

Minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee Meeting held on 22 April 2021

Present: John Francis (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech
Ron Clarke
Ann Edgeller
Bryan Jones

Paul Snape
Bob Spencer (Vice-Chairman)
Mike Worthington

Also in attendance: Mark Sutton

Apologies: Trevor Johnson

PART ONE

5. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

6. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 March 2021

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee meeting held on 1 March 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

7. Contextual Safeguarding and Vulnerable Adolescents

Contextual Safeguarding is a theoretical response to safeguarding vulnerable adolescents outside of their family developed by Bedfordshire University. The Select Committee had first considered this approach at their meeting of 23 July 2019 and at a joint workshop with members of the Corporate Parenting Panel on 2 March 2020.

The Select Committee were aware that a Contextual Safeguarding Implementation Plan was in place to support improvement. This was a live working document to enable learning during development to be incorporated into the plan. There was now a Child Exploitation Strategy shared by Safeguarding Boards across the city and county. It had been intended to launch the Strategy in March 2020 but due to the pandemic this had been delayed until December 2020, at the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Virtual Child Exploitation Conference. The launch had included over 250 professionals and had focused on spotting and understanding the early signs of child exploitation. At the conference people with lived experience of exploitation had shared their experiences, both parents and children.

Members heard that extensive training had been delivered with all partners, with feedback from this being very positive and helping shape future practice. A level 2 Child Exploitation Training package was being developed which would be available through

the Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children's Board (SSSCB) to all partners. Several champions had been established across all local authority children and family services who worked to share specialist knowledge, embed good practice and raise professional awareness. "Top Tips" guides had also been developed around early identification, mapping of associates and safety planning to reduce risks.

Extra capacity within the existing service had been built to support development and had allowed the addition of a CSE co-ordinator and administrator. To support identification of vulnerable adolescents the existing Risk Factor Matrix (RFM) had been revised to include all exploitation. Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panels (MACE) received referrals from completed RFMs, with information cross referenced to identify links between vulnerable children and those causing harm, and to identify vulnerabilities. Vulnerable locations were also identified through this process, with the focus of Panels on disrupting and preventing those causing harm to children from doing so. Members were satisfied that the linkages made through the MACE Panels provided a joined-up approach to this work and noted that recommendations from the Panel were included on an individual's young person's care plan. They were also pleased to note that engagement and attendance at Panels was excellent, supported by digital technology and effective panel agenda management.

Members heard that District and Borough Council's had engaged well in supporting this work helping to make spaces safe for young people through safeguarding assessments of spaces and places.

A performance framework was being developed to help demonstrate impact and identify areas for improvement, best practice and trends. National funding had been secured to help with this, with work over a number of months with partners to develop the performance framework. A Child Exploitation Steering Group had been developed with responsibility for driving forward improvements in this key area.

Members raised the risks associated with social media and concerns at how young people could be safeguarded from these. Social media had a huge impact on safeguarding. Work was undertaken with schools, Police colleagues and parents to help identify and warn children about harmful sites. Whilst new sites were created all the time work was ongoing to mitigate the risks they presented.

Difficulties in engaging exploited young people was raised as a concern and Members heard that there was a need for patience and tenacity when working with these young people. It was necessary to target the exploitation and address this, recognising that child exploitation was a safeguarding issue.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the considerable progress made on Contextual safeguarding be noted; and
- b) details of how the County Council is meeting the statutory requirements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who were being exploited or at risk of being exploited be welcomed.

8. Commissioning of Child Exploitation and Children and Young People Missing from Home or Care

The Select Committee considered an overview of the delivery and future commissioning intentions of the Pan-Staffordshire Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Children and Young People Service. The Service was currently delivered by Catch22 on behalf of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire Commissioners Office. The Partners of the Joint Commissioning Group had agreed that the Catch22 contract would remain in place until 31 March 2022, following approval to extend the provisions of the Deed of Agreement within the internal governance arrangement of each Partner. On 1 April 2021 Catch22 entered the final year of delivery under the current procurement arrangements. The Partnership are working collaboratively to co-produce future commissioning intentions. The intention was for the reconfigured Service to be inclusive of all forms of exploitation, configured around three components: child exploitation; lived experience; and statutory functions.

Members were reminded that Catch22 facilitated all independent Return Home Interviews (RHI) for missing children and young people aged up to 18 years residing in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. This included children and young people cared for in Staffordshire who were the Corporate Parenting responsibility of another local authority. Interviews were an opportunity to gather information from individuals, identify root cause factors contributing to the incident and aimed to protect and prevent future missing episodes.

Members received performance data for the period April 2020 to December 2020 and heard that throughout Covid-19, Catch22 had continued to offer face to face delivery of RHIs when they were requested. Flexibility of delivery had enabled Catch22 to provide virtual and phone RHIs when these were preferred, or necessity required this approach.

Covid-19 had resulted in an increase in overall declines of an RHI and this was seen across all quarters. Where families and carers had agreed to the RHI taking place there had been an increased parental and carer involvement which had seen positive results. The number of children and young people receiving an RHI remained consistent. Members were reminded that it was usual for the number of individuals to be less than the number of notifications and the overall RHI offer figure as regrettably multiple missing episodes took place in quick succession for some individuals.

Members raised some concerns around difficulties in scrutinising the performance figures owing to the discrepancy between the notification figures and figures for the number of RHIs offered. They were informed that, for those young people who were placed in Staffordshire from other Authorities, the LA with the corporate parenting responsibility could choose to undertake the RHI themselves and therefore decline Catch22's RHI offer. Equally in some circumstances the LA with corporate parenting responsibility may ask that no offer is made by Catch22 as they undertake the RHI themselves, however Catch22 would still receive the notification. Whilst understanding this Members felt the figures given prevented them from effectively scrutinising performance. Data recording was being addressed as part of the new commissioned service approach, allowing the specific data relating to those young people for whom Staffordshire was the Corporate Parent to be identified. However, it was necessary to continue to report the current figures as well as all missing incidents in Staffordshire potentially had a wider impact, allowing the whole picture to be better understood and helping to map the safeguarding impacts. This change in reporting would allow

Members to see the complexity of the picture whilst easily identifying performance specific to Staffordshire young people.

The Select Committee were pleased to note that there had been a reported overall reduction in the number of children and young people requiring intervention meetings for the 5+ or 9+ missing episodes over a 90-day period. The average number of episodes had remained between 2-4, suggesting that in many instances the first intervention meeting held at 3+ missing episodes had been impactful.

The Select Committee heard that Catch22 continued to deliver against the Performance and Quality Assurance Framework for the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Children & Young People's Service. They have adapted their delivery during the pandemic and their efforts with this have been recognised nationally.

RESOLVED: That,

- a) the performance of the Pan-Staffordshire CSE and Missing Children & Young People's Service provided by Catch22 be welcomed;
- b) the emerging future commissioning intentions in relation to the Pan-Staffordshire Exploitation and Missing Children & Young People's Service be acknowledged;
- c) the service delivery outlined within the report contributed to the delivery of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Child Exploitation Strategy; and,
- d) the proposed changes to performance data recording be welcomed.

9. Work Programme

Members received a copy of their Work programme. They noted this was the last meeting prior to the County Council elections and that any ongoing items would be considered for inclusion on the new Select Committee's work programme, once the remit and membership had been agreed at the 20 May Annual Council.

The complexity of the work undertaken by this Select Committee was raised and Members asked that ongoing training be included in their work programme going forward. They also highlighted the importance of wider training to all Councillors for specific issues.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

Chairman