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Dear Councillor,

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SAFEGUARDING) - TUESDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2024**

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting and now enclose the following report which were unavailable when the agenda was published.

<b>Agenda No.</b>	<b>Item</b>
5	<b>Cabinet Member Reports</b> (Pages 3 - 14) Appendix B – Cabinet Member Update Report - Children's Social Care

Yours faithfully,

Laura Bootland  
Democratic Services

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O&S Report		
COUNCILLOR	COMMITTEE	DATE
Councillor Roscoe	Cabinet Member Children's Social Care	24/09/2024

## **Children's Social Care**

### **Ofsted Letter and response**

The monitoring visit to the Front Door took place on June 25 and 26. The letter was published on 25 July 2024. There were number of areas where progress was noted, however some significant concerns were raised about the safeguarding response to some children, including delay in some child protection processes. We have taken the following immediate action in response:

- VPRFs (Police notifications) - meeting with Chief Inspector to review processes. Police are delivering training to ensure that frontline Police officers understand the necessity for urgent action when concerns about children are identified. An audit has been undertaken by the Police.

- Some delays were noted in strategy meetings. In response, there has been a clear written instruction to all staff that all strategy meetings must take place within one working day. There has also been clear direction within partnership agencies of the need to support this approach. Service managers within Children's Services are notified if any delay is anticipated for any reason so they can intervene or have oversight. All delays are interrogated and followed up.

-- In order to ensure no further delays in holding Initial Child Protection Conferences, the date cannot be changed without authorisation of the DCS or the AD in his absence.

- Practice guidance has been written in relation to safety planning and next steps to create safety following concerns being raised. This guidance was issued in July. Mandatory training has been delivered to all practitioners over 3 sessions. Training is being rolled out to partners in September.

Progress was noted by Ofsted in the following areas.

# Agenda Item 5

The front door has been restructured (FAST and CHAT) which are supporting more timely decision-making.

Children who need early help now receive a more timely and effective service.

The response to children outside of normal office hours has improved.

The response when allegations are made against professionals working with children has improved.

Increased management oversight, monitoring and regular sampling are leading to greater consistency in application of thresholds.

Assessment timeliness has significantly improved, and more assessments now demonstrate elements of stronger practice.

Enhanced quality assurance is providing a greater understanding of weaknesses in the front door response.

## **Early Help**

Since our last report in May 2024, Early Help continues to work hard to provide a timely response to the families of Sefton.

In June 2024, the FAST team was subject to an Ofsted Monitoring visit. Feedback was positive -

*'Children who need early help receive an effective and timely response from FAST. Screening is robust and informed by detailed conversations with referrers. There is comprehensive management guidance to identify what additional actions are needed to inform decisions about next steps. This is leading to appropriate threshold decisions being made and the rationale is clear. Detailed child-centered actions are swiftly signposted to the appropriate services to progress. Following screening, FAST secures timely access to support from community services for children and families. This is a significant improvement from the last inspection.'*

We are continuing to build on this positive feedback and are working closely with our partners to ensure that the right cases are progressed at the right time.

The step across meeting has also become embedded, this is a weekly meeting, to discuss cases which are stepping to Early Help from Children's Social Care and for cases that potentially need to be assessed by a social worker and will therefore step up. This has become a positive meeting that feels dynamic, with supportive challenge and a willingness for colleagues to work together for families.

The Early Help Management team along with our QA lead, have reflected on the findings of completed audits over the last 6 months to identify themes and learning. We have had two management sessions to plan an 'Away Day' in September 2024, which

# Agenda Item 5

will include all Early Help workers and will address what a good assessment and plan looks like and a focus on direct work and exploitation.

Sadly, in July there was a serious incident in Southport followed by Civil unrest. The North team mobilised immediately and turned Linaker Family Centre into a Trauma hub supported by colleagues from Family Group Conference and Targeted Family Support. Members of the public and professionals/staff can go to the Centre to access emotional and mental health support. This has been open over the weekends and until 8pm on Thursday evenings.

Team Around the School have also been instrumental in working alongside the schools to support the children and families in Hart Street, neighboring roads and where the civil unrest took place.

We are extremely proud of the efforts of our staff who have worked tirelessly to support the community and staff.

Peopletoo are supporting a review of the Family Time service is ongoing. This will consider the effectiveness and review the current way of working. In September there will be a week WILO (week in the life of) so we can look at what the day-to-day work looks like.

In June, the Family Group Conference team received their qualifications in Restorative Mediation which they are now using to support Families and at times use to build good foundations that make a Family Group Conference a more positive experience. The team also secured funding for 'Later Life Links' which will support our care experienced people.

Team Around the school continues to receive positive feedback from schools, partners, families, and children. The case study below highlights just one example of the impact of TAS (Team Around the School).

*'TAS were working with a child whose attendance was less than 10%, he was not accessing any on site schooling. TAS worker met with child, Mum, and Nan at school they expressed their concerns. Home visits were made to build a relationship up with the child, who was a very kind and polite young boy, but who struggled in busy environments and making friends, resulting in him staying home most days and avoiding going out. He said he wanted to compete his GCSE's but felt he need extra support, he said he would complete his exams but felt he needed to be a way from the other children as it was so overwhelming.*

*To support him and re-establish aspirations the TAS worker took him to visit colleges and worked with school. School initiated English, Maths and Science revision sessions, which started in April, the child attended all sessions.*

*The worker asked school if she could become an invigilator for his exams, to offer support and to encourage him to complete the exams, school agreed. He attended every exam; was always on time, with everything he needed, arriving early to have a coffee with the TAS worker and prepare for his exam.*

Over the summer 4 of the 5 clusters, we have offered summer school activities for targeted children (mainly SEND (Special Education Needs or Disability) or attendance).

# Agenda Item 5

These have proved invaluable in keeping strong links with vulnerable families and providing a safe space with fun activities and support. Partnerships with internal and external partners have been central to this such as Everton in the Community and Active Sefton.

Across Family Hubs, a mapping exercise has been completed to identify gaps in delivery and we are currently exploring ways of working with partners to address these. We are planning a formal launch of Family Hubs in November and aim to showcase our partnerships. Currently work is ongoing on developing a proof of concept for a new website – starting with domestic abuse and infant feeding.

## Youth Justice

### **Performance**

Performance against National Metrics (reoffending, first time entrants (FTE) and custody) remains stable. There was a slight decrease in out of court disposals and an increase in statutory court orders although in small numbers and within an acceptable range of variance. There was an increase in girls although this related to group assault towards one victim. There were 5 FTEs in this quarter, three for possession of a knife in a public place and two for assaults (actual bodily harm). The top three offences for this quarter were drugs offences, violence then motoring offences.

Sefton's performance is comparable with the Merseyside region, in the last two years the First Time Entrants rate for Merseyside has increased, Nationally, it has decreased but Sefton's has remained stable. For reoffending Sefton is at 28.2% which is the lowest across Merseyside, the majority are between 33% and 38%. It should be noted that the most recently published data for reoffending is for the year 2021 to 2022. There have been no further custodial sentences. There was one child who was in custody at Wetherby and one child who has just been remanded for a drug offence.

Looking at the Key Performance Indicator for Education, there were 26 children who were in unsuitable education arrangements, two less children than the previous quarter. Unsuitability relates to any circumstances outside of Alternative Provision, Mainstream or college. 28 children were offered less than 25 hours of education and 39 children attended less than 25 hours. All of these children are reviewed monthly by YJS, Education Welfare and Virtual School to understand the context and escalate as appropriate.

52.5% of the cohort have SEN Support needs or an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plans) with Social, Emotional and Mental Health concerns being the most prevalent issue, followed by ASD, Behavior Concerns, Multiple Learning Difficulties, Dyslexia and Speech and Language. This is comparative with previous quarters.

In Quarter 1, no children committed an offence classed as serious violence and in previous quarters the maximum number was 2. Serious Violence is recorded in line with the YJB definition as any drug, robbery or violence against the person offence that has a gravity score of five or more resulting in a caution or court sentence.

In terms of the cohort profile there are:

- 59 males (79.7%) aged range between 13 and 19yrs
- 15 females (20.3%) age range between 13 and 18yrs
- The cohort is predominantly White British.
- 22 children (29.8% of the cohort) are living in the top 10% of the most deprived areas nationally.
- 45% of the children have out of court disposal with the rest on statutory orders.

The most prevalent adverse childhood experiences are drug use within the household and domestic abuse, followed by emotional abuse.

## **Practice Improvement**

YJS continues to focus on practice improvements with monthly audits across out of court and statutory work, to assess performance against the YJB National Standards and the HMIP Inspection Frameworks. External consultants are undertaking a service review in line with the new HMIP Inspection Framework. This is in the very early stages although some themes have been identified around support from the partnership and risk management and safety planning which will be addressed immediately. Some good practice has also been identified.

The consultants shared observations around the complexity of the children accessing the YJS and commented on the care and compassion from some workers towards children and families. The service review is expected to be complete by late August with further support scheduled for early September.

## **YJS Prevention**

YJS continues to deliver prevention work through Turnaround and Community Youth Connector Projects. Children working through Turnaround have just completed a media programme during which they produced a film about their self-identity and aspirations which will be submitted to this year's Film Festival.

## **Help and Protection**

FAST and CHAT are developing well and continue to receive positive feedback from partners. The first evaluation of the service is currently being undertaken by Leeds and Peopletoo.

The CHAT service responded very well to the Southport incident, ensuring that sensitive and professional strategy meetings were held for all the children involved, and ensuring that schools were closely involved and supported in the recovery plan.

# Agenda Item 5

A new Interim Service Manager has been appointed over the Children with Complex Needs Service we are considering a 0-25 model of service delivery, with the support of Peopletoo.

The final 2 project teams have now left as we progress the restructuring of the workforce within Support and Protect. The DfE improvement advisor is supporting us to develop and progress an improvement plan with key priorities to improve practice, systems and structures ahead of further inspection visits. We have a specific focus on embedding learning in respect of our Sefton approach to practice (e.g. safety planning), strengthening the role of Team Managers, and continuing to embed a performance culture. The QA service is supporting us with a clear focus on child protection work.

## **Corporate Parenting**

### **Children placed subject to a care order at home.**

24 are cared for in the longer-term teams of these 11 are in the process of discharge. Likely to be discharged by December.

20 sit in the health and protection teams all subject to ICO's therefore there are only 13 children subject to Care Orders at home all of whom have returned home and will be subject to discharge over the next 6 months.

## **Discharges**

37 children have been discharged, a further 27 are in the court process and a further 112 have been identified of who 72 are in assessment.

## **Education**

8 cared for young people are on their way to university the national average is 1 in 12 cared for children this year's results mean Sefton are bucking the trend in 1 in 10 is our average.

Our GCSE results are the best ever too, so a big congratulations to all our cared for and care experienced young people.

For the first time too, we have more young people engaged in work/training or school than ever before, finally outnumbering those out of work 56% in and 44% out. Still a lot of work to do but it is all going the right way.

## **Care Experienced**

98% of our 18- to 21-year-olds are in suitable accommodation.

The care experienced hub is well on its way to stage 1 opening with a full diary of events from Care Leavers Week in October half term.

The care experienced and older cared for teams are about to pilot a 'new look' service transferring to a pilot 16 to 25 service, likely to be in place by end of October.



## **Stability**

We have 56 children placed in residential settings and all bar 13 are within the Northwest area, this is a statistic to be very proud of.

We have no child placed in an unregistered Ofsted setting.

67% of all cared for children have been with the same family for more than two years.

Whilst the teams do have several agency social workers and managers have all been in place for 6 months or more.

## **Safeguarding**

The Safeguarding Unit has welcomed and new, experienced Service Manager, Stephen Harley, who joined us at the end of August.

A focus over the next three months strengthening the 'footprint' of the safeguarding unit through a focus on the escalation process and active review of those cases where there may be risk of drift or delay (long term child protection plans, children in longer term unmatched foster placements).

Work continues alongside our Leeds partners in terms of a review of the case conference and cared for review meeting processes.

The numbers of cared for children continues to fall at a slow yet steady rate and sits at 563, CP numbers have risen slightly over the past three months after a period of consistent decline and now sit at 314, work is underway to understand any issues behind this recent increase.

## **The Social Work Academy**

Staff morale remains high, and newly qualified social workers within the academy are engaged, enthusiastic and keen to improve and develop their practice. The learning culture within the academy is evident in the staff attendance at training and open discussion within the service.

All staff within the Academy have now attended the safety planning training and this is being put into practice. In addition to the training that has been rolled out to the whole of the service, NQSWs have also attended development sessions that have been focused on risk assessment and safety planning, these sessions have reflected upon and considered the Ofsted feedback from the last monitoring visit.

There have been recent audits undertaken of families open in the academy and the grading for these audits have all had good features, with overall grading of good or requires improvement to be good. There have been no inadequate gradings or immediate response forms actioned. Whilst undertaking a current audit, the auditor has shared views that the assessment undertaken by a frontline participant was very good

# Agenda Item 5

and the recording of CP visits undertaken by the social worker excellent. The visits linked to the plan and recorded the consideration of safety for the children throughout the recordings.

Team Managers continue to hold regular supervision with all social workers in their teams, and all have a good understanding of the circumstances of children open in their teams. Team Managers are challenging assessments and plans and there is evidence through audits that the assessments & plans are becoming stronger. Development sessions have been held in respect of analysis and there has been guidance shared by PSW that is now becoming evident in the assessments that are being authorised.

There are regular performance meetings taking place between Team Managers and their teams, Team Manager and Service Manager, Service Manager and Assistant Director, Assistant Director and Director of Children's Services. These meetings provide leaders with an understanding of the detail & practice behind the data.

Nine participants (student social workers from Frontline) have completed the social work programme, each will be qualified from 31<sup>st</sup> August. Eight of the participants will become Social Workers employed by Sefton from 1<sup>st</sup> September, the ninth has deferred employment until 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025 due to maternity.

Next steps to be taken for the Academy is the transition planning for the current cohort. Discussions about transition have started, the preference of the Academy staff is to move together as teams.

## **Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement**

### **Quality Assurance**

In terms of quality assurance, there have been 49 deep dive audits from May 2024 to July 2024 with a further 17 allocated in August 2024. Over the last 3 months 14% of audits (7) have been graded inadequate, 78% (38) have been graded requires improvement to be good and 8% (4) have been graded good. This is a decline in work graded good since the last reporting period which has resulted in scrutiny of work to understand where inadequate work mainly sits; potential reasons for this and actions to address this which are numerous and varied.

When work is graded inadequate; audits are moderated swiftly; if the inadequate grade is maintained a reflective conversation is facilitated by the relevant Service Manager to unpick learning and ensure any remedial identified actions are followed up to improve

the child and families' lives. Good and inadequate work is also moderated with ADs involved to ensure line of sight.

Child and family feedback has continued to be gathered as part of audit with more determination evident to obtain this as noted by Ofsted in their recent monitoring visit *"Feedback from families is sought to understand the impact of social work practice."* Practice Improvement Managers continue to observe practice which supports ongoing learning and allows for additional feedback from children and families. It was also positive to see Ofsted recently commenting on auditing being more consistent with corrective actions being appropriately identified and more focused on improving children's circumstances, rather than overly focused on process.

Work has been ongoing with the Fostering Service to create a bespoke audit tool incorporated into our monthly audit schedule from September 2024. There has been an evaluation of the Family Group Conferencing Service and dip sampling planned to review progress. Additional thematic dip samples have focused on areas for improvement and will continue to be informed by data and other lines of enquiry.

## **Practice Improvement**

Improvement activity has continued to focus on plans and planning for children and families and analytical recording and thinking skills. An analysis activity book has been created and launched with follow-up sessions planned within individual service areas.

Managers continue to benefit from quarterly management oversight and supervision action learning sets which allow peers to show, share, reflect and grow. It was good to see that Ofsted noted improvements in respect of supervision at the last monitoring visit, but consistency is still to be achieved. Reflective learning conversations during audit continue to support practitioners and managers; encouraging feedback and reflection which people find helpful.

Social Work England have facilitated bespoke sessions for Sefton to explain fitness to practice in more detail to managers.

Children's Service staff are kept informed of audit progress at Practice and Performance meetings where good practice is also celebrated, and outside speakers attend e.g., complaints and compliments service in July 2024. The next Practice and Performance meeting is planned for October 2024 when new Practice Standards will be launched. These Practice Standards have been created with input from teams, managers, leaders, partners, children, and families and Think ACES Create PACES group who will be attending the meeting to share their voice and reinforce why standards are so important.

# Agenda Item 5

There has been a focus on increasing understanding around steps to reduce risk and create safety and ongoing safety planning with training delivered to over 140 Children's Services staff in August and a further session is planned for September. Dip sampling is also planned to track progress.

The Practice Improvement Service has also been directly supporting Help and Protect teams, leaders, and managers to drill into practice issues and provide assurance. A whole service meeting is planned to reinforce safeguarding expectations and oversight within these teams - "back to basics."

The focus for Practice month during October 2024 is Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse - core safeguarding which is one of Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership priorities. The Principal Social Worker has organized an extensive programme of learning events with input from the partnership to encourage multi agency learning, working together and shared responsibility. Our partners in Research in Practice are also facilitating a workshop on key findings, resilience, and resources and two other bespoke sessions in September - Working Effectively With Fathers and a session on understanding identity to support Heritage Day which Sefton wish to celebrate and support.

Increased attention has been given to staff wellbeing over recent weeks following the tragic incident in Southport and subsequent unrest. Support from Sefton Communications team has been excellent, and a recovery wellbeing plan was created to support staff.

## **Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership**

The Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Unit is fully staffed.

The Partnership is being supported by Leeds Children's Service to progress in meeting the Partnerships Strategic priorities:

- Leadership and Culture
- Harm outside the Home
- Core Safeguarding

The Partnership has completed its first Multi Agency Audit of the year with the findings being presented to the Performance Quality Assurance Date Sub-Group in September. Partners engaged very well in the process.

# Agenda Item 5

The Partnership has held two Rapid Review Meeting this year in response to receiving two serious incident notifications involving cared for children experiencing significant harm outside of the home. The outcome of one Rapid Review was to progress to a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) which is now in progress and due to be completed in January 2025. The other Rapid Review outcome was not to progress to a LCSPR as any learning identified was already in progress across the partnership.

There is one ongoing LSCPR in progress, again in respect of a cared for child who suffered significant harm, the outcome of the review will be presented to the Key Strategic Leads this month.

The Partnership is working collaboratively with Lancashire Safeguarding Partnership following the tragic event in Southport on 29 July that resulted in the death of three children in Sefton. Lancashire held a Rapid Review panel on 27 August 2024 in respect of the perpetrator, and Partners across Sefton have contributed to the Review.

The Partnership in October will be publishing the outcome of the S175 Audit, and the S11 audit is in progress and the findings will be reported on in December 2024.

The Partnership continues to provide regular updates about progress to the Children's Improvement Board.

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