

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)

Councillor	Portfolio	Date
Mhairi Doyle	Cabinet Member Children's Social Care	11 September 2023

Children's Social Care

Stability and capacity in the workforce

In line with the Corporate Plan and the Improvement Plan recruitment and retention of a stable workforce remains a priority for the service. Between April and August 2023 fifteen Social Workers commenced employment and a further fifteen people have been offered places in the second annual intake to the Academy and are due to start later in the year. Fourteen Social Workers will graduate from the first Academy intake in October 2023.

The project to recruit Social Workers from overseas has continued and thirteen international Social Workers are now in post with a further five are due to arrive in the coming weeks. A number of agency Social Workers have also applied to become permanent members of staff

In addition, the following roles have also been recruited to

- Assistant Team Manager
- Practice Improvement Managers
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Service Manager - Fostering & Adoption
- Short Breaks Support Workers
- Missing Interventions Workers
- Missing From Home Co-ordinator
- Youth Justice Case Managers
- Targeted Family Support Worker
- Early Help Worker
- Night Care Worker
- Youth Justice Practitioner
- Youth Connector
- A number of business support roles

The Council is also working with Frontline, England's largest social work charity, and through this scheme twelve Social Workers will join the Academy. Work is also underway with regard to the Step Up to Social Work Programme and it is anticipated that recruits via this scheme will commence in January 2024. The Council has previously approved a number of retention initiatives and the impact of these initiatives will be assessed in January 2024.

Recruitment activity is continuing; however, it must be noted that recruitment of experienced Social Workers remains a challenge.

Budget

The table below provides the latest budget position as reported to September Cabinet –

	Budget £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Variance £m	Variance to June £m
Children's Social Care	80.081	85.042	4.791	-0.170

The current forecast for the service shows a potential overspend of £4.791m. However, there are a number of significant assumptions and uncertainties that could impact on this position before the year-end. Members of the Committee will be aware that the 2023/24 approved budget included an additional £21m of investment in the service based on the requirement for additional staffing (including some temporary funding for additional agency costs whilst more permanent staff are recruited to, including International Social Workers and from staff coming through the social work academy) as well as additional resources to reflect the number of packages at the time, some potential growth as well as resource for inflationary pressures.

The current forecast for staffing is that it will broadly remain within budget as the impact of the initiatives above start to have an impact.

Certain areas of accommodation and support packages are forecast to overspend, partly due to additional packages in the late part of 2022/23 and early part of 2023/24. Recently improvements in practice have resulted in more children being placed in more appropriate settings at a lower cost. This is expected to continue throughout the year. Work is currently being undertaken to review forecasts for all types of care settings based on several children being in higher cost settings for shorter periods, which is expected to significantly impact on the forecast. In addition, where numbers and costs of Children with Disabilities has increased, specialist work is being undertaken to ensure health are making the appropriate contributions to the cost of care.

The next three-year budget planning cycle will also take place at the same time as the Council's Children's Service Improvement Plan is delivered - this is the priority for the Council. As Members will be aware, a recommendation in the Commissioner's report was that the MTFP should be aligned with that Improvement Plan for a period of five years. That process was conducted and reflected in the budget report of March 2023, and this will again be a key feature of this MTFP. Substantial ongoing work is continuing on this budget, with the Chief Executive, s151 Officer and Director of Children's Services working collaboratively on the management of the in-year position and longer-term budget plan. This service is now showing signs of stability in terms of financial management with the Council Financial Sustainability Growth Programme Capital Programme High Needs Budget General Fund

Budget Reserves Strategy Wholly owned council companies understanding the key cost drivers of each aspect within the service. These will be developed over the course of this budget planning process and will continue to be aligned to the Improvement Plan and the view of the service around future demand in order to inform the three-year budget plan. This will in turn inform budget allocation, budget realignment in the service as required and how this will influence other budgets across the Council and longer-term investment opportunities.

Elected Member Training

Following the training and development needs assessment undertaken in March 2023 by the Local Government Association (LGA) elected members have received Corporate Parenting training plus members of Overview and Scrutiny Children's Services and Safeguarding Committee have received two training sessions delivered by the LGA and a further session is scheduled for October.

Feedback from both the DFE Commissioner and council Officers has been positive in regard to the quality and tone of scrutiny in recent meetings.

Help and Protection

Early Help

Over recent weeks, Peopletoo have been engaged to undertake a review evaluation of Sefton's' Early Help Partnership which has included talking to all key stakeholders. The final report and recommendations are imminent. The plan is for the creation of a Family Hub model in which key agencies are based within the community creating easily accessible and targeted services for families. The review has also highlighted gaps in the process and practice within the partnership Integrated Front Door. An alternative model is being considered which is informed by our close working relationship with Leeds.

Alongside this work, the partnership has embarked on drawing together a comprehensive toolbox/directory of what is available to families and young people <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/earlyhelp>. This is structured under key themes and allows families and professionals to explore what is available and where to go for help.

The recent practice and system changes supported to improve the quality of and timeliness of delivering services to families and there is no longer a waiting list for families to receive a service. All incoming work is allocated within 24 hours. Since realigning with children services in April the delivery of interventions has been reviewed and has now been relaunched with a improved focus on the needs of the community.

Team Around the School

As part of our improvement journey, adopting new ways of working with partners to develop a strong, relationship-based networks which support children and families in school or the community, ultimately improving outcomes is central to adopting a team around the school pilot.

The pilot, for team around the school approach, encompassing 29 Schools within 5 clusters is to go live following an induction in early September. The team around the school approach is a mechanism for agencies, key stakeholders, and communities to come together to improve outcomes for children and young people.

This approach will provide a structure for services to collaborate and meet regularly to support families alongside a cluster of schools, who will work together to offer early help and support or additional guidance. The team around the school will consist of a bespoke core team and supplementary members to wrap around a school community to address needs more efficiently and effectively. The model provides an opportunity to take this learning and develop a different and more co-ordinated way of delivering help and support, led by the right person, at the right time.

Domestic Abuse

The Sefton Safer Family Practice Hub (SSFPH) has four key strands of provision

- Support the improvement of social work practice in its response to domestic abuse
- Provision of resource to Children Social Care – Caring Dad’s programme
- Support Wider Partnership Activity
- Outcome measurement.

The team were established in April 2023 with 2 Social Workers who have expertise within the field of domestic abuse and 1 Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and 1 Team Manager. The team has supported over 40 families with over 80 children. The team has supported Social Work teams with reflective practice sessions to support assessment and planning for children. The team have been using Reflective supervision tools for these sessions such as the anchor principles, the Winnicott model to support the implementation of Restorative Practice within domestic abuse.

The Team has used pro social modelling with Social Workers and Family Support Workers working directly with families by supporting joint visits and completing domestic abuse risk assessments and safety plans. The Team IDVA has completed DASH Ric with a total of 16 families equating to 32 children and young people with 11 of these families being progressed to Sefton Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to establish multi-agency safety planning for these families.

The SSFPH Social Work Team has also completed 3 Domestic Abuse Risk Assessments to support safe family time for children. Completing one to one behaviour change with one female parent using harmful behaviour and one male parent using harmful behaviour. Completing one to one victim recovery work with one care experienced female. The team have completed 12 reflective practice sessions.

The team have provided training to the Social Work teams, this has included signs of domestic abuse, risk assessment and safety planning, tools to support victims, parents using harmful behaviours and children and young people. 48 Social Workers have attended the training thus far.

The team are trained and accredited Caring Dad’s Facilitators. SSFPH started to accept referrals for the programme in May 2023. An initial 12 referrals were received. The first cohort of Caring Dad’s started on June with 10 fathers equating to 26 children. The team also

providing IDVA support for 13 associated victims of the fathers. The group is within its infancy for any meaningful data to be retrieved however at the time of writing this report no participants have left the programme.

A second programme commenced in July and a third is scheduled for this month.

A related bid has been submitted to Foundations – What Works Centre for children and families: Participants in the Domestic Abuse Evaluation Accelerator Funding Call. The Project Proposal is, Caring Dad's and Training and Development for Social Workers (Starting Jan 2024 - 3month start up, 12month running programme).

Cared for Children and Care Experienced

Ofsted Monitoring Visit

Ofsted undertook a third Monitoring Visit in July, which are a regular part of the improvement journey and support the Council and partners to identify areas where more and faster progress is required and mark signs of improvement. During this two-day visit Ofsted considered cared for children.

Ofsted recognised signs of improvement in some areas of work particularly the work done to strengthen the Corporate Parenting Board, developing the Academy and the recruitment and retention of Social Workers.

The feedback from the visit also recognised the further work needed in respect of improving permanency.

Officers are actively addressing the concerns raised plan to engage additional staff to assist in the discharge applications for children who should not be in our care. Officers are developing a strategy for permanence which fits with our core values to ensure children live in stable and loving homes at the earliest stage possible. As part of this strategy, we have introduced a permanence tracker meeting to identify those children who are likely to need alternative care long term much earlier in the process so officers can divert them from long term care via alternative order

As Cabinet Member I would like to express my thanks to our partners and workforce for their continued commitment and willingness to learn so that we can improve outcomes for children and their families.

Corporate Parenting

Considerable progress has been made in area of the Corporate Parenting responsibility's the strategy and action plan are in place partners are now attending board regularly. There are discreet working parties for each key area of a cared for child's life to ensure that improvements are in place and maintained. Members have received training and are appropriately challenging officers to ensure compliance with the corporate parenting pledge.

The progress was noted by Ofsted: 'The corporate parenting board has been refreshed with clear and appropriate priorities and workstreams and this is starting to improve the oversight of children in care. Management direction has significantly increased to support decision making including for children living in unregistered and unregulated placements.'

Sufficiency

The Sufficiency Strategy has now been finalised and there is now a defined project plan and working group to ensure grip on the delivery of key pieces of work across operations and commissioning and ensuring progress against the following priorities:

Priority 1 – safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to be cared for by the Council

Priority 2 - reducing the number of children 'placed with parents'

Priority 3 – proactively explore potential for Going Home

Priority 4 – supporting more children to live within their wider family network.

Priority 5 – local, loving homes for cared for children

Priority 6 – Focused, therapeutic residential care for young people with complex needs

Priority 7 – Permanency

Priority 8 – Is this good enough for my child?

Unregulated and unregistered Placements

Since May 2023 the number of children placed in unregistered settings has fallen, with clear exit plans for the majority of these. Robust scrutiny and monitoring of these placements provides greater assurance as plans to move on are progressed. There are currently caring for 4 children /young people who are living in unregistered settings, one of these young people is appropriately placed and officers are awaiting confirmation of a regulated provider to receive the transfer care contract, she is having all her needs met appropriately and she remains in her family home. Two other young people are about to be placed in registered provision and will have moved by the end of October. The fourth young person is transferring back to parental care. We have achieved this reduction through the continued support of our in-house foster carers.

Young people who are placed in what is referred to as "unregulated" is slightly misleading at this point because these are young people aged 16 to 18 who have been assessed as needing support rather than care and are therefore appropriately placed their providers under new legislation need to register by the 25th October and officers are monitoring their registration progress.

By the end of October, there should be at no more than 2 young people in an unregistered setting. This is significantly lower than most other authorities.

Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance

Practice Week

Practice week is planned for 02.-05 October 2023. The theme will be Family First, Firm Foundations and Fulfilling Futures. There will be practitioner led events to raise awareness of the importance of understanding family and creating genograms. Mock Family Group Conferences will be shown during the week and a new video to support care planning. Our partners in Leeds will be facilitating some face-to-face training on achieving permanence and stability.

During the month of October, there will be ongoing observations of practice assigned as part of our monthly audit to consider understanding and promotion of permanence at different points in the child's journey. Seniors Leaders and Cabinet Members will be asked to support this. The Council will also be celebrating World Mental Health Day to support staff, Black History Month as part of our commitment to being an inclusive employee and National Care Leavers week also.

Safeguarding Partnership

At present the safeguarding partnership are in the process of finalising their annual report which will be published no later than November 2023. A session is currently being planned with our colleagues from Leeds to support the development of the new Strategic Plan in response to the annual report. This will be against the recently revised SSCP priorities which, moving forward, are Core Safeguarding, Culture and Leadership and Contextual safeguarding. Against the recommendations from the independent scrutineer review, the 3 Key Leads are working together to strengthen the governance of the partnership at all levels. Their communication and commitment to this area of work has started to embed the values of the partnership and encouraged engagement by strengthening the membership representations. They have led events for partnership members to develop a positive culture of partnership working.

Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance Framework continues support the development of a learning culture as well as ensuring a clear line of sight on practice. Audits are centred around practice conversations with workers as well as in depth reviews of case files. The views of children and families are also obtained where possible, providing as in depth a view as possible on the quality of practice. Following the latest Ofsted monitoring visit, the framework has been amended to allow for a greater volume of audits to be undertaken, a greater percentage of moderation and an increased number of practice observations. Over the last 12 months the quantum of work deemed to be inadequate has decreased dramatically and in recent month has moved closer to the target of the Children's Commissioner of no more than 10% graded inadequate. Officers are also beginning to see the first examples of cases graded as good.

In response to the recent OFSTED monitoring visit, we have reviewed the framework and will be increasing our monthly audits from 14 to 27 per month. We will also be undertaking

regular thematic audits to understand better any critical concerns such as assessments which are closed without further intervention or why we are doing such high numbers of strategy meetings.

We will be delivering our focussed assessments training to all staff in children services. The training has been created in collaboration with colleagues in Leeds with the aim to improve both quality and effectiveness of social work assessments.

Youth Offending

Performance

First Time Entrants (FTE) – There has been an increase in FTE which aligns with national statistics. For Sefton, there was an increase of eight children in the Youth Justice Board data for FTE which compares Jan – Dec 2021 to same period in 2022.

Use of Custody – for some years there has been a base line rate of zero, however Sefton has two children in the secure estate. Sefton's Youth Justice Service support these children and will continue to do so until they are 18 years old. There is potential to provide support until they are 19yrs depending on their transfer into the adult secure estate.

New Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) – The service has collected data relating to the new KPI's which provide insight and information to the Youth Justice Board. Sefton is in a good position to report against the new KPI's. There has been a moderate increase of violence over the last year. The Youth Justice Service is working closely with Communities to develop and deliver Sefton's strand of the Pan Merseyside Strategic Serious Violence Plan, in line with the statutory duties placed upon the Council.

Oversight Framework

The Youth Justice Board have placed Sefton into Quadrant 2 of the Oversight Framework which is titled satisfactory performance. The Youth Justice Board will scrutinise the new key performance indicator returns along with the recently submitted Annual Plan, and complete onsite visits as part of their decision-making process on future quadrant placement. Sefton has received positive feedback for Sefton's Annual Plan 2023.

HMIP Inspection Cycle

HMIP is about to draw the current inspection cycle to a close before launching the next cycle of inspections in early 2024. HMIP are consulting with Youth Justice Services nationally about new standards and inspection proposals throughout August and September.

Prevention Projects

The Turnaround and Community Youth Connector projects continue to deliver good outcomes for children and their families. Both projects have had excellent feedback from children, parents and schools relating to improved engagement with education, diversionary activities and improved relationships at home. The Community Youth Connector project is currently being evaluated by Liverpool John Moores University and Sefton has been selected to take part in the Turnaround evaluation by the Anne Freud Research Organisation.