

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 27 July 2023

Present: Paul Snape (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Attendance	
Janet Eagland	Gillian Pardesi
Johnny McMahon	Mike Wilcox

Also in attendance: Julia Jessel and Mark Sutton

Apologies: Gill Burnett-Faulkner, Ann Edgeller, Kath Perry, MBE and Bob Spencer

Part One

6. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

7. Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 June 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 June 2023 and the addendum to the minutes of 10 July 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

8. Customer Feedback and Complaints Service Adult Social Care Annual Report 2022/23

The County Council has a duty to publish an Annual Complaints and Representation report for complaints against the Adults Social Care Service. The Cabinet Member for Health and Care introduced the Annual Report for 2022/23, highlighting with Members the increase in complaints regarding financial assessments. A review of procedures for financial assessments had been undertaken to identify how the process could be made less bureaucratic. The process had now been simplified to make it easier for the individual whilst maintaining the appropriate level of rigour.

Improvements to systems was an ongoing project, including reviewing how information is made available, particularly on-line, looking at making it more user friendly and more easily accessible. Many of the Members will be involved in a system test this October to identify ease of access to financial assessments. This will be an opportunity to test how easy the amended system is to use and whether further improvements can be identified.

It was noted that the number of complaints received were relatively low in comparison with the number of individuals involved in receiving services. Details of the complaints process was shared with the Committee. The top three areas for complaint in 2022/23 being: delays in receiving a service; financial assessment; and invoice issues. The Ombudsman numbers remained constant.

Members had previously asked whether increased training for officers at first point of contact would help reduce complaint numbers. There was always an attempt to resolve issues at the first point of contact, with early resolution at the heart of the process, however it was also important to inform individuals of their right to access the complaints process. The First Contact Team dealt with social care assessments and was staffed by social workers and social work assessors. Any financial concerns would be dealt with by the finance team. The information for both financial and social care assessments was prescribed by the Care Act. Member noted that all complaints were acknowledged and defined with the complainant initially, once the complaint had been timescales for dealing with the complaint were shared.

Further training had been undertaken with front line social workers on explaining the financial process and tackling difficult financial discussions with service users. These discussions were now evidenced on Care Director. Further changes were proposed with the introduction of a form which is signed by the service user outlining the financial discussions that had taken place. This form will then be included on Care Director.

Members had suggested that more context and detail of complaints within the Annual Report would be helpful. However, there was a need to balance the level of detail with the confidentiality of complaints, particularly as the report is a public document. Members had also queried how cross border service users were dealt, which authority had responsibility for the service user and therefore the complaint. These are taken on a case-by-case basis and depended on whether the individual had chosen to move across the border themselves or whether the County Council had made the placement.

Members queried whether staff working from home had an impact on complaints and/or productivity. There was no evidence of this and in most cases a hybrid system of working had been developed that worked well.

The Committee raised concerns about difficulties with transition from children's to adult's services for those individuals with learning disabilities, and their preparation for adulthood. They were pleased to note that work was underway to ensure earlier planned transition to help easier transitions, with a strength based approach to adult services which would

help to maximise potential.

68 compliments were recorded within the report. Member were pleased to note that these were acknowledged and celebrated within the team. The Cabinet Member told the Committee that she takes every opportunity to recognise the professionalism and commitment, which was particularly important when the job is such a complex and difficult one.

The Committee wished to pass on their thanks for the work undertaken to the whole team. They are also keen to see evidence of the impact of changes to the financial assessment accessibility and ways of charging, which they intend to refer to Corporate Review for their consideration.

Resolved: That:

- a) the Annual Report of the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service for Adults Social Care 2022/23 be welcomed;
- b) the Committee's thanks be passed to all Teams for their diligence, professionalism and commitment, and particularly to those responsible for receiving the 68 compliments shown within the report; and
- c) the Committee make a referral to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny to consider the impact of changes to the financial assessment accessibility and method of charging six months from implementation.

9. Customer Feedback and Complaints Service Children's Social Care Annual Report 2022/23

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People introduced the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service Children's Social Care Annual Report for 2022/23. The number of complaints had risen this year. Details within the report had been broken down by district allowing District Leads to have the opportunity to better understand and address any issues identified. It also allowed District Leads to discuss issues and learn from each other.

Members noted this was the first Annual Report since the Children's Services Transformation was completed. The report included complaints around both Children's Social Service and SEND. However, the complaints process for the two areas had to be dealt with differently according to legislation, with SEND coming under the Corporate Complaints process.

The complaint processes were shared with the Committee, explaining that with Children's Social Care the complainant had the right to go through the complete complaint three stage process and on the Ombudsman irrespective of whether the complaints had been upheld at any part of the process. Statutory Stage one complaints were up by 56% and Stage two complaints were up from 6 to 13 complaints. Stage three remained largely

the same as the previous year.

SEND complaints, under Corporate Complaint regulations, had increased at Stage one around the SEND offer. This was often in respect of a child being considered not eligible for a EHCP (Education Health & Care Plan). Stage two complaints had decreased which would suggest that handling of complaints at stage one had been more successful. The number of compliments remained the same.

This report reflected the introduction of significant changes as part of the Transformation process. Training had been introduced to support these changes and support the necessary complaints processes.

Professional curiosity was mentioned within the report and Members were concerned that it indicated some team managers had lacked professional curiosity and sought reassurance that this was addressed. The reference was as a result of a stage two investigation. The recommendation was implemented, highlighting across the organisation the importance of professional curiosity. Consistency of practice was particularly important and the Cabinet Member assured Members that professional curiosity was central for social care work.

The Committee acknowledged that any transition to new ways of working created difficulties and understood that this may have impacted on the number of complaints. Whilst this may be so, there were also other factors potentially impacting on the numbers, including the impact of Covid. Going forward work was being undertaken to ensure that all aspects of the Transformation changes were working well. Part of the new ways of working, such as restorative practice, would take some time to bed in, as would the introduction of new staff and a move away from agency workers. Work to improve the offer to the social care work force had also been undertaken to help retention of staff.

This report formed part of a Benchmarking process. Once the Report had been agreed and signed off by Members it would be part of benchmarking discussions as part of both the Regional and National Complaints Manager Groups.

Resolved: That the Annual Report of the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service, Children's Social Services 2022/23 be welcomed.

10. PSHE Coordinator impact

[Phil Pusey, Chief Executive of Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS) and Natalie McGrath, Staffordshire PSHE Coordinator in attendance for this item]

SCVYS had been a strategic partner for the County Council since 2016, particularly in relation to its work with the children and young people's voluntary sector. The three main areas of work for SCVYS were: capacity building for the sector with 200+ voluntary organisations delivering to over 35 thousand children and young people on a week by week basis, helping ensure groups were safe, strong and sustainable in everything they did; youth engagement and capturing the youth voice; and the PSHE coordination service.

In 2018 the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office identified a need for improved PSHE provision in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. In the summer of 2021 SCVYS volunteered to host the Staffordshire PSHE Coordinator, seeing the potential benefit of strengthening links between formal and informal education sectors. By December 2021 the Pan Staffordshire PSHE Education Service was created to support development and delivery of age-appropriate, quality, consistent PSHE education. A multi-agency steering group was established to oversee the work.

Natalie McGrath was appointed as the Coordinator for Staffordshire. A separate Coordinator works within Stoke-on-Trent, however the two Coordinators work closely together, dividing tasks and avoiding duplication for best use of resources.

Members were reminded that PSHE, Personal, Social, Health and Economic education helped children and young people to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to thrive as individuals, family members and members of society. The Education Act (2002) required all schools to teach a curriculum that was "broadly based, balanced and meets the needs of pupils". Within this schools had to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepare pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. Since September 2020, Relationship Education, Health Education, and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) had been compulsory in England. The Department for Education (DfE) advised that this should be taught as part of a wider PSHE curriculum, with schools expected to "use their PSHE education programme to equip pupils with a sound understanding of risk and with the knowledge and skills necessary to make safe and informed decisions."

An impact report had been produced at the end of year one of the PSHE Coordinator being in place. This report detailed the activity and outcome

from the new post and provided case studies of work completed in the first year. This included the launch of a new website in April 2023, with 203 users signed up, including 12% of primary schools, 30% of secondary schools, and 21% of independent settings. The website held quality approved resources for use in PSHE as well as links to the “& PSHE” packs. All education providers across Staffordshire received a monthly PSHE Digest (686 providers) sent directly to the PSHE Leads in 60% of primary schools, 85% of secondary schools and 38% of independent settings. To support the delivery of age-appropriate, consistent PSHE: 13 PSHE packs had been created, including for example on knife crime and water safety; seven bitesize practice development sessions had been hosted; and local resources had been developed. Five best practice documents had been produced to help the development of consistent and high quality PSHE. Webinars had also been held on a number of topics to help provide evidence based subject knowledge, how this linked to PSHE and referral links. These webinars included: Stoke City Council’s Community Cohesion Team exploring topics such as extremism and Prevent; United Staffordshire Against Hate to look at homophobia and hate crimes; New Era for domestic abuse; Action for Children looking at mental health; MPFT considering sexual health; and Catch22 for child exploitation.

Work had also been undertaken with Staffordshire Police to help develop an education package that Police Community Support Officers would deliver in the classroom around safeguarding for adults and children. A five stage package education programme had been developed which would be available for delivery from September. Work was currently being developed to support similar education programmes for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

To ensure there was a true multiagency approach the Coordinator role fed into a number of local strategies and priorities, including:

- Community Safety Partnerships
- Early Intervention and Prevention Delivery Plan
 - Reducing Reoffending
 - Domestic Abuse Action Plan
 - Drugs and Alcohol
- Harmful and Problematic Sexualised Behaviours Action Plan
- ICS Mental Health Prevention Action Plan
- Serious Violence Strategy

- Staffordshire Early Help and Place Based Approach
- Staffordshire Support for Young People
- Better Health Staffordshire

The Committee were pleased to note the breadth of the PSHE curriculum, which including a large number of health focussed topics such as being healthy, online safety, vaccinations, and first aid.

Members also noted the importance of being work ready and the disconnect between this and qualifications. These “work ready” skills were important, with many areas included within PSHE, for example resilience.

The Committee were pleased to note the Coordinator’s involvement with the current Knife Angel visit to Lichfield.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their very valuable work.

Resolved: That the impact of the PSHE Coordinator role after its first year be welcomed and Officers be congratulated for the impressive work completed.

11. Work Programme

Following the focus for the future items considered at both 15 June meeting and at the extra 10 July informal meeting, and the subsequent work programme planning, the following additions and amendments were proposed:

- 14 September meeting will focus on the impact of the extra Cabinet funding for Children’s Services. Placement Sufficiency had also been requested, however this is an area of focus for the SLT/Cabinet Away Day at the end of September and therefore will come to the November meeting. Items on the work of the Family Improvement Board and the Children in care Programme have been added in its place;
- an informal meeting has been arranged with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner on 24 October at 2.00pm (County Buildings) to consider 3 key areas, these being: response to the PEEL review and impact of changes made to date; the neighbourhood safety delivery process to enable Members to better understand and inform their constituents; the Humberside pilot project “Right Care Right Person”, whether Staffordshire are following this method of working with those who have mental health concerns and the potential impact of this;
- two Trading Standards items have been requested for the November

meeting, one looking at the impact of the Service and its work to maintain a safe marketplace, the other considering the issue of non-compliance vaping and the safeguarding concerns around this, particularly considering the way they are targeted at children and young people;

- other items Members prioritised during their planning session will be added to the work programme;

Members asked that consideration be given to inviting the Chairman of Health and care Overview and Scrutiny to the meeting when the issue of vaping is included on the agenda.

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

Chair