

CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 12 March 2020

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: S Ashraf MBE, M Brain, M Gough (Chairman), R Holt, A Mackenzie, A Rebeiro, P Thomas, Mrs K Wild, R Sexton, G Slater and K Thomas

Officers: Louise Rees - Director of Children's Services and Skills, Childrens Services and Skills Directorate
Susan Haddon – Local Children's Safeguarding Board Manager
Frank McSheffrey – Service Director, Childrens Services and Skills Directorate
Claire McNeill – Education Improvement Team Manager, Childrens Services and Skills Directorate

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors A Adeyemo (Councillor K Thomas - substitute), K Blunt, J Butler, J Hamilton (Councillor Dr Sexton - substitute), L McCarthy (Councillor G Slater - substitute) and co-opted Member Mr B Hall.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTING INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were submitted.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the Scrutiny Board meeting held on 13th January 2020 were presented.

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th January 2020 were approved as a correct record.

5. UPDATE ON MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Business Manager for the Solihull Local Safeguarding Children Partnership presented the report on behalf of the Independent Scrutineer. She updated Members on progress since the introduction of the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in May 2019, as well as the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review undertaken in October 2019.

Members raised the following points and observations:

- Members queried the level of engagement and information sharing between the Partner agencies, following the introduction of the new safeguarding arrangements.
- The Business Manager confirmed the engagement from all partners was good, emphasising this was recognised by the peer review. It was noted there were

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many examples of effective collaboration, including strategic decisions, frontline practice, as well as attendance at events and activities.

- The Business Manager explained there were good arrangements in place for information sharing between agencies. She detailed how a lot of the work undertaken by the LSCP was not case specific, instead there was a focus upon strategic oversight. The Business Manager confirmed the LSCP took into account the need for confidentiality and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) when sharing information.
- Members requested an update on progress following the recommendations made by peer reviewers, specifically the following:
 - The development of a multi-agency performance framework.
 - Providing an evidence-based rationale for determining LSCP priorities and develop a project management approach to delivery against these priorities, to include assessment of impact and outcomes.
 - Embedding the Voice of the Child across the work of the LSCP.
- Members also highlighted how, previously, there had been a joint working protocol between Scrutiny and the Local Safeguarding Children Board and queried whether this would be revisited, as part of the new arrangements.
- The Business Manager detailed how, under the previous arrangements, Members had been invited to attend meetings of the LSCB, noting this provided further opportunities for scrutiny. She also explained how the LSCP was required to produce an Annual Report – it was explained this document could be presented to Scrutiny by the Independent Scrutineer. It was also noted this Annual Report would be helpful to Scrutiny, in determining its future work programme.
- In regards to embedding the Voice of Child, the Business Manager emphasised how the LSCP was exploring opportunities to support Partners to engage with and understand the views of children and young people. As an example, she detailed how the LSCP was currently undertaking work to develop guidance to support practitioners in understanding the lived experience of children and young people who were non-verbal, after this was identified as part of a multi-agency case audit.
- The Business Manager detailed the ongoing work across the LSCP to develop a multi-agency performance framework, as well as evidence impact and outcomes. She explained how they were working together to develop a single, multi-agency safeguarding dataset to support this. It was noted Scrutiny could receive a future update on the development of this performance framework.

RESOLVED

The Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board:

- (i) Noted the update on progress since the introduction of the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and the findings of the LGA Peer Review.
- (ii) Agreed to receive an update report on the development of a multi-agency performance framework, including how it helps the LSCP to understand what difference has been made by its activities.
- (iii) Requested that the review of the LSCP Terms of Reference includes an explanation of the role of the Scrutiny Board and how the two Boards will engage with one another; and
- (iv) Agreed for future LSCP priorities to be reported to the Scrutiny Board, to inform work planning.

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6. OFSTED ACTION PLAN: INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Director of Children's Services and Skills presented the report, updating Members about the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of the Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers. She also informed Members of the plans to address the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report.

The Director of Children's Services and Skills explained how an action plan had been developed, focusing on the areas identified for improvement – this was due to be submitted to Ofsted by 15 April 2020. She detailed how progress against these actions would be reported and monitored – including reporting to the Cabinet Member and Scrutiny on a regular basis. It was also noted that previous experience suggested there would be at least two visits from Ofsted to consider progress in delivering the improvement actions.

Members raised the following queries and observations:

- Members queried whether the Ofsted report demonstrated there were issues in respect of partner agencies engaging and cooperating with Children's Services.
- The Service Director, Children's Services and Skills Directorate explained how the Ofsted inspection identified a small number of cases from the Police that had been referred to the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) that did not provide enough information to enable Officers to make a decision. This meant Social Workers had to undertake additional work and visits to establish the facts. The Service Director detailed how they were looking to work with Partners to ensure quality referrals and effective information sharing.
- The Service Director also explained how the Ofsted inspection identified issues in regards to police availability to attend MASH strategy meetings. He detailed how the Ofsted inspection raised concerns that services were currently disjointed – it was explained how social workers had to currently work alongside three different police teams to respond to different forms of child exploitation, making communication and collation of information more complex. The Service Director explained how they had written to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to raise their concerns. He also detailed how they had good relations with the local Chief Superintendent, who was aware of the points raised. It was noted a number of other Local Authorities (LA's) within the West Midlands had contacted the PCC about this issue also.
- A Councillor detailed their experience, whilst working in the voluntary sector, of referring a case to the MASH. The Councillor queried the staff recording incoming cases, in particular capturing the necessary details and assessing the risk level.
- The Service Director explained how the Council had a strong front door multi-agency service via the MASH – he emphasised this service had been commended by Ofsted. He detailed how other LA's had looked at the MASH as an example of good practice and endeavoured to replicate the service. The Service Director explained how all staff within the MASH had a clear understanding of risk, which helped ensure the necessary information was recorded for cases and they were allocated to the appropriate officers. It was agreed to explore the case the Member referred to outside of the meeting.
- Members queried recommendation 4 contained within the Ofsted Action Plan – 'the offer and take up and analysis of return home interviews following episodes of going missing.' They highlighted the timescales for the actions and noted the

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service was delivered by an external provider – Members queried who would be leading on this.

- The Service Director confirmed the LA would be leading on this, on the basis they commissioned the service. He detailed how they would be looking at what they were asking the external provider to do and reviewing the service specification – the focus would be to look at better ways of engaging with young people and obtaining good levels of feedback from them.
- A Councillor explained how the service provision detailed within Council reports didn't always reflect their experiences as a parent. As an example, they highlighted recommendation 1 contained in the Ofsted Action Plan (Quality assurance and audit arrangements to improve practice so that leaders are aware of strengths and weaknesses). The Councillor queried what this recommendation would mean in terms of real life experience for children and families within the Borough.
- The Service Director explained how this recommendation related to quality assurance and audit arrangements – he detailed how audits and reviews of cases focused on 2 aspects – compliance with procedures and outcomes for children. He explained how, from the cases the Ofsted inspectors reviewed, they recognised the focus upon outcomes for the child; however they found evidence of Officers not fully adhering to existing Council rules and procedures. The Service Director detailed how they were looking at best practice elsewhere in the region to ensure effective audit arrangements.

RESOLVED

The Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board:

- (i) Noted the outcome of the recent inspection under the new Ofsted framework: Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS).
- (ii) Received the draft Action Plan in response to the areas for improvement identified by inspectors.
- (iii) Agreed to receive a further progress report on the delivery of the Action Plan at future Scrutiny Board meetings.

13. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

The Education Improvement Team Manager presented the report, updating Members on the 2019 performance outcomes for schools in Solihull. She detailed how the performance data demonstrated a number of improved education outcomes within the Borough, including the following:

- Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) – the percentage of pupils making a good level of development had been maintained and remained above the national figure for 2019.
- Key Stage 1 – reading had improved this year and they were significantly above the national level in writing.
- Key Stage 2 - Solihull had seen a five per cent increase in maths in 2019. Results for Reading, Writing and Maths all remained above the national average.
- Key Stage 4 – ranking in comparison to previous years was improving.
- Key Stage 5 – results were now in line with the England average – the Education Improvement Team Manager explained that, historically, this hadn't been the case. It was also noted Solihull had improved significantly in the national ranking.

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The Education Improvement Team Manager also detailed how they focused upon closing the gap for vulnerable pupils – it was noted the gap was closing in many measures for disadvantaged pupils. Members were also informed how they closely monitored performance and outcomes for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Members raised the following queries and observations:

- Members highlighted the targeted support for Schools where there were concerns over education outcomes – they requested an explanation of what this entailed.
- The Education Improvement Team Manager detailed how the Schools would be allocated an Improvement Advisor, who identified potential options for support. It was noted this could include additional support from the Local Authorities as well as collaborative working across the wider Schools network. The Education Improvement Team Manager also explained how the establishment of specialist hubs offered further opportunities for Schools to share expertise and learning – examples of this included the Maths hub at Tudor Grange, as well as the Computing hub at Bishop Challenor.
- Members requested for future reports to identify those Schools currently receiving support to improve performance and outcomes – it was recognised this may need to be reported in private session. They also requested to receive a break-down of the additional activities undertaken within these Schools to support pupils.
- Members highlighted the gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils – they queried the underlying reasons for this. The Education Improvement Team Manager emphasised the reasons for this gap were complex – it was noted economic deprivation often negatively impacted on education attainment, however she explained there were still many instances of pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds outperforming their peers. The Education Improvement Team Manager detailed how they closely monitored school attendance records, due to the impact on attainment. She explained how, where necessary, they would challenge Schools that had attendance levels below the national averages and looked to pursue a wide range of strategies to support improvement, such as walking buses as well as individualised support.
- Members queried the arrangements in place for pupils not attending an Additional Resourced Centre, but who may still require support. The Education Improvement Team Manager detailed how they focused upon pupils in the bottom 20% attainment group – she explained how they closely monitored what additional support these pupils received, as well as the progress they made.
- Members requested clarification whether results for excluded pupils were also included in the performance data. They also queried how trends for exclusions were monitored and analysed, including whether there was a high cohort of excluded pupils with SEND.
- The Education Improvement Team Manager confirmed excluded pupils were included within the performance outcomes, as they still sat the same exams as their peers. She also explained how the Team monitored trends and data in regards to exclusions – they were currently working on this with the Head teacher of the local Alternative Provision Academy. It was confirmed they challenged Schools where the volume of excluded pupils appeared high. The Education Improvement Team Manager also detailed how they reviewed whether excluded pupils may require SEND support and they looked at alternative education provision, where appropriate.

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RESOLVED

That the Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board:

- (i) Noted the 2019 performance outcomes for Schools in Solihull.
- (ii) Agreed to receive a further update on the impact the measures identified in paragraph 4 are having upon performance outcomes for Schools; and
- (iii) Requested for any future report to provide a break-down of the additional activities undertaken within those Schools receiving targeted support to improve performance and outcomes.

End time of meeting: 8.10 pm