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Date: 24th September

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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 document which will be tabled at the meeting.

Agenda No.	Item
4	Public Question Time (Pages 3 - 12) Public Questions and responses.

Yours faithfully,

Laura Bootland
Democratic Services

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Public Questions to Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)

24th September 2024

No.	Question	Response
	FASD	
1	Why does Sefton not record how many children have FASD or autism? Can Sefton start to record in this way?	The Code of Practice describes needs as: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health difficulties; sensory and physical needs. It is not required to keep a record of how many children have FASD, A specific diagnosis may be recorded in plans and the likelihood is that there may be a variety of need arising from that diagnosis which would be addressed in those plans.
2	Is the u turn by Sefton over its FASD training a funding issue? In the committee meeting in November, the public were told Sefton would be using an expert recommended by the Voice of the Families. The training is now being carried out in house. Has this saved Sefton money?	The training will be given by a Sefton educational psychologist with a specific interest and knowledge regarding FASD. She has ensured it is compliant with the National Organisation for FASD guidelines for training. The training will be online, which will allow a larger number and wider range of partners to attend from Social Care, Education, Early Help and Health. This will help create a consistent language and dialogue between agencies and will raise awareness for all working directly or

		<p>indirectly with CYP with FASD. There will be 3 training dates. The first at the end of September, the next in November with a third early in 2025. Parents and carers with lived FASD experience are being consulted to ensure that their voice and experience is integrated into the training. Health will provide information and a local context. There is also an option for a recording of the training to be available through our training portal for refresher. The strength of this training is both the reach of the training, the coproduction, the consistency of the message and that it will be representative of experiences at a local level within the national context.</p>
3	<p>Does the Sefton and the Scrutiny Committee support the Voice of the Families campaign to make it a law that FASD training is compulsory for all schools and children services employees? Currently it is an option.</p>	<p>This would be a decision for the council and for individual schools. There is no national legislation that requires this.</p> <p>However, the council is exploring whether there could be training on specific neurodevelopmental conditions as part of Sefton's induction and as part of a rolling programme.</p>

	Education	
4	<p>Is there a limit to the number of schools that can be academised or is Sefton bracing itself for all schools to leave the care of the Local Authority? What is Sefton doing to stop the mass exodus as Academies are using Sefton's Ofsted failures as a way to lure schools?</p>	<p>Local authorities do not have any powers to prevent schools from becoming academies. The decision to convert to Academy Status is for the governing body of the school exclusively, following the correct process.</p> <p>The Secretary of State may make an academy order in respect of a maintained school if either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The governing body applies to become an academy (voluntary conversion) • The school is 'eligible for intervention' within the meaning of Part 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (other than being an 'Inadequate' school) *. • The school is defined as 'coasting' under the Coasting School (England) Regulations 2022 which in the vast majority of circumstances will mean that the school has been judged below 'Good' in more than one consecutive inspection.

<p>5</p>	<p>The breakdown of data around education doesn't go far enough. Can we start to include children out of education for longer than a month, six months, a year, five years?</p> <p>This then needs further scrutiny. These children are being lost in figures, they are more than just a number or percentage.</p>	<p>Data in relation to absence is scrutinised. Individual children who are persistently absent over 10% or severely absent over 50% are tracked and monitored.</p> <p>Schools follow 'Children Missing from Education' requirements, and these pupils are also traced and tracked returning them to school or home Education where possible. All children who are electively home educated or are missing from education are tracked.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Children with ehcp's who are without placement. Is any priority given to expedite placement? How are these children overseen?</p>	<p>These children are prioritised and the Service Manager meets with the Senior Casework Officers on a weekly basis to discuss any progress, consultation responses are looked at and challenged where appropriate. Any options that have not been explored are also discussed and Casework Officers are given follow up actions.</p> <p>Families are kept fully informed throughout by their allocated casework officer.</p>

7	<p>With many SEN schools in Sefton being full or unsuitable for some children more and more EOTAS (education other than at school) packages are being issued. This involves bespoke packages of education being delivered at home or in the community.</p> <p>My experience of the mapping and oversight of these packages has been severely lacking and I now ask if we can employ an EOTAS specialist caseworker? These are in place in some other local authorities.</p>	<p>There is currently 1% of the EHCP population with an EOTAS package and there has been less than 5 agreed in the past academic year.</p> <p>The EOTAS packages are spread across the SEND casework team, and they are overseen by the Senior Casework Officers. There is work ongoing with commissioning about procurement of services to minimise any delays.</p>
Childrens Social Care		
8	<p>What are the plans to combat the bullying of social workers by other social workers?</p>	<p>Sefton takes any complaints of bullying and harassment very seriously and will deal with issues raised under the Council's Dignity at Work policy. Staff are encouraged to make complaints with their manager, HR, or their Trade Union so issues can be fully investigated, and measures put in place to rectify issues if appropriate.</p>

9	<p>How do several families lodge a joint formal complaint about one social worker?</p>	<p>The complaints procedure doesn't currently allow for joint complaints about one social worker. Complaints should be made by individual parents and there would be an expectation that Team/Service Managers and Complaint Officers would identify a theme/trend of complaints relating to one social worker and address this.</p> <p>The complaints lead is working with one of our project managers on an improvement plan for Children's complaints. The complaints lead advised an informal overview and scrutiny meeting on the 02/09/2024 that he would go away and consider the issue of making a joint complaint and report back.</p> <p>A report on Complaints is scheduled to come to the formal O&S(CS&S) Committee on 12 November.</p>
10	<p>Paul Boyce has given Sefton 6 points that they have to address immediately. One is the complaints procedures. What are the other 5? Paul says Sefton can tell the public.</p>	<p>We spoke to Paul Boyce to clarify this question but he has advised we ask the public speaker what they mean?</p> <p>Paul advised his report in April was for the Minister and was shared with the Council but not published (in public).</p>

	Democratic Services	
11	<p>A year ago the Voice of the Families presented a petition to ask for three people with lived experience to be on the committee. The group has had no direct feedback on this petition such as an email. Please can the group have an update on their petition. Does the committee feel that they have acted in the right way to the group over this petition?</p>	<p>The petition was discussed at the time on 26/9/23, while the representatives of Voice of the Families were present in the meeting. The request was not agreed to because committee members considered that they do have lived experience.</p> <p>The Committee were also advised by the Democratic Services Manager that a review of the Committee's Terms of Reference was due to begin. This review included looking at the Committee's membership. A report outlining a draft updated Terms of Reference was considered by the O&S Committee at its meeting in November 2023 and subsequently approved at Full Council in May 2024.</p> <p>The Review of the Terms of Reference Report stated that: "It is proposed that no action should be taken at the current time regarding the request to increase membership on the Committee".</p> <p>Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the minutes of the meeting on 26/9/23 do state that the Committee would review its</p>

		<p>membership and Voice of the Families would be advised of the outcome.</p> <p>The Chair apologises for not having advised the Voice of the Families specifically about this subject. However, the steps we have taken to review the membership of the committee have been reported publicly in committee meetings and records of these meetings are available publicly.</p> <p>It should be noted that as part of the Terms of reference Review, it was agreed that the Council would introduce a parent/ carers subcommittee. Voice of the Families representatives have been invited to the first two meetings of the sub-committee and have been able to give their perspective directly to the subcommittee.</p> <p>Although the membership of the committee has changed following the election in May 2024, we continue to have 3 members with direct experience of caring for a child with SEND.</p> <p>The Chair is happy to put this response into letter form so that it can be shared with members of the Voice of the Families group.</p>
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12	<p>Why has the role of education and social care been merged and given to one cabinet minister Diane Roscoe? Is this to save money? According to Paul Boyce, this practice occurred in the past and was heavily criticised. Hence the roles were divided.</p>	<p>Sefton children services and the wider council has recognised that the experiences of children in need of support and their education are intrinsically linked. We recognise that a positive experience of education, including attendance and feelings of safety can help support wider family problems which are being supported through children’s social care. Our approach brings education to the forefront of our work with families and partners, as is evidenced by the success of initiatives such as Team Around a School. Feedback from Schools is that this approach is welcome.</p> <p>In order to support this closer working together I made the decision to bring the political governance under one lead member. I would like to give assurance that this decision is supported by both the CEX and the DCS who value the challenge and support from the current lead member and have reported that it has simplified governance and supported the progress of our improvement. It is also recognised as best practice across the country.</p> <p>Marion Atkinson</p>
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