



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

MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor Hardman (in the Chair)
Councillor Carlin (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Danny Burns, Carragher, Howard,
Christopher Page, Prendergast, Richards and Spring

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs. S. Cain, Independent Advisory Member
Ms. K. Christie, Healthwatch
Ms. G. Armer, Parent Governor Representative
Ms. C. Swainbank, Parent Governor Representative
Councillor Doyle, Cabinet Member – Children's
Social Care
Councillor Roscoe, Cabinet Member - Education
17 members of the public

15. INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions took place.

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Evans and his Substitute Councillor Lloyd-Johnson; and Mr. Maurice Byrne, Healthwatch Sefton.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2023, be confirmed as a correct record.

19. PETITION - THE VOICE OF THE FAMILIES

The Committee considered a petition which had been received by the Council from The Voice of the Families group.

The petition requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) membership be increased by a

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further three independent people who had lived experience, especially those in the crucial Early Years, Primary and Teen years.

A representative of The Voice of the Families was in attendance to present the petition.

The Committee responded with the following points:

- Members of the Committee considered that they had lived experience.
- Membership of the Committee, including co-opted members, could be reviewed.
- Advice would be sought from officers and the Local Government Association.
- Consideration would be given as to how best the Committee could obtain views of service users.

RESOLVED:

That the petition be noted and The Voice of the Families be advised of the outcome of discussions in due course.

20. 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.

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

- Children's Social Care
- Stability and capacity in the workforce
- Budget
- Elected Member Training
- Help and Protection
- Early Help
- Team Around School
- Domestic Abuse
- Cared for Children and Care Experienced
- Ofsted Monitoring Visit
- Corporate Parenting
- Sufficiency
- Unregulated and unregistered placements
- Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance
- Practice Week
- Safeguarding Partnership
- Quality Assurance
- Youth Justice Service (YJS):

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- Performance
- First Time Entrants
- Use of Custody
- New Key Performance Indicators
- Oversight Framework
- HMIP Inspection cycle

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

- Delivering Better Value in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Programme
- OFSTED Local Area Inspection preparation
- SEND
- Inclusion
- School Improvement
- Early Years
- Virtual School
- Attendance
- Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC)

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.

Members of the Committee raised the following questions/issues on the update report from the Cabinet Member – Children's Social Care:

- The rationale behind safeguarding leads working more closely together.
- Increasing numbers of permanent staff.
- The creation of the Family Hub model.
- Children in the Youth Justice system.
- Sufficiency and priorities.

Members of the Committee raised the following questions/issues on the update report from the Cabinet Member – Education:

- The prevalence of RAAC in Sefton schools.
- SEND, EHC assessments and the graduated approach.
- The new SEND Dashboard.
- SEND had been identified as an area for review.
- Difficulties associated with waiting for a diagnosis and pathway, as part of the EHC assessments.
- The virtual school and links to higher education.

RESOLVED:

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

21. REPORT FOR INFORMATION ON VAPING AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

Further to Minute No. 17 of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Adult Social Care and Health) meeting of 5 September 2023, the Committee considered the report of the Director of Public Health that provided a range of relevant information about vaping amongst young people in Sefton. The content of the report centred on presentation and discussion of findings from a recent large survey of young people's experiences, attitudes, and behaviours towards vaping and smoking in Sefton and the report set out key points to note.

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

- The health impact of disposable vapes.
- The need to see the impact in schools and how schools were addressing the issue.
- The licensing route to controlling under-age vaping.
- Non-criminalisation of children where retailers were fined.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

22. DOMESTIC ABUSE UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 12 of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) of 19 September 2023, the Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director of People (Communities) that updated on Sefton's strategic approach to tackling domestic abuse. The report set out the background to the matter, together with details of the Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board; the Sefton Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2028 and Action Plan; and cross partnership collaboration. The following Appendices were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Sefton Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2028
- Appendix 2 – Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2023-2028.

Councillor Hardy, the Cabinet Member – Communities and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and to respond to any questions or issues raised by Members of the Committee.

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

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- The use and current status of perpetrator programmes in Sefton, and how organisations can help support this work.
- The themes identified within the Strategy.
- How to identify vulnerable “hidden groups”.
- The importance of routine enquiries.
- Young people might require services, in order to move forward.

RESOLVED

That the content of the report be noted.

23. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE OVERVIEW OF PRACTICE

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education that set out performance management and quality assurance information in respect of Children's Social Care. The report set out the background to the matter and the following Appendices were attached to the report:

- Appendix A - Dashboard - Performance Management and Quality Assurance Report; and
- Appendix B Children's Services Analysis Tool (CHAT)

Members of the Committee raised the following questions/issues:

- The current system of recording and reporting children and young people missing from home, care and education.
- The “pace of improvement” around quality assurance.
- The percentage of completed assessments within the CHAT.
- What happened to children when no further action was taken on assessments?
- Children in Need who had not received a visit within the last 20 working days.
- Visits that were not purposeful.
- Staff training arising from audits on quality assurance.
- How dental checks for Children Looked After could be improved.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the information provided be noted; and
- (2) the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to submit a further report to the next meeting of the Committee.

24. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Social Care and Education on progress made on the Improvement Programme. The report set out the background to the matter, indicating that the

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Improvement Programme continued to be comprised of the four themes, 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.
- 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 Improvement Plan also 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 set out details of progress and Improvement Plan priorities for the next quarter.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made be noted.

25. EXECUTIVE/SCRUTINY PROTOCOL

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that sought formal approval of changes to the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol (the Protocol) for submission to the Cabinet.

The report advised that the draft protocol was approved by the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Cabinet at their meetings in late 2020; and that at its first meeting of the 2023/24 municipal year, held on 20 June 2023, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board considered the Protocol and suggested two additions in relation to the submission of Plans and Strategies to Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Working Group Reviews/Informal Meetings.

For illustrative purposes, an updated version of the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol was attached to the agenda highlighting the changes if ultimately approved by Overview and Scrutiny and the Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That

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the Cabinet be requested to approve changes to the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol in relation to:

- (1) Executive Directors and Assistant Directors, whose responsibilities fall within the remit of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, being requested to seek the views of the Committees on all strategies and plans prior to submission to the Cabinet and Council; and that if it is not possible, due to time constraints, to submit the final strategy or plan for consideration, then an outline or synopsis be submitted to the Committees to allow an oversight of the proposals to be considered and commented upon; and Section 6 of the Protocol relating to pre-scrutiny be amended accordingly; and
- (2) reference being made to informal meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to review topics in Section 8 of the Protocol.

26. WORK PROGRAMME KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN

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

- seek the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2023/24;
- indicate whether representatives of the Police and other Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team members should be invited to attend a future formal meeting of the Committee, or if the item should be referred to an informal meeting of Committee Members;
- note that there were no items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the latest Key Decision Forward Plan;
- note the informal meetings of Committee Members and site visits to be undertaken during 2023/24;
- note the training proposals available from the Local Government Association (LGA) and in-house;
- consider the topic of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) as a potential item for in-depth scrutiny during 2023/24; and
- receive an update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A supplementary agenda requested Committee Members to formally agree a number of proposals that had arisen from an informal meeting of the Committee held with Health Providers.

Members of the Committee raised the following questions/issues:

- The in-person training sessions currently being offered by the LGA.

RESOLVED: That

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- (1) the Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be noted, along with any additional items to be included and agreed;
- (2) consideration as to whether representatives of the Police and other Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team members should be invited to attend a future formal meeting of the Committee, or if the item should be referred to an informal meeting of Committee Members, be deferred to a future meeting;
- (3) the fact that there are no items for pre-scrutiny from the Key Decision Forward Plan that fall under the remit of the Committee, on this occasion, be noted;
- (4) the informal meetings of Committee Members and site visits to be undertaken during 2023/24, as set out at Appendix B be noted;
- (5) the following proposals, arising from the informal meeting held on 21 September 2023, be approved:
 - (a) Health Providers be urged to work with the Cahmelions group to improve their social media presence;
 - (b) the Committee be requested to consider an in-depth review of the issues around transition between services for children into adulthood;
 - (c) the Committee be recommended to request the receipt of further information around the pathway to services for looked after children and vulnerable children, recognising that there will be a particular focus on children vulnerable to exploitation in the forthcoming Ofsted monitoring visit;
 - (d) the Committee be requested to receive a presentation on ASD/ADHD services, in particular around progress in addressing any backlog issues;
 - (e) the Member Development Steering Group be requested to consider working with Providers to ensure that all elected members are provided with a briefing pack which signposts to the difference services, to include a laminated chart which can be displayed in Ward Surgeries;
 - (f) the Committee be recommended to request receive regular updates on numbers of children placed "out of area", whether in mental health in-patient placements or social care settings;
 - (g) a visit to the Sunflowers House building at Alder Hey be arranged for Committee Members;

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- (h) further information be requested on the provision of information on the geographical spread of the use of services such as Kooth, to understand why it is being underused in some areas;
 - (i) the Committee be recommended to receive further information on the loss of youth services and the impact this has had;
 - (j) the Committee be requested to give consideration as to how it can take account of the views of young people using the services, when making decisions;
- (6) the training proposals available from the Local Government Association and in-house be noted;
 - (7) the topic of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) be approved for in-depth scrutiny by Members of the Committee during 2023/24 and relevant activities be included in the schedule of the informal meetings of Committee Members and site visits to be undertaken during 2023/24, as set out at Appendix B; and
 - (8) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.