
SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 JULY 2022

Present: Councillors Winning (Chair), Bunday, D Galton, Laurent, Vaughan and Windle

Apologies: Appointed Member: Rob Sanders

6. **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR**

RESOLVED that Councillor Laurent be elected as Vice-Chair for the Municipal Year 2022/23.

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

It was noted that Councillor Baillie had permanently left the Panel. Councillors D Galton, Laurent and McEwing joined the Panel.

The apologies of Councillor McEwing were noted, as were the apologies of appointed member Rob Sanders.

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2022, be approved and signed as a correct record.

9. **EARLY HELP AND PREVENTION**

The Panel received the report of the Executive Director Children and Learning, which recommended that the Panel note the Highlight Report for Early Help and Prevention and scrutinise the content provided with the invited officers and Cabinet Member.

Councillor Paffey, Cabinet Member for Children and Learning, Steph Murray, Deputy Director of Children and Learning; Dan Buckle, Head of Service: Prevention & Early Help were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

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

- That Early Help (EH) is proposed as a culture shift toward proactive intervention, to alter current perceptions of intervention, and provide support to avoid stepping up to statutory intervention.
- That early intervention expertise is clearly designed for good effect. Case holding and parenting work was separated in April 2022. A significant number of cases have been identified and redirected to EH. Support for families should decrease substantial social worker caseloads.
- That EH is crucial. The content of EH practice can help save money and achieve better outcomes earlier.
- That EH provides a pathway through holistic help, in an integrated model, for the child and family to receive support and guidance, and to empower.

- That SCC is one of 175 LAs receiving support for family Hubs for the first 1001 days of a child's life.
- A significant number of parents accessing the service go on to do EH training.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Head of Quality Assurance provides the Panel with an overview of the audit activity relating to Early Help and Prevention Services.
- 2) That, reflecting recruitment challenges, the Panel are provided with details relating to vacancies across the Children and Families First Service and the actions being taken to fill these positions.
- 3) That, to enable success measures to be developed and reported, the performance of the Children and Families First Service is considered by the Panel at the January 2023 meeting.

10. **CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND PERFORMANCE**

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

The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning, Councillor Paffey; Steph Murray, Deputy Director of Children and Learning; Stuart Webb, Head of Quality Assurance; and Jo Feeney, Performance Manager were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

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

- That data was sent to the Improvement Board every two months. Following the approval of a series of recommendations made to the Improvement Board, work had started on areas of priority action.
- A report would be presented to Panel in Autumn 2022 with management improvements.
- That Agency staff had reduced from 94 to 52.
 - New staff recruited were not yet fully case holding.
 - Working to bring caseloads under control.
 - Permanent staff to improve problems of timely visits and reports.
- That in the longer term, the move to permanent staff would be more financially efficient. However, the short term costs were crucial to bringing the overall cost down to ensure a better, stronger, more sustainable service.
- That there was a national problem with unregulated placements.
- That a quick response was important when suitable properties become available.
- That conversion data would be presented to Panel at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 4) That the findings from the review of the functions and effectiveness of the Improvement Board is circulated to the Panel.
- 5) That sickness absence data for Children's Services is circulated to the Panel.
- 6) That performance information relating to the ongoing foster care recruitment activity is circulated to the Panel.

11. **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.