

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 15 June 2023

Present: Bob Spencer (Chair)

Attendance	
Ann Edgeller	Paul Snape (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))
Johnny McMahon	Mike Wilcox
Gillian Pardesi	Conor Wileman
Kath Perry, MBE	

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

Apologies: Gill Burnett-Faulkner and Janet Eagland

Part One

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

2. Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 April 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 April 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

3. Focus for the Future

[Note by Clerk: Due to time restrictions it was necessary to defer hearing from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture and the County Commissioner for Regulatory Services and Community Safety. This will be rescheduled.]

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received presentations from the Director of Children and Families and the Adult Safeguarding Lead, and heard from the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Mid-point in this four-year administration, this was an opportunity for Members to take a forward look at key areas of work within their remit to help inform work programme planning.

The Director of Children and Families and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People highlighted the following:

- a) national changes following the Care Review and the Government's response to that entitled "Stable Homes Built on Love", with its six

pillars around: family help; decisive multi agency child protection systems; Family Network potentials; relationships and stability at the heart of being a child in care; highly skilled work force; and continuous learning and improvement making better use of evidence and data.

- b) Staffordshire had been chosen as one of six Authorities to take part in a pilot project around the third pillar, unlocking the potential in Family Networks. Staffordshire would be in the second year of this two-year pilot, with funding to develop formal packages of support to enable extended family and friend networks in looking after children that may otherwise be placed in care;
- c) recruitment and retention of social workers, both work around a memorandum of understanding across the West Midlands, and consideration of possible national requirements, such as a period of time working with a local authority post qualification before being able to move to agency working;
- d) Family Hubs and Early Help, developing the workforce in this new approach and with the Early Help pathways as well as considering how this district model developed effective partnership working;
- e) Children in Care Programme, with key projects around: improving the reunification support offer; edge of care services review; improve practice in Independent Review Officer (IRO) services; and cohort analysis to highlight potential areas for improvement;
- f) Placement Sufficiency Strategy, securing the right homes for children in Staffordshire's care and looking to: increase the number of children living locally, where this was safe; eliminate the use of unregulated placements; reduce placement breakdowns; increase the quality of care experienced by Staffordshire children within homes and through the broad range of partners who support them. This was particularly influenced by the increased complexity of children's needs post covid as well as these complex needs being evident at a much younger age;
- g) MASH review and the adoption of a Staffordshire Children's Front Door;
- h) continuing to embed the cultural changes that were part of the Children's Transformation;
- i) the impact of the investment by Cabinet in Children's Services, considering the specific purposes for the investment and the difference made;
- j) the Supporting Families Programme.

Some concerns were shared around a suggestion that the Police were retreating from some social care type calls they may receive and Members asked what impact this would have and whether this would have an adverse effect on partnership working. This was in connection with a pilot in Humberside "Right Care Right Person" which was a model

designed to ensure that when there was a concern for an individual's welfare linked to their mental health, the right person with the right skills, training and experience would respond. This would help avoid any detrimental effects on vulnerable individuals who may feel criminalised by a Police response to a health and/or social care issue.

Members noted that the significant rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children within the County had resulted in considerable increases in the number of children in care in Staffordshire. They were also made aware that, whilst the County received funding if an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child was placed directly with the Local Authority (LA), less funding was available where an individual had been placed in accommodation within the County as an adult, but was later found to be under 18 years and taken into care.

The Adult Safeguarding Lead highlighted the following:

- a) Adult Social Care assurance and the introduction of inspections of LA adult social services, particularly safeguarding, by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), with the potential for inspections from October 2023. Consideration of how Staffordshire would respond to an inspection;
- b) separation of the MASH from Stoke-on-Trent, co-locating with the children's MASH, and its development in ensuring the right partnership involvement;
- c) adult safeguarding, looking at early safeguarding responses reducing the need for Section 42 referrals;
- d) Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), the work to reduce the backlog and the impact of the move to Care Director which should support a rationalisation of the administrative process;
- e) the introduction of on-line safeguarding referral forms for partners and providers;
- f) results of the new adult experience feedback, hearing from front line service users about their experience of adult services to help inform service development;
- g) multi-agency safeguarding training, in which Members have asked to be included;
- h) quality assurance framework based around making safeguarding personal, including what was expected of partners;
- i) the development of adult vulnerability hubs.

The Chairman thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for sharing their future focus and welcomed the detailed debate that would help inform work programme planning. A new date would be scheduled for hearing from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture and the County Commissioner for Regulatory Services and Community Safety, after which Members would look at prioritising the items for their work

programme, including consideration of methods for scrutiny.

Resolved: That:

- a) a date be scheduled for the Committee to hear the future focus presentation from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture and the County Commissioner for Regulatory Services and Community Safety;
- b) following this the Committee reflect on all the detail shared to support their work programme planning.

4. 'Living my Best Life': Report on the Joint Strategy for Disabled and Neurodivergent people in Staffordshire 2023-2028

The Committee heard that there were approximately 21,000 adults with a learning disability living in Staffordshire, of whom 3,400 had a moderate or severe disability, and 7,000 adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. 26,000 Staffordshire residents aged 18-65 had a disability that made personal care difficult; 35,000 aged over 65 were unable to manage at least one mobility activity on their own. 6,200 adults had registrable eye conditions or were severely visually impaired; 18,200 experienced severe hearing loss.

The committee were informed that currently, national prevalence data for children and young people was limited, with no national repository of quality reviewed data for individuals under 18.

The majority of people with disabilities and neurodivergences managed with help and support from their family, friends and communities, and assistance from technologies. The importance of accessibility for universal services was stressed, including: education and lifelong learning; shops, leisure and cultural activities within the community; health and wellbeing services; work and money; social life and connections. Appropriate housing options were also important to enable independent living.

A small number of people with disabilities and neurodivergences were eligible for dedicated care and support from the County Council and/or the NHS and needed a reasonable choice of good quality, sustainable services. Staffordshire County Council and the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board (ICB) had agreed to jointly develop a new 'Living my Best Life': Joint Strategy for Disabled and Neurodivergent people in Staffordshire 2023-2028, replacing the current Whole Life Disability Strategy 2018-2023. The new Strategy aspired to support all disabled and neurodivergent individuals to live the best lives possible. A new Staffordshire Disability Partnership Board had been created to co-ordinate development and oversee implementation of the

Strategy, reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Strategy complemented the Staffordshire Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy and the SEND Strategy for Special Provision.

Members considered detail of the Strategy development and the learning so far. An associated action plan was being co-produced, with this expected to be in place by the end of December 2023. Delivery of the action plan would be overseen by the new Disability Partnership Board and ultimately, the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Throughout the engagement process the importance of giving individuals the time and space to speak for themselves was emphasised. The Strategy endeavoured to ensure individuals were given the opportunity and ability to help themselves rather than services being “done to” them, keeping the individual at the heart of services and focusing on removing barriers and looking at what the individual could achieve rather than what they couldn’t.

The Committee queried how the aspirations of the Strategy and its vision would be achieved, specifically asking how opportunities for learning and development, and for increased help when needed, would be realised. Working towards improving access to opportunities, including further and higher education, helped address these issues, and would also support employability. A lack of understanding remained a barrier towards employability, including in some instances within job centres. However examples of excellent practice could be seen, such as within the Police, but there was further work to be done.

Whilst Members endorsed the Strategy, they remained concerned at its breadth, asking how success would be measured. Detail would be included in the Action Plan, highlighting success measures. Members supported the ideology of putting the individual at the heart of the strategy, however they felt there was a need for significant cultural change, citing as an example work within the NHS, where patients were routinely asked what was the matter with them, rather than what mattered to them.

Concern was shared over a reference within the Strategy that improvements would be made where funding allowed. Members were informed that as a general point if one strategy included this comment then all strategies should, as working within the budgetary confines was a requirement for all. Members were also reminded that a tension existed between producing a strategy that explained in detail its’ delivery and one that was accessible and readable.

Resolved: the “Living Your Best Life”: Joint Strategy for Disabled and Neurodivergent people in Staffordshire 2023-2028 be supported.

5. Work Programme Planning

This item was deferred. Work programme planning will be considered after Members have heard from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture and the County Commissioner for Regulatory Services and Community Safety.

Resolved: That the item be deferred.

Chair