

<b>CABINET MEMBER UPDATE</b>		
<b>Overview and Scrutiny ( Children's Services and Safeguarding )</b>		
<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Date</b>
Mhairi Doyle	Cabinet Member Children's Services	February 2024

## **Children's Social Care**

### **Early Help**

Work on Family Hubs is continuing with ongoing discussions with partners and Council based Services to co-locate. Exploration around the potential of developing a SEND specialist hub (Litherland) is continuing this would incorporate an offer from Early Help, education, and health. There is also potential to link with special schools. Having an accessible and engaging digital offer is crucial if we want to encourage Families to get the help they need when they need it. We have developed a robust specification including an offer of information, advice, and guidance via community directories, with a focus on different levels of support. Greater opportunities to interact with services through online chat functionality and the ability to book activities.

A strategic review of progress to date within Team Around the school has taken place. This considered the many successes and remaining challenges. The 5 clusters have already worked with more than 200 families. Professionals, families, and parents have all commented on the difference it is making. A model for an extended phase 2 is to be discussed in March.

### **Monitoring Visit**

We have received the draft letter which will be published on 19th March 2024. The letter summarised states that senior Leaders have made steady progress from a low baseline and that more recently there has been a positive step change at a strategic level and a new CEO brings a clear understanding of the councils' corporate responsibilities as well as a new resolute and child focussed leader of the council. There is more focus and a drive towards a whole council approach to improve outcomes for care leaver but there is still a lot to do to improve practice. Multi agency partnerships are not utilised to provide additional support and there are delays in accessing timely lower-level emotional support. There is insufficient choice of accommodation for young people.

### **Integrated Front Door**

The conversation model is planned to go live on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024. The proposed name is Children's Help and Assessment Team (CHAT). Fast progressed in being made in all areas of this redesign. Staffing funding has been agreed for 5 additional social worker post and the recruitment process is underway. Changes and being made Liquid Logic and LCS systems to ensure how we record the conversations reflect the restorative nature of these and capture the right information. Telephone systems have been agreed and finance has been requested to fund the system. Communication and Briefings have begun with all partners with a clear communication and launch plan set out over the next months and joint training with the Safeguarding Board now available for partners to book on to.

### **Court Revocation Team**

We have discharged 10 children's care orders. There are 13 children who's paperwork has been submitted to legal. There are a further 17 children who's paperwork has been QA'd but we are waiting on the foster carers to seek legal advice and the allocated workers to complete some care planning tasks etc. before these can be submitted to legal. There are currently a further 51 children being actively worked by the discharge team and the majority of these have had an example support plan and financial offer letter, the checks have been sent and the paperwork is at various stages of completion. We will continue to work with the statutory

teams to identify more children. We are feeding back the children who are not ready for discharge due to outstanding care planning tasks and reviewing these through PPM with Julie Bucknall with the view to these children being ready before our departure.

### **Help & Protection**

Recruitment continues to permanent positions. Equinox agency teams sitting within Help and Protection will shortly be disbanded and replaced with permanent staff, subject to successful external recruitment.

Some resources will imminently be redirected and additional recruitment undertaken in order to create a specialist, integrated pre- and post-birth assessment and intervention team developed with BABS with the aim of safely keeping babies in the care of their parents or wider family.

### **Youth Justice Service**

#### **Performance** (Quarter 3 23/24)

In this quarter there has been an increase in court disposals (from 8 statutory starts to 13), with a decrease in out of court work (from 20 non statutory starts to 14). During this quarter 18 children have reoffended and for 2023 overall, 31 children have reoffended. This quarter seems particularly high which requires some exploration. There were no children sentenced to custody.

It has been noted across Merseyside Youth Justice Services that there has been an increase in Referral Orders and Pre-Sentence Report requests from Court. One reason for this is that there are currently less available Magistrates, therefore more District Judges sitting at Youth Court.

Violence remains the top offence, followed by drug and robbery offences. Education offers remain a priority for YJS and each case where a child offered less than 25 hours per week is scrutinised. In addition, any exclusions are scrutinised. 5 children were permanently excluded from school, 3 children were excluded whilst open to YJS and 2 prior to YJS involvement.

#### **Out of Court Disposals – New YJB Guidance**

The Youth Justice Board has issued new guidance for out of court work including an assessment and planning tool. Sefton welcomes this as it creates a clear expectation for out of court work and consistency across youth justice services. There is an increase in data relating to this work area to be reported to the board. There are no specific risks associated with the new guidance for Sefton YJS. The new way of working commences 1<sup>st</sup> April and Sefton's YJS is preparing staff through training and testing the new assessment and planning tool.

### **Prevention**

Sefton YJS is developing the Prevention offer building on learning from the Turnaround and Community Youth Connectors project. With a welcomed additional Police Officer, we have developed a further offer through schools called 'Roots'. Schools can identify a small group of children to work through a one hour session per week over four weeks covering various topics including anti-social behaviour, child criminal exploitation, knife crime, and healthy relationships.

We will evaluate the project through child, parent and school feedback. Roots extends to boys and any school, although we are initially trialling this in two schools in the north of the borough. Our resource is limited but the learning from this will feed into the further development of the youth offer (10+yrs) within early help.

### **Youth Justice Board Oversight Framework**

The Youth Justice Board have rated Sefton's performance against the Key Performance as 'satisfactory' and therefore in Quadrant 2. The ratings are undertaken quarterly and cover a wider range of indicators relevant to youth justice services. Quadrant 1 is the top rating that captures outstanding performance. YJS performance is scrutinised by the YJS Management Team and the Youth Justice Partnership Board.

### **Cared for Children and Care Experienced**

Springbrook Children's Home had its annual 2-day Ofsted inspection on 25/26 January 2024. The home was judged to be Good in all areas (Overall experiences & progress of children, how well children are helped/protected and the effectiveness of Leaders/Managers). There were no breaches of the Children's Homes Regulations and therefore no Requirements were made. This is the second year in a row that the home has achieved this judgement.

The contract for the refurbishment of Cherry Road Children's Home was been put out to tender by the Property Services Team. An evaluation of the tenders has taken place and a contractor selected. It is anticipated that the refurbishment work will commence 18 March 2024. The post of Registered Manager is currently being advertised.

The Commissioning team have recently reopened the Sefton Framework, this work is extend and cement the successful establishment of a local framework to help stimulate the market into providing local homes for local children. The framework allows us to reopen on a 12 monthly basis and establish a relationship-based commissioning communication with high quality providers who provide care and support to our cared for children that aligns with our vision and ambitions. We had 13 applications and continue to conclude the evaluation based on quality and experience. It also allows us to block book with good/outstanding Sefton Providers, to support enabling sufficient homes for our Cared for Children, and we will secure 16 new beds for cared for Sefton children by April 2024 enabling reunification to Sefton for children placed out of borough.

We now have no illegal placements, and this is currently a sustained position.

We are supporting our 16 plus providers to progress the registration process, Ofsted have been unable to meet the deadline of October 2023 to register all providers once registration is completed, we will only work with registered providers going forward

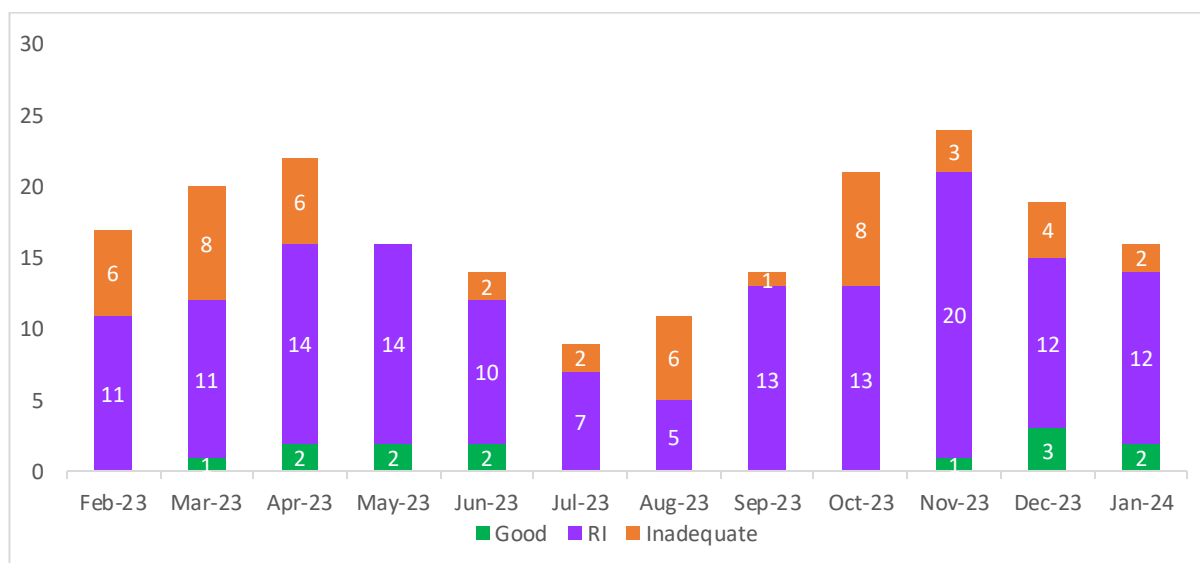
The commissioning team continue to monitor the delivery of the sufficiency strategy and an important part of this work is ensure we can negotiate fee uplifts to support quality delivery and sustainable offers from the market. This year the work across commissioning and finance has allowed the fee uplifts to be contained in the allocated budget provision for the second consecutive year.

### **Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance continues to evidence an improvement in practice, with a decrease in the number of cases graded as inadequate as well as an increase in the work being judged to be good. Increased levels of moderation of these audits is providing further assurance that there is an accurate line of sight on practice. The direction of travel is illustrated in the tables below.

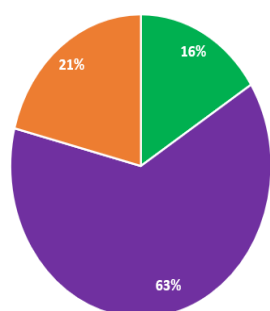
### **Audit judgements - last 12 Months**

The chart below summarises activity over the last 12 months; it provides a wider context and shows gradual improvement over time. There is clear evidence that the amount of work graded Inadequate has reduced significantly over the last year; (February 2023 35% versus January 2024 13%). Although good work has been identified each month in the last 3 months, most work audited is considered Requires Improvement to Be Good.



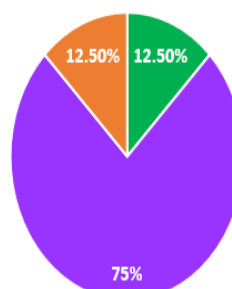
**Recent Audit Activity – December 2023 and January 2024**

Audit judgements December 2023  
Post moderation



■ Good ■ Requires Improvement to be good ■ Inadequate

Audit Judgements January 2024  
Post moderation



■ Good ■ RI ■ Inadequate

Quality assurance has provided clear evidence that a focus on improving plans for children at all levels of intervention is a clear improvement priority and the next three months will see a focused programme of improvement delivered to managers, IROs, Social Workers as well as professionals across the partnership.