

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of this Panel held on
12 July 2021

(Present) Councillor T Long (Chair)
Councillors Barton, Greaves, McDonnell, Mussell, Osundeko and
Sweeney

(Also Present) Amy Kirman (Parent Governor – Primary)

(Not Present) Councillors A Johnson, Preston and Sims, Mr Williams (Roman Catholic Church), Mr Thorpe (Church of England) and Mrs Lawson (Parent Governor -Secondary)

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Johnson, Preston (Covid related absence), Sims (Covid related absence), Mr Thorpe and Mr Williams.

2 **MINUTES**

* **Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2021, be approved and signed.**

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest from Members were made.

4 **DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP**

No declarations of party whip were made.

5 **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee gave consideration to its terms of reference. References to monitoring the achievement of the Council's Priorities had been updated for the committee to reflect the new priorities set out in the recently adopted the Borough Strategy 2021-2030.

The Terms of Reference were as follows:

The Committee shall undertake the functions delegated by the Commission, and in particular:

- To consider and scrutinise items relating to the provision of Children and Young People's Services in the Borough.
- To review and scrutinise items relating to the operation of Children and Young People's Services and their performance, as selected by members of the Committee or referred to them by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission or the Cabinet.

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- To monitor the achievement of the “Ensure Children and Young People have a positive start in life” Council Priority as set out in the Our Borough Strategy 2021-2030.
- In undertaking this role the Committee is able to question members of the Cabinet, and/or Chief Officers, regarding their decisions, performance in relation to service operations and targets.
- To receive and have regard for Councillor Calls for Action within the remit of the Committee.
- To exercise the right following call-in to review and, where appropriate, ask for re-consideration of decisions made by, but not yet implemented by, the Cabinet or Council.
- To provide regular updates on the Committee’s work programme to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.
- To produce final reports of all reviews undertaken and monitor and evaluate progress of recommendations as appropriate.
- To make representations to the Cabinet, and Council if necessary, on any issues or areas of concern arising from the overview and scrutiny process

* **Resolved that the report be noted.**

6 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY AND OFSTED RESTART VISIT UPDATE

The Director of Children Services presented a report providing an update on the Children’s Services department’s improvement journey and Ofsted’s restart focussed visit in May 2021. In November 2019 Ofsted’s ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children Services) judged St Helens Children’s Services to be Inadequate. As a consequence of this judgement the Secretary of State made St Helens Council the subject of formal intervention and an Intervention Manager was appointed. The Intervention Manager is a member of St Helens Children Improvement Board (CIB) and provides feedback to the Department for Education (DfE). The CIB has an Independent Chair who also provides monitoring reports to DfE.

It was explained that, due to the Inadequate judgement, alongside 6-monthly DfE Reviews, an authority would usually have several Ofsted Monitoring and Focused Visits to ascertain progress and in preparation for another full inspection. COVID-19 had impacted this timetable greatly. St Helens was the first authority to receive a virtual Focused Visit in Summer 2020.

As the second lockdown occurred, Ofsted announced a new framework to begin Restart Visits. This framework would cover three areas; Help and Protection, Children in Care and Care Leavers.

In May 2021 Ofsted announced they would be undertaking a Restart Visit to St Helens. The visit was conducted online and feedback was provided in the form of a letter from

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Ofsted to the Director of Children Services which was published by Ofsted on 2nd July 2021.

Since January 2021 the CIB had moved from monthly to 6-weekly meetings following approval from DfE. The Board monitors and challenges progress. Updates were provided through presentations, reports and Children's Improvement Plan and Scorecard.

The Improvement Plan and Scorecard had recently been reviewed and had merged into one document - elements of Signs of Safety had been added which would provide further assurance for ongoing and completed actions. Feedback from the recent Ofsted visit would be added to this revised Improvement Plan.

Heads of Service, from across Children's Services, continued to meet fortnightly as part of the improvement journey/Ofsted readiness process and would use the new Improvement Plan to provide updates on workstreams and evidence good practice. This would provide the CIB with greater assurance and evidence for all areas.

A query was raised with regard to how the improvements were being communicated to staff.

It was confirmed that all staff were aware of the improvements that were needed. Managers were engaging with frontline social work staff to ensure input from them in improvement process.

A question was raised with regard to how to act in a timely manner to ensure that children are protected and if social worker caseload was an issue in terms of this.

It was confirmed that it was a constant challenge to get timely action and it was a complicated process in which changes needed to be made and were being made, however that takes time to implement.

In terms of Social Worker caseload there had been significant improvements, however staffing was an issue as a number of staff were on or due to take maternity leave and others had been lost to other authorities due to better salaries and that was also an issue in terms of attracting new staff to the authority.

A query was also raised with regard to multi agency working and also monitoring of children who were put in placements outside of the borough.

It was confirmed that multi agency working in St Helens was very good. Relationships between the Local Authority, Police and schools in the borough were very good in terms of working to protect or identify vulnerable children and partnerships were very strong.

In terms of monitoring of children put in placements out of borough, regular visits were undertaken to ensure that the care met the required standards.

* **Resolved that the report be noted.**

7 CABINET RESPONSE TO REVIEW OF IMPROVING WORK OPPORTUNITIES FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

A report was submitted which updated the Committee on improving work opportunities for care experienced young people.

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An Action Plan within the report set out how the recommendations made in the Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Committee task group review of improving work opportunities for care experienced young people would be delivered.

The recommendations of the review recognised the need for the Council and its partners to be aspirational for young people who are care experienced and to prioritise areas of communication, engagement, training and discussions aimed at improving opportunities for work experience.

Regular and detailed monitoring of the action plan would be undertaken by responsible officers and overseen by the Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that the Committee would consider the an updated version of the Action Plan at a subsequent meeting when further progress had been made by officers to implement the agreed actions.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) the report be noted; and**
- (2) an update be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.**

8 SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19 UPDATE

The Assistant Director for Education and Learning provided a presentation to Members to update on the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on schools in the Borough.

The presentations covered the following areas:

- The Impact of Covid-19 on education services/schools and settings;
- Learning, curriculum and assessment;
- Supporting vulnerable learners;
- Early learning and childcare;
- Pathway planning;
- Workforce support;
- Mental health in schools;
- Impact so far of the above initiatives;
- KS2 – KS3 ready to progress: English;
- Further work required to achieve objectives;
- Updates from the Department for Education (DfE) for the new school year; and
- Next steps.

A query was raised with regard to the mental health support teams that had been established to work in 20 schools in St Helens and if this would be rolled out to all schools.

It was confirmed that the staff who were trained in the 20 schools initially receiving the service would then be able to train more staff in other schools, however it was not known how many more schools would be receiving the support. Staff training staff was a very effective method of getting more staff in schools trained in this area, however the programme would also depend on individual school funding and if they were able to invest time and funds into this area given their other budget pressures.

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A query was also raised as to how effective Operation Encompass had been.

It was confirmed that the programme was working well in identifying when children had been involved in domestic violence, however more work was needed to help support schools in dealing with issues where children have been victims of domestic violence and getting the help that is needed for them.

A question was also raised with regards to futureproofing schools' practices in case of another pandemic happening in the future.

It was confirmed that new ways of working and dealing with issues which had presented in the current pandemic and the ways they were dealt with would mean that in the event of a future pandemic the lessons learnt and the input from staff and children would mean that schools would be well prepared.

A question was raised about exclusions and how the multi-agency working works to ensure the children involved still receive an education.

It was confirmed that head teachers, housing, school admission service representatives and the family of the child work together and look at the situation and why the exclusion has happened or is expected to happen, to see if a more suitable offer can be given. For example, a headteacher from one school may see that their school could meet the child's needs in a better way than the school they are being excluded from due to having different practices or provisions in place that are more relevant to what that child needs.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) the report be noted; and**
- (2) an update be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.**

Councillor McDonnell and Councillor Sweeney here left the meeting.

9 NHS RESPONSE TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEND SPOTLIGHT REVIEW

Representatives of NHS St Helens Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust presented a report providing an update on the NHS Bodies' response to the Mental Health Service for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs spotlight review report.

On 2nd December 2020 a Task Group from the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held a spotlight review meeting attended by representatives of the NHS Bodies, the St Helens Parent Carer Forum and the Children and Young People Portfolio Holder.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the spotlight review meeting were published in a report to the CYPS Scrutiny Committee and approved by the Committee as its meeting on 8th March 2021. On 15th March 2021, the Committee Chair submitted the report via a letter to representatives of the NHS Bodies requesting a response to the recommendations and attendance at the Committee's meeting on 12th July 2021 to present the response. The initial response to the recommendations was received by the Chair in a letter on 30th March 2021. The letter provided an overview of work that had

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been undertaken since the meeting on 2nd December 2020 by the two NHS Bodies to address the concerns and issues raised by parents/carers and councillors. The letter also submitted a detailed response to the recommendations of the Task Group report in the action plan.

The action plan had subsequently been updated to provide the Committee with the most up to date information in relation to the outcomes of the recommendations.

A query was raised regarding progress on the gap identified with service provision for children and young people with Tourette's Syndrome to provide a better local service until a regional solution is re-introduced.

It was explained by representatives of the CCG that this was a regional issue with care for St Helens residents previously provided through the specialist neurology services (including diagnosis and management of medication) delivered by Alder Hey Hospital and was the responsibility of NHS England to commission, not the CCG. The Committee was informed that the specialist unit at Alder Hey had closed and no alternative had been established locally since the closure. It was explained that some children, as a result of a Tourette's diagnosis, may have other mental health conditions which they would receive local services for, however the CCG and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) could not provide support for Tourette's Syndrome. It was suggested by NHS representatives that each case was looked at individually to assess their needs.

A joint CAMHS and Paediatric clinic service had been set up which identified children and young people in St Helens affected by the changes to the service and they had worked with Alder Hey to identify those children and young people who required assistance. Some were already receiving services and other needs they may have were identified. Not all children suspected of having Tourette's Syndrome had yet received a diagnosis. Feedback was being received from the relevant service providers with regard to what those children and young people needed.

* **Resolved that the report be noted.**

10 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

Prior to the Committee's meeting, Members of the Committee had held two informal meetings to discuss the Committee's work programme for 2021/22. A number of potential topics had been suggested and were under consideration for including in the work programme.

It was suggested that the Chair would liaise with the Director of Children's Service to check the availability of resources to support the work identified and for Co-opted Members to see the plan and put forward any further suggestions. The Chair would then email Members to confirm the items for the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) **the report be noted;**
- (2) **the Chair of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee to liaise with the Director of Children's Services with**

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regard to availability of resources to support the proposed work programme;

- (3) co-opted Members to be consulted on the work programme for any further suggestions of areas for scrutiny; and**
- (4) the Chair of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee to email Members to inform them of the items for the final work programme.**

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