

# Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 15 February 2024

Present: Bob Spencer (Chair)

Attendance	
Janet Eagland	Paul Snape (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))
Ann Edgeller	Conor Wileman
Gillian Pardesi	

**Also in attendance:** Paul Northcott, Mark Sutton, Mike Wilcox and Victoria Wilson

**Apologies:** Gill Burnett-Faulkner, Johnny McMahon and Kath Perry, MBE

## Part One

### 13. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Ann Edgeller declared an interest in minute no. 15 in her role as a governor of MPFT.

### 14. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2024

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4 January 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

### 15. MASH Review and Adoption of a Staffordshire Children's Front Door

*[Clive Cartman-Frost, Head of Access to Services and Family Support and Nisha Gupta, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, in attendance or this item]*

The Committee considered the report and presentation on the development of MASH arrangements and heard from the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

Originally developed in 2011 the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent co-located a range of agencies, including police, children's social care and adult social care, to share information and to meet statutory functions, identify emerging risks and issues, particularly in relation to domestic abuse.

In March 2019, an inadequate Ofsted judgement in respect of Stoke on Trent Children's Services led to an examination of various elements of

practice within that authority. Whilst the original Ofsted judgement had not criticised the MASH, it did comment on the authority's interaction with it. As a result, there was a clear indication from interim and permanent senior managers in Stoke-on-Trent that they wished to leave the combined MASH and create separate arrangements. The Committee heard details of the separation process over the subsequent four years. The final separation of governance arrangements in March 2023 gave an opportunity to develop a specific Staffordshire Childrens multi-agency safeguarding arrangement.

Members queried the extended timescale taken by Stoke-on-Trent in their separation from the joint arrangements, noting that developing their own systems had taken longer than the anticipated six months.

The scope of the current MASH arrangements focussed primarily on statutory partners, that is, SCC, police and health and not necessarily partners in Housing, Education, Probation, and the youth offending service for example. As the MASH is developed there will be a need to consider what functions are retained in a centralised service and which are developed using a district footprint to correspond with the place-based approach and the development of Family Hubs and the Police Harm Reduction Hubs.

Members heard that during the 2021 Children's Transformation process, the Children's Front Door (at that time called First Response) underwent significant change. This saw predominantly unqualified staff supervised by a small group of social workers being replaced by a team of experienced qualified consultant social workers retaining a small group of unqualified workers, and a single team manager being replaced by two team managers. An IRV system and single phone number for Staffordshire Children's Advice and Support (SCAS) had now replaced the single First Response phone number. The IRV will be administered and managed by Customer Services and is the single front door for all children's enquiries. It was anticipated that the IRV system would enable better filtration of calls, enabling the MASH to receive those specific to its function.

The Committee queried whether the change in personnel had taken qualified social workers from front line positions. As part of the Transformation process personnel had moved across different parts of the service. The work force had not been diluted and Staffordshire was also attracting new social workers from other local authorities.

Members received details of new governance arrangements and systems development. They also considered details of the new performance framework and the new multi-agency audit form which had been developed to correspond to grade descriptors. The Committee were informed that two audits had been undertaken so far and that ten further

audits were planned over the next year.

The importance of the physical co-location of MASH partners was emphasised in effecting good communication. The MASH was a focused space that promoted excellent working relationships. Members heard that some challenges were present in non-urgent Police checks, where a backlog currently existed. Staffordshire Police were giving consideration to how this backlog could be addressed.

The Committee queried the range of health-based services that were part of the MASH, specifically whether mental health services were included. A specific health team provided information to the MASH, overseen by MPFT (Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust). However, this team gathered information from across the health family, including mental health services.

Members considered the range of activity undertaken within the MASH, including child sexual exploitation and modern slavery. The MASH had a clear process to identify concerns, following due diligence.

The Committee had previously considered the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report, during which concerns were raised around the effectiveness of communication. Members asked what barriers prevented effective information sharing and whether GDPR considerations created difficulties and how these were resolved. The "Working Together to Safeguard Children" statutory guidance had considered information sharing and multi-agency working. Whilst some local authorities had retreated to providing statutory functions only, moving away from MASH arrangements, Staffordshire felt the MASH enabled strong partnership working and remained committed to co-location to support this. Whilst the independent chairman of the SSCB had noted that poor information sharing and communication was a common concern in all Serious Case Reviews (SCRs), the Committee were informed that there were no barriers to information sharing within the MASH. GDPR was not used as an excuse to block information within the MASH. However there remained some challenges to information sharing across some Child Safeguarding Practise Reviews (CSPRs), which included the current difficulties with the backlog in non-urgent Police checks. A further challenge existed within the Health sector as systems across Health services weren't able to share information across the Health Service itself. Information sharing at ground level was therefore not currently well triangulated. The Committee heard that whilst the Independent Chair of the SSCB had been right to raise this as a concern, service leadership had already been aware of these challenges and was working to ameliorate these.

Members queried what data existed to evidence that safeguarding was effective within Staffordshire. Data existed on two levels, from Care

Director for Children's Services and from the information services log for performance. It was suggested that a report evidencing this data be brought to a future O&S meeting.

**Resolved:** That:

- a) changes to the MASH multi-agency safeguarding arrangements be noted;
- b) a visit to the MASH be arranged for O&S Committee Members to consider first hand the changes made and the effectiveness of communication, information sharing and safeguarding arrangements;
- c) a performance report showing the effectiveness of safeguarding be included on the Committee's work programme.

## **16. Community Safety Agreement 2023 - 2026**

*[Catherine Mann, Assistant Director for Culture, Rural and Safer Communities and Trish Caldwell, County Commissioner, Regulatory Services and Community Safety, in attendance for this item.]*

Members considered the report and heard from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture.

The Community Safety Agreement (CSA) outlined the key community safety priorities for Staffordshire. The CSA is reviewed and refreshed every three years and is mandatory for two tier authorities, helping to meet the statutory duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (as amended by the Police and Justice Act 2006) in which responsible authorities are required to consider crime and disorder in the delivery of all their duties.

Staffordshire County Council must meet the obligations of the statutory duty but also had an additional role in providing the overarching governance for the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) priorities. The 2023-2026 CSA aimed to develop a joined-up approach to public service delivery, to enable more effective and co-ordinated strategic planning across partner agencies and to ensure sustainable and lasting improvements in delivering outcomes. It recognised that community safety issues did not always respect district boundaries, and that coordination of effort could lead to economies of scale, and more effective

outcomes.

The Staffordshire Community Safety Partnership, known as the Safer and Stronger Communities Strategy Group (SSCSG) was responsible for the efficient and effective delivery of the Staffordshire Community Safety Agreement priorities to comply with statutory responsibilities. Members received details of the partnership's priorities and performance against these.

The Committee scrutinised details of: community cohesion and tackling extremism; fraud; local priorities; anti-social behaviour; safeguarding vulnerable persons and child exploitation; and Domestic Abuse (DA). Members had previously scrutinised the new contract for DA and asked for a future report to consider progress with this.

Members were aware that Staffordshire County Council was the specified authority for tackling extremism under the Prevent Duty. They were informed that at the latest Prevent board a presentation had been delivered by a Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) analyst, providing reassurance on the referral process within Staffordshire. The number of referrals converted to cases progressing to Channel was 25%. However, whilst they were informed that this was significantly higher than other authorities within the West Midlands, the Committee felt they were unable to establish whether this was positive as they had no reference point to understand what number the 25% figure represented. They were informed that this figure evidenced the effective training and awareness raising which resulted in high quality and appropriate referrals. Whilst the Committee accepted this, they remained concerned that they were unable to establish what local threat existed on the basis of the information provided. The Committee were aware of the sensitive nature of this information. It was suggested that the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, could receive an overview of the CTU briefing to help establish the parameters of any current threat and risk.

The Chairman shared with Members that he had been offered, on behalf of the Committee, the opportunity to see a redacted copy of the Local Plan for counter terrorism, which would enable him to share with Members whether there was reassurance from this. The Chairman thanked Officers for arranging this.

Members noted that Safer Streets Fund monies had been allocated to Newcastle-under-Lyme, Burton and Stafford following a successful bid by the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office and partners. Detail of the Stafford funding was requested by Stafford Committee Members.

**Resolved:** That:

- a) details of the Community Safety Agreement 2023-2026 within Staffordshire be noted;
- b) an item be included on the Committee's work programme to scrutinise progress with the new Domestic Abuse contract;
- c) the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, receive an overview of the CTU briefing to help give parameters to any current threat and risk; and,
- d) detail of the Safer Street Fund successful bid for Stafford be forwarded to Cllr Edgeller and Cllr Pardesi.

## **17. Early Response in Adult Safeguarding**

*[Ruth Martin, Principal Social Worker and Safeguarding Lead, in attendance for this item.]*

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Mike Wilcox to the Committee and congratulated him on his new role as Cabinet Member for Health and Care.

The Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Health and Care and the Cabinet Support Member for Public Health and Integrated Care.

The committee had previously received updates on the adult safeguarding transformation project, which was completed last year. Members now received details highlighting the wider work to ensure an early response to safeguarding matters and the actions being taken to reduce risks and ensure that concerns had the right response at the earliest opportunity. Since the close of the transformation project the response from the Staffordshire Adult Safeguarding Team (SAST) had improved significantly, meaning that safeguarding concerns were being responded to in a timelier way. Members received performance data on timescales for dealing with safeguarding concerns evidencing the substantial reduction in delays.

The Committee received details of the changes that had enabled this improvement, which included a change in practise to enable decisions to be taken in a much timelier way. They were also pleased to note that continuity planning was in place which would be triggered should the number of safeguarding concerns waiting for decision increase. Members noted there had been no need so far to enact the continuity plan.

The Committee were pleased to hear that the quality of decision making had been retained. Although the number of agency staff had been reduced, some remained. Should funding for these agency staff be removed this may have an impact on the timeliness of decisions.

Work had also been undertaken to provide tools enabling appropriate referrals to be made. An on-line portal was currently being developed for

providers which would further support appropriate referrals. Alongside this an on-line training platform was being developed which would be available through the Learning Hub and it was hoped that councillors would take this training once it became available. Members also noted that there was a hope for this training to be made mandatory for all SCC officers.

**Resolved:** That:

- a) the latest position for early adult safeguarding response in Staffordshire be welcomed; and
- b) Members undertake and promote the on-line referral training once this becomes available.

## **18. Right Care Right Person Scrutiny**

Having raised concerns about the Right Care Right Person initiative the Committee had undertaken to investigate how this would work within Staffordshire. They had met with the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (the Commissioner) and the County Police Commander to understand how the initiative would be implemented in Staffordshire. They had also looked at its implementation in the Humberside Policing area, which had piloted the initiative.

This report by the Chairman outlined their work undertaken and the conclusions drawn. In principle the Committee support the introduction of this initiative and recommend that progress on its implementation be referred to the Staffordshire Health and Wellbeing Board to enable a wider strategic consideration of its development as their membership included representation from both health and police colleagues.

**Resolved:** That:

- a) introduction of the Right Care Right Person initiative be supported; and
- b) monitoring of progress of the phased implementation be referred to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

## **19. Work Programme**

The Committee received details of their current work programme.

Members were informed that the letter to District and Borough Council Planning Committee Chairmen had been sent. This letter raised the Committee's concerns around vaping and sought their consideration of these concerns as part of their Health in all Policies.

Members noted that no Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) had been shared with the Committee for some time. It could be that there hadn't been any, however this would be raised at the Triangulation meeting next week by

the Chairman with Cabinet Members and Officers.

During scrutiny of the SSCB Annual Report at their January meeting Members had resolved to raise their concerns with Chief Officers of the statutory partners around the issues highlighted. On further discussion it was suggested that the Committee undertake a visit to the MASH to see first hand this work and to discuss the concerns from the Annual Report. This will enable a more informed decision on whether the request to Chief Officers should be made and the questions that remain.

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

**Chair**