



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SAFEGUARDING)

MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, BOOTLE
ON TUESDAY 31ST JANUARY, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor June Burns (in the Chair)
Councillor Spencer (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Danny Burns, Carlin, Hardman, Lloyd-Johnson, McKee, Murphy and Prendergast

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. M. Byrne, Healthwatch Representative
Mrs. S. Cain, Independent Advisory Member
Ms. C. Swainbank, Parent Governor Representative
Councillor Doyle – Cabinet Member – Children's Social Care
Councillor Roscoe, Cabinet Member – Education
Councillor Lynne Thompson
10 members of the public

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Ms. Joan McCarthy, Archdiocese Representative.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

40. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 December 2022, be confirmed as a correct record.

41. ATTENDANCE OF PAUL BOYCE, IMPROVEMENT BOARD CHAIR

Further to Minute No. 34 (3) of 20 December 2022, Paul Boyce, the independent Improvement Board Chair, attended the meeting and outlined his experience in the Children's Services field; interventions taken by the Department for Education for delivering improvements, following the Inadequate inspection grading by Ofsted, and possible future interventions in the event that improvements were not sufficient; the appointment of the Children's Services Commissioner for Sefton; the role and responsibilities of the Improvement Board Chair; the reporting mechanisms and timescales undertaken by him to report to the Secretary of State for Education on Sefton's performance in Children's Services; the role of the

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Improvement Board in Sefton; oversight of the Children's Services Improvement Programme; and issues perceived regarding the requirement of the Committee for transparency and good quality information from Council Officers.

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

- The re-structuring of the Improvement Board.
- Access by Members of the Committee to the Minutes of the Improvement Board and comparable information.
- Reasons why the Minutes of the Improvement Board were not made available to the Committee.
- Assurances were sought that comparable information was provided to both the Improvement Board and the Committee.
- Options and advice as to next steps to be taken.
- The possibility of the Committee receiving feedback from the Improvement Board.
- The timescale and process for interventions following the Inadequate grading.
- Whether the Improvement Plan provided sufficient assurances for the Committee.
- The importance of a healthy culture to drive improvement.

Mr. Boyce stressed the importance of safeguarding children in Sefton; that his responsibility was to the Secretary of State for Education; the role of the Committee in exhibiting political leadership; and that assurances on the quality of social work practice and the role of partners could be sought.

RESOLVED:

That the information provided be noted.

42. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education that updated the Committee on the progress made in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) within the Education Portfolio and with reference to the SEND Continuous Improvement Plan. The report set out the background to the matter; issues regarding the SEND Team and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC Plans), together with actions taken to address those issues; Sefton's High Needs Funding/Budget position 2022/23; delivering the Better Values Programme; the new Ofsted Local Area SEND Inspection Framework; and monitoring and review of the SEND Improvement Plan.

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

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- Difficulties faced by schools in terms of producing effective EHC Plans and the impact on parents/carers.
- Support provided to mainstream schools and their levels of inclusivity.
- Resources provided to mainstream schools to assist in accommodating pupils with SEND.
- Concerns regarding the difficulties associated with compliance of statutory timescales to complete an EHC assessment and produce a final EHC Plan, due to increasing levels of demand and capacity issues affecting the SEND Team.
- Reasons for increasing levels of demand.
- Costs associated with home-school transport arrangements.
- Issues associated with parental preference of particular schools and sufficient resources required by those schools.
- The appeals process where parental preference was unable to be met. Figures could be obtained.
- The length of time currently associated with completion of EHC assessments and the production of a final EHC Plan.
- Issues associated with EHC assessments and the production of EHC Plans had been on-going for some considerable time.
- Funding, support and training provided to mainstream schools in relation to SEND.
- Measuring outcomes of children with SEND who attended mainstream schools and comparisons with other local authorities.
- An update report on progress regarding compliance with statutory timescales to complete an EHC assessment and produce a final EHC Plan was requested for the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) it be noted that the SEND Continuous Improvement Board will continue to provide robust governance of further developments in this area with oversight provided by the Health and Wellbeing Board;
- (2) the current position in relation to the SEND Team and the linkages with the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments and compliance, be noted;
- (3) the fact that the Council will be engaging with the Delivering Better Value Programme delivered with the support of the Department for Education and financial advisors in order to address the long-term financial sustainability of the High Needs Funding Budget, be noted; and
- (4) the Assistant Director Education be requested to submit an update report to the next meeting of the Committee on 6 March 2023, on progress regarding compliance with statutory timescales to complete Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments and to

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produce a final EHC Plan, to include figures for the appeals process where parental preferences were unable to be met.

43. SEFTON CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Further to Minute No. 20 of 28 September 2021, the Committee considered the report of the Cabinet Member – Children's Social Care presenting the Annual Report of the Sefton Corporate Parenting Board for 2022. The Sefton Corporate Parenting Board - Annual Report 2022 was attached to the report and set out information on the following:

- Purpose of the Sefton Corporate Parenting Board
- Roles and Responsibilities of the Board
- Review and Restructure 2021
- Sefton Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Five Key Priority Areas
- Ofsted Inspection of Sefton Children's Services 21 February to 4 March 2022
- Children and Young People's Participation
- Achievements
- Sefton Corporate Parenting Board – Terms of Reference

The Committee was requested to comment on the Annual Report and to note it.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

44. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME PHASE 2

Further to Minute No. 34 (2) of 20 December 2022, the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education that presented the draft of the Improvement Plan for Phase 2. The Draft Improvement Plan Phase 2 was attached to the report and would continue to be comprised of the four themes of improvement, namely:

- Quality - Ensuring the right staff are in the right place at the right time to deliver a consistent standard of good quality safeguarding services to children and families.
- Improving Implementation of Learning - Using what we know and learn to continuously improve and enhance the services we deliver for children and families.
- Improving Tools - Ensuring we have the right tools to enable the workforce to deliver good quality services for children and families.

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- Improving Strategic Partnerships - Effective partnership working to enable the delivery of common goals and a high-quality multi-agency response for children and families.

The report indicated that the draft Improvement Plan also now identified four key areas that would be strengthened through the actions included, namely:

- Corporate Leadership
- Governance and Partnerships
- Practice
- Enablers and Resources

The report also indicated that the draft Improvement Plan now included milestones and measures for the four themes that would be monitored and reported on; that the Improvement Plan was a live document that would be updated on a regular basis; and requested Committee Members to consider and comment on the draft Improvement Plan.

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

- Recruitment and retention of staff.
- Feedback on the draft Improvement Plan and future reporting on Quality Assurance and Practice Performance. Quality Assurance was regularly reported to the Improvement Board and could be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.
- Assurances were sought regarding oversight of Council activities and Practice Performance. This had not yet been submitted to the Improvement Board and could be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.
- The use of milestones, measures and Key Performance Indicators. It was considered useful for the Committee to receive actual figures for comparisons with “before and after”. Milestones and measures were already included within the draft Improvement Plan, for the four themes.
- The quality of information provided to Members and adequate training. It was anticipated that bespoke training would be provided to Committee Members.
- Members’ enquiries could be raised with the Executive Director of Children’s Social Care and Education and responses shared with all Committee Members.
- Disappointment was expressed regarding the lack of an adequate response to Member’s previous requests for receipt of the Minutes of the Improvement Board, together with a request for more transparency in the future.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report and draft Improvement Plan be noted; and

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- (2) the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to submit reports on Quality Assurance and Practice Performance to the next meeting of the Committee on 6 March 2023.

45. RECRUITMENT AND SUPPORT FOR NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS

Further to Minute No. 8 (2) of 5 July 2022, the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education that set out Sefton's response to the recruitment and support for newly qualified social workers (NQSW's). The report detailed the difficulties that existed on a national and local level and the impact on the local authority, the newly qualified social worker and most importantly, the families that the Council worked with.

The report detailed Sefton's response, outlined progress of the new Social Work Academy and set out the Academy working model and the impact it was hoped would be achieved, together with some of the early signs of impact. The report concluded that the Academy could continue to support Sefton's Children Services and the wider Council.

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

- How the Academy could support social workers from overseas as part of the induction process; different methods of support and a dedicated member of staff for cultural transitions.
- Other methods used to identify additional support, such as the annual staff survey and regular dialogue.
- The anticipated timescale for agency workers to remain in place.
- Difficulties associated with the retention of social workers, which was an issue for every local authority.
- The anticipated timescale for the Academy to remain in place, funding and the number of social workers expected to pass through the process.
- Work undertaken to ensure safe and secure accommodation for social workers from overseas.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

46. CABINET MEMBER REPORTS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer submitting the most recent update reports from the Cabinet Member – Children's Social Care, and the Cabinet Member – Education, whose portfolios fell within the remit of the Committee.

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The Cabinet Member update report – Children's Social Care, attached to the report at Appendix A, outlined information on the following:

- Children's Services
- Youth Justice Services

The Cabinet Member update report – Education, attached to the report at Appendix B, outlined information on the following:

- Inclusion Workshop
- Exclusions
- Attendance
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- School Improvement
- Early Years
- Virtual School
- Academisation

Councillors Roscoe and Doyle attended the meeting to present their reports and to respond to any questions or issues raised by Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the update reports from the Cabinet Member – Children's Social Care and the Cabinet Member – Education, be noted.

47. WORK PROGRAMME KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer seeking to:

- review the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2022/23;
- give consideration to any further informal briefing sessions that Members would wish to be arranged during 2022/23;
- note that there were no items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the latest Key Decision Forward Plan; and
- receive an update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Since the agenda for the meeting was published, a further Key Decision Forward Plan had been produced and the Committee was invited to identify any items for pre-scrutiny, as set out at Appendix B.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2022/23, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be noted, along with any additional items to be included and agreed;

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- (2) further to Minutes numbered 42 (4) and 44 (2) above, the following items be added to the Committee's Work Programme for 2022/23:
 - (a) the Assistant Director Education be requested to submit an update report to the next meeting of the Committee on 6 March 2023, on progress regarding compliance with statutory timescales to complete Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments and to produce a final EHC Plan, to include figures for the appeals process where parental preferences were unable to be met; and
 - (b) the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to submit reports on Quality Assurance and Practice Performance to the next meeting of the Committee on 6 March 2023;
- (3) the informal briefing sessions held to date be noted;
- (4) the Key Decision Forward Plan for the period 1 March – 30 June 2023, be noted; and
- (5) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.