanked Members of the Spotlight Review for their report, which he felt was useful. He had some reservations that the review had been unable to give an exact measure of how prevalent the issue was in Staffordshire. He also suggested that there was a need to consider evidence based good practice.

Members supported the recommendations and the rationale of the report, which was well thought through.

They endorsed the report, its recommendations and submission to the Cabinet Members for Children and Young people and for Education (and SEND) for their executive response.

Members agreed that an item should be included on the next Scrutiny Chair's Forum agenda to discuss the most appropriate committee to monitor the Cabinet Member response and implementation of recommendations.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the report and recommendations be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet Members for their executive response, and
- b) the most appropriate approach to monitoring the Cabinet Member response and recommendation implementation be considered at the next Scrutiny Chair's Forum.

6. Work Programme

Members noted the changes to their work programme.

As part of their role as designated crime and disorder panel Members received details of a briefing to the Chairman and Vice Chairmen on discussions at the Cabinet Member for Communities & Cultures' Safe and Strong Communities Strategy Group (SSCSG).

They requested an informal work programme planning meeting be set up prior to their 16 June meeting.

Having trialled a whole committee pre-preview meeting Members asked that this process be adopted for future meetings.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) an informal work programme planning meeting be arranged prior to the 16 June meeting; and
- b) whole committee pre-preview meetings be set up for the next municipal year's Safeguarding O&S calendared meetings.

Chairman