

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE		
Overview and Scrutiny (Children’s Services and Safeguarding)		
Councillor	Portfolio	Date
Diane Roscoe	Cabinet Member Children, Schools, and families	06/04/2024

Children’s Social Care

Early Help

The 1st May saw the launch of FAST (Family advice and support team). This dedicated team have adopted the conversation model along with the approach taken in Children’s Social Care and their role is to support families and professionals to access the Early Help offer across Sefton.

The DfE advisor spent a day within Netherpton Family Hub, engaging with families, partners and professionals to gain an understanding of what is working well within Early Help. She commented that she experienced a service which was ‘passionate committed and caring. With staff who demonstrated a real caring, family/child centred approach, prepared to go the extra mile’.

Work is progressing in reaching out to partners to encourage co-delivery from our Family Hub buildings with the latest addition being Women’s Probation. Further development work, consultation and engagement is also taking place around a potential SEND specialist hub. This would see one of the Family Hubs with an enhanced SEND offer and truly demonstrate multi-agency working across education, early help and health.

Family Group Conferencing team has now completed over 400 conferences. This is an empowering process that supports families resolving their identified issues themselves, facilitated by the Family Group Conference coordinator. The feedback

from families is incredibly positive. They have recently been trained in restorative mediation and have been using this in their work with families. This allows for families to be supported pre-FGC the hope being that the conference will be a much more positive experience and the desired outcome more likely achieved.

My Space team are working with 34 young people who are at risk of exploitation. The feedback from the young people who have worked with the team has been positive.

'K (mum) was interviewed as part of the feedback offered to NHS England and throughout the interview S (the my space worker) was mentioned, *the way you formed a safe and trusting relationship with A, how you kept mum informed, how responsive you were at times of crisis, how A cried when you ended your involvement* these were just some of many highlights'.

"Thanks for everything E, your support and help is so appreciated and I couldn't have done it without you!"

"Thanks again for everything. You really became a part of the supportive network for J and I couldn't be more grateful! X"

Team around the school pilot has been running since the Autumn term, with a significant

number of families engaging including:

- 4 marketplace events have taken place incorporating partners from a broad range of services
- 200 coffee mornings
- 200 drop in sessions
- 490+ families have been signposted to services or resources through interaction with the service.
- 100+ children have benefitted from direct work sessions encompassing, craft and play, games clubs, 'relax kids', and LEGO therapy sessions.

- 80+ families supported through a 'getting help' assessment – pathway to change'
- 10 staff now trained in Lego Therapy

Monitoring visit/Scrutiny

Ofsted returned to monitor our service for care experienced young people on the 13 and 14th February 2024. Please see link to the final letter outlining their findings [Report template - monitoring visit \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](#)

The headline findings included that “Senior leaders have made steady progress in strengthening a number of areas of practice for care leavers, from a very low starting point. Strides have been taken to positively change the culture of the leaving care service. These changes have improved the attitude and approach, at both a strategic and operational level, to providing support for young people in Sefton”.

They also highlighted the need for improvements for some groups of vulnerable young people. This included the provision of support for those in custody, and earlier effective arrangements to ensure successful transition for those moving from children to adults' services.

Several recommendations were made for future improvement of the service.

These include developing better medium-level mental health support for young people, improving the numbers of those in education and employment, and broadening the choice of accommodation. In addition, there is a need to strengthen the use of findings from audit work, improve the quality of supervision, and ensure personal advisors have enough time to support young people by reducing their workloads.

Integrated Front Door

Children's Help and Advice Team (CHAT) launched on 1st May. The move to the conversation model of referral has been well received so far and we have had positive feedback from across the partnership. Since going live, we have had 308 telephone conversations and the children and family have been moving swiftly to the outcome. The staff have been extremely positive about the model and all the systems are working well to support this. The phone system is working well with the average call wait time is 0.25 seconds.

Feedback has included:

Designated Safeguarding Lead, Primary School passed on the following:

She is absolutely delighted with the new process and asked me to pass how much better it is being able to speak to someone.

She said she has called a couple of times this week and has found everyone to be extremely friendly and helpful. She went on to say that she feels safe in the knowledge that things are happening when she calls.

Mental Health Matters, NHS:

We used the new CHAT service this morning for the first time and got some really positive feedback from the clinician who made the call. Only waited 2 minutes, felt much more relevant information was obtained through talking, described the social worker / early help worker as 'lovely', our practitioner was really positive about it and we shared this feedback in our managers meeting this afternoon. So great job so far!

We are now focusing on the upcoming monitoring visit. Performance data is reflection of the conversation model and shows how work is moving through CHAT at a steady and consistent pace for children, reducing the delay for children waiting to receive a service.

Help & Protection

There has been successful appointment of existing Sefton practitioners to Team Manager posts in Team 4 and Team Around a Baby. Social workers and a family support worker have also been appointed to TAB which will be operational from June 2024.

There has been progress in all areas of the targeted Improvement Plan developed after the Ofsted MV in November 2023 for the Children with Complex Needs Service, which includes appointment of permanent staff from within the service to more positions including all management positions. Performance has improved considerably over recent months, with a dip following appointment of permanent managers from practitioners within the service. The quality of practice has also improved with a recent dip sample re-audit of CwCN assessments showing many areas of improvement following the roll out of assessment training. There has also been a Good audit within CwCN.

Performance in care proceedings continues to improve with legal permanence being achieved at the outcome of care proceedings for more children, and Sefton performs better than other local authorities in terms of compliance with court directions. Our reputation with the court continues to improve and a Family Justice Improvement Plan has been developed for Sefton.

Youth Justice Service

Cohort summary - There were 93 children accessing YJS services within this quarter, 78% were boys and 36% lived in the most deprived wards. Violence remains the top offence and domestic abuse is the most prevalent adverse childhood experience. 74% of the cohort were open to CSC or Early Help which represents an increase in involvement with wider services. There was an increase in out of court work although the variation is relatively small, and fluctuations are not unusual.

Re-Offending - In 23/24, 42 children reoffended, compared with 22/23 where 43 children reoffended. The full cohort in 23/24 was 168 children. This equates to 25.0% of children in 23/24 identified as re-offending. The full cohort of children in 22/23 was 167 children. This equates to 25.7% of children in 22/23 identified as re-offending. Therefore, there has been a reduction of 0.7% of children identified as re-Offenders.

Practice Improvement - we are focusing on the quality of practice to improve performance. Audits against the National Standards will be completed monthly across the next year with a focus on 'out of court' work and court orders. Practice Development sessions are held monthly with the team focusing on practice quality. We have arranged Child First training for the team and the Board members which focuses on the key principles which are as follows:

- Seeing children as children
- Building a pro-social identity and developing the child's sense of self
- Collaboration with children
- Diverting from the stigma of involvement in the criminal justice system

Prevention and Diversion

The YJS are delivering prevention work in a number of High Schools in Southport. The work is focusing on anti-social behaviour, drug awareness, knife crime, joint enterprise and violence. In addition YJS are planning the Summer Activities programme to engage children in fun educational activities.

The Turnaround and Community Connector projects continue to support children and they will take referrals until December 2024, as the projects will cease to be funded from the end of March 2025.

Cared for Children and Care Experienced

Unlike most other LA's in the country Sefton has had no children in an unregulated setting since November 2023.

Commissioning

The Commissioning team have now concluded the evaluation of the most recent round of tenders on the Sefton Framework and this has resulted in the appointment of 6 new providers. This furthers our work to establish relationship-based commissioning with providers who share our ambition and vision and to date the framework has allowed an additional 16 Sefton Children living in Sefton with a partner provider delivering to aligned vision, ambition and values to the council.

The fee consultation process for 2024/25 has concluded for our Children's market and final checks and balances are taking place but it is expected this will be delivered within the MTFP expectations for the second consecutive year representing a marked improvement in financial grip. In addition, we are pursuing Block Booking arrangements with newly developed services with the potential to secure a further 11 Sefton beds for Sefton children

We now have no illegal placements, and this continues to be a sustained position.

Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance

In terms of quality assurance, monthly deep dive audit activity continues across Children's Social Care. The rate of work deemed to be inadequate is decreasing (5% in April 2024 – this equating to one inadequate audit) with the majority of work graded requires improvement to be good (58% in April 2024). We are seeing an increasing amount of work being graded good (37% in April 2024; compared with 9% in April 2023). When work is graded inadequate; audits are moderated swiftly; if the inadequate grade is maintained a reflective conversation is facilitated by the relevant Service Manager to unpick learning and ensure any remedial identified actions are followed up to improve the child and families' lives.

A refreshed audit tool was launched in May 2024; which focuses on Sefton's 5 key practice priorities - Assessment, Plans and Planning, Child Centered Practice, Management Oversight and Supervision and Creating stability and permanence. The focus of audit will be on impact and outcomes, child and family feedback rather than compliance. Observations of practice and Make a Difference interviews continue to help us to spot and celebrate good practice and provide additional opportunities for feedback from children and families.

Work is ongoing within the Fostering Service and Family Group Conferencing Service to embed auditing and thematic dip samples.

Practice Improvement

A comprehensive package of training around plans and planning has been delivered to Social Workers, Managers, IROs and Partners. There is further work planned to support practitioners to improve analytical writing and thinking skills. Managers also continue to benefit from quarterly management oversight and supervision action learning sets which allow peers to show, share, reflect and grow.

Social Work Week was celebrated in March 2024 with learning events focused on plans and planning. Isabelle Trowler CBE, Chief Social Worker opened the week; health and education partners and a Sefton parent supported other learning events. Our International Social Workers offered insights into social work in their home countries on World Social Work day. A culture of curiosity and continual learning is growing in Sefton with quarterly Practice and Performance Meetings taking place and additional Practice Weeks planned.

The ongoing focus of improvement activity remains plans and planning for children, with a comprehensive package of training for Social Workers, Managers, IROs and Partners underway.

