OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
(CHILDRN’S SERVICES AND SAFEGUARDING)  
MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, BOOTLE  
ON TUESDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2019  

PRESENT:  
Councillor Murphy (in the Chair)  
Councillor Carragher (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors Bennett, Cluskey, Evans, Keith, Michael O’Brien (Substitute Member for Councillor Webster), Yvonne Sayers and Thomas  

ALSO PRESENT:  
Mrs. Sandra Cain, Independent Advisory Member  
Father Des Seddon, Archdiocese  

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE  

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pitt and his Substitute Councillor Dutton; Councillor Webster; Maurice Byrne and Karen Christie, Healthwatch; Machalla McDermott, Parent Governor Representative; and Councillor J.J. Kelly, Cabinet Member – Children, Schools and Safeguarding.  

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST  

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

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS  

RESOLVED:  
That the Minutes of the Special meeting held on 1 July and the meeting held on 9 July 2019, be confirmed as a correct record.  

16. NHS SEFTON FIVE YEAR PLACE PLAN  

The Committee considered the report of the Programme Director, Sefton Health and Social Care Transformation Programme, NHS South Sefton Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS Southport and Formby Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), indicating that Sefton was currently engaging on the compilation of a draft Five-Year Place Plan for the local NHS. This was in co-operation with all local partners and contributed towards the five-year plan for the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership. The report set out the background to the matter; the approach undertaken to prepare the draft plan; expected outcomes and foundations; ambitions; priorities; a future view of Sefton; patient expectations and population responsibility; together with the timeline of actions over forthcoming months. The report also set out feedback received to date; key issues and conclusions. A copy of the draft Plan was
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attached to the report. The Committee was invited to make comments on the content of the Plan as part of the engagement process.

Dan Grice, Communications and Engagement Officer and Fiona Taylor, Chief Officer for NHS South Sefton CCG and NHS Southport and Formby CCG, were in attendance to present the report and draft Plan to the Committee; to highlight aspects of it; and to respond to questions put by Members of the Committee.

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

- It was difficult to compare the needs of some populations with others, particularly as Southport has a high older population. Different factors were standardised to make comparisons of populations.

- It was difficult to attract people to work within the NHS. The workforce numbers within the NHS presented a challenge nationally, due to the skillset required for certain positions, together with a range of other factors.

- The 7 day GP extended access scheme required GPs to work longer hours at a time when there were less GPs, which resulted in additional pressures on the workforce. Staff could work flexibly and factors were considered to reduce the burden for GPs. This presented a challenge nationally.

- The “run a mile a day” scheme was an example of good practice within certain primary schools, to assist in the prevention of obesity in childhood. Sport England supported schools nationally and Active Sefton worked with schools to support physical activity, providing bespoke programmes for schools, if required.

- Another example of good practice was that certain GPs were encouraging patients to exercise in the Borough’s green spaces and this often led to participation in park runs. Many GPs were now considering social prescribing for certain conditions and it was anticipated that the move by the NHS to Primary Care Networks would encourage this development by sharing examples of good practice. There would be 7 such networks across Sefton.

- It was considered that mental health services were fragmented and information was sought on the Sefton in Mind campaign. The Sefton CCGs did not commission the campaign.

- Was technology used to its fullest extent by General Practice?
General Practice had embraced technology in general, particularly for patient bookings and repeat prescriptions, although this was not the same in all practices. There were also methods by which data could be shared within the NHS.

- Regarding patient responsibilities, was engagement by the NHS and the CCGs taking place with food manufacturers, in order to reduce fat and salt content, etc.? Encouraging healthy choices in diet and drinks was a challenge. CCGs were currently encouraging all NHS organisations to commit to Healthy Food Declarations.

- Was there enough focus within the draft Five-Year Place Plan on early interventions for young people, such as tackling obesity, smoking, alcohol, substance use, how to check for cancers, etc.? The Council commissioned services to work with Family Wellbeing Centres to discuss the use of alcohol. School Nurses could discuss matters relating to smoking and long-term health, healthy lifestyles, etc. NHS England delivered immunisations, including those for teenagers, although School nurses could support this work. Sexual Health Services provided the service to all users from young teens to older people.

- Vaccination rates were declining, particularly for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR). How could this be improved? NHS England commissioned the immunisations and Public Health England monitored them, whilst the Department for Public Health did consider the immunisation rates. These public bodies were now working together to examine the data and target specific areas and populations, if necessary.

- Where did the work of the Council’s Children’s Services teams feature within the draft Five-Year Place Plan? The CCGs were required to have a Plan, that featured the wider determinants of health, in place by the end of November 2019. The Plan overlapped with much of the work undertaken with partners and it was anticipated that partners, including Children’s Services, would challenge the Plan and its delivery. The comments raised by Committee Members would be considered in the finalisation of the Plan.

- Older people were not necessarily able to order repeat prescriptions on-line. The on-line initiative had been generally successful, reducing waste and stockpiling of medicines by individuals. Practices knew their patients best and could assist individuals with the process, if necessary. Feed-back from the Sefton Older People’s Forum had also been positive regarding the shift to on-line use.

- Would the draft Five-Year Place Plan address severe food allergies, particularly the risks associated with the use of food chains?
NHS England commissioned such specialist services and monitored trends. Some support might be offered within schools.

- What were the boundaries for the draft Five-Year Place Plan and did the CCGs liaise with Liverpool regarding the principles? The CCGs were tasked to commission care for the registered population of Sefton and liaison with neighbouring CCGs within the region did take place.

RESOLVED:

That progress on the development of the Five-Year Place Plan be noted.

17. SEND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Further to Minute No. 3 (3) of the Special Meeting held on 1 July 2019, the Committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Children’s Social Care and Education providing an update on the Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Continuous Improvement Plan and identifying future action to be taken. The report indicated that the Health and Wellbeing Board had considered the matter at its meeting held on 11 September 2019 and had requested this Committee to:

1. monitor progress against the Improvement Plan on a quarterly basis, commencing in January 2020; and
2. give particular consideration to the improvements needed and progress made in the area of co-production, communication and engagement.

The Interim Director of Children’s Social Care and Education provided a presentation updating on SEND Continuous Improvement that outlined the following:

- Background to the (SEND) Continuous Improvement Plan;
- Membership of the SEND Continuous Improvement Board (SENDCIB);
- The governance structure of the SENDCIB and the Sub-Groups under the Board;
- The terms of reference of the Co-Production, Communication and Engagement Sub-Group; and
- The next steps planned.

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

- Reference was made to the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Committee of 1 July 2019, and to Minute No. 3 (3). Concerns were expressed that Committee Members had yet to have sight of the (SEND) Continuous Improvement Plan.
The Improvement Plan was currently being shared with the Department for Education (DfE) and the DfE was yet to agree the Plan. The Plan was not yet a public document and it would be provided to Committee Members once the DfE had agreed the document.

- Was the timetable of actions required progressing?
The structure of the SENDCIB had been set up and the timetable of actions required was in progress.

- Reference was made to the 20-week statutory timescale to produce Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans. What action was being taken to produce and manage the backlog of Plans?
The workforce associated with meeting the production and managing the backlog of Plans had been increased which had produced some improvement. Performance had been at 3% and it was currently at 10%. A lot of work was required to clear the backlog.

- Reference was made to the recommendations of the former Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group, established by this Committee, particularly the request for this Committee to receive a six-monthly monitoring report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations, as a means of ensuring SMART objectives. When would the monitoring report be submitted?
The objectives of the Working Group would be incorporated into the Improvement Plan and reported on in due course. Work was also on-going to develop a performance scorecard.

- Disappointment was expressed that the Committee had not yet received more detail on the work being undertaken. Progress on the matter, to be monitored on a quarterly basis commencing in January 2020, was anticipated. It was hoped that the views of the Committee would be relayed back to the SENDCIB.

- A co-production working group, to consider the matter in more detail, could be established by the Committee in the future.

RESOLVED:
That the report and future action to be taken be noted.

18. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL REPORT

Further to Minute No. 6 of 10 July 2018, the Committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Children's Social Care and Education providing a summary of the progress in relation to the Children’s Social Care Improvement Plan for the year end 2018/19, to be considered alongside the performance scorecard data.
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 report indicated that following on from the Ofsted Inspection of Services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers during April 2016, Ofsted undertook a two-day focused visit under the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services on 27 and 28 September 2018. Inspectors looked at the local authority’s arrangements for children in need and children subject to a plan, with a specific focus on services and practice for children who may be on the edge of care.

The following appendices were attached to the report:-
- Children’s Social Care Annual Report and Review of Improvement Plan 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019; and
- Annual performance score card.

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

- Reference was made to paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the report and the re-structure of Children’s Social Care. Had significant improvements been made to staffing levels? It had been agreed to recruit 10 additional social workers, although this had proved difficult due to the national shortage of social workers. Staff turnover still took place, particularly in front line Locality Teams, although most social workers did remain in Sefton. National research indicated that social workers tended to stay for around three years in a front-line role. Case-loads remained a challenge due to increasing demand. Transition points had been removed and a Sefton model of practice would be implemented across the partnership.

- Reference was made to practice standards that stated that reports to Child Protection conferences should be available 3 days prior to conference, allowing reports to be shared with families. Currently, only 33% of reports were available 3 days before. This remained an area of focus for the service and was being monitored by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Social Workers were asked to produce their reports 5 days before conference to ensure they were signed off by managers and
available to families 3 days before. Nothing in the reports should be a surprise to parents.

- There was a rising number of Looked After Children. Why was this?
  
  There was a focus on neglect which had led to an increase in the 5+ age range. There was not a significant increase in numbers being taken into care for the first time. Children aged 5-15 tended to stay in care for longer.

- A number of cases went to court. What could be done to improve the process?
  
  There was a target of 26 weeks for court proceedings, for some families. Situations could improve during proceedings and children became the subject of Care Orders placed with their parents. There was a need to focus on discharging these Care Orders when family life was improving and this involved going back to the courts.

- Were there any Councillor representatives on the Adoption Panel?
  
  It was no longer a requirement to have a Councillor on the Adoption Panel.

- There were still a number of red arrows that appeared on the annual performance score card, 2 years after the re-structure. Demand for Children’s Social Care was increasing at a time when there was a national shortage of social workers.

- Could a re-inspection of Children’s Social Care take place in the near future?
  
  There was a 3-year inspection cycle, with focussed visits also taking place. A multi-agency Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) was currently taking place. Whilst this would not have a judgement and had a partnership focus around a theme, it would provide an indication of how the service was performing.

- Would the Children’s Continuous Improvement Board continue?
  
  Yes, this Board would continue and would develop to have a partnership focus. It was hoped that the Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Continuous Improvement Board would eventually be incorporated into this Board.

- Were student social workers considered as a means of addressing the workforce shortage?
  
  The Council offered student placements and many students went on to work for Sefton as a result.

- The work could be stressful with heavy workloads and complex cases. How was morale amongst the workforce?
The Chair had undertaken a front-line visit earlier this year and morale had been good. It was acknowledged how hard social workers worked.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the Committee continues to receive bi-annual reports and updated performance scorecards in relation to the progress of the Children’s Social Care and Continuous Improvement Plan.

19. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

Further to Minute No. 18 of 25 September 2019, the Committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Children’s Social Care and Education providing information about the Fostering Service and outcomes for children and young people looked after by Sefton M.B.C, from 1 April 2018 - 31 March 2019. 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 2018 to 31 March 2019 was attached to the report.

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

- What was the percentage of placements that broke down? This information would be obtained and shared with Members of the Committee. Where such breakdowns occurred, meetings were held to find out reasons. Older teenagers tended to be most affected in such circumstances.

- The Annual Report referred to withdrawals due to “proceeding with another agency”. What was the attraction in approaching other agencies? There were numerous reasons why people approached other agencies. However, the Council had also been successful in recruiting some agency foster carers to Sefton’s fostering service.

- Was there an upper age limit for fostering? No

- What schemes took place for post-18 young people looked after? The “staying put” scheme, where young people remained living with their foster family after they were 18 years of age, was increasing. Supported lodging schemes also took place.
RESOLVED: That

(1) the activity that has taken place in relation to fostering in the year 2018-19 be noted; and

(2) the Interim Director of Children’s Social Care and Education be requested to provide information to the Senior Democratic Services Officer on the following, for circulation to Members of the Committee:

(a) the percentage of placements that break down; and

(b) the number of people with disabilities who foster children.

20. 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 July – September 2019. The report outlined information on the following:

- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Re-visit and Notice to Improve;
- Family Health and Wellbeing Centres and Early Help Update; and
- Budget Monitoring – Schools Outturn 2018/19 and Forecast.

Councillor J.J. Kelly, Cabinet Member – Children, Schools and Safeguarding, had submitted his apologies for the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member update report be noted.

21. 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 2019/20; noting the progress to date by the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group; noting the progress to date in appointing a replacement Parent Governor Representative; noting the that the vacancy for a second Healthwatch representative on the Committee had now been filled; and identifying any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan.

A Work Programme for 2019/20 was set out at Appendix A to the report, to be considered, along with any additional items to be included and agreed.
An update report on Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) across Sefton was anticipated for the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 12 November 2019. The Chief Officer for NHS South Sefton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS Southport and Formby CCG requested any specific issues on the service to be raised via the Senior Democratic Services Officer. A performance dashboard illustrating the service could be produced for future meetings.

An update report on work undertaken by Liverpool John Moores University on CAMHS was anticipated for the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 12 November 2019. The Consultant in Public Health indicated that she could report on this, but asked the Committee to note that the Liverpool John Moores University work related to mental health resilience work in schools rather than CAMHS.

The report set out progress to date made by the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group, comprised of Councillors Carragher, Keith and Mrs. Sandra Cain, Independent Advisory Member.

Councillor Bennett indicated that she would also wish to be a Member of the Working Group.

Further to Minute No. 17 above, a co-production working group, to consider Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Continuous Improvement in more detail, could be established by the Committee in the future.

The report advised that one of the former Parent Governor Representatives had now resigned and that the Governor Services Team was seeking nominations from interested parents for the vacancy. The Committee would be advised once a replacement Parent Governor Representative had been appointed.

The report advised that the vacancy for a second Healthwatch representative on the Committee had now been filled.

There were two Decisions within the latest Key Decision Forward Plan, attached to the report at Appendix B, that fell under this Committee’s remit, and the Committee was invited to consider items for pre-scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the Work Programme for 2019/20, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed;

(2) progress made to date by the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group be noted, and Councillor Bennet be included in the Membership of the Working Group;
(3) progress made to date in appointing a replacement Parent Governor Representative be noted;

(4) the fact that the vacancy for a second Healthwatch Sefton representative on the Committee has now been filled, be noted; and

(5) the contents of the Key Decision Forward Plan for the period 1 October 2019 – 31 January 2020, be noted.