

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 5 January 2023

Present: Bob Spencer (Chair)

Attendance

Gill Burnett (Vice-Chair (Overview))

Janet Eagland

Johnny McMahon

Gillian Pardesi

Kath Perry, MBE

Mike Wilcox

Conor Wileman

Also in attendance: Paul Northcott

PART ONE

38. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

39. Minutes of the Safeguarding O&S meeting held on 24 November 2022

Resolved: That the minutes of the 24 November 2022 Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

40. Adult Safeguarding Transformation Project

The Cabinet Support Member introduced the report updating Members on the Adult Safeguarding Transformation Project that had started in February 2020. Its aim was to ensure the correct processes and capacity were in place to deliver the Council's statutory responsibilities for safeguarding.

The Committee had previously considered progress with the Transformation Project at their meeting of 14 September 2021. At that time Members had been made aware that all reported adult safeguarding concerns were reviewed by the Staffordshire Adult Safeguarding Team (SAST) on the day the concern was received, being risk assessed by a qualified social worker (Advanced Practitioner) working with other professionals across the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub). Any concerns assessed as high risk were responded to as a priority.

The Committee received figures showing an increase in the number of Safeguarding concerns reported since 2017. During 2022 there had been an increase in the number of Safeguarding concerns reported between May and September, which had led to a backlog of work for this period. Members asked whether there had been a reason for this increase. They heard that no specific reason had been identified, and that there had been similar increases seen amongst other local authorities. The Transformation Project had enabled this backlog to be addressed. The number of outstanding concerns had now been reduced to 250, with the longest waiting for less than one month. Most of these reported concerns would not require a Section 42 enquiry. It was hoped that more consistent recording introduced as part of the Transformation project would enable appropriate contingency planning in the future.

The Committee heard that a wholesale review of processes and forms had been completed, removing duplication and repetition. This had enabled a reduction in administration tasks. Capacity had also been reviewed. The SAST was now fully staffed with seven substantive Advanced Practitioner posts filled. Key performance indicators for timeliness of decision making had been introduced, aiming to make an initial decision within 5 working days, and ideally within 2 working days. Members received details of month-on-month improvements made and details of the ongoing work to develop contingency plans to reduce the risk of delays caused by demand increases.

Hidden neglect was a concern for the Committee, with Members informed that robust practises were in place within adult social care and with commissioning colleagues to help uncover where abuse was hidden. Better relationships had also been developed with Healthwatch to help identify any concerns in care homes, hospitals or with agencies. Abuse taking place in an individual's own home was more difficult to identify, however work was undertaken to raise awareness with agencies such as GPs to help support identification. Financial abuse was also an area of concern for the Committee, with training to help identify this issue being provided as well as support in place from the Office for Public Guardianship, however there was always more to be done.

Concerns were also shared around the appropriate use of Section 42 referrals. In particular whether changes made as a result of the Transformation programme would impact on other parts of the service or key stakeholders. This had not been the case and Members were reassured that consideration of possible impacts on stakeholders had been part of the planning process. Further work was needed to ensure appropriate Section 42 referrals made by some agencies, with Members querying referrals made by the West Midlands Ambulance Service in particular. Sandwell Council was the lead commissioner for this service

and Members suggested the Committee's concerns around the burden that inappropriate Section 42 referrals was putting on the system should be shared with them.

Members suggested more sophisticated use of data would help in identifying areas of concern and support contingency planning.

Resolved: That:

- a) progress on the Adult Safeguarding Transformation Project, including details of Key Performance Indicators, be welcomed; and
- b) the Chairman write to Sandwell Council, as lead commissioner for the West Midlands Ambulance Service, advising them of the Committee's concerns at the burden inappropriate Section 42 referrals places on the adult safeguarding system.

41. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board (SSASPB) Annual Report 2021/2022

[John Wood, Independent Chairman of the SSASPB & Helen Jones, Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board Manager, in attendance for this item]

As part of requirements within the Care Act 2014 Statutory Guidance, the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board's (SSASPB) Annual Report is presented to the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee were aware that the Board had a strategic role to oversee and lead adult safeguarding and consider a range of matters that contributed to the prevention of abuse and neglect.

The Annual Report covered the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. During this period there had been 13,227 occasions where concerns had been reported that adults with care and support needs may have been experiencing or at risk of abuse and neglect. This was an increase of 1,051 from 2020/21. Following initial assessment, the duty of enquiry requirement had been met in 21% of those reported concerns, a decrease of 4% from 2020/21. Members heard that arising from this increase discussions were taking place amongst safeguarding partners to develop a mutual understanding of what constitutes a safeguarding concern with the aim of ensuring proportionate ongoing management to protect resources.

The Committee received details of the age, gender and ethnicity of those subject to a Section 42 enquiry. They also received details of the type of abuse and location of reported abuse. The Annual Report also contained case study examples which exemplified types of abuse and neglect and the multi-agency responses to these. The Committee were informed that these case studies helped to give context to the Annual Report, particularly when considering the readership of the Report and the need to present a balanced picture.

In Staffordshire, 67% of adults subject of a Section 42 enquiry provided a response to the question of whether their desired outcomes from the enquiry had been met in full, partially met or not met. 97% of those responding stated that their desired outcomes were either fully or partially met. This was a slight reduction from the reported 98% last year. Members heard that the reasons given for desired outcomes not having been met had been explored by the Board and received examples of reasons for this.

Hidden abuse had been a priority for the Board and remained a theme that was addressed by them. In particular it was important that awareness training was in place as personnel changed amongst practitioners. The Committee were keen to be a part of this awareness training to help spot hidden abusive behaviours.

The importance of data was discussed. In particular the areas where specifics were unknown, eg 6% of ethnicity was unrecorded. This had the potential to impact on targeting resources as the most vulnerable groups may not be identified accurately. There was a constant strive to improve data recording and to ensure all practitioners understood the importance of thorough and accurate data, although sometimes the data recording systems used made this difficult. Members also emphasised the benefits of meta-analysis to help identify the most vulnerable and target support appropriately. Board partners were at different stages of data recording, and this had an impact on data analysis. However, these suggestions would be taken to the Board's Quality Assurance Group for consideration.

Members raised concerns at the lack of reference within the Report to online abuse. Abuse recording was in line with the Care Act and therefore online abuse was not recorded as a stand-alone category. However, this type of abuse was recorded within existing categories. Work by Age Concern and Age UK helped support awareness raising and education in this area. Consideration was given to how this could be more obviously reflected in the Report, with a suggestion that this should be included on the Board's next Audit and Assurance agenda.

Members raised the disparity in numbers between referrals from Staffordshire when compared with those from Stoke-on-Trent. As in previous years this was due to a different interpretation to recording. This had been the subject of discussion, with interpretational differences remaining unresolved.

Resolved: That:

- a) in accordance with the requirements of the Care Act 2014 Statutory Guidance the SSASPB Annual Report be received; and,
- b) the Committee take part in hidden abuse awareness training;

- c) consideration of how more sophisticated data analysis could be used within the report be included on the SSASPB next Quality Assurance meeting agenda; and
- d) how online abuse could be highlighted in future Annual Reports be included on the SSASPB's next Audit and Assurance agenda.

42. Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report

[Ian Vinall, Independent Chairman and Scrutineer of the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board]

The Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB) partners had changed the role of the Board Chair in May 2022, adding the function of Scrutineer and therefore making the role different from that of the previous Board Chair. This role enabled a critical friend approach, considering the impact and outcomes on children and young people of the safeguarding system. It was designed to promote reflection and drive improvements. Listening to the voice of the child was crucial within this role. The new independent Chairman shared initiatives with the Committee, including: an inaugural meeting with the Chairs of the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Child Safeguarding Board and Adult Safeguarding Board to enable consideration of shared priorities; understanding the impact of neglect; impact of graded care profile and disparity between the number of practitioners trained compared with its use across the safeguarding system; the role of schools as key stakeholders in safeguarding children, although schools were not statutory partners; scrutiny of the MASH as Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent form separate Hubs; Staffordshire Police inspection and the poor findings with regard to children's safeguarding; changes to social care and health, and ensuring there wasn't a negative impact on the safeguarding system resulting from these changes; a focus on transitional safeguarding at 18 from children's to adults social care; and, safeguarding concerns identified in the inspection report at Werrington Youth Offender Institute (YOI).

The Committee were aware that the SSCB worked together in partnership to safeguard and promote the welfare of children across areas of safeguarding activity that considered the need to promote equality of opportunity and to meet the diverse needs of all children in Staffordshire. The objectives of the Board were pursued through core statutory functions which were set out within the Children Act 2004 and the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. These core functions were achieved through the work of the Board's revised subgroup structure. Governance arrangements of the SSCB had been the subject of significant review since 2019 and were in line with the statutory guidance.

The Committee heard that child grooming and online harm was being considered by the Board's Child Exploitation Task Group, a joint group with Stoke-on-Trent, looking to identify where exploitation was taking place. Members asked if further detail of the work could be shared with the Committee at a later date.

Family Involvement Boards were raised by Members as a vehicle where concerns around a number of safeguarding issues were discussed. One area of concern was around teenage pregnancy and Members asked what work the SSCB was undertaking to tackle this area. The SSCB Chairman suggested this was an area that could be taken back to the Board for further consideration.

Members also raised concerns at the continued difficulties around communication and sharing information. These frustrations were shared by many practitioners across the system. Appropriate information sharing was key and this happened well within the MASH. However, challenges were present where children fell below the statutory framework, as in these cases consent to share information was necessary, and this was not always forthcoming.

Members noted a new information system was proposed for the MASH and asked what timescales were anticipated for its introduction. The IT system currently used had been in place since 2010. However, this was no longer fit for purpose and options were currently being explored to introduce an updated system with consideration around the most effective systems and cost. There was no agreed timescale at present but it was anticipated the changes would take place within the next 6 to 12 months.

Members noted that the number of missing children had decreased recently, however it remained a concern as missing education left them vulnerable. The Committee were reminded of the work undertaken by the Sexual Harassment in Education Inquiry Day. This work would be shared with the new SSCB Independent Chairman.

Members remained concerned at the safeguarding impacts of online abuse, feeling there was an epidemic of mental health issues for children related to this and asking whether the Board were able to assure the Committee around the work undertaken to mitigate this. In particular they noted the work of the National Cyber Security Agency and crypto analysis at GCHQ, being aware that security services saw online grooming as a step towards radicalisation. Members also raised the importance of education in awareness raising with children and young people, and the 5 Rights campaign by Baroness Beeban Kidron OBE, which Members hoped would be adopted in Staffordshire. The Board were aware of the range of risks. The Independent Chairman agreed to take these issues back to the SSCB, and in particular the very tangible suggestion around the 5 Rights

campaign. The Committee asked for further detail on developments with this.

Members also queried what emotional support was available for children and young people post covid, particularly tackling issues around social anxiety. Examples of partnership working were shared through Integrated Care Boards and Early Help Teams in other local authorities. Part of the SSCB's role was to encourage partners to hear children's stories to help explain issues and unblock support. Challenges for children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties and CAHMS support was an area of work for the Board.

Resolved: That:

- a) the SSCB Annual Report setting out progress made by the partnership during 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022 be received;
- b) the Chair of the Child Exploitation Task Group attend a future Safeguarding O&S meeting with the Independent SSCB Chairman to consider progress in tackling the issues raised;
- c) further detail is shared with the Committee on work to tackle safeguarding concerns of teenage pregnancy; and
- d) the SSCB Independent Chairman take back to the Board the Committees concerns and suggestions around online abuse and the 5 Rights campaign, updating the Committee on progress.

43. Work Programme

Following discussions at the December Triangulation meeting Members agreed the following amendments to their work programme:

- the pre-decision scrutiny item on the House Project, originally scheduled for February, to be put back to their April meeting;
- the Chairman of the Sexual Harassment in Education Inquiry, Rev Preb Metcalf, be invited to the February meeting where the Executive Response to the Inquiry day report will be considered;
- an item on Safeguarding concerns re children permanently excluded from school requested at the November meeting has been included on the work programme for 20 April;
- an item on DoLS included on work programme for 20 April;
- an item considering adult safeguarding assessments be included on the work programme for 20 April; and
- the proposed item on Early Help Strategy will now be included as part of consideration on the Family Hub.

Members were also informed that work had begun in considering the 2023-24 work programme. Items from this meeting for inclusion on the new work programme were:

- separation of the MASH;
- Catch22 presentation;
- Online abuse and grooming;
- Work of the SSCB Child Exploitation Sub-group;
- Partnership approaches to early Help and emotional and behavioural support.

Any further items Members wished to put forward for consideration for the new work programme should be forwarded to the Chairman, Vice Chairmen or the Scrutiny Support Officer.

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

Chairman