



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

**MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL BOOTLE  
ON TUESDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER, 2018**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Murphy (in the Chair)  
Councillor Carragher (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors Keith, Brenda O'Brien, Yvonne Sayers  
and Webster

**14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hands and his Substitute Councillor Brodie-Browne; Councillor Pitt and his Substitute Councillor Jones; Councillor Spencer; Sandra Cain, Advisory Member and Karen Christie, Healthwatch Representative.

**15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**16. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2018, be confirmed as a correct record.

**17. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT  
PLAN**

Further to Minute No. 6 (2) of 10 July 2018, the Committee considered the report of the Director of Social Care and Health on the Children's Social Care Continuous Improvement Plan.

The report indicated that Children's Social Care was inspected by Ofsted under the Single Inspection Framework in April 2016 and was judged as "requires improvement". An improvement plan was developed which addressed the 11 recommendations made by Ofsted. Bi – annual reports had been provided to the Committee in relation to progress against these

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recommendations, supported by a performance dash-board. The Annual Report was presented to the last meeting of the Committee on 10 July 2018.

This plan was the third refresh of the Improvement Plan and incorporated learning from the Local Government Care Practice Diagnostic which took place in April 2018, the recently published Serious Case Review, as well as learning from audits.

The Plan identified three key objectives, namely:-

1. Ensure frontline practice is consistently good, effective and focussed on timely, measurable outcomes for children.
2. To improve management oversight at all levels to ensure effective services for children and young people receive good quality supervision.
3. Ensure that frontline services are sufficiently resourced and the workforce appropriately skilled to enable high quality work to be undertaken with children and young people.

The Children's Services Improvement Action Plan 2018/19 was attached to the report.

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

- A number of areas within the Children's Services Improvement Action Plan appeared to indicate that improvements were required. Were senior managers happy with the direction of travel for services?  
Case-loads were higher than preferred. A number of social workers were newly qualified and relatively lacking in experience, although no children were deemed to be at risk.
- Were case-loads dangerously high?  
Case-loads were not dangerously high although they were higher than preferred. Case-load complexity was taken into account when assigned to social workers, together with the experience of social workers. The number of looked after children had increased during the previous 12 months, so there was increased demand to the Children's Social Care service. This mirrored the national and regional picture.
- What was morale like amongst social workers?  
Morale fluctuated, although a number of social workers spoken to during the recent Local Government Association Peer Review had indicated that they enjoyed working at Sefton.
- Reference was made to the transition period following the recent re-structure. Was this working well?

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Positive feedback had been received following the recent re-structure, although there were always challenges to new ways of working.

- Some of the performance measures within the Children's Services Improvement Action Plan had not been rated. Some bench-marks were not national standards, rather they were standards set within the Sefton Service and practice was monitored.
- Reference was made to the performance measure of:-  
"Accommodation and support for care leavers is appropriate...".  
What was deemed to be "appropriate"?  
There was some accommodation which would not be deemed to be appropriate, e.g. bed and breakfast or custody.
- When was Children's Social Care likely to be re-inspected?  
Ofsted Inspectors had notified on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> September that they would be undertaking a two-day focussed visit under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework (ILAC), Although this was not a judgement inspection, they would look at areas for improvement and this would influence when the next full inspection would take place.

### RESOLVED:

That bi-annual reports and performance scorecards continue to be received by the Committee for scrutiny and challenge.

## **18. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

Further to Minute No. 20 of 26 September 2017, the Committee considered the report of the Director of Social Care and Health providing information about the Fostering Service and outcomes for children and young people looked after by Sefton M.B.C, from 1 April 2017- 31st March 2018. The purpose of the annual report was to inform the public, Elected Members, partners and staff of the progress and developments in the Service during this period.

The report outlined the regulations and legislation that governed fostering practice; the numbers of fostering households within Sefton; and the difficulties encountered in recruiting sufficient foster carers in order to meet demand.

The Sefton Fostering Service Annual Report, covering the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 was attached to the report.

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

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- Reference was made to the fact that foster carers received a payment. Was the financial incentive lost when adoption took place?  
Adoption was more likely to occur for younger children under the age of 5 and although some foster carers did adopt the children they cared for, this was not the norm. Where adoption or Special Guardianship did occur, the Service often committed to continue with payments until the child reached 18 years of age. Finance would not be a barrier to securing permanency for children.
- Where large numbers of siblings became available for fostering, were placements vetted to assess their suitability for such a challenge?  
It was often a challenge to keep siblings together and this could present a dilemma for the Service as, where appropriate, the Service would want to do this. Support workers were available for foster carers. Sometimes emergency situations could exacerbate problems and the Service endeavoured to plan and match placements appropriately.
- What was the age range for fostering to take place?  
0-18 with “staying put” arrangements for post-18, to enable care leavers to continue to live with their foster carers.
- What support and guidance was available for children in foster care in schools?  
Legislation required a looked after children designated lead in schools and there was now more of an onus on schools to provide support to looked after children. Pupil premium was used to provide support to looked after children, e.g. additional tuition could also be available. The Council had a Virtual Head Teacher and staff to provide support to schools and ensure their duties to looked after children were met.
- Reference was made to “staying put”, where young people remained living with their foster family after they were 18 years of age.  
There was limited statutory guidance in relation to such arrangements, although the Service continued to offer support, as appropriate, as technically, such young people were deemed to be adults.
- Were young people who were “staying put” able to access support if they chose to enter higher education?  
Such young people were automatically entitled to financial support as the foster carers’ income was not taken into consideration. Universities were now becoming more pro-active in their arrangements, supporting care leavers to access places.

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- What arrangements were put into place where there were insufficient numbers of foster carers and what was the cost of this? Independent fostering agencies were used before residential care was considered and this was likely to cost in the region of £700-800 per week.

### RESOLVED:

That the activity that has taken place in relation to fostering in the year 2017 -18 be noted.

### **19. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CARE PRACTICE DIAGNOSTIC (PEER REVIEW)**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Social Care and Health on the Local Government Association Care Practice Diagnostic (Peer Review).

The report indicated that the Local Government Association (LGA) had been invited to undertake a Care Practice Diagnostic of Children's Social Care to provide external scrutiny and assurance that services had continued to improve and to identify areas for further improvement. The on-site element of the review took place in April 2018, which was two years on from the Ofsted Inspection of 2016. The final report was received in June 2018, and recommendations from the report had been included in the updated and refreshed Children's Social Care Improvement Plan which was reported under Minute No. 17, above.

The LGA Care Practice Diagnostic feedback report, covering the period 24-27 April 2018 was attached to the report.

Debbie Fagan, Chief Nurse and Quality Officer, NHS Southport and Formby Clinical Commissioning Group and South Sefton Clinical Commissioning Group, was in attendance and reported on progress regarding the commissioning of dedicated health services for looked after children and young people. The Council's Public Health and Children's Social Care teams were being kept abreast of progress within this area.

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

- Reference was made to the work of the former Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Working Group and the difficulties reported by young people during the transition from CAMHS to adult services, together with the need to continue to raise awareness of this issue.

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- Would the commissioning of dedicated health services for looked after children and young people be part of the Improvement Plan for Children's Social Care?  
Yes.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report and findings of the Local Government Association be received; and
- (2) the bi-annual report and performance score card, which incorporates the recommendations of the LGA to ensure progress is being made against the recommendations, be continued to be received by this Committee.

### **20. ENHANCING ELECTED MEMBER INVOLVEMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Social Care and Health on enhancing Elected Member involvement with Children's Social Care. The report indicated that during April 2018, the Local Government Association (LGA) had undertaken a Care Practice Diagnostic into Children's Social Care and the team had made the following recommendation:-

“Provide opportunities for a wider range of Members to engage with Children's Social Care, to enhance understanding of front-line delivery, and take advantage of the intake of new councilors following the elections to further raise the profile of the corporate parenting role.”

The report outlined the requirements following Lord Laming's inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié; the role of effective strategic leadership; and details of the proposal for front-line visits.

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

- In the light of the Victoria Climbié case, had the Council been slow to engage Members with Children's Social Care?  
Different local authorities had different approaches on this matter and the Cabinet Member – Children's Services and Safeguarding met with officers regularly for briefings, visited front line teams, and data and information was provided to this Committee regarding performance of the service.
- All Members present at the meeting volunteered to participate in engagement with Children's Social Care, to enhance understanding of front-line delivery.

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RESOLVED:

That the suggested approach to introduce a rota of front-line visits by Elected Members to Children's Social Care Teams, be supported.

### **21. SERIOUS CASE REVIEW**

Further to Minute No. 6 (2) of 10 July 2018, the Committee considered the report of the Director of Social Care and Health indicating that the Sefton Local Safeguarding Children's Board had undertaken a Serious Case Review which was published on the Local Safeguarding Children's Board's (LSCB) website on 31 July 2018, in line with procedures in the Government's statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in "Working Together to Safeguard Children" 2015.

Progress on recommendations from the Serious Case Review would be monitored through the LSCB and had been incorporated into the Children's Social Care Continuous Improvement Plan which was reported under Minute no. 17 above.

The report into the LSCB's Serious Case Review Report and a LSCB "7 Minute Briefing" that incorporated learning from a Serious Case Review, were attached to the report.

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

- Did the staff involved in Serious Case Reviews have support offered to them?  
Plenty of support was offered to the staff concerned and they were able to reflect on the matter without feeling blamed.
- How often were Serious Case Reviews raised in Sefton?  
This had been the first for 7-8 years, although 2 other cases were due to be reported in the next few months.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the findings of the Serious Case Review be received; and
- (2) 6-monthly progress reports on the improvement plan, which includes recommendations from this review, be continued to be received by this Committee.

### **22. EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES – GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO**

## **DCLG SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Regulation and Compliance advising Members on the Government's response to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee report titled "Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees".

The report indicated that the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Select Committee, on 24 January 2017, launched an inquiry into overview and scrutiny in local government, as the CLG Committee wanted to consider whether overview and scrutiny arrangements in England were working effectively and whether local communities were able to contribute to and monitor the work of their councils.

The report of the Select Committee, entitled "Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees" was published by the House of Commons on 15 December 2017, and a copy of the published report was attached to the report as Appendix 1.

The Government's response to the CLG report was published on 12 March 2018, and the 8 CLG recommendations and accompanying Government responses were set out in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.9 of the report. A full copy of the Government response was attached to the report as Appendix 2.

The proposed revisions to Government guidance on Overview and Scrutiny Committees contained in the report were set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report.

It had been established from a recent County/Unitary Scrutiny Network meeting that the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) was hoping to be commissioned to help the Government produce the updated statutory Scrutiny Guidance which was promised in the response to the CLG Select Committee's report on the Effectiveness of Local Authority Scrutiny. If so, the CfPS would seek to obtain the views of a wide range of interested parties during the drafting stage and there might be the possibility for the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Committees to contribute, as part of the consultation phase.

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

- Discussion took place on public engagement with the Overview and Scrutiny function and the possibility of disseminating information via schools, in the future.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;



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- (2) a further update be submitted to the Committee once the Government has published updated guidance in respect of recommendations 1 (a) to (e) and 6 and further consideration has been given to recommendation 2; and
- (3) if consultations are allowed to be undertaken, as referred to in paragraph 4 of the report, then the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees be obtained for inclusion in the consultation process.

### **23. 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 June-September 2018. The report outlined information on the following:-

- Appointment of Local Authority Governors;
- Designated Teacher for Looked after Children;
- High Needs Funding;
- School balances on conversion to an academy;
- Sand Dunes Nursery School;
- SEND and the role of Schools; and
- Children's Social Care - demand and budget.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member update report be noted.

### **24. 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 draft Work Programme for the remainder of 2018/19; requesting the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by any Working Group(s) appointed by the Committee; and identification of any items for pre-scrutiny scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan.

A Work Programme for 2018/19 was set out in Appendix A to the report, to be considered, along with any additional items to be included and agreed.

A proposal had been made by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group to establish a working group to consider post-19 provision. This could be a joint working group with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills). At its meeting on 18 September the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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(Regeneration and Skills) had agreed the establishment of a Joint Working Group and appointed Councillors Dowd and Michael O'Brien to the Working Group.

The Final Report of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group had been submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet held on 26 July 2018 and the recommendations were approved. A six-monthly monitoring report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations was now anticipated to be submitted to the Committee in January 2019.

There was just one Decision within the latest Key Decision Forward Plan, attached to the report at Appendix D that fell under this Committee's remit, and the Committee was invited to consider items for pre-scrutiny.

Further to Minute No. 102 (7) of the Cabinet meeting of 11 January 2018, the possibility of a site visit to the Dewi Jones Unit in Waterloo was currently being investigated and Members would be advised of arrangements in due course. The Senior Democratic Services Officer would liaise with the Chair of the Committee regarding potential dates for the visits.

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

- Regarding the item on the current Key Decision Forward Plan – “Sand Dunes Nursery School -Outcome of the Consultation” – what was the process to be adopted for consideration of the item by the Cabinet?  
The outcome of the consultation on Sand Dunes Nursery would be reported to the Cabinet on 1 November 2018 and a final decision by the Cabinet was likely to be made on 10 January 2019. This would allow the Committee to review the outcome of the consultation at its next meeting on 13 November 2018, if necessary.
- Did Sefton residents attend the Dewi Jones Unit, Waterloo, and if so, how many?  
The Unit was a specialist seven bed in-patient mental health facility, commissioned nationally by NHS England through Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust, that accepted patients from around the country. The general wards at Alder Hey Children's had resources for general mental health conditions.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2018/19, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed;
- (2) Councillors Brenda O'Brien and Spencer be appointed to serve on the joint working group to consider post-19 provision for Special

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Educational Needs and Disability, with Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills);

- (3) the progress to date by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group Final Report, together with the intention for a monitoring report to be submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 29 January 2019, be noted;
- (5) the contents of the Key Decision Forward Plan for the period 1 October 2018 to 31 January 2019 be noted, and
- (6) following the outcome of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) review, the possibility of a future site visit to the Dewi Jones Unit, Waterloo, be noted.