
SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JUNE 2021

Present: Councillors Guthrie (Chair), Bell, Laurent, Mitchell and Dr Paffey
Appointed Members: Rob Sanders

Apologies: Appointed Members: Catherine Hobbs, Nicola Brown, Francis Otieno and Claire Rogers

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

The apologies of the appointed members, Nicola Brown, Catherine Hobbs, Francis Otieno and Claire Rogers were noted.

2. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

RESOLVED that Councillor Mitchell as Vice-Chair for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

3. **STATEMENT FROM CHAIR**

The Chair requested that all attendees noted the Covid-19 meeting protocol that had been applied to the meeting.

The Chair shared a message from the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Councillor P Baillie, who was not in attendance at the meeting.

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

5. **CHILDREN AND LEARNING - PERFORMANCE**

The Panel considered the report of the Director, Legal and Business Operation which recommended that the Panel considered and challenged the performance of Children and Learning Services in Southampton.

Councillor J Baillie, Cabinet Member for Education, Robert Henderson, Executive Director Wellbeing (Children and Learning), Southampton City Council; and Phil Bullingham, Head of Service: Children's Social Care, Southampton City Council; were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the officers, the Panel noted the following:

- There had been a significant increase in contact and referrals since February 2021.
- A move away from enforcement and legal action and towards supporting families to make a difference early was required to improve the referrals into the Early Help service.
- The impact on services and the budget pressure associated with the increase in demand

- The risk averse culture resulted in too many assessments of children being completed which concluded with no further action required.
- The recruitment challenges had improved with the recruitment of a number of new Social Workers.
- There had been activity nationally and regionally regarding the anticipated increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children to be looked after by Southampton City Council.

RESOLVED that the Panel would be provided with a report from the Executive Director Wellbeing (Children and Learning) which detailed the key actions, developments and milestones that were fundamental to the delivery of the stated ambition to realign the focus of our services from assessment to intervention.

6. **MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel noted the report of the Director, Legal and Business Operations 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.

7. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC - EXEMPT PAPERS INCLUDED IN THE FOLLOWING ITEM**

The Chair moved that in accordance with the Council's Constitution, specifically the Access to Information Procedure Rules contained within the Constitution, the press and public be excluded from the meeting in respect of any consideration of the exempt report and appendices to the following item. It was not appropriate to disclose this information based on Categories 7 of paragraph 10.4 of the council's Access to Information Procedure Rules as the information was subject to an obligation of confidentiality.

RESOLVED that having applied the public interest test, the press and public be excluded from the meeting.

8. **OFSTED - SOUTHAMPTON FOCUSED VISIT**

The Panel considered the report of the Executive Director for Children Learning which briefed the Panel on the Ofsted Focused Visit Inspection that was undertaken between 20 April and 6 May 2021.

Councillor J Baillie, Cabinet Member for Education, Robert Henderson, Executive Director of Children and Learning, Southampton City Council; and Phil Bullingham, Head of Service: Children's Social Care, Southampton City Council; were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the officers, the Panel noted the following:

- Ofsted noted an improvement in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, Child Protection Conferences and court work.
- Ofsted also noted that the Virtual School and Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Children's team were a strength.

- Ofsted identified that there needed to be improvement in face to face or virtual contact with children placed with connected carers, with those placed in non-registered children's homes and with Care Leavers.
- The provision of quality reflective supervision would help to manage caseloads and the relevance of referrals.
- The audit process required improvement so that managers can monitor performance and manage capacity issues more effectively.
- Improvements to the Early Help service and better planning and assessment work would enable the Court and Protection Teams to focus on those children whose needs are the most acute.
- The service provided would be based on what a child needs and not which threshold they've got to meet to receive a service.
- The number of children who are eligible for free school meals and are home educated is disproportionately high and, with regard to safeguarding and raising attainment, the authority would like to be able to assess and monitor the provision of education by parents who have elected to home educate.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) That the Cabinet Member for Education would lobby the Government, on behalf of the Council, to give local authorities additional powers with regards to the oversight of elected home educated children.
- (ii) That the Panel would be provided with an update on the implementation of the Priority Action Improvement Plan in advance of the 22 July 2021 meeting of the Panel.