

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 16 June 2022

Present: Bob Spencer (Chairman)

Attendance

Gill Burnett (Vice-Chairman (Overview))
Janet Eagland
Johnny McMahon

Gillian Pardesi
Kath Perry, MBE

Also in attendance: Mark Sutton

Apologies: Richard Ford, Derrick Huckfield and Mike Wilcox

PART ONE

7. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

8. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2022

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 April 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

9. Neglect

In February 2019 the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board had commissioned a Serious Case Review in respect of four children who died in a house fire on 5 February that year. The Review had been published in November 2020, making seven recommendations for the LA and the Partnership. The recommendations related to three main issues, these being:

- issues around developing an understanding of the impact of neglect on children within the partnership;
- the use of appropriate professional curiosity to understand family history and dynamics; and
- the ability to understand and act upon a child's experience.

Following this, Neglect, including the impact of low-level neglect on children and families, became one of the priorities for the Safeguarding

Partnership, with the work plan that sat with this priority reviewed annually.

Members received details of progress to date around each of these three issues, including an agreed strategic joint protocol, performance standards and ambitious training programme. Further work had been identified in respect of improvements in the use of the GCP2 assessment tool in practice across all tiers of services and agencies, which would assist in the early identification of neglect.

Ofsted discussions in May around child protection plans had been positive, with Ofsted concluding that majority of Staffordshire's plans for children were robust.

Members queried the impact of social worker absence on service continuity. Whilst this was a national issue Staffordshire had a stable and able management group, with team managers having regular oversight. We also have good composition of Social Worker (SW) teams which allows team managers time to have oversight of work undertaken by SWs. Staffordshire was looking at their recruitment and retention of social workers to identify further developments to support retention of their skilled social workers.

Members noted that the recently published MacAlister report highlighted concerns over the proportion of a social workers contact time with children and young people compared with the time completing the administrative roles, with the average contact time being one third. It had also identified a top-down approach to policies and the unintended consequences this had created, asking where Staffordshire sat in relation to these identified concerns. Part of considerations during the Children's Services Transformation had looked at how to increase the amount of social worker contact time. Each team now had dedicated administrative staff members to help relieve some of the admin pressures on social workers. Staffordshire continued to aspire to improve the balance of contact time, however reassurance was taken from the recent Ofsted discussions, where they confirmed that Staffordshire knew their children well and heard their voice.

The Committee queried the difference between neglect as opposed to low level neglect, the impact of both and whether these should be considered as separate issues, as the Committee had done previously. Neglect is a wide continuum and therefore whilst acknowledging low level neglect helps articulate service provision and delivery, considering neglect as a whole is important to have a joined up approach and consistency in services

Members queried whether the GCP2 assessment tool was sensitive enough to pick up signs of neglect, and at what point a decision would be taken for interventions. This was a well-researched tool which helped bring information together, presenting a broader picture that may not be obvious if incidents were considered in isolation. The tool was used by a wide range of partners, including schools, health visitors, midwives etc. creating an early evidence base which helped to inform decision making. Members noted there was no mention of an audit of GCP2's use, having concerns that no tool was perfect and the need to assess its effectiveness. GCP2 could not be used until the individual had completed the training, and whilst much training had been completed, not all those trained were making use of the tool. There was a need for further work on this and the Steering Group was looking to identify the benefits and usage of GCP2, helping to articulate the difference it was making to young people.

The use of appropriate professional curiosity to understand family history and dynamics had been a recommendation from the Serious Case Review. Members questioned whether this had improved consistently across the County, wanting to reassure themselves that GCP2 was not being used as an alternative to the recommended improvements. The professional curiosity was there, and improvements had been made, although as a partnership across all tiers there was more work to do. Key to supporting early identification of neglect was having access to the broad range of information from partners, which the GCP2 tool allowed. This work also fed into the Family Hub model currently being implemented.

Members also heard that the Government had agreed to further funding for the social worker in schools programme. Early Help and the Front Door work was open to everyone, including all schools, with a qualified professional offering advice and signposting when these services were accessed.

Members raised concerns around the risk to children and young people through inappropriate use of mobiles phones and social media, asking if the GCP2 tool helped identify this. The tool wouldn't specifically help to identify use of devices, but rather where parents were struggling to imbed good routines, boundaries and meeting children's needs. Use of these devices posed an increasing risk of criminal exploitation. However, the County Council had a very robust team working relentlessly to tackle this exploitation, although it was ever evolving.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Officer for their report. The Committee were encouraged by the developments made and the continuing work to tackle neglect.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is reassured by the continued work to tackle neglect for the children and young people in Staffordshire.

10. Community Safety & the Outcome of the Fishmonger Hall Inquiry

The Chairman updated Members on the Community Safety and outcome of the Fishmonger Hall Inquiry report, which had been scheduled for consideration at this meeting. The item had been deferred until after a meeting on 28 June organised by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (the Commissioner) to consider the inquiry outcome. The Chairman has been invited to attend on this meeting as the Committee's representative.

It is proposed that the item be moved to the Committee's 1 September meeting, including feedback by the Chairman on the findings, conclusions, and actions from 28 June.

RESOLVED: That the Fishmonger Hall report be included on the Committee's work programme for 1 September.

11. Work Programme Planning

The Committee had held an informal work programme planning meeting on 23 May. Members now considered the outcomes from that meeting, making the following amendments/additions to their work programme:

- the Fishmonger Hall report to be included on 1 September agenda, to include feedback from the Commissioner's 28 June meeting;
- the LA's role as part of the Prevent Partnership be included on 1 September agenda;
- the Whole Life Disabilities Strategy, which primarily looks at preparation for adulthood for those with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and autism, be included on the 16 February agenda;
- following discussions at the Prosperous Staffordshire Overview & Scrutiny Committee of 15 June the Committee and/or their representative be invited to join the 1 September Safeguarding meeting for the Children's Transformation Services item;
- the SEND Green paper, which has been included on the Safeguarding work programme, was considered by the Prosperous O&S at their 15 June meeting. A link to the report and an extract from the minutes will be circulated to Members for their consideration on whether the SEND Green paper should remain on their work programme;
- the Spotlight Review on Sexual Harassment in Schools final report and recommendations has been forwarded to the Cabinet Members, awaiting their response. Two of the recommendations

(recommendations 6 & 7) are for Scrutiny, and at the Scrutiny Chair's Forum it was agreed that Safeguarding should be the lead committee for these;

- following scrutiny of the Young Carers Service in April, Members had requested the opportunity to meet with young carers to see first hand how this service supported them. A series of visits has been arranged to young carers respite sessions throughout the County. A Teams meeting with young carers will also be arranged for September;
- the MacAlister report was finally published at the end of May. This has been included on the work programme for September, and a link to the published report has been circulated to Members for information;
- a further informal work programme planning meeting has been arranged at the conclusion of 24 November meeting. This will be an opportunity to reflect on work to date and develop the work programme moving forward.
- a suggestion was made to include consideration of reports on LGBT and hate crime on the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the further work suggested and changes to the work programme be agreed.

Chairman