
SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2022

Present: Councillors Winning (Chair), T Bunday, D Galton, Laurent and W Payne

19. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN PANEL MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

The Panel noted the resignation of Councillors McEwing and Windle and the appointments of Councillors Denness and W Payne respectfully in place thereof in accordance with the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 4.3.

Apologies were noted from Councillors Denness and Vaughan.

20. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Children and Family Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 29th September 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

21. **CHILD FRIENDLY CITY UPDATE**

The Panel considered the report of the Stronger Communities Manager, which recommended that the Panel consider the report and note the progress being made towards Southampton becoming accredited as a UNICEF Child Friendly City.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning, Councillor Dr Paffey and Jason Murphy, Stronger Communities Manager, were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the Cabinet Member and officers, the Panel noted the following:

Southampton is the first south coast city in the UK to have joined the programme. It takes between three to five years to be recognised as a UNICEF UK Child Friendly City.

- The UNICEF programme will support Southampton City Council and its partners through a three-stage process of Discovery, Development, and Implementation.
- Key priorities will be established towards the end of the Discovery stage in December 2022, following extensive engagement with stakeholders, children and young people, and communities.
- 2000 children have been surveyed, offering rich data about a range of child related issues.
- Accreditation is a Southampton city-wide responsibility.
- Accountable partnerships and sponsors across the city make the programme sustainable.
- The support of the Steering Group, Ambassadors, and other key partners is key in addressing:

- The need for children and young people to be involved in the democratic process.
- Children's rights being embedded across the city.
- Collaborative work to address complex needs and trauma.
- Changes that can be made in the city to benefit the lives of its children.

22. **CHILDREN AND LEARNING - PERFORMANCE**

The Panel considered the report of the Service Director, Legal and Business Services, which recommended that the Panel consider and challenge the performance of Children's Services and Learning in Southampton.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning, Councillor Dr Paffey and Southampton City Council Officers, Steph Murray, Deputy Director, Children and Learning; and Petra Pankova, Performance Manager, Children and Learning were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

A number of issues were raised and discussed including:

- Concerns about the consistency of the data
- Drivers for improved timescales in case supervision
- National high workforce turnover of social workers at senior management level
- Improvement of the quality of practice
- Learning from audits
- Expected improvements in performance indicators moving forward.

In discussions with the Cabinet Member and officers, the Panel noted the following:

- Children's Services was working hard to strengthen services and address fluctuating performance resulting from the high number of new social workers and the need for managers to provide additional supervision.
- System practice indicated that group supervision, frequency and quality were working well following additional training to managers and minimum practice levels.
- A new Manager, expected in January 2023, would help to address capacity issues. Nationally and locally caseloads were continuing to increase.
- Key performance and snapshot dashboard data was reliable and enabling a more sophisticated analysis of information.
- A comprehensive audit program was expected to obtain information from multiple sources, including feedback from families, Head Teachers, and Child Protection Conference Chairs.
- Audit themes to be undertaken included: placement breakdowns, individual child experiences; changes and impact on children of a change in social worker, child protection thresholds, learning about sharing information with partners, domestic abuse thresholds, learning brought into practice and, analysis of ethnicity was to be undertaken, to ensure SCC's commitment to the Equality Act.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the Panel are provided with an overview of the ethnicity of children and young people engaging with safeguarding services.
- ii) That learning from audits is included as an agenda item at a future meeting of the Panel.

23. **SOUTHAMPTON'S LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

The Panel considered the report of the Service Director, Legal and Business Services, which recommended that the Panel note how corporate parenting responsibilities would be discharged in Southampton and scrutinise outcomes and developments for looked after children relating to educational attainment, mental health, and placement sufficiency.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning, Councillor Dr Paffey and Southampton City Council Officers, Steph Murray, Deputy Director of Children and Learning; Maria Anderson, Head of the Virtual School, Children's Education & Learning, and Tim Nelson - Head of Service, Young People's Services were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the Cabinet Member and officers, the Panel noted the following:

- The Corporate Parenting Board is considering the recommendations of the Improvement Board.
- Southampton Voices Unite (Children in Care Council), has an open, standing invitation to Corporate Parenting meetings.
- The Virtual school has extended the remit for non-statutory advisory services for children who have had a social worker at any time.
- A new statutory post exists in all local authorities to provide strategic oversight of LAC.
- There has been some success around recruiting assistant psychology posts, with the intention to transition later to fill harder to reach psychology posts.
- Increased volume of support at early age will reduce the demand on CAMHS. Waiting lists are significantly high. Alternative support is being provided to those on waiting lists.
- Improvements anticipated in the next 12 months included:
 - Children's stability and feeling about their support: Children should realise how interventions are helping them. Those who need it should be aware that intervention is helping them.
 - Timeliness and effectiveness is essential: Early intervention before the need for acute specialist help.
 - Ensure high needs demand is met at an earlier stage.
- Achieving the best outcomes usually involves keeping children local. There is a cost to LA's to send children further afield. The human cost is disruption, moving children from networks of support, and this can result in poorer outcomes.
- Matching well with foster parents is more beneficial for children and for budgets.

- Several thousand pounds a week is being spent on emergency care. Despite the cost of provision, it would be better to provide local residential homes so that children can return to families and support.
- Significant work is taking place in schools to become trauma informed.
- A significant city wide recruitment drive for foster carers is underway.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the Chief Executive and Executive Management Team ensures that Council services, that are required to act to help deliver the proposed residential children's homes, work proactively to enable homes to open as soon as possible.
- ii) That following the University of Southampton's development of a Civic University agreement, the Council utilises the opportunity to encourage the University to become a Fostering Friendly employer.

24. **MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel received the report of the Director, Legal and Business Services, which enabled the Panel to monitor and track progress on recommendations made at previous meetings.

The Panel noted that all the requested information had been provided and utilised to inform the discussion of the agenda items.