

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 April  
2022**

**MINUTES**

Present: Councillors: M Gough (Chairman), A Mackenzie (Vice-Chairman), M Allen, S Ashraf MBE, K Blunt, M Brain, Y Clements, D Gibbin, N Moses, J Tildesley, K Thomas, and Co-opted Member S Freeman

Councillor R Holt – Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills

Officers: Steve Cullen – Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership, Independent Scrutineer  
Tim Browne – Interim Director of Children's Services  
Karen Helliwell – Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group  
Chief Superintendent Ian Parnell – West Midlands Police

**1. APOLOGIES**

The following Members submitted their apologies:

Councillor J Hamilton

Councillor L McCarthy (Councillor K Thomas – substitute)

Parent Governor Representative S Golby

Councillor A Rebeiro and Mr B Hall, Diocesan representative, submitted their apologies and joined the meeting remotely.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTING INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

There were no questions or deputations.

**4. JOINT TARGETED AREA INSPECTION - UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Board was invited to consider a summary of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) into the identification of initial risk and need regarding Children and Families within Solihull, the findings of which were published on 21<sup>st</sup> of February.

Members raised the following queries and observations:

- A Member highlighted the role of Councillors as Corporate Parents. They also queried whether there was potential for greater Member involvement in the partnership safeguarding arrangements. The Member also detailed how the role of the Scrutiny Board and its Members needed to be considered going forward.

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- A Member detailed how, when they were Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services, they met with front-line Social Workers, and queried whether there was potential for the Scrutiny Board to do this. They also questioned whether there was a need to create a separate Children's Safeguarding Scrutiny Board.
- The Chairman confirmed that it was proposed for reporting on Corporate Parenting to be included as part of the Board's future work programme as well as meeting with Social Workers. He also explained that, prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, the Scrutiny Board had met with Social Workers and conducted a site visit to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). During the pandemic Scrutiny Board members had also held virtual meetings with Social Workers. It was also noted the establishment of any additional Board would be subject to reporting to Full Council.
- In considering the report, Members expressed their deep sadness at the murder of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and the killing of Kaylee-Jayde Priest – they requested for this to be recorded as part of the minutes.
- A Member highlighted the the recruitment of additional officers to join the MASH and raised the following questions:
  - They queried the volume of experienced Social Workers recruited to the MASH. The Member also raised a number of points and queries regarding the use of agency staff.
  - The Member detailed how the Chief Superintendent had previously advised the Board about the recruitment of additional Police staff to the MASH. Again, they requested clarification regarding the background and experience of these newly recruited officers.
  - They also questioned whether these new Police recruits were part of a region-wide team, or whether they were specifically for Solihull.
  - The Member also noted how reference had been made to the provision of services via the West Bromwich Police Station and it was questioned whether these could be delivered in Solihull.
  - They queried the child safeguarding provision in Solihull and requested clarification that there were officers available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services emphasised how there was a national shortage of Social Workers. Solihull Council had been successful in retaining its experienced Social Workers. It was explained that, during the pandemic and following the trial for the murder of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, there had been a significant upsurge in demand for Children's Social Services. Additional staff had been recruited during the summer months and, further to this, the Council had arranged for 2 additional teams of agency Social Workers to join the MASH, both consisting of 7 experienced Social Workers.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained the MASH did not operate for 24 hours a day, there was collaborative working with the Emergency Duty Team that covered out of hours working. It was also

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confirmed that all the staff within the MASH were experienced, including agency workers. The Council also undertook continuous recruitment of Social Workers, and was currently recruiting additional Family Support Workers.

- The Chief Superintendent detailed how Police services that supported the MASH and child safeguarding in Solihull were split into two parts – officers in the Neighbourhood Policing Unit (NPU), alongside officers in the Public Protection Unit. This second Unit was a force wide resource, with a dedicated footprint in Solihull. It was explained that, similar to Social Workers, there was a national shortage of Detectives; however, for the NPU, there was a Sargeant in post, an experienced detective, who had previously worked in Child Protection. This officer had been directly recruited by the Chief Superintendent, along with the other Police workers in the NPU. These officers were co-located at the Bluebell Centre at Chelmsley Wood. There were 4 constable posts in support of the NPU Sargeant – 3 officers were in post already delivering 2 full-time equivalent posts. A further 2 officers would be recruited directly by the Chief Superintendent over the next 3 months. The workers in post already were experienced Police Officers, who had worked directly with schools and children.
- The Chief Superintendent explained that, in regards to the Public Protection Unit, 1 Detective Sargeant already worked in the MASH – they had brought in an additional Detective Sargeant, who had previously worked in complex child investigation across Coventry and Solihull. They had also appointed a dedicated Detective Inspector, who also had experience of working across Coventry and Solihull, in child investigation. They were also currently in the process of recruiting an experienced Detective Constable to the role of MASH co-ordinator, again, they would be based in the Bluebell Centre.
- The Chief Superintendent explained that, from a Policing perspective, there were officers located in the MASH, who worked alongside Social Worker and Health Sector colleagues on a day-to-day basis. The function that delivered intelligence gathering and checks – the Central Referral Unit (CRU) – was located in West Bromwich and served the West Midlands Police area. To help manage demand they had invested in an additional CRU Sargeant.
- The Chief Superintendent explained he would provide a diagram structure, outlining how the Police supporting child safeguarding in Solihull.
- The Accountable Officer for BSOL CCG detailed how they had commissioned a Senior Chief Nurse, from the National Chief Nurse Exceptional Leaders Network, to provide additional advice and support around safeguarding, as well as support to the Improvement Board. In terms of actions around MASH resources, they had recently recruited an experienced Lead Nurse, whilst they had re-allocated CCG staff to the Hub. They were currently recruiting 3 substantive, dedicated Solihull full-time Nurses, with 1 full-time admin officer.

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- The LSCP Independent Scrutineer welcomed the above actions undertaken by the Partner agencies. He also detailed how he had requested the Council to undertake a review of both current and potential future demand – this was to ensure both the appropriate capacity and capability, to future proof the MASH.
- A Member raised the following queries:
  - They highlighted how the JTAI identified a number of critical issues, in particular communication. This included that health representatives in the MASH did not have access to each other's records. The Member also flagged up that incomplete records had been found within the police 'Connect' system, with the Inspectors raising concerns about ensuring linkages to connected individuals.
  - The Member queried who had overarching responsibility for the MASH and the delivery of safeguarding services.
  - They questioned whether it could be beneficial for a Member of the Scrutiny Board to be represented on the Improvement Board.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained that, as part of the JTAI findings, it was recognised there were concerns in regards to the MASH governance arrangements and actions were being undertaken to address this. He detailed how, within a local area, the delivery of safeguarding services was the shared responsibility of the Council, Police and Clinical Commissioning Group, as outlined in the regulations. They had also formed an operational MASH group, which oversaw the day-to-day working of the Hub. There was also a strategic MASH group, which oversaw the strategy and linked with the LSCP, who had overall responsibility for ensuring the safeguarding arrangements within the area were sufficient. It was explained that some of the communication issues identified were due to a lack of capacity at the MASH and the additional recruitment undertaken, as outlined above, was noted.
- The Accountable Officer for BSOL CCG detailed how they had brought in additional expertise around the governance and information sharing across IT systems and agencies.
- Chief Superintendent Parnell detailed how it was clear that children's safeguarding was a joint responsibility across the Local Authority, the CCG and the Police and, as the delegated Police lead for Solihull, it was his responsibility to ensure effective measures were in place. He explained that, in regards to the police Connect system, this would deliver significant benefits; however, as an early adopter, West Midlands Police had encountered issues. As part of addressing the issues identified in the JTAI, there was a clear governance structure in place within West Midlands Police, led by the Assistant Chief Constable, where officers responsible for the delivery and maintenance of Connect were held to account. In regards to ensuring individuals were connected, they were putting in place additional mandatory questions for front-line workers. West Midlands Police had also appointed 4 dedicated officers, working within the information management department, who were focusing on reducing duplicate records and ensuring they were linked

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appropriately. The West Midlands Police data lab was also running a series of programmes to identify potential duplicate records.

- A Member highlighted a number of findings identified by the Ofsted inspection of Council services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers, completed in 2019. The Member also raised the following questions:
  - They flagged up the priority actions identified in the covering report, in paragraph 4.3, to be taken forward by the LSCP, and queried how these would be delivered.
  - The Member noted the covering report also detailed areas for improvement, including the timeliness and quality of initial decision-making in the MASH in relation to concerns received about children – they queried the monitoring arrangements for this
  - The JTAI had identified that Solihull's LSCP had experienced frequent changes of personnel in its membership, which had resulted in a loss of knowledge and experience – they queried how this point would be responded to.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained that, in regards to the timeliness of decision-making in the MASH, work had been undertaken to ensure cases were triaged and allocated to officers within a four-hour timescale. Cases that were referred to Early Help were monitored also, to ensure they were responded to in a timely way.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services received a daily report about unallocated cases, whilst the MASH Operational Board, the MASH Strategic Board and the LSCP would receive reporting on the activity in the Hub, to help ensure quality and timeliness. He also explained that a new Head of Service was leading on developing and introducing a new quality assurance framework, whereby regular audits would be undertaken to ensure the work undertaken was of the right quality.
- The LSCP Independent Scrutineer explained that, after he started in the role in the summer of 2021, he saw that the Partnership's safeguarding and governance arrangements required significant strengthening and needed to be more robust. The Executive Board now met more frequently and, during the JTAI, met on a weekly basis. He emphasised the importance of this Partnership having a resource base that had sufficient knowledge, experience and capacity. He also noted the role of Probation and Education and there was now senior representation of these agencies on the Executive Board. It was recognised the Partnership and the MASH had been under-resourced – as a result, additional investment was being made, including the appointment of another experienced Business Manager for the Partnership.
- The Independent Scrutineer also stressed the importance of professional development, detailing a recently held development day, to enable front-line practitioners to come together and share their experiences.
- In response to a Member query, it was agreed for the Improvement Board Terms of Reference to be circulated.
- A Member detailed how they wished for a performance management matrix to be reported to all the Scrutiny Boards, to allow regular

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monitoring and further reporting for any areas of concern, as well as identification of any examples of good practice.

- A Member raised the following points:
  - They detailed how it could be beneficial for the Improvement Board to engage with Education representatives, working within a setting or school.
  - The Member questioned how it was ensured that the voice of children and families were considered. They queried what measures were in place to ensure a child always had the opportunity to talk, before a case was closed, especially in instances where they may be coerced.
  - They also questioned what training was in place to ensure officers were aware of the referral pathways, to report any safeguarding matters.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that, for the Council, across all departments, there was a core set of mandatory training modules in place, including for safeguarding. Additional training was also commissioned for Social Worker staff, on conditions such as Autism. Training was also provided to Social Workers and other professionals on coercive control.
- The LSCP Independent Scrutineer explained that, in regards to disguised compliance, there was focus here upon providing support to front-line professionals, especially as it was recognised they could be dealing with manipulative individuals. He highlighted the work of the Partnership during the pandemic to continue professional development. He also emphasised the benefits of the recent development day, where practitioners were able to come together and share experiences. Such events would be an ongoing area of focus, as part of the Improvement Plan.
- A Member raised the following questions:
  - They queried what arrangements were in place if schools or other agencies made safeguarding referrals to the MASH, at 4pm on a Friday.
  - The Member questioned the arrangements in place to ensure practitioners understood the roles of other professionals, especially for jobs that involved multi-agency working.
  - In regards to the recruitment of Social Workers, it was queried how it was ensured that salaries were comparative with neighbouring Authorities.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that, if referrals were made to the MASH at 4pm or later, due to the length of time it may take for enquiries to be completed, they would be taken forward, as appropriate, by the Emergency Duty Team, with clear linkages in place. It was detailed how, with the different organisations represented on the MASH, this enabled professionals to share their experiences, gain an understanding of each other's roles, as well as bring their own expertise.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained that, in regards to the recruitment of Social Workers, there was an extensive workforce

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strategy in place – as part of this, they had benchmarked themselves against other Authorities in the region and there was a Memorandum of Understanding in regards to salaries.

- A Member flagged up how the JTAI found that the MASH was under-resourced – they queried this and requested clarification regarding the oversight of this going forward.
- The LSCP Independent Scrutineer highlighted again the review that was being undertaken, to focus on both current and potential future demand – it was noted that, key to this would be the retention of existing staff. The Chief Superintendent detailed how it took many years to develop and train experienced Police staff – also, there was a national shortage of Detectives, especially for Child Protection, as it was an extremely challenging role. The recruitment of additional Police staff for the MASH had been outlined earlier in the meeting and the Chief Superintendent explained how they were now in a stronger funding position, with clear strategies around the development of staff.
- The Accountable Officer for BSOL CCG flagged up the findings of the JTAI in regards to frequent changes of personnel – she detailed how they were currently going through a major Health service re-organisation, with the introduction of the Integrated Care System. She emphasised they were committed to a clear handover of all risks, issues and funding for this service area.
- A Member raised the following questions:
  - They queried the accountability arrangements for the LSCP and the MASH.
  - The Member also noted the various IT systems that supported the MASH and queried the business continuity plans in place, as well as information sharing.
  - They also questioned if it was possible to share an organisation structure that covered the whole of the LSCP and the MASH, detailing the different partners and their responsibilities.
- The Interim Director for Children's Services emphasised the guidance was clear, whereby the Local Authority, CCG and Police were jointly responsible for the delivery of safeguarding services for children in an area, with the LSCP the overarching organisation responsible for ensuring safeguarding arrangements were appropriate. He also confirmed there were business continuity management plans in place, whereby officers could continue to access records if IT systems were inaccessible.
- The LSCP Independent Scrutineer explained that, in regards to accountability, it was his role to hold the Council, Police and Health to account, as part of the new arrangements introduced in 2018. In regards to information sharing, the Accountable Officer for BSOL CCG emphasised how, nationally, a major rationale for the introduction of Integrated Care Systems was to support effective communication and information sharing across different agencies.
- A Member expressed their concerns in regards to the issues identified in respect of the Police Connect system. They queried why these issues

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weren't addressed as part of the design specification and roll-out. They also raised questions in regards to the Liquid Logic system.

- The Chief Superintendent reiterated how, for the Connect system, there was a clear governance system in place within West Midlands Police to address these issues, headed by the Assistant Chief Constable. He also detailed the work being undertaken by the Police to improve data quality, to reduce duplications and ensure, where appropriate, records were linked – it was confirmed there would be future reporting on this work to the Board. The Interim Director of Children's Services responded to the points made in regards to the Liquid Logic system.
- A Member highlighted how, as part of the JTAI, most partner agencies told inspectors that they were not involved or kept informed about the outcomes of their concerns and that they felt it necessary to chase the MASH for an update on what decisions had been made. They queried who was responsible for addressing this.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services detailed how a wide ranging Improvement Plan had been created, to address the issues identified as part of the JTAI, as well as part of a wider Improvement Programme. The Improvement Plan would be reported to the Scrutiny Board and this would set out the responsibility for each aspect of this Plan. It was also confirmed a multi-agency written statement of proposed actions, responding to the findings of the JTAI, would be submitted to the Department for Education by 30<sup>th</sup> May 2022.
- A Member flagged up how the JTAI found that not all agencies were invited to, or attended, child protection strategy meetings. The Member requested clarification on how this was being addressed.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services highlighted the work undertaken by the Council, Police and CCG to increase the capacity of their agencies on the MASH, to help ensure the right professionals were able to attend these meetings. A specific piece of work was being undertaken to help ensure GP's were able to join strategy discussions, as required, taking into account this was not an issue specific to Solihull. In considering the points raised by the Member, it was again noted the LSCP was currently developing the multi-agency statement of action, to be submitted to the DfE.
- A Member detailed how it could be beneficial for front-line workers from the MASH team to attend meetings of the Improvement Board, to help ensure understanding of their day-to-day experiences and gain assurances on the changes being introduced.
- A Member queried whether it could be possible to provide front-line workers the opportunity to report any matters to a separate group. The LSCP Independent Scrutineer explained how, as part of strengthening the governance arrangements, a practitioners group was being established, for across the 3 agencies, to provide further opportunities for front-line workers to express their views.
- The Chairman thanked Members for the points they raised. He also detailed how the Scrutiny Board had previously visited the MASH, to



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meet front-line workers. It was confirmed a future Member visit to the MASH could be scheduled as part of future work planning.

Members noted how it was the last meeting of the municipal year and highlighted how Stuart McHale, the Children's Services Finance Manager had recently retired, after working for 40 years at the Council. Members requested to put on record their thanks to Stuart for all of his work for Children's Services, over many years.

### **RESOLVED**

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

- (i) Noted the findings of the JTAI and action being taken to respond to the issues identified. As part of this, the Board noted the role of all elected Members as Corporate Parents.
- (ii) Agreed for a minute extract of this agenda item to be shared with the Improvement Board
- (iii) Agreed for the following reports to be presented at the next Scrutiny Board meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> June:
  - The multi-agency written statement of proposed action.
  - The Improving Outcomes for Children in Solihull Plan.
- (iv) Agreed for the findings of the National Panel Review to be presented at a future Scrutiny Board, following publication.

End time of meeting: 20:20