
SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 JULY 2023

Present: Councillors T Bunday (Chair), J Baillie, Barnes-Andrews, Chapman, Mrs Mintoff and Webb
Appointed Members:

Apologies: Councillors Lambert
Appointed Members: Rob Sanders

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

The Panel noted the apologies of Councillors Lambert and Quadir and Appointed Member Rob Sanders.

2. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

RESOLVED that Councillor A Barnes-Andrews be elected as Vice-Chair for the Municipal Year 2023/24.

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

4. **CHILDREN AND LEARNING POSITION STATEMENT**

The Panel received the report of the Executive Director for Children and Learning outlining the context in which the service was working for children and families in Southampton; successes, challenges, and service priorities for the coming year.

Rob Henderson, Executive Director of Children & Learning was in attendance and with the consent of the Chair, addressed the meeting.

The Panel noted and considered the content of the presentation, in particular:

- The post-pandemic impact on mental health issues, substance abuse, domestic abuse, and other family relationship issues, which had continued to increase referrals locally and nationally.
- The number of children in need was predicted to rise from 85K to 100K by 2025 in England.
- Foster Care shortages were a local and national challenge.
- School non-attendance and exclusions had increased nationally and was prevalent in Southampton. SCC was working in partnership with the police and multiple agencies to address this.
- The increase in permanence of SCC social care workforce (90%) and senior leadership team (95%).
- The Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding Model would be launched in Southampton in September 2023.

- In September 2023, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight was set to become the second region in the UK to benefit from England's largest youth-centred wellbeing programme. 'BeeWell' was founded to improve wellbeing support available to young people and training for teachers to identify mental health issues. It would be funded by CAMHS and the Integrated Commissioning Board.
- The Neglect Toolkit, which replaced MASH, provides the framework for good practice around the early identification and signs of neglect and was undergoing tracking, improvement, and self-evaluation.

The Panel noted and considered the content of the Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting letter. In particular:

- New Audit Framework: Talking to children, social workers, and partners.
- Ofsted stated that the Council's new audit framework was one of the best they had seen.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That, to help develop understanding of the locality working model in Southampton, the presentation detailing the key elements of the Southampton approach is circulated to the Panel.
- 2) That, reflecting the high prevalence of cases of neglect in Southampton, the feedback provided by schools on the use of the Neglect Toolkit and how it is supporting decision making is circulated to the Panel.

5. CHILDREN'S RESOURCE SERVICE AUDIT AND SERVICE RESPONSE

The Panel received the report of the Executive Director for Children and Learning, recommending that the Panel consider and note the findings of the Children's Resource Service audit and the service response.

During the discussion the Panel noted the following:

- That the Service had responded robustly with vigorous activity in place.
- That the evidence around improved practice and the Improvement Board would be validated by the publication of the Ofsted report later in the month.
- That audit activity was to move forward toward partnership audits.
- That several well attended training sessions had taken place. Training had focussed on first line managers as a core group for consistent practice.
- Good timeliness in screening strategy discussions had resulted in fewer referrals to child protection.
- That safeguarding activity had the best engagement within the service. As a critical part of the service and its ongoing decision making, it was a critical area for continual focus to scrutinise continuing practice.
- That the service will review quality across three audits: 1. Managers Audit, 2. Re-referrals, 3. Safeguarding Childrens' partnership. Audits will resume taking account of Ofsted's findings. The three audits will give assurance that the audit process is working.
- Re-referrals were still at 21%, so above the national average.

RESOLVED that the service would report the findings of the three audits to the Panel.

6. **CHILDREN AND LEARNING - PERFORMANCE**

The Panel received the report of the Scrutiny Manager recommending that the Panel consider and challenge the performance of Children's Services and Learning in Southampton.

Laura Trevett – Performance Manager and Stuart Webb – Head of Quality Assurance were in attendance and with the consent of the Chair, addressed the meeting.

The Panel noted a number of points within the report including:

- That the number of children looked after and children with children in need plans had reduced.
- That Intervention teams had worked well to provide support, following assessment, and had reduced the escalation to referral.
- Children in our care:
 - The number of asylum seekers in our care was likely to increase despite the drop in April.
 - The service was working hard at getting children safely back into family homes and was able to discharge children once they were back in family homes.
- Challenges in CLA: Staff absences had led to supervisions not taking place. Managers have oversight, so child are seen by other members of the team, so not to lose sight of children if the social worker is not at work.
- Multi-agency teams looked at how performance was measured. Where performance was down it was due to poor record keeping rather than meetings not taking place.
- Health Assessments performance needed to improve.
- SCC is an improving authority in terms of children's services. The dip in placements during April was the result of Court judgements. No Placement Orders could be made until the Orders were resolved. Twenty-four children were placed for adoption in April. Children remain in care until the court discharges the Care Order, even if the child is back living at home.
- The No Further Action (NFA) trend was increasing. There is currently no measure of outcomes of assessment, even though children will have had intensive support. That data needs to be separated.

RESOLVED that the recommendations of the report be approved.

7. **MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel received and noted the report of the Scrutiny Manager, which enabled the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel to monitor and track progress on recommendations made at previous meetings.