

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 9 June
2022**

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: D Gibbin (Chairman), S Ashraf MBE, A Burrow, Y Clements, S Gethen, J Hamilton, R Holt, A Mackenzie, L McCarthy, A Rebeiro, J Tildesley, A Wilson, Co-opted Member S Freeman and Parent Governor representative S Golby

Diocesan Representative Mr B Hall joined the meeting remotely.

Officers: Tim Browne – Interim Director of Children's Services
Nick Page – Chief Executive
Joseph Bright – Democratic Services Officer

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

The Scrutiny Officer asked for nominations for the role of Chairperson of the Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Daniel Gibbin be elected Chairperson of the Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

(Councillor Gibbin in the Chair)

2. APPOINTMENT OF A VICE-CHAIRPERSON

Nominations were sought for the role of Vice-Chairperson of the Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Richard Holt be elected Vice-Chairperson of the Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

3. APOLOGIES

Councillor B Donnelly submitted their apologies.

4. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTING INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

Councillor Laura McCarthy declared a personal interest in the meeting. This matter has been discussed with the Chair and it has been agreed by the Chair her interest is noted and details of that interest will remain confidential.

5. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were submitted.

6. MINUTES

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The minutes of the meetings held on 3rd March and 6th April 2022 were presented. A summary of the points raised at the meeting held on 23rd March 2022 were also shared.

It was noted that an amendment needed to be made in respect of all meetings, to show that Co-opted Member Mr B Hall had joined the meeting remotely.

RESOLVED

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

- (i) That the minutes of the meetings held on 3rd March and 6th April 2022 be held as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of the amendment detailed above.
- (ii) That the summary of the points raised at the meeting held on 23rd March 2022 were noted, again, subject to the inclusion of the amendment detailed above.

7. CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRIORITIES 2022-23

The Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills presented the report, setting out the priorities for 2022-23, in regards to the services provided by the Children's Services and Skills and Public Health Directorates.

Prior to presenting his report, the Cabinet Member highlighted the following points, to reflect the current pressures facing Children's Services:

- For May 2022, 978 contacts regarding children and young people were reported to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- From these contacts, 511 were taken forward as referrals.
- In turn, 443 of these referrals were assessed to be Level 4 referrals, the highest level.
- Overall, this represented a 100% increase in demand for MASH services.

The Cabinet Member began by expressing his sadness and shock at the tragic murder of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes. His report outlined the work and priority actions being taken forward, through the Children, Education and Skills Portfolio, in implementing the JTAI Statement of Action, Children's Social Care Improvement Plan and the recommendations from the National Review into the death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes.

The following priority areas from the Children, Education and Skills Portfolio were also highlighted:

- Reducing the number of children experiencing care and implementing the Sufficiency Strategy to secure permanency and placement arrangements for those children and young people.
- Implementing the Joint Additional Needs and Disability Strategy to improve outcomes for children and young people with additional needs, including Special Education Needs and Disabilities.

Members raised the following questions:

- Members requested for regular updates on the volume of children and young people reported to the MASH be shared with and reported to the Board.
- Members welcomed the priorities outlined in the report. They requested a further update upon the priorities for Education and Schools. The Member also queried the potential for holding a meeting at a school.

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- The Cabinet Member responded, emphasising the Local Authority maintained a strong working relationship with schools in the Borough. The Interim Director of Children's Services also detailed how the LA's relationship with schools would change as a consequence of the recommendations of the Schools White Paper. It was noted this Paper included proposals for all schools to become members of Multi Academy Trusts, as well as the removal of LA Improvement functions. Going forward, it was anticipated an LA's role would focus upon championing vulnerable children.
- A Member highlighted a recommendation from the National Panel Report into the murder of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson – specifically the establishment of a new expert-led, multi-agency model for child protection investigation, planning, intervention and review. The Member queried the capacity in place to support this recommendation.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed they had significantly increased the capacity of the MASH. In January they had introduced an additional 3 full-time Health professional roles, a number of Police Officers, as well as an additional 5 Social Workers for the MASH. Further capacity was also being recruited due to the recent significant increase in demand. In regards to the National Panel Review, it was confirmed Officers were currently reviewing the recommendations – it was anticipated that new national guidance would be issued in due course.
- A Member raised the potential changes arising from the Schools White Paper and requested confirmation there would still be information sharing arrangements in place, to allow the Council to monitor attainment levels and outcomes for looked after children, as well as young carers.
- The Cabinet Member confirmed there would be information sharing arrangements in place with schools. He also detailed the work being undertaken with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health, in regards to offering support for young carers across the Borough.
- Members requested for an executive summary on the Schools White Paper to be shared with the Scrutiny Board, to include a breakdown of the proposed statutory responsibilities for Local Authorities. The Chairman also queried whether it was possible, as part of this report, to include reference to Section 1 of the Child and Social Care Act 2017.
- Members also noted that, as part of the White Paper proposals, responsibility for School Improvement would sit with the Regional Schools Commissioner. Going forward, Members queried if Local Authorities would still have the authority to visit and engage with schools, in regards to their performance.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained that, for the next year, the School Improvement Team would continue to provide support to LA maintained schools and after this point, responsibility would shift to the Regional Schools Commissioner. Going forward, if there were any concerns about a school's performance, this could be raised with the multi academy trust, as well as the Regional Schools Commissioner. Also, the Local Authority and the Scrutiny Board would still have a responsibility to engage with schools, through acting as champions for vulnerable children.
- Members noted the points raised about the capacity of the MASH and queried whether data on staff turnover and recruitment within Children's Services could be shared. They also requested whether information on staff morale could be shared as well.
- Members questioned if data on SEND processes could be shared with the Board as well – including timescales for the completion of Education Health

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and Care Plans, as well as the volume of cases that went to SEND mediation and tribunal. Members requested for a breakdown of the reasons to be shared as well.

- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained that the statutory timescales for the completion of EHCPs was 20 weeks. 3 years ago the Council was completing approximately 12% within this timescale. This year, the Council was regularly completing 100% of EHCPs within the time period, whilst nationally it was 53% for the current month. Nationally, there was a shortage of qualified SEND staff, alongside a significant increase in demand for support and these pressures were also experienced locally in Solihull. As a consequence, Officers were focusing on ensuring an effective Workforce Strategy.
- A Member noted the request for updates on the volume of children and young people reported to the MASH and queried whether it could be possible to provide a further breakdown, including the reasons why referrals were made, as well as by area. It was noted this could potentially allow the identification of trends, as well as opportunities for earlier intervention.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained how the LSCP was taking forward, as an action, the development of a robust audit and performance information programme covering MASH practice – it was noted this could be considered as part of the Scrutiny work programme.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained that, as part of the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan, a review was being undertaken of the overall Early Help Offer and arrangements – colleagues from another Local Authority were supporting this review and recommendations would be identified to help strengthen the offer going forward.
- A Member highlighted how, with some MASH referrals, it may be concluded that no further Children's Social Care involvement should be undertaken at that stage. They queried the engagement here with the people who made these MASH referrals, including Head teachers, schools and third party sector organisations.
- The Interim Director for Children's Services explained how a multi-agency thresholds document was shared with professionals and local organisations, to provide guidance on MASH referrals. He detailed how, if a professional had any remaining concerns, there was an escalation process in place. In regards to Head teachers and schools, the JTAI had found the education representative in the MASH had effective relationships with Solihull schools' staff, whilst school leaders found the advice and support from the MASH beneficial.
- Members highlighted instances of children being unable to attend school due to mental health issues. They noted how, in certain circumstances, fines could be issued for non-attendance at school – they queried the support in place for these pupils.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services explained the Government had issued new school attendance guidance that was currently out for consultation – officers were developing a support pack for schools, setting out responsibilities. He detailed how they would support and, where necessary, challenge schools, to ensure the appropriate recording of authorised and unauthorised absences. It was confirmed that, as part of the individual assessment of each case, the Council would look at the family circumstances and consider whether additional support and alternative measures may be required. As part of this, officers would link with the specialist advisory service, Educational Psychologists, as well as wider support services.

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Action Points:

Overall, Members agreed for the following action points to be taken forward:

- That regular updates on the volume of children and young people reported to the MASH be shared with and reported to the Board.
- Members requested for a breakdown of the referrals to be provided, including the reasons why referrals were made, as well as by area.
- Members asked for data on staff turnover and recruitment for the MASH to be shared. They also requested whether information on staff morale could be shared as well.
- For an executive summary on the Schools White Paper to be shared with the Scrutiny Board, to include a breakdown of the proposed statutory responsibilities for Local Authorities.
- For data on SEND processes to be shared with the Board – including timescales for the completion of Education Health and Care Plans, as well as the volume of cases that went to SEND mediation and tribunal. Again, Members requested for the reasons to be provided also.
- It was noted the LSCP was developing a robust audit and performance information programme covering MASH practice – it was agreed for this to be scheduled as part of the Scrutiny Board's Work Programme.

RESOLVED

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

- (i) Noted the priorities of the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Education for 2022-23; and
- (ii) Agreed for the draft Work Programme for 2022-23 to be updated to include the action points recorded above.

8. CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

The Scrutiny Board was invited to consider a draft work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year. Members raised the following points and observations:

- Due to the volume of agenda items the Board wished to consider, it was recognised that additional meetings would need to be scheduled during this municipal year.
- Members requested for a performance framework document to be developed, to be presented at future Scrutiny Board meetings.
- Members also asked for a Task and Finish Group to be established, to consider the findings of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.
- It was explained how Solihull Parent Carer Voice had offered to provide a SEND training session for all Councillors – meeting dates for this would be shared with Members shortly.
- It was also requested that further training and development sessions for Members to be arranged during the municipal year, as appropriate.
- Members asked for an additional column to be added to the work plan, to outline which Council Plan priorities for each agenda item.
- It was highlighted how a review of the Council's financial position, including the impact of financial pressures in Children's Services, was scheduled for the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board in November. It was requested for this agenda item to also be scheduled for this Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED

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That the Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board approved the work plan, as submitted, subject to the addition of the points raised by Members above.

End time of meeting: 19:30