



**INTERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
AND SAFEGUARDING)**

REMOTE MEETING HELD ON  
TUESDAY 26TH JANUARY, 2021

**PRESENT:** Councillor Murphy (in the Chair)  
Councillor Carragher (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors Bennett, Cluskey, Evans, Keith, Pitt,  
Yvonne Sayers, Thomas and Webster

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mr. M. Byrne, Healthwatch Representative  
Ms. K. Christie, Healthwatch Representative  
Ms. C. McDonough, Parent Governor  
Representative  
Councillor J. J. Kelly, Cabinet Member – Children,  
Schools and Safeguarding

**19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Ms. Machalla McDermott, Parent Governor Representative, and Mrs. Sandra Cain, Independent Advisory Member.

**20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

**21. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2020, be confirmed as a correct record.

**22. PERSISTENT PUPIL ABSENCE WORKING GROUP FINAL REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer presenting formally the final report of the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group. The Final Report of the Working Group was attached to the report.

Councillor Carragher, the Lead Member of the Working Group, introduced the report.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

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- Consideration of how a temporary post associated with school attendance could be made permanent.
- How sanctions for non-attendance could be applied consistently throughout the Borough.
- Information requested on home schooling from parents, for the working group review had produced a disappointing response.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet and Council be recommended to support and approve the following recommendations:

1. That the good practice regarding school attendance currently undertaken by the Council and schools, as outlined in the findings of the Final Report, be acknowledged and noted;
2. That the Interim Head of Education be requested to explore the possibility of:
  - (a) a campaign to tackle school attendance across all key stages with a specific emphasis on the early years and foundation stage, the campaign to focus on conveying clear messages about how absence affects attainment, wellbeing and wider outcomes;
  - (b) delivering of clear messages about expectations, routines and consequences to new pupils and families through prospectus and admission/transition events;
  - (c) ensuring that the attendance of vulnerable children is monitored across the early years stage;
  - (d) an aspiration for a post of a dedicated worker for children who are supported by Education, Health and Care Plans, in order to address any barriers for children and young people attending school; this aspiration could be considered in the future as part of the on-going work on school attendance;
  - (e) attendance being part of the enhanced transition and not just for children and young people on the Special Educational Needs and disability (SEND) register, as this will address the early identification of any school attendance issues;
  - (f) sanctions for non-attendance being applied consistently across primary and secondary schools;
  - (g) schools providing an adult mentor to those children who have contact with the school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) but who are not on the SEND register,

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with whom the children can have regular access and build up a relationship;

- (h) encouraging schools to provide training in SEND and Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) conditions to all teaching staff, to include office staff;
  - (i) extending buddy schemes with older peers to all schools, pupils to be “matched up” to ensure they have something in common;
  - (j) Improving communication between primary and secondary schools at transition stage, to ensure children are “understood” by teaching staff in secondary schools and that any good practice is shared; and
3. That the Senior Democratic Services Officer be requested to liaise with relevant officers in order to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding) receives a six-monthly monitoring report, setting out progress made against each of the recommendations outlined above.

### **23. COVID MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children’s Social Care and Education outlining the safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable children who did not attend school during the first Covid-19 lockdown, between March to June 2020. The report also referenced information relating to the wider re-opening of schools following this period. The report indicated that the Covid Act 2020 had removed statutory enforcement of school attendance.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- The roll-out of equipment to children in order for them to participate in on-line learning.
- The number of children attending school during the current lock-down restrictions.
- The number of children currently attending school who were deemed to be vulnerable.
- Monitoring of attendance.
- The number of primary children currently attending school and whether numbers were too high given risks associated with Covid-19. A response would be sought from Public Health.
- How to donate unwanted laptops, etc. to schools. Information on the BBC donation scheme would be sought.
- Support available to schools for both home learning and classroom learning.
- The possibility of schools operating beyond their risk assessments.

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- Funding and continuity planning available for schools in the event of emergency situations.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the Director of Public Health be requested to provide information on whether numbers of primary children currently attending school were too high given the risks associated with Covid-19, to the Senior Democratic Services Officer, for circulation to Members of the Committee; and
- (3) the Head of Communities be requested to provide information on the BBC donation scheme of unwanted IT equipment to schools, to the Senior Democratic Services Officer, for circulation to Members of the Committee.

### **24. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN DATA DASHBOARD IN-DEPTH NARRATIVE**

Further to Minute No. 12 (2) of 10 November 2020, the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education presenting an update on the data relating to the Children and Young People's Plan four priorities that were presented at the previous meeting. The latest Children and Young People's Plan dashboard was attached to the report.

An informal workshop session had taken place previously to explain the data in detail to Members of the Committee.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- Indicator 30 and the progress 8 performance in Sefton for Key Stage 4.
- The relatively low number of secondary schools in the Borough that were rated as "Good" by Ofsted.
- The National Child Measurement Programme and whether any monitoring with local foodbanks took place. Information would be sought from Public Health, including the support offered to schools by the Council.
- Indicator 6 and the reporting change implemented by Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust in relation to self-harm hospital admissions.
- Indicator 10 and the proportion of children and young people with a diagnosable mental health condition who are receiving treatment from NHS funded community services. What was the impact of Covid-19 on this indicator in the future?

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- Mental health teams in Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a further update be received by the Committee on the progress of the plan in six months' time; and
- (3) the Director of Public Health be requested to provide information on the National Child Measurement Programme and whether any monitoring with local foodbanks took place, to include information on support offered to schools through Active Sefton, etc., and the information to be provided to the Senior Democratic Services Officer, for circulation to Members of the Committee.

### **25. SEND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 5 of 22 September 2020, the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education on the progress made against the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Continuous Improvement Plan.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- The lack of data available against Action 1 – “To improve the poor progress made from starting points by pupils with a statement of special educational needs”.
- Any qualitative data available to indicate progress against SEN school performance.
- The outcome of the follow-up survey for parents/carers of children and young people with SEND.
- Progress made against “All other reviews” and had Covid-19 had an impact? Any update on figures could be provided to Members.
- How could responses to surveys be improved?
- The therapy waiting times outlined at paragraph 2.19 and how many patients were affected. Figures could be obtained from Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the progress made be noted and activity be continued to be prioritised during the pandemic;
- (2) a further report be submitted to a future Committee meeting;
- (3) the Head of Communities be requested to provide any update on figures associated with progress made against “All other reviews” to

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the Senior Democratic Services Officer, for circulation to Members of the Committee; and

- (4) the Chief Officer of the Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups be requested to obtain figures for the numbers of patients affected by the therapy waiting times from Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust, to be provided to the Senior Democratic Services Officer, for circulation to Members of the Committee.

### **26. SEFTON LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD REPORT ON SERIOUS CASE REVIEW ACTIVITY**

Further to Minute No. 7 (2) of 22 September 2020, the Committee considered the report of the Sefton Local Safeguarding Children Board Independent Chair providing an overview of Series Case Review activity.

Paula St Aubyn, Sefton Local Safeguarding Children Board Independent Chair, was in attendance to present the report and respond to issues raised by Members.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- Common themes arising from serious case reviews and assurances around learning from these.
- Action taken in relation to multi-agency 7-minute briefings.
- The Sefton Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Sefton Local Safeguarding Children Board be requested to provide its Annual Report to the Committee in future; and
- (2) Paula St Aubyn, Sefton Local Safeguarding Children Board Independent Chair, be thanked for her attendance.

### **27. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

Further to Minute No. 19 of 24 September 2019, the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education that provided a summary of the fostering service; highlighting practice; and plans to build on current achievements for the period 2019/2020.

The Fostering Service provided a range of short-term and permanent placements for Looked After Children with foster carers who had a diverse range of skills and experience. Foster carers provided respite support to each other, support to birth parents and carers, emergency care, and care for children in preparation for adoption and long-term permanence. Many young people had chosen to Stay Put with foster carers and carers had been able to support them beyond 18, through to independence and into adulthood.

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As of 31 March 2020, Sefton Fostering Service had 89 approved mainstream fostering households caring for 159 children and 62 connected carer households caring for 67 children. The remainder of the children in care were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies, residential units, residential schools, Staying Put placements, Supported Lodgings or in semi-independent accommodation and children placed for adoption.

The Sefton Fostering Service Annual Report 2019/20 was attached to the report.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- The timing of the Sefton Fostering Service Annual Report.
- If Covid-19 affected the figures for children placed into emergency care.
- Factors taken into consideration for the recruitment of foster carers, particularly the unsuitability of the bedroom.
- Figures on the number of people with disabilities who were foster carers. This could be provided.
- Kinship data and the number of requests for viability, in particular. Links with this to panel activity.
- Progress and monitoring of the Foster Service Improvement Plan.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) annual reports in relation to the progress of the Children's Social Care Fostering Service be continued to be received by the Committee; and
- (3) the Head of Children's Care be requested to provide figures on the number of people with disabilities who are foster carers to the Senior Democratic Services Officer, for circulation to Members of the Committee.

### **28. CABINET MEMBER REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer in relation to the most recent report of the Cabinet Member – Children, Schools and Safeguarding for the period November - December 2020. The report outlined information on the following:

- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND);
- Commissioning; and
- Response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor J.J. Kelly, Cabinet Member – Children, Schools and Safeguarding, attended the meeting to present his update report and highlight aspects of it.

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A Member of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- An item on High Needs Funding appeared on the current Key Decision Forward Plan and this could be considered as a possible item for pre-scrutiny under the Work Programme item, below.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member update report be noted.

### **29. EXECUTIVE/SCRUTINY PROTOCOL**

Further to Minute No. 69 of the Cabinet meeting of 3 December 2020, the Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer advising of the Cabinet decision to approve the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol for use in Sefton.

The Executive/Scrutiny Protocol was attached to the report at Appendix A.

A Member of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- Regarding public participation in the overview and scrutiny process, this was an issue that all Overview and Scrutiny Committees should consider, particularly in respect of future working groups.

RESOLVED:

That the decision of the Cabinet in approving the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol for use in Sefton be noted and welcomed.

### **30. WORK PROGRAMME KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer seeking the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/21; reporting on progress of the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group; reporting on progress of the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group; identification of any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the latest Key Decision Forward Plan; and receipt of an update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Work Programme for 2020/21 was set out at Appendix A to the report, to be considered along with any additional items to be included and agreed.

The report set out progress to date made by the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group that had completed its review, and also progress to date made by the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group. The Chair of the Committee had agreed to serve on the latter



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Working Group that had been established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills).

There were two Key Decisions within the latest Key Decision Forward Plan, attached to the report at Appendix B, that fell under the Committee's remit, and the Committee was invited to consider items for pre-scrutiny.

The report set out an update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- Discussion took place on the establishment of a possible new working group review.
- The item Plan on High Needs Funding could possibly be considered as an item for pre-scrutiny. In the event that dates of meetings would prevent pre-scrutiny, an update report on the matter could be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2020/21, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed;
- (2) the completion of the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group review be noted;
- (3) the progress of the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group, established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills), be noted;
- (4) a working group be established to review the topic of secondary school performance and attainment, and the following Members be appointed to serve on the working group:
  - Councillors Carragher, Keith and Murphy;
- (5) the contents of the Key Decision Forward Plan for the period 1 February – 31 May 2021, be noted;
- (6) the item Forward Plan on High Needs Funding be considered as a possible item for pre-scrutiny, and in the event that dates of meetings would prevent pre-scrutiny, an update report on the matter be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- (7) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.