

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 16 February 2023

Present: Bob Spencer (Chair)

Attendance

Gill Burnett (Vice-Chair (Overview))	Gillian Pardesi
Johnny McMahon	Mike Wilcox
	Paul Snape (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))

Also in attendance: Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf (Churches), Jonathan Price and Mark Sutton

Apologies: Janet Eagland, Kath Perry, MBE and Conor Wileman

PART ONE

44. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

45. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 January 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

46. Executive Response to the Report of the Spot Light Review on Sexual Harassment in Schools January 2022

[Reverend Prebendary Michael Metcalf in attendance for this item.]

The final report and recommendations of the joint Spotlight Review on Sexual Harassment in Schools was endorsed by the Health and Care, Prosperous, and Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committees and forwarded, with their comments, to the Cabinet Members for Children and Young People and for Education (and SEND) for their Executive Response. The three Committees agreed to delegate monitoring of the response and implementation of the recommendations to the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members now received the Executive response, setting out actions and timeframes for accepted recommendations.

The Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) emphasised the importance of safeguarding within education in Staffordshire and informed

the Committee that Schools were seen as key partners in the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board. The appendix to the report gave detail of actions already taken to implement the Spotlight Review's recommendations. The Cabinet Member noted particularly that the latest Section 175/157 safeguarding audit that education providers are required to complete annually, now included a separate section on peer-on-peer abuse. This helped identify areas for further assistance and possible training needs.

Recommendation 1 was yet to be addressed. This recommendation proposed a joint letter from the relevant scrutiny committees and Cabinet Members to Central Government in respect of the Online Safety Bill, asking them what further action they would take to protect children from online peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse. It was agreed that the Chairman, Committee Member Cllr Johnny McMahon and the Cabinet Members would work together to address this.

Members were particularly concerned to ensure the voices of children and young people were heard to help inform safeguarding and raise awareness of the emerging online issues early enough for these to be tackled effectively. One aspect of the PSHE Co-ordinator's role and the broader PSHE curriculum included discussing with, and listening to, children and young people. Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS) also worked to give children and young people an opportunity for their voices to be heard. SCVYS linked back to the Local Authority (LA) enabling any concerns to be shared. Members asked for further work to be undertaken to enable the Committee to understand better this work and how affective it was in helping to identify areas of safeguarding concern early. It was proposed that further consideration be given to a mechanism to enable a process for this to be agreed.

The Committee asked how well attended the District Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) meetings were and whether attendance at these meetings could be made mandatory. These meetings were well attended and took learning from both good and less effective practice. It was not possible for the LA to make attendance mandatory as approximately 75% of children in Staffordshire attended academies for which the LA had no direct responsibility. However, the Safeguarding Audit schools completed annually would highlight good practice and effective training. Members noted that it would be possible for Governing Bodies to insist on District meeting attendance by their DSLs. The Committee were also informed that Ofsted included safeguarding within any inspection, as well as consideration of safeguarding training and the role of the DSL as part of that process. Members asked for figures of percentage attendance by DSLs at the District meetings of 12 October 2022 and 12 January 2023.

The PSHE co-ordinator role had been piloted in Newcastle District and Members asked how long it would be before learning from this pilot was taken on board. It was important to ensure enough time was given before the impact of any pilot was assessed, however emerging learning was shared regularly and already influenced delivery.

The Committee discussed the role of academies and the structure for reporting concerns, noting the route for escalation where concerns were not addressed. It was also noted that this process would be the same for escalation with regard to independent schools.

The Charman noted that in the original terms of reference for the Review it had sought to identify the level of the issue for Staffordshire. The Review had been unable to quantify the level for a number of reasons, although Ofsted indicate the problem is present in every school. The Chairman asked whether it was possible to get a granular understanding of the issue for Staffordshire schools. The Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board would have a strategic view of the extent of the issue. However, every educational practitioner was responsible for safeguarding and completed the annual audit, with peer-on-peer online abuse now being highlighted separately within that audit. Whilst it was recognised that this was a problem affecting all schools, the important issue was how this was being dealt with, hearing the voice of the child and addressing concerns appropriately.

Rev Metcalf, Spotlight Review Chairman, thanked all those who had taken part in the Review and thanked the Cabinet Members for their response and implementation of the recommendations. He noted that the Review had found that good practice was largely embedded in Staffordshire educational establishments. However so much of this peer-on-peer abuse remained unreported, and much of this took place outside of school but had an impact within school.

Members remained eager to further consider how children and young people could build confidence and/or resilience to enable them to better manage safeguarding challenges. PSHE and RSE were part of the school curriculum, helping support this resilience building. Relationship education was part of the curriculum, with discussions around positive relationships taking place from a very early age.

Resolved: That:

- a) the Cabinet Members be thanked for their Executive Response to the Spotlight Review recommendations, and the actions taken to date be welcomed;
- b) a meeting be arranged between the Cabinet Members, Chairman and Cllr Johnny McMahon to consider the letter to Central

- Government in respect of peer-on-peer online sexual harassment and abuse being addressed in the Online Safety Bill;
- c) further consideration be given to agreeing a mechanism by which the Committee can better understand how the voices of children and young people are heard to enable early and effective identification of their emerging online safety concerns; and
 - d) percentage attendance figures by DSLs at the District meetings be forwarded to the Committee.

47. Children's Transformation Project - progress briefing

Following the 1 September 2022 Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny meeting it was agreed that scrutiny of the Children's System Transformation would include four monthly feedback, with the first three of these being a brief outline of developments that highlight key progress and concerns, and the final feedback being a full report. The Committee now considered a presentation for the first of the briefings, highlighting what was working well and areas of further work.

The Programme Structure had been changed, adding a separate programme board for Children in Care and for SEND Improvement. Communications and Engagement now ran across all four programme boards rather than sitting as a standalone programme.

Members noted the additional investment approved by Cabinet to support the work force programme. This investment had been requested as a result of pressures in the system, with numbers being higher than those expected through the modelling process due to Covid.

Activity to date and "next steps" were shared with the Committee for each programme board. Three risks across the whole Transformation process were highlighted, these being:

- a) capacity of the workforce whilst still recruiting to new roles;
- b) scope and scale of cultural change underway within the Service taking time to embed and realise outcomes; and
- c) potential future inspection of service diverting resources temporarily.

The number of children currently in the care system was 1384. However this figure was nuanced, being a reduced figure of 1284 if considered without the recent increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Members queried whether there remained delays in the adoption process that may impact on the number of children within the care system. They were aware of the new regional adoption agency Together4Children which helped support a broader pool of adopter families. However, delays in adoption still existed due to a backlog within Court proceedings.

The Committee asked for clarification over the type of work undertaken to ensure the health and wellbeing of staff during these significant changes. This was undertaken in a variety of ways, including person to person and specific to the individual employee's needs. Support training sessions around wellbeing were also available as well as opportunities to raise concerns through We Talk monthly conversations and through staff surveys. Members also queried the percentage of staff still working from home and how this was managed. Most staff now worked a hybrid system, working a minimum of two days in the office and the remainder either from home and/or external visits as appropriate. Enabling this flexible and balanced approach to working helped with the recruitment and retention of staff.

Members were aware that the Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) for SEND improvement was in place. They heard that the implementation plan for the APP was moving at pace, working to the Department for Education (DfE) timescales. Making a standalone SEND Programme Board had ensured the APP's part in the Transformation Programme was highlighted. The DfE had been pleased with progress made and had been sharing Staffordshire's ways of working with other LAs as examples of improved good practice.

Members noted the work undertaken by SCYVS to develop a coproduction charter that outlined what was understood by "coproduction" and how to ensure its continuous implementation. This helped support one of the principles of the Transformation System, working with families and making them part of the solution rather than implementing predetermined responses. The Committee were aware of previous criticism from Ofsted of Staffordshire's work around coproduction in connection to SEND. Coproduction was extremely difficult as there were so many different partners involved, often with very differing views, including those of parents and carers, schools, health, and every part of the children's social care system, from Early Help onwards. Considerable work had been undertaken to find an effective solution to this process, including much work with the Parent's Forum.

Within Children's Services coproduction had been brought into every part of the system and had formed part of the planning process throughout the whole Transformation programme. Members were reminded that the aspiration of the Transformation process was district-based services that enabled the right help at the right time and at the earliest opportunity. Members were also informed that consideration was being given to extending the role of the MASH as part of the coproduction process, with the possibility of this work being from tier 2 rather than from tier 4, giving another opportunity for appropriate information sharing and support at the earliest opportunity.

Members queried whether there was too much focus on restorative practice at the possible exclusion of other solutions. Restorative practice was the way in which staff would work, problem solve, lead and manage. However, this would only be successful if staff had the right skill level, time, space and partnerships to enable this approach to work.

Whilst the Committee welcomed the developments, they asked at what stage figures would be available to show improvements made and evidence progress. Following the additional investment approved as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) it had been agreed that quarterly progress reports would be shared with Cabinet to monitor developments. It was envisaged that the extra funding would support more in-house staff and less use of agency workers, which would ultimately reduce costs. The Committee were also informed that a performance matrix already existed that would help identify progress.

Resolved: Members welcomed the progress made to date.

48. Possible Working Group/Inquiry Day activity

Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee had the flexibility to undertake working group and/or inquiry day activity outside of their calendared committee meetings. During the year a range of queries and areas for further scrutiny had been raised by the Committee and Members now considered these alongside other areas for suggested further scrutiny work.

Members considered work around safeguarding concerns over the increased number of permanently excluded pupils in Staffordshire and Ofsted's view on the impact of exclusions. A report on this issue was scheduled for 20 April 2023 O&S meeting and the Committee agreed any further work should be considered after this.

Members suggested further work on identifying progress with the PEEL inspection plan. The Chairman had been invited to attend a special meeting of Staffordshire's Police, Fire and Crime Panel (PFCP) on Tuesday 21 February 2023 which was considering this issue. The Chairman had previously met with both the Chairman of the PFCP and the Commissioner to discuss possible ways forward and it had been agreed that the Commissioner would attend a future Safeguarding O&S Committee to discuss any continued safeguarding queries the Committee may have after the 21 February PFCP. Members suggested that a possible informal inquiry day session would be beneficial, preferably with both the

Commissioner and the Chief Constable attending. This would be dependent on the outcome of the 21 February meeting.

Resolved: That possible future inquiry day/working group activity on:

- a. safeguarding implications for permanently excluded pupils; and
- b. PEEL inspection action plan progress;

await the outcome of the 20 April Safeguarding O&S Committee and the 21 February PFCP meetings respectively.

49. Work Programme

Members received an update on their work programme, noting that the House Project item had been removed as this was no longer an item requiring pre-decision scrutiny. The Whole Life Disabilities item, which had been scheduled for this meeting, had been put back to the 20 April meeting at the request of the Cabinet Member for Health and Care.

Members received details on progress of the actions requested at their 5 January meeting:

- a. a letter from the Chairman to Sandwell Council (as lead commissioner) outlining the burden on the safeguarding social care system of inappropriate Section 42 referrals made by West Midlands Ambulance Service. The Chairman reported that he had raised this with the Chairman of the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Health and Care O&S Committee were already in the process of tackling this issue jointly with the other commissioning authorities. It was therefore agreed that no letter should be sent at this time;
- b. hidden abuse training, with Members agreeing that this training should be arranged for Members of this Committee only initially, with consideration of this being opened up to all Members at a later date;
- c. the Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board (SSASPB) had been asked to consider more sophisticated data analysis for future annual reporting. The SSASPB have asked the Council's performance team to support this process;
- d. the SSASPB had been asked to consider how online abuse could be more clearly identified in future annual reports. The Board has arranged a multi-agency audit of online abuse and conference as a direct consequence of the Committee's query. The conference is to be held on 30 March 2023;
- e. the Staffordshire Children's Safeguarding Board have asked for responses to the Committee's queries on: attending a future O&S meeting with the Chairman of their Child Exploitation Task Group; details of work around teenage pregnancy; and support for the 5Rights campaign.

The first meeting of the new municipal year normally looks at work programme planning. However this meeting was already scheduled to receive the next Children's Transformation System briefing. Members were asked to consider whether they would like Cabinet Members and Lead Officers to attend as part of their work programme planning. It was agreed that the Chairman would discuss and agree a way forward for this with the Scrutiny and Support Officer.

Consideration would need to be given to the questions Members wished to raise with the PFC Commissioner and Chief Constable if the proposed informal inquiry session was to go ahead. Members agreed this should wait until after the Chairman had fed back from his attendance at the 21 February PFCP.

Members noted that items to add to the work programme from today's meeting were:

- consideration of mechanisms for the Committee Members to hear the voice of the child, particularly with regard to online abuse and the emerging challenges they face.

Resolved: That the amendments to the work programme be noted.

Chairman