

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 1 September 2022

Present: Bob Spencer (Chair)

Attendance

Gill Burnett (Vice-Chair (Overview))	Johnny McMahon
Janet Eagland	Gillian Pardesi
Richard Ford (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))	Mike Wilcox
Derrick Huckfield	Conor Wileman

Also in attendance: Paul Northcott, Jonathan Price and Mark Sutton

Apologies: Kath Perry, MBE and Victoria Wilson

PART ONE

18. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

19. Minutes of the Safeguarding O&S Committee meeting held on 19 July 2022

Resolved: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 July 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

20. Recommissioning Arrangements for the Domestic Abuse Contract

Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, and the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office (SCO) currently jointly commission Domestic Abuse (DA) services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, with the SCO acting as lead commissioner. Members heard that the current Service Contract, which had commenced in October 2018, had seen the provision of Domestic Abuse Services for Victims awarded to Victim Support and the Service Contract for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse to the Reducing Reoffending Partnership. Both services had been provided under the brand name of 'New Era' and had included provision for victims, perpetrators, children, and young people. The current contract

ends on 30 September 2023. To allow sufficient time for the procurement process, work was underway on the service recommissioning.

Domestic Abuse is a key priority highlighted within every Community Safety Strategic Assessment across all Staffordshire Districts and Boroughs and the joint commissioning of the service had enabled a consistent approach for Domestic Abuse services across the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The Scrutiny Committee were informed that demand for Domestic Abuse services remained high, with referrals to the victim service having increased by approximately 30% on pre-covid figures.

The committee received figures for the number of referrals made into the current contracted services to date. They noted that the overarching governance for the contract was provided by the Domestic Abuse Commissioning and Delivery Board (DACDB) which was jointly chaired by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council representatives. Domestic Abuse, including the commissioned service contract performance, was also considered at the Safer and Stronger Communities Strategy Group, chaired by the County Council's Cabinet Member for Communities & Culture and it was intended that these arrangements would continue with the new Contract.

The Committee scrutinised the draft recommendations to Cabinet within the Domestic Abuse Recommissioning report. They asked that consideration be given to how services would ensure they reached all in need, including those in more rural areas. They also queried why the level of support for the new contract mirrored that from 5 years earlier when demand had increased by 30%, which would see a decrease in real term funding. Members were particularly concerned that this appeared incongruous with the priority status currently given to Domestic Abuse in Staffordshire and asked whether funding levels were mirrored in other authorities. The Committee also noted the disparity in funding allocation between the victim and the perpetrator service, being concerned that not all perpetrators would benefit from services as a result and having concern that opportunities for prevention work may be missed.

The Committee was informed that whilst there had been an increase in demand, the service methods used had also changed post covid, allowing more group work again, which was more cost effective. No request had been made for an increase in core funding, however funding from other areas was also used for targeted services. Officers agreed to look at comparisons in service funding from other authorities. Members noted that participation in offender services was voluntary, with not all offenders choosing to participate.

The Committee requested a breakdown of how the Domestic Abuse SCO funding contribution had been allocated across Staffordshire in comparison with the level of SCO funding allocated across Stoke-on-Trent.

Resolved: That:

- a) the O&S Committee's comments and concerns be shared with Cabinet to help inform their consideration of the proposed contract renewal; and
- b) a breakdown of how the SCO Domestic Abuse funding contribution had been used between Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent be forwarded to the Committee.

21. Children's Services Transformation Six Month Review

[Rev Preb Michael Metcalf in attendance for this item, representing the Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee]

The Committee had previously scrutinised the development and implementation of the Children's Services Transformation. They now received a presentation giving an overview of the Children's Transformation six-month review findings, considering the interdependencies of national pressures, and showing the key themes that had emerged and the plans being put in place to address these.

Members noted that the number of children in care was rising across all authorities, and that whilst Staffordshire numbers were rising, the increase was relatively low when compared with neighbouring authorities. The impact of Covid, and the lack of face-to-face activity, had been greater than expected and would impact on Children's Transformation. The number of children coming into care was also greater than the figure on which the Transformation had been based and therefore there was a need to consider the impact this had on staffing levels.

Plans to address areas for improvement had been agreed, these being:

- a review of the staffing structure to ensure it is fit for purpose, whilst maintaining the principles of the transformation and budget constraints, reflecting on the feedback and making the required changes;
- establishing three task and finish groups to take forward the areas that received the most feedback, these being: workforce; communications and engagement; and ways of working. These groups will be led by multidisciplinary teams to ensure that they reflect the needs identified. Feedback from the workforce had been shared with these task and finish groups to ensure the development of a coherent plan; and,

- continuing to keep the workforce up to date with progress and continuing to engage in regular dialogue about how the system operates so that continuous learning can take place, evolving to better meet the needs of children and their families.

Members received an outline of the task and finish groups, with the plans to be overseen by the leadership team for Children and Families Services.

Members noted that there remained social worker vacancies in some areas within Staffordshire, these currently being filled by agency workers. Examples of the disparity were given, with no vacancies currently in Newcastle in comparison to a number of vacancies in East Staffordshire. There remained a national shortage of social workers and Staffordshire had an on-going recruitment campaign to help address these vacancy issues. Members also considered the issue of silo working and how this was avoided.

The Action Plan was detailed, and the Committee discussed its implementation and requested a quarterly update on progress. It was agreed that further consideration should be given to the most appropriate method for updating Members, with a suggestion that the framework could be shared on a quarterly basis, and a report reviewing progress in 12 months.

The Committee thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for the candid and detailed information shared with them.

Resolved: That:

- a) the detailed information showing progress with the Children's Transformation Service be welcomed; and
- b) further consideration be given to the process by which the Committee can receive regular detail on progress with the Transformation action plan over the next 12 month period.

22. Ofsted Focused Visit - Improvement Action Plan

On 26 and 27 May 2022 Her Majesty's Inspectors working on behalf of Ofsted visited Staffordshire County Council under the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. This was a focused visit to look at Staffordshire's arrangements for children subject to child in need and child protection planning and was Staffordshire's first social care visit from Ofsted since 2019.

The inspection findings had been largely positive, stating that children in need of help and protection received services that responded to their

needs, risk was managed effectively, children were visited and trusting relationships built with their practitioners, and that there was effective partnership working. Some areas for improvement were identified, these being:

- the quality of case supervision records, to ensure a consistent focus on planning for all children to: make sure that children's needs are prioritised over adults; have team managers record actions that progress children's plans ensuring there is no drift or delay; and, that supervision records detail child's experience and reflection on practice;
- the maintaining of timely recording on children's case files, to accurately reflect children's experiences, ensuring: appropriate case loads; the effectiveness of the audit process to improve outcomes for children; independent scrutiny within the audit process; an improved moderation process; and, that accurate performance data is used effectively, to improve social work practice.

Members received details of the improvement action plan which showed prioritisation of identified actions and gave a timescale for these.

Members reinforced the importance of good record keeping for both the child and for the practitioner. It was explained to the Committee that Ofsted's reference to record keeping had related to officers not always recording the level of work and engagement with partners that was undertaken. It was imperative to keep the child as the focus, considering if they should seek to see their files in the future and wanting them to be able to see the level of work undertaken to support them and their families.

Resolved: That the Committee commend the work already undertaken and note the action plan and timescales in place to address the outstanding areas for development.

23. Independent Review of Children's Social Care (MacAlister Report)

The Committee had been aware of the draft MacAlister report at their meeting of 17 June 2021, intending to consider the report's proposals and any potential impact on Staffordshire's Children's Services. Members had agreed to await the final report before considering possible implications.

The final report from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care was published on Monday 23rd May 2022, followed by the report from the National Panel into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson on 29th May 2022. The Government responded to the Care Review on the day of publication committing to producing an implementation strategy by the end of the year and moving forward with the development of a national children's social care framework, support for social workers in

their early career, exploring data to increase transparency and improving foster care recruitment.

An Implementation Board will be established to bring together the recommendations from the Independent Review, the National Panel Report and the Competition and Market's Authority (CMA) Children's Social Care Study into one coherent plan of work while also making the connections to the major reforms proposed in the Schools White Paper and SEND green paper.

The Committee were pleased to note that Staffordshire's Children's Transformation vision and partnership working was largely in-line with the Independent Review findings, although there was a need to await more detail from central Government.

Resolved: That the report be welcomed.

24. Work Programme

The Committee considered their current work programme, noting that:

- the extra meeting arranged for 24 October was to consider the outcome of the Fishmonger Hall inquiry and the LAs role in the Prevent Partnership; and
- a review of progress with the new Regional Permanency Partnership be included on the 24 November agenda.

Members also noted that the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen were meeting with Cabinet Members and Officers at the Committee's Triangulation meeting this afternoon, with detail from this meeting helping to inform work programme planning. An informal work programme planning meeting is scheduled at the conclusion of the 24 November meeting.

Resolved: That proposed changes to the work programme be agreed.

25. Family Hubs in Staffordshire (Public)

The Committee were informed that whilst there were many strengths to the way in which work was currently undertaken, with many families saying that the help and support they received was helping them achieve better outcomes, as a partnership there was recognition that this could be better integrated around the needs of families. The need for this integrated approach had increased following the pandemic and Staffordshire's development of a Family Hub Model of delivery would help support families with children 0-19 (25 with SEND) as part of this commitment.

Family Hubs were not just a physical place but a way to bring together all the support families might need from pregnancy through to young people turning 18 (25 if they have a disability). A single physical or virtual access point would be used across the family hub network, giving easier accessibility. Family Hubs were intended to provide families with the right help, at the time and in the right place and were a critical way to deliver Staffordshire's Early Help Strategy.

Unfortunately Staffordshire had not been successful in obtaining additional funding from the Government to develop this initiative.

Members heard that these Hubs would use predictive analysis to determine the needs of a community and work with those communities using an evidence-based approach to develop partnerships and support to meet family's needs as early as possible. Hubs brought together early help and intervention delivered by a variety of people including: children, young people and their families; Children's Centres; Early Years settings; Schools; Health; Housing; Police, Fire and Rescue; District and Borough Councils; and, local voluntary and community service providers. Support and services could be delivered in a variety of ways from numerous venues that formed the wider Family Hub Network including Children's Centres, Libraries, community venues, Youth Clubs, leisure centres and many more places.

Members supported this initiative and suggested that all County Councillors would benefit from receiving briefings on these developments.

Resolved: That the emerging Family Hub model be welcomed.

26. Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED – That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 as indicated.

27. Family Hubs in Staffordshire (exemption paragraph 2)

A range of existing staff working across teams had roles and functions that aligned to the Family Hub model but were not currently working as an integrated team. The Committee received details of the proposed changes to the existing staffing structures that would form part of the consultation process. Staff consultation was expected to run from January to April 2023.

Resolved: That the family hub initiative and the consultation on the proposed new staffing structures be supported.

Chairman